

Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage

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Rita Warden Oral History Vanishing Culture Project
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Interviewers: Michael Jepson/Wayne Nield

I 1: Rita, we start our interviews each time by having you state your full name and your date of birth.

R: Rita Warden. I'm a widow. I was born the 11th day of November, 1919.

I 1: Where were you born?

R: Turtleford, Saskatchewan, Canada.

I 1: What were your parents' names?

R: Orville Maury and Isabelle Murehead-Maury. My mother was Scotch. She came from the old country in 1910. My father was born in Michigan. He went to Canada to prove up two homesteads in Canada and then they came back to Michigan.

I 1: What did your father do?

R: He was a carpenter. Originally, they farmed of course and proved up land in Canada. He was a carpenter and he also put in about 20 years with the U.S. Coast Guard in the Corps of Engineers repairing light houses and all that sort of thing around Lake Michigan.

I 1: What was your husband's name?

R: Emerson Warden.

I 1: What was his occupation?

R: Well, he farmed some. But he also worked construction work for about 25 years.

I 1: You have children?

R: I have one daughter, Rebecca Warden-Slimkal. She is an English Professor at McCullen College north of Detroit.

I 1: You also have grandchildren?

R: I have one grandson, Gabriel Warden Slimkal. My husband was born in northwestern North Carolina. And he went through at Appalachian State in North Carolina.

I 1: You aren't a resident of Cortez, but you've been coming to Cortez for some time. Can you tell us a little bit about why you come to Cortez and when was the first time you did come to Cortez?

R: I came after I was married in 1938. My husband had been down here a couple years before that bacheloring. He was

He was a friend of all the Adams boys and he just liked Cortez. So when we were married we were going to Cortez. So we came to Cortez and we were down the first four years, almost four, and then World War II came. Then of course, you couldn't come back down. We went north to Michigan in the summer to farm and then come back down. See fruit farmers can get away in the winter because you don't have stock to take care of. So we used to come winters.

I 1: You raised fruit in Michigan?

R: Yes. We lived on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan, but the western side of Michigan State. And it's fruit from the Indiana line clear to Travers City. It's apples, peaches, pears, blueberries, all kinds of small crops like cauliflower, cabbage, cucumbers, all that stuff. It's a belt probably 25 miles wide and 300 miles long. Because over in the middle of the State it gets too cold for fruit trees.

I 1: So the summer time was a slow time.

R: Winter time was.

I 1: And you would come to Florida. When you first came to Cortez, where did you stay?

R: We lived at the trailer park. We had our own little trailer and we came down. It was right after the trailer park was first built. We became real good friends with the Guthries who were owners at that time.

I 1: This is the trailer park that's on the west end of Cortez and south of Cortez Road?

R: Yes.

I 1: What were you saying about the Guthries?

R: Well, because we came every year and Waylon and Jean who ran the trailer park were just our age. But then old Mr. Guthrie, Mr. John as everyone called him, was the bridge tender. He originally had owned some gear for shrimp fishing for bait. So, my husband Emerson, bought that business and that's what we did the four years when we were down here. We had a nice big business and he enjoyed it. He fished.

I 1: When you say he had some gear for bait fishing, can you explain what it was?

R: It was just a big old heavy scowl. A big 16 foot open boat. But the nets were really, really fine mesh. I think this is correct, what they called a quarter inch mesh. And it was just about 100 feet long and the men used to seine the bottom, especially up here in the kitchen, just in their waders at night. I think now I would have been crazy worrying about it if I were my age then, to walk in that water out there and never know how deep the holes are or anything. And they'd seine at

night and of course that's when they'd catch most of the shrimp. In those days everything was done by hand. I mean, they pulled the seine with one man on each end and then they'd pull it ashore and sort the shrimp from the jelly fish and from all the crabs and that sort of thing. And that always went right back into the water. It was just the shrimp that they were interested in. It was a tedious operation, nothin' like it is now.

I 1: Would you help Emerson do that?

R: No, I never went out on the water.

I 1: Who helped him?

R: He had a friend who now lives in Denver and came from Wisconsin. His name was Bob Ricks. The two of them. He really helped Emerson. He was also a carpenter, so he did other things lots of times too. In fact, Emerson and Bob Ricks built the house that Brooks Holly lives in.

I 1: They built it one of those winters they were down here?

R: Yes.

I 1: Before I forget it, I want you to go back. You said that when the War started you could no longer come down.

R: Couldn't get gas.

I 1: Oh, I see.

R: Yes. We lived out in the country six miles from town and you got three gallons every two weeks. So you bought groceries every two weeks. And you better buy enough. Oh, there was always a little country store that you could run down to for little amounts. But that was the reason. Tight times.

I 1: Tell me, what was the trailer park like when you first came?

R: Well, it was ... I have a picture here ya know ... it was about an 80 trailer park. And of course, it was not like it is now because the edge of it was not as wide. See they pumped in fill. They did a lot. This is where, you can see along there, how rough the shoreline was compared to what it is now.

I 1: And this photograph was taken when?

R: '38. It should say on the back.

I 1: So people would bring trailers down? There were no permanent trailers here?

R: No, no, no. Everything was ... they called 'em tin can tourists because now this is a different view. I think this is a copy too. I think this was done off of another. But you can see the bridge tender's house out there. Now, not the same bridge that's there now.

I 1: Right. And there's a lot of fill going out there that's not there, underneath the bridge. And you said the bridge tender at that time, his name was ...

R: John Guthrie, Sr. He was a handsome man. And we always liked him. Now here's a picture of the shoreline. You see they used to smoke the fish right down on the shoreline. Our trailer was about as close as you could get to the water. But that's been filled in at least 20 feet. Maybe 25 feet up from where it was originally. Dredge and fill.

I 1: So they had the lots there. Did you have a certain lot that you would pick out each year?

R: We always stayed in the same place. But they never had them all itemized. This was not 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. You kind of picked out your place. Because the trailers were all so small and nothing like these big elaborate things now. My gosh.

I 1: This is your trailer there?

R: No. That just happens to be a picture. This is the one. Sixteen feet long. It was cozy.

I 1: You have boards.

R: Yeah, cause this was when we had high water one time. That's what the trailer park looked like one night afterwards.

I 1: You had a lot of water.

R: Oh, yes.

I 1: So you would drive down.

R: Uh huh. Pulled the trailer. We lived in the trailer in the summer time up in Michigan for awhile, until we built our house. Now here's a picture I'd like to show ya. Maybe this won't fit in right now. This is Bob Ricks and my husband when they were out fishin' one day. It was a cold, cold winter. A lot of the fish came to the surface. This was a turtle that they was floating out. They brought the thing ashore because it was such a big logger-head turtle.

I 1: Is it still alive in this picture?

R: Yeah. But he was so near dead. See they are cold weather animals. And he was so cold and they just brought him ashore and left him there in the sunshine. And in three or four days he began to move around. But before that he just kind of laid there. That's a big turtle. See, my husband was about 6'4", so you can see the size of the turtle's head there. Emerson was a big man. Now this was one of the fish they picked up out of the cold water out there that same day. I think that's an amberjack.

I 1: Some type of jack. When you first came down and you'd stay at the trailer park. Approximately how many other people would be in the park?

R: Well, there was about 80 trailers and some of them had kids. Mostly retired people. But there was a few of us young ones who would have starved to death up north so we came down here. There was maybe 4, 5 or 6 families that had kids.

I 1: Let me ask you about this picture. There's two large buildings near the road.

R: This is the community house. It's still there.

I 1: That was moved from the hotel?

R: I don't know. It was there when we came. It could have been moved from the old hotel, I don't know about that. But this was the community house and this house right here was one that the Bender family ... he also was a fisherman ... this house is the one that's back of Toodles' house. When they moved the road, they bought the house and had it moved up here. But that was just a big frame house. Just typical southern frame house. But I thought that was an interesting picture because it shows that better than the other one.

I 1: So, you would come down in the winter and Emerson would do some bay shrimping. How were your days filled back then?

R: Well, I worked.

I 1: You worked where?

R: The first year we were married I worked downtown at Thomas' Drug Store. They had drug stores with open doors and all they did at night was pull screens across and it was open. And I worked there at the drug store. That's not even there now. There's a big bank building there now where Thomas' Pharmacy was. I used to drive home at night from down there. Palma Sola Road, you'd come clear to the corner and make a left hand turn. But you couldn't get out that far. There was just kind of a winding road that came down through Palma Sola Park. And I'd come out that road. Lots of nights there'd be armadillos all over. No lights at all.

I 1: I wondered about that road. I wondered if it was just for

local people, fishermen or hunters. Because there were no houses there at that time.

R: I don't even remember it being anything. Any road at all along there. I'm sure there must have been a trail or something like that. But no road as such. Just about where 75th Street light and Manatee Avenue, where that light is, then is when you started comin' across lots. Then when you got almost to Palma Sola Bay then that road just kind of wound up around till you got to the road down there by the Shell Station. But at that time there was no Shell Station there.

I 1: Well, tell me a little bit about Cortez. What was in Cortez in those days?

R: Much as it is now. Simple frame houses. The fishing. I guess I didn't get around in the Village as much because my house and home was down there and I really didn't maneuver around Cortez very much. But where the Marine Store is down there, that was the grocery store. Parrott's Grocery Store. And there was ... where that pink house across the street is, that was not there. That was a duck pasture, or duck pen, and geese. And old Mr. Guthrie. Old Uncle Joe Guthrie owned that and they were the ones that run the hotel.

They raised the ducks and geese there. But then you came across from the trailer park on a foot bridge because that was pumped in later too, that other. We'd always come across there on a foot bridge. My daughter used to think that the biggest thing in her life was to go over and stand and look at the ducks in the duck pen when she was about 4 years old. She'd go anyplace when she was 4. Nowadays you don't let kids run all over like that.

I 1: You were telling something yesterday about Uncle Joe Guthrie and every time she went over there he would give her something.

R: He usually gave her a coconut. A lot of them you see, wouldn't be mature enough to have anything in 'em. But she came home often with a coconut. She thought that was big stuff ya know. Or a duck egg or something like that.

I 1: Did you ever eat at the Albion Inn when you were visiting?

R: No, I never did. The post office was there and we used to come across to the post office.

I 1: So you gathered your mail there?

R: Yes. And the thing about it too that there was no post office on Bradenton Beach at that time. Bradenton Beach people, the little town, would come across here and the address was Bradenton Beach, Cortez, Florida.

I 1: Oh, really. I didn't know that. Tell me about your trip down to Cortez. What was that like in those days?

R: Laugh. I don't know whether we were crazy or just brave.

When we first to married and came down we wanted to go to see Emerson's people in northwestern North Carolina on our road down. Maybe because we thought we'd run out of money or something. But anyway, we came down through West Virginia and U.S. 21 was nothing but up hill, down hill, round and about and down around through Charleston and those mountains, the mountain would be here and then the road and then the railroad and the river. And then up Gully Mountain which is just south of Charleston, that was awful I thought.

Of course, Emerson was used to mountains. He was raised in them and he could zip around those corners and half

the time I'd be seasick before we got to the town. But it wasn't any more of a trip ... well, I guess we probably took three days or four days to come down and we had a little old '34 Ford V8 and it pulled that trailer.

I 1: There was a picture in one of these where you could see the back end of the car.

R: Yeah, the back end. That isn't ours. Ours was an old '34 V8. It's in some of the other pictures. I thought I'd seen some today. But the front door was opened. But we brought all your canned goods and stuff that you'd canned all summer. Came down and of course the laundry facilities were all in the shower houses. Mens and womens. I don't know, we always enjoyed the trip down. It was kind of iffy coming down through those mountains and through western Virginia was really primitive. Even more so than down Route 21 in West Virginia.

Then of course, the mountains around Emerson's home were dirt roads. But there was a sign when you went into this little town of Sparta, which was their County Seat. And the sign said flatlanders welcome. But I liked the mountains because it was altogether different. They raised cattle and sheep and some corn. Corn was for feed for their cornbread. But not any row crops like we'd grow up in Michigan because it was too hilly. Just to mountainous.

I 1: So, where would you stay when you stopped at these different places?

R: Oftentimes you'd pull into a filling station. Especially if there was any area around it and they'd let you pull in for free. And oftentimes they'd even let you plug in to the electric for overnight electric. And most times they'd leave the lavatory door open so you'd have that facility. You'd gas up the next morning, and that was it.

I remember one time we were going on down through Georgia. We were right at the edge of a railroad track and that train came through in the night. And I can remember we were off the road a good bit, just in a wide place in the road really. I can remember that train comin' tootin' through and it scared me half to death. It scared Emerson so that he jumped right out of bed and went

outdoors. He just didn't know. You can just imagine hoo hoo right alongside the trailer! That was just one of the experiences we had.

Most anyplace. And when we'd come down from Atlanta, usually it was Route 19 and we'd cross which is now U.S. 10 and come down 19. And I'm tellin' you, now that was some desolate country because it was open range and the cows just went anyplace they wanted to. Each little house was fenced like your garden area and that, was fenced. And everything else ran free. We would see

cows killed all the time by trains. These big old Longhorns so skinny. It was really quite an experience. And we came by a turpentine plantation up there around Brooksville. Well, west of Brooksville. One time we came down and Emerson all of a sudden stopped. He was laughin'. I said, what are you laughing so about? Well, here out of the brush comes an big old razorback female and she must have had ... he stopped. And right across the road and there must have been 15 or 20 little ones running after her. It was the funniest thing. We just sat there and laughed till she got across the road. She just went in the ditch and she just flopped down and of course all the little ones just grabbed onto ma you know? It was the funniest thing. We took pictures of it. It was the funniest thing I ever saw in my life.

But those were the things that you were used to. Nowadays people would be horrified if anything ran across. But you just took it in your stride, that's all. Came down through Cross City which was just a place for a sawmill practically in those days. I remember coming down through Brooksville. You don't actually come through it anymore I don't think on 19. Fantastic.

I 1: Sounds sort of exciting. These days all you want to do is stay away from 19 because of the traffic.

R: Well, not only that, but it was really desolate. Maybe there wasn't the terrible things that happen nowadays on these highways. I don't remember ever being afraid of anything. And we'd stay overnight. We'd just pull off to the side of the road.

I 1: No one would bother you?

R: Either we were stupid or brave, one or the other.

I 1: Was there much traffic on the road in those days?

R: Oh, nothing like it is now. Oh, no. Nothing. But you would see people coming down. But the cars were old and they didn't go as fast as they do now.

I 1: And the roads, what type of shape were they in?

R: They were narrow. But they were black topped or something of that sort. Florida I think always had

good public roads. Of course, they don't run the danger of all like we do up north. The freezing and all that kind of stuff. But oftentimes we'd stop at that turpentine still up there. Just a place to stop and we'd picnic there. It was really fascinating because they'd let you go and watch them distilling the turpentine. I thoroughly enjoyed it. Of course, I had never seen anything like that. Now, Emerson coming from the mountains in North Carolina, he was used to sawin' logs and buildin' fences and making molasses. I had never seen that. That really fascinated me. I had never seen mountains like I did down through West Virginia.

I 1: Coming down 19, did you come through Tampa?

R: Yes, we always had to come through Tampa.

I 1: What was that like?

R: An awful lot of stop lights I remember. Still is. But that was accepted in those days and it wasn't as big as it is now of course. And then we'd come over and come down through Tampa and pick up 41 and come around. There was no bridge across. But we always came down around. It was about 50 miles by the time you came all the way around through Ruskin and all that down into here. I don't remember any trouble. Only in West Virginia. The way I understand it, the fuel pump on those Fords was mounted high. Why I don't know. But oftentimes in West Virginia some of those mountains were pretty tough to pull, when you were pulling a trailer.

And about the time you'd get about half way up the mountain, the fuel pump would go out. So you just kind of pulled off. We always carried an extra kit. Always carried an extra fuel pump kit. Just get out and change the fuel pump and go on up over the mountain. As I said, I don't know whether we were crazy or brave.

I 1: What was your first impression of Cortez when you first came?

R: Well, I'll tell ya. I guess I was ... well, I was young and I'd never really been that far away from home. I really think I was scared to death. Although the water didn't bother me because I lived on Lake Michigan. So the amount of water didn't bother me. But I just wondered what next? But there was quite a lot of young people around and Emerson of course, he was in here a couple of years so he had a lot of acquaintances like the Adams'. I knew them right away. And Wally Schroeder who is no longer alive. And the Guthries' and this other young couple that came from Wisconsin down. There were several young people and we just got acquainted.

I never had any trouble talking to anybody.

I 1: So what would you do? Would you socialize with the Adams'?

R: Well, Emerson did more because he oftentimes fished and he fished with Charlie Lewis, Popeye's father, for awhile

before he got into the bait business. So, he was acquainted more with those families than I was. Now, I knew Polly, Toodles' oldest sister. Because Toodles had little kids then so she was kind of confined. And she was ill too. She had some real problems. But I knew her mother. But anybody who were our age just like you would if you were there.

I 1: You help out with the fish frys that they have today. Did they have those type of gatherings back then?

R: No, not that I know of. But you see, I was more involved in the trailer park. And we just had our own Christmas Eve

celebration over there. And we played lots of cards and there was shuffleboard there. And of course, this friend of mine from Wisconsin, she and I both liked to sew. So we did a lot of sewing and knitting and this kind of stuff, and going to the beach and shelling. Then after we were in the bait business Emerson used to go fishing daytimes, hook and line fishing, and I kept the bait business. That was when I fell off the dock twice in one day.

I 1: Tell us that story. You were telling me that the other day.

R: Well, he was gone fishing and I was selling the bait. And this man came down and we sold three dozen for a quarter.

I 1: Three dozen shrimp for a quarter?

R: Yes. And he came down on the dock. There's Emerson snagging a fish off the dock. That was the dock. And I'd just go down and have a bit net, a small bit net in the live boxes. I'd just reach down and pick 'em up and this day was kind of cold so I had tennis shoes on. And around the dock you should know better than to wear tennis shoes, especially if it's slippery. And my feet went out from under me and I scooted right off the end of that thing into the water. Didn't get hurt or anything, just water and it was cold. But I climbed out. And the next man that came to get shrimp happened to be a friend of mine from up north. He just arrived in time to see me go in the first time. Then of course, they wanted to know if I was alright.

So he wanted some shrimp too. So I took the little dip net and I went over to the box to get some and my feet went out from under me the second time and I went scootin' right off the end of that dock the second time. To this day I have never lived it down. Every time I see him in church or anything he tells me, well did you fall in the water? But there was no use to get all bent out of shape. What could you do? Just climb out and go get some dry clothes on and go back to work. But I never lived that down.

A big school of mullet had come up the bay there and in those days you could gig 'em, and you could snitch hook 'em with the big three hooks on it. And Mr. Guthrie was snitching and he said Emerson, go get that gig and see if ... he was so busy and he had them crammed in his pockets.

I 1: I just noticed that. He's got mullet sticking out of his pocket.

R: You know, I had to finally just throw those jeans away. I could not get the fish smell or the slime off of 'em. Fish are slimy that's all. That was not exactly protocol I guess. That picture really got beat up. But we ate mullet.

I 1: Did you like mullet?

R: Oh, yes. I liked fish. My dad was always a great fisherman. I don't know what kind of a fish this was. This was taken in '38. Now, this was before we were married. That was when he was down here before. That was over on the island, where Pines Trailer Park is. Now somebody's got a bunch of fish there. That was before ... this is another picture of him before we were married.

I 1: Climbing a coconut tree.

R: That was in front of the Albion Inn. Now that's a big jew fish. This older man was in the trailer park and he couldn't manage. Emerson used to go over and help him bait his hook underneath the bridge. They would anchor the line. Usually it was like a cow chain almost. And they'd bait the hook for the big mullet. I think, as I remember, in all the years we were down here they only got two or three of them. But that was a big one.

I 1: The fish is over 6 feet long.

R: You can see, cause Emerson was just 6'4" and you can see how long ...

I 1: How many people did it take to bring that fish in?

R: Well, I think they towed it over to the fish house if I remember right. They just towed it over there and I think they got three cents a pound for it. They called them jew fish, I don't know what else. There probably was a real name for them.

I 1: They call them jew fish but they are in the grouper family. They are a large grouper but they are still referred to as jew fish.

R: You can see his tail on the dock and Emerson was 6'4". So you can see, it's just a little over 6 feet. But this old man was a nice little old man. He came down and he had a little dinky Ford Coup and a tiny little trailer. It almost looked like a little dog house, or a big dog house. The door opened from the back and actually all he did was sleep in there. Sleep and a little bit of cooking. Oftentimes he cooked outdoors. He was an elderly man, but he was a nice man and a good conversationalist. I imagine quite well educated. You can see there, he had a mustache and everything. But he came down in his little Ford car and his little

trailer.

I 1: Where were most of the people who were staying in the trailer park from?

R: Michigan, Indiana, Ohio. A few people from New York State. But it was mostly midwesterners.

I 1: Would you see them every year then?

R: Yes. A lot of them came year after year.

I 1: So you probably made a lot of friends that you would see each time you'd come down.

R: Oh, yes.

I 1: You said you would go to the beach. What was the beach like?

R: As you go south on Cocina, where Cocina Beach starts. You know those houses along there? That was really the end of the beach. And when we first came there was no bridge across to Longboat Key. When we were fishing we'd often come around the point and come up to where the place is where they have refreshments and stuff. And I think that Artesian Well is still there. Because that was in the water. We'd pull up alongside with a boat and get fresh water to drink while we were out fishing. It was that awful sulfur stuff, but it was wet. And most of that south of that was just mangos. I had some pictures of that too.

Anyway, there was lots of places to go to the beach. And people weren't fussy about walking on their beach.

I 1: There were some houses there then?

R: Oh, yes. Sure. When Emerson first came down there was an extra row of houses beyond where those houses on the shore are. There was enough beach to where there was another row of houses out there. Over there I remember one particular friend he had. He came down as kind of a male nurse for a man who was terribly, terribly arthritic. In fact, I don't think he sit upright like this. And he actually helped him and they'd take him down and he'd lie at the edge of the water, in the warm salt water. In those days that was supposed to be a cure for arthritis. Of course, it wasn't. But the whole winter he was down there and every day they'd go to the sun and the water. They were typical tourists but the houses were small cottages. Really cottages you know? Probably not even boarded up on the inside. But people didn't care. It was like camping. Like going to camp.

I 1: What was Bradenton Beach like? What was in Bradenton Beach at that time?

R: Where that fishing pier is now, that was the end of the bridge that came across.

I 1: That's where you entered Bradenton Beach?

R: Yes. And there was nothing. Well, there was a grocery store. There was always Todd's Pavilion on the corner.

I 1: That's if you go to the highway. If you come south on Bridge Street?

R: Well, Bridge Street is the one where the old bridge came in. That was called Bridge Street. And it was right at the end. Well, it was another street before you went onto the beach there. I wish I had my pictures.

I 1: Is that where Key West Willy's is now?

R: I guess so. Right on the right hand side. And it's kind of chopped off on one corner. That used to be the door to go in. And Todd's was the place. In fact, Saturday nights my husband used to go tend bar over there. There was a grocery store. A nice grocery store. I can't remember their name now, but they were from northern Ontario. They had a nice grocery store there. And across the street I think the hardware store was there at that time. And then there was an automobile mechanic. But all the little streets out of there were just small wood cottages. But as you went up toward Anna Maria, there was no Holmes Beach in those days. Holmes Beach didn't occur until after World War II.

Just a little two-lane road. A lot of mangroves on each side. In fact ...

I 1: There were no motels?

R: No.

I 1: No beach tee shirt shops?

R: Oh, no. No. But people lived year round. They were nice little houses. And there's still standing a little church ... as you go across the bridge now, right where the police station. Right down over that hill and down that street, I think the little church is still there. It had some very simple little cottages, nice little houses, but small. Nothing big and elaborate. But that was Bradenton Beach. But as I say, they didn't have a post office, cause they came to Cortez for their mail.

I 1: So, for some night time entertainment people would go to Todd's.

R: Yeah. Well, I don't know what else. It seems to me like we were so tied up over in Cortez that I didn't really investigate Bradenton Beach. Because lots of times I worked till 10:00 at night at the drug store so I was late getting in and Emerson was off shrimping most every night. I wonder how we made it. But you do what you have to do. But it was a fun time. I really enjoyed it. I didn't feel like we were overworked or underpaid or anything else.

We made a lot of good friends. We just had a lot of

fun things going on in the trailer park. People was always playing tricks on each other. And just fun things. At least I thought they were fun.

I 1: After the War had things changed at all when you came down?

R: We didn't come until '47. Well, the trailer park hadn't changed much because there was still kids there for Becky to play with. Oh, I'm sure it did. But I didn't really recognize it I suppose as much as the natives here because after the War the government gave the fishermen a chance to buy their own gear and their own nets. The small business

boons they gave the veterans and all. And I think that's when the fishing business changed. But I was not aware of it because I was not involved in it you see. And we came in '47 and then of course, we didn't get back until '67. Because then Becky started in school and high school and college and then when she went to graduate school we said we want Florida.

I 1: So there was a ...

R: Twenty years. And that's when you see the difference. Well, the differences in Cortez.

I 1: So when you came back in '67 were you really surprised?

R: No. Not really. Because other people had been down. People from our area had been down and they knew that Cortez had changed. I think we were aware of it. Not particularly house by house or anything like that. But there was a big difference.

I 1: What were some of those changes? The differences that you noticed?

R: Well, one of the first things I remember was Orie Williams' big house on the corner. That was a big two story house with a front porch and everything. And that was cut down to a one story and he'd built cottages back of it. In fact, we stayed there one winter in his apartments. And we stayed in Charlie Guthrie's cottage. But we didn't come up here till '74. So there were those years that we stayed at the different places.

And then of course, before we got back the coast had been all pumped in and all that filled in. And the trailer park was much bigger and the trailers were different. You can imagine.

I 1: People were still bringing their own trailers down?

R: Yes. I don't know when they first started leaving them. Because, at that time again, we were renting here in Cortez. So again, I was not as involved in the trailer park as much as we had been before. But there was a lot of the same people that we had known before still coming.

I 1: While you were gone for those 20 years did you correspond with people down here?

R: Yes. The Guthries. Jean. I didn't really know Toodles that well because I'd never got acquainted with her so much. And then of course, the boys went to War and came back. But they had come up to Michigan, some of them, to work in the summertime in the fruit. Sometimes the fishing here was pretty slack in the summertime. But the Adams boys would come up and Wally Schroeder. That was Doris who lives down on the corner, her husband. And Wally Lewis' uncle.

I 1: So they came up to Michigan and worked there for awhile?

R: Yes.

I 1: That's interesting. I didn't know that.

R: A couple summers. We always laughed at Man Adams who was Toodles' oldest brother. They were putting in hay and of course being a typical fisherman, they would load the hay loose on trucks and then truck it to the barn and then put it in the barn. And I remember Emerson saying well Man, throw another shovel full here on the stern.

I 1: Using nautical terms.

R: Yeah.

I 1: What else did you think had changed about Cortez?

R: Oh, the streets were the biggest things. The blacktop and the post office was different of course. It was an established post office. Well, it was in those days but it was just one post mistress. And the grocery stores and places for produce and the marina across over there. When we first came down here we could have bought 40 acres for \$4,000, but no one had \$4,000. 4000 cents maybe. And that had been developed across on the other side of the road.

And the school of course. By that time they had started taking the kids to town to school. I don't remember _____ bought the school house.

I 1: You say the streets had changed and the roads. When you first came what was the road like to Bradenton?

R: It was a blacktop or something. Woodrow, Toodles' husband, always called it the shell road. But that was not in my memory. That was before we came. That was before me.

I 1: But the streets in Cortez had been ...

R: Oh, yeah. Because a lot of people had their fences around their little houses and there was a lot of shell roads. And the houses were not exactly ... yes they were. I think people had maybe added onto the little houses. It was just a different place that's all.

I 1: So when you came back in '67 then you no longer were staying in the trailer park. You were staying in Cortez.

R: Yes, we stayed in Cortez then.

I 1: Then you were socializing more with people in Cortez or would you still go to the trailer park?

R: No, I got acquainted here. Doris, of course. Being as how we knew the Adams'. She and I kind of buddied because we both liked to ride our bicycles and both sewed. And Emerson and Woodrow were good friends. So just automatically ... she was really my first best friend after we came back. Because Jean Guthrie had moved away from

this little town and she lived over in Palma Sola. Well, I'd see her. Not as often. And Palma Sola has just developed in the past few years just tremendously from where she lived at first.

I 1: A lot of build-up there. You no longer would work when you came down. Did Emerson still fish?

R: He always had a job. He had more widows to fix screens for and paint.

I 1: He was sort of a handyman.

R: Oh, yeah. He'd build bird houses and he liked to work. He liked to be busy. And then he fished and had his own boat. Of course when we left for all those years he'd sold all his gear because he couldn't do anything about it. But when we came back he had his own fishing boat. And he fished a lot. He loved to fish. He'd go out all day long to fish.

I 1: I wanted to ask you about those early days when he was selling bait. He was selling to recreational fishermen?

R: Oh, yeah.

I 1: But at that time there weren't a lot of boats. People weren't fishing out of boats a lot were they?

R: Off the bridge. Some of them had small boats, yeah. This one picture I have of Emerson in his boat there was an old doctor on the island that he used to take fishing. They were nothing fancy.

I 1: About how long is that boat?

R: That was a 16 foot boat. But it was only about a 5 horse motor. Nowadays ...

I 1: Was this boat built here locally do you know?

R: I think so because it was a big old cypress boat. It was an old boat when Emerson bought it. It was not a new boat. But then he had one that Riley Lewis, who was Wally's father, sold to him. A boat that they'd found someplace.

I 1: So he would go out in this boat. Would they fish in the bay?

R: Yeah, everyplace you could find a hole. He used to catch as high as a hundred pounds of trout a day. Hook and line. He'd get ten cents a pound for them. He made \$10.00 a day. Pretty good deal. Then of course, as we started to get more and more older people in this little complex here where we live now, we always used to have New Year's Eve parties over at Toodles. These are some of the people. You can tell how foolish we were. Paper hats and all. We were just goofy.

I 1: Who are some of these people in the pictures?

R: Oh, they're all dead and gone now. We were really the youngest ones around. Steve Padaski still lives across 41 in a trailer. And of course, the Fughs. And Woodrow. The Easts. They were older people. And this man was Mrs. East's brother. They lived the other half of this house. There was Toodles. Oh, the people who lived next door to Toodles, that's her right there. Bessie and Carl. What was their last name? It was a German name, I'm sure. They came from New York State. But they're both gone now.

I 1: This house that you stay in now was the Fugh's homeplace originally?

R: Yes. Albert was raised here.

I 1: And you knew Albert.

R: You know, we rented this place for two years before we ever saw Albert. Because Woodrow and Doris used to kind of do the business end of it. Rent it out to people. If it passed with them it would pass with Albert. Of course, he was still working for NASA. He was in aerospace. As I said, we stayed here two years before we ever saw Albert. Then I guess he retired and started coming down then. He was just a little bit younger than me. I think he's two years younger than me. So he was World War II.

I 1: Now this was Albert Fugh, Jr. His father built this house?

R: No, his grandfather I think. Yes. I'm sure it was his grandmother's house. His father's mother. But Albert always talks about this used to be the dining room and that was always open. And his bedroom was over on the other side. You see these doors. Originally they opened out onto a porch like the old houses that had the old square porches around them. But yeah, Albert was raised here. And Bill, Albert's son, talks about coming and staying here in the summertime with his grandmother.

I 1: So you came down here in '67? What year was that?

R: '74. We've been here ever since '74. There was one winter we didn't come because my husband wasn't well that year. But we've been here ever since. Before and since.

I 1: You've been very active in the Women's Auxiliary?

R: Yeah. The Volunteer Fire Department Auxiliary.

I 1: Can you tell me a little bit about that organization.

R: At first when we started we had the best crowd. Of course the fire district takes in clear up as far as Paradise Bay. And we had a very active group from there. Women retired. Well, one woman was from Michigan and some from New York State. But they really ... oh, we had a bunch

of women. We used to have about 35 people in the Auxiliary. And did a lot of things. Did a lot of real active things and raised money. But these women were all gung ho. They were used to club people and we really had some wonderful times. And of course, as they gradually died or didn't come back then it kind of dwindled down.

Then I, at one time, was the youngest one in the bunch. Now I'm the oldest. So you know what that means. But it was just a wonderful group of people. And the women here who are older now like Ruth Culbreath for one. She was very active in it too. Now she's older. And the young women don't seem to have the interest in it. And again, a lot of them are not fishermen anymore. The Village itself has changed a lot. And a lot of young women have jobs. And they don't have time for that kind of stuff.

I 1: Do you think Cortez has changed a lot because there aren't as many fishing families here?

R: Oh, yes. It's a different bunch of people. Their interests are different. The old basic fishermen are very few and far between now. There's a few of the younger ones but their interests are different and a lot of their occupations are different. There's a lot of people here now who don't even begin to fish when you think about it. But they like the Village. Have you ever met this couple who live down on the street behind Margaret Bennet. Her name is Laura and I don't know what her husband's name is. Now you see, their interest is entirely different but they still like Cortez. They're an interesting couple.

I 1: What are some of the older fishing families that you remember in Cortez?

R: The Adams and of course the Fulfords, Ralph and Blue. And Alcee Taylor and his older brother. He one time came up to the little town where I lived in Michigan and I knew him before I met any of the rest of these. He came up with ...

I 1: Leo or Neary?

R: No. Hub. Hub Taylor. He's next older than Alcee. Now I never knew the older boys. I knew who they were but I didn't know them well. And of course the Fulfords and the Guthries. There was a lot of Guthries who fished. And those were the primary families. Culbreaths, Moras. They're all the old families who were here.

I 1: Do you remember ever coming to gatherings when the Cortez Grand Ole Opry would play?

R: No, I don't. I never was involved in that. I don't know if it was just kind of a family thing or what. I don't think they had a real organized ... it was more of a recreational thing. The family themselves. I know that a lot of the people in the little town would come, but I don't remember ever going.

I 1: You don't remember it really being open to the public? People from the beach or like that?

R: No, I don't remember that.

I 1: Do you have any favorite stories about Todd's that you can tell us?

R: I really was not that involved because Emerson was working and in those days you just didn't go and sit at the bar. Ladies didn't do that. And if you went, you went with a group of people our own age. I don't ever remember. But Emerson used to tell a lot of them. Like the boys that used to come over there and tie one on a little bit. Except there was one tale we always tell about. The Deputy Sheriff used to come out from Bradenton on a motorcycle to kind of keep things I suppose on the square. Because the fishermen, there was always a great I think, it was between the Cortez young men and the Palmetto young men. Always had this rivalry.

And oftentimes it would kind of break into a wild thing over there. But some of these young fellas would tie one on and get _____ . I don't think any of them were mean. This was just young men I guess. Again, I was young and married and unless I went with a bunch I didn't go over and sit at the end of the bar, you can bet your life. Even if my husband was working over there. I don't really remember except that Todd's was a fun place to go on a Saturday night. Great place to dance and have a beer.

I 1: What about at the trailer park? Where would you have your meals? Would you prepare them in the trailer and eat there or would you gather with other people.

R: Very seldom. Most people, like Emerson says, they lived at home and ate at the same place. I was trying to find that picture of this family that we were so close to. There. This is when we thought we were really hard up. This was Helene Ricks and her husband took the picture. But there we were eating supper at their house. We felt really poor because we had clam chowder and shrimp salad for supper.

I 1: That was a poor man's meal then?

R: Because it was free. Go get the clams out of the water and we had the shrimp ourselves. About every two weeks we would get together. We ate a lot of fish and I always loved fish anyway. We ate a lot of fish.

I 1: Who would prepare the fish?

R: I did. I was good cook. I'm still a good cook. My husband was a good cook too.

I 1: I hear you make some very good pies.

R: Oh, you do? Yeah, we just always had ... we didn't really have as we call them now potlucks ... once in awhile, but not very often at the trailer park. But we'd gather especially on cold days because our trailers weren't as they are now, equipped with circular heating and all this kind of stuff. And we'd go over to the community house.

It was a great place. They always had a big potbellied fire over there that kept it warm in there. And you'd go over there. Lots of times you'd go over there and women would sit there to gossip or whatever and then they'd play cards. The women would play cards. And oftentimes had a lot of bingo games which were fun on Saturday night. Big deal you know? The prizes were simple things. I don't even remember how much a card cost. Very little. But the man there that had the deep sea fishing boat would give a prize and whoever would win it the prize was to go out on it. A lot of people wouldn't go out. I had a lot of trips out because a lot of people wouldn't go or didn't want to go. I enjoyed that.

Of course, I always had loved the water.

I 1: You enjoyed the deep sea fishing?

R: I liked the water, yeah. That's what I miss most being a widow. You don't get out on the water.

I 1: What type of fish would you catch?

R: A lot of trout and whiting, which I didn't care for. And we used to get black grouper down around Jew Fish Key. At the bottom end of that we used to get, not big black grouper, but nice size ones.

I 1: Were you going into the gulf?

R: No, that's inside here. You wouldn't go out, not in the size boats we had. You didn't go outside Palma Sola Bay. We fished a lot in Palma Sola. That was before that Manatee Bridge was put across there. There was no connection there. We used to fish a lot in Palma Sola.

I 1: I want to know if you liked to fish and you go out on the deep sea fishing boat like that, why didn't you go out with Woodrow when he would fish?

R: He was working with a crew. And a lot of fishermen, you know how they feel about women in their boats.

I 1: No, I didn't know that.

R: Really. It is a superstition. You talk to Toodles and some of the older ones and their fathers were real fussy about ... I can't remember. They tell the story about one

of them that didn't want anything black on board his boat. I don't know whether that was Ralph Fulford's father. But some of them, you know there was this superstition about women on boats. Most women didn't want to go out on the boats. It's pretty rough you know. Dirty and rough.

I 1: So you were satisfied to be at home.

R: Oh, yeah.

I 1: And doing your hook and line fishing.

R: Oh, yeah. Emerson liked hook and line fishing too. He really enjoyed that.

I 1: Well, would you go out with Emerson in his boat and hook and line fish a lot?

R: Oh, yes. Lots of times we'd go and stay all day. Take lunch and not come home till 4:00 in the afternoon. And then any of these little islands where Flamingo Cay and all those places are now? You could pull ashore anytime. Oftentimes we'd get tired of fishing and we'd pull ashore and maybe even fix hot dogs for lunch. Just goof off some more and come in late in the afternoon.

I 1: Would you ever take boat trips as far as to Sarasota?

R: No. Not unless you'd go on one of these boats that went that way. In later years. Not when we were first down here. But we used to go to Egmont Key on those boats. Like deep sea fishing, they'd have an excursion to Egmont Key. I haven't been over there in years and I'd love to go again.

I 1: Do you remember who used to have those excursion boats out of Cortez?

R: There were some Andersons. And there was ... I can see that man's face just as plain as day but you suppose I can remember his name?

I 1: Do you remember any of the boats' names?

R: I'm just sittin' here trying to think. I guess that didn't mean anything to me, the name of the boat.

I 1: Well, it might have. You just can't remember now. Maybe if you saw a picture it would come back to you just like that.

R: This one boat that we went in was really rough. I mean it wasn't fancy with fancy seats like this to sit on. You sat on a board you know? And so it was basic. Really basic. But it was fun. You know, when you're young like that you don't care whether you're sitting on anything fancy or not.

I 1: Did you ever take trips to Sarasota while you were here?

R: Not boat trips no. But car trips. Oh, yeah. That was THE thing. To go to Sarasota to shop. My, you'd go look

in the nice fancy little shops. You didn't buy much but you looked.

I 1: So Sarasota was quite a place back then?

R: Now, not as big as it is now. It's all grown south. But the little shops up in the old part of the town were very fancy shops. But then when the circus was there we'd go to the circus in Sarasota. I remember when Becky was a little kid, her fourth birthday we took her down there to the circus.

I 1: Was it the Ringling?

R: Uh huh. But we used to go fishing with this bunch of young people and we'd go clear off down almost to Venice when they'd go snook fishing. Because they'd catch snook at night. Wherever the estuaries would come out, the snook would be up there and that's where we'd go at night. That was a big deal. Three couples of us would go. Oh, a big deal. But you know, the money didn't flow as freely as it is now and you were content with doing cheap things. You'd do cheap things. Playing cards and playing shuffleboard.

I 1: What type of cards would you play?

R: Eucker, Five Hundred, Rummy, Cribbage. That kind of stuff. I don't know, maybe the men played Poker. I never learned to play Poker. I don't like to play Poker yet.

I 1: Do you remember any stories about moonshine in this area?

R: No, I never was aware of it. The only thing that I finally found out, but this was years later. There used to be, where Wag's is down there now. At that corner. Now what did they call that? Toodles could tell you the name of that juke. Cause they called them juke joints. It was the first time we ever went to a drive up place to eat and I remember going down there and driving up. And the waitress would come out and ask you what you wanted. A hamburger and so on and so forth. A drive in you see.

But I remember one time we girls stopped there and I never knew till later that it was a bootleg joint. They always went around to the back door to get your bootleg. But the young men knew about it and would go, but I never was aware of it until years later. Not until Man Adams told me about that. That's Toodles' older brother. Now, you see I was just never involved and I guess maybe I was too young and innocent.

I 1: We're getting low on the tape. Are there any of those pictures that you would like to talk about before we end?

R: I really got them out so I could kind of jog my memory a little bit. I think I've just about covered it. Of course, that was the molasses barge.

I 1: Well, talk a little bit about that. Do you remember that?

R: I took those pictures. I took the pictures that are in the book.

I 1: And what's the story with that?

R: Well, I don't remember it going aground. But we heard about it.

I 1: From who?

R: Oh, just word of mouth and everybody went over. And now see, Tooodles' younger brother. The one they call Jap, he was one that swam out and took the rope out.

I 1: Before you go on, this is a molasses barge that ran aground just off of Anna Maria.

R: Yes. You see, they were going into Tampa the way I understand it. And now again, Claude Lewis said something about it. What they did was they were trying to go around the end of Anna Maria Island and they should have gone up farther. And it was rough, rough sea. Well, they got up there ... now this is what he told me and this is the way I understand it ... they got a cross wash or whatever they call it and they were afraid that their tug was going to capsize. So what they did to save the tug, they cut the barge loose. Well, then it just drifted back down here and then they saved the tug. Now that was my understanding.

I 1: But then there were some people on the barge.

R: They were all Cubans.

I 1: All Cubans? I didn't know that.

R: Because they couldn't talk English at all.

I 1: So you went over to take those pictures. It looks like there was a crowd of people?

R: Oh, yes. The whole beach was up and down there. Was it ever cold over there. You thought you had enough clothes on, but you get a cold wind off of that gulf and it can freeze you.

I 1: Everyone has their winter coats on. And this is the story that Jap was telling at the Native's Picnic, how he swam out there and rescued them.

R: He was just a kid. I think that was in '40. What does the date on the back say?

I 1: March, 1940.

R: You see, well I was just newly married and Jap couldn't have been ... well, he's two years younger than me and so he was 17 or 18 when he swam out there. But these fishermen are tough and they can swim like fish.

I 1: So, how many people were on that barge?

R: Oh, golly. I can't remember. Toodles I think said about it in the book. They were all Cubans and I think that

there was one man thought he could swim ashore but he drowned. I can't remember how many more. I know that two or three came in with a line, hanging onto a line coming in. But as close as that thing was to shore you wouldn't have ever thought that there would be such an undertow. But it was a rough, rough sea that day.

I 1: Yes, you can tell in this picture.

R: You know, that's a long time ago. You don't expect me to remember all the details. That was years ago. Sometimes if you ask me what happened yesterday I can't tell you.

I 1: Well, we were talking earlier when Kim had the questionnaire and you were talking about tourism and she asked you what is it about Cortez that is special. Could you tell us again?

R: Well, to me it's special because I've been coming so long. It's like a second home. And the second place is that I really relate to most of the people, especially the ones I've know for years. I relate to them. I don't know their lifestyle and mainly because I'm rural. Because I live in the country.

I 1: Do you get a feeling that Cortez is rural?

R: No, not really rural like you would say with farmers. But it's the idea that their lifestyle isn't big city. They're not sophisticated like big cities are supposed to be, you see. We farmers all feel like we are not sophisticated people. We're earthy people.

I 1: So you feel the people of Cortez were rural in their character?

R: Yes, I do. If you want to make it rural. Maybe that isn't a good word.

I 1: I think it's a fine word.

R: Well, you know, rural people look after each other a good bit and I think the people here in Cortez look after each other and they look after those that are in need. If there's a want or a need they tend to it. And maybe not so much now as they used to. I think the idea here in Cortez there was a lot of families and the families were intermingled. I've always felt very much at home. I've always felt right at home here in Cortez.

I 1: You've never felt excluded.

R: Oh, no. Never.

I 1: And you aren't really a Cortezian. You aren't part of the families. You were actually an outsider who came in and you've been treated rather well.

R: Oh, yes. I have never had anyone ... I've heard people say oh, you can't walk by yourself at night. I say there's never anyone who has ever made any rude remarks or been ugly to me or anything all these years I've been coming.

I 1: You've always felt save in Cortez as compared to being elsewhere outside of this community.

R: Yes. Well, I never was in that many other parts of Florida. See, this has been all my Florida living, here in Cortez. Maybe I would like some other place, but I'm not interested in hunting another place. I'm not gonna live that long anyway. When you say you've been coming to Cortez 55 years ago when I first came, that's awful.

I 1: Well, I think the people in Cortez have enjoyed having you here because you contribute a lot. That's what I've been told.

R: Oh, really. I wonder if I'm not sometimes too mouthy and too pushy or something. But nobody has ever told me I wasn't welcome.

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

R: Well, the difference in the people and their occupations and their commitment to Cortez. I think that's the biggest change and I don't think they are basically really interested, the younger ones. They aren't interested in Cortez itself as a Village. I can't really explain what I want to say. It's a different lifestyle nowadays and the old values maybe aren't the same you know. It's different.

I 1: When you say old values exactly what do you ...

R: I don't know really what I mean by values. But I tell you one thing I think and we've noticed that where I am. A big difference came when they sent the kids into school. Into Bradenton to school. When you lose the community school, that's a closeness. Even in the country where I live, when our kids started going into high school into just the little town no further than six miles, you didn't have the closeness of Christmas programs and community gatherings and community things like putting on plays and that kind of stuff you see. Now, that's really passe now.

I 1: The school played a real important role in uniting community then?

R: It did. I never was here during school time and Becky was not old enough to go to school. But I think in regard to our community up home, we're still a very close community but we don't have that feeling of unity or something. When the kids all went to the country school and here every kid took part. Well, they go to the big city school and only the ones that are talented could take part. I think that's one of the things that probably has changed Cortez a little bit. The fact that there isn't the closeness of families like there used to be, especially the younger people.

Now even working the fish fries and stuff, it's hard to get

certain people to do anything you know. Some of them are quite anxious to do it, but other people just don't want to be bothered.

I 1: How long have you been doing the fish frys? How long has that been something you've done?

R: Well, they started much earlier than before I ever was here. I think they started in 1935 or something like that. Because they used to have them at the school and they cooked the fish outdoors and ate outdoors and all this. But I didn't get started really working the fish frys until we came back in '67. Then when I came down all the time ...

I 1: Fish fries have always been kind of a fund raiser for the Volunteer Fire Department?

R: Oh, yeah. It's always been the Volunteer Fire Department. And I've always enjoyed it because it used to be the older women did a lot more of the work. Well, there's not that many older women that are able to do it anymore.

I 1: It was pretty much a volunteer effort. You would bake pies and the fish were usually donated?

R: Oh, they've always been donated. By the fish companies.

I 1: And then you put on pretty much a volunteer effort to raise money for the Fire Department?

R: Yes.

I 1: Has that changed much since when you first started with those little gatherings? Could you see any change in ...

R: Oh, I can see the change in the attitude because a lot of these people who come to the Volunteer Fire Department aren't Cortezians because the whole Fire Department's changed. See, it's a Fire District now. This little town started its first little Volunteer Fire Department. So it was Cortez-involved. And then, of course, from down at Paradise Bay they were just wonderful people to help. But then as they quit coming or died off, the interest waned and it isn't the same. It just isn't the same. And the younger people, they don't seem to volunteer. Of course, as I said there's reasons because their interests are different and their kids may be more involved in school things in town. Now maybe this isn't the reason, but I've felt as I said ... I used to be the youngest one to work and now I'm the oldest one. And that's awful! When you think about it. They're stuck with me.

I 1: I want to ask you about this picture. It shows the back of the house and this water tank. Is that water tank still out there?

R: It's still out there.

I 1: And what is that actually?

R: Well, it used to be their source of water when they had Artesian Water. A lot of people wouldn't drink it because it has a sulfur taste and smell. And the water runs off

the roof and Albert's been gonna take it down for I don't know how many years. And every year we won't let him. We said it goes with the house and you don't dare take it down. And then somebody else said there's only two or three of these left in Cortez. Used to be everybody had them. But this was here but we don't keep water in it anymore. He's opened the valves because he's afraid the under panning of that thing ... and it's dangerous in case somebody would be around it, and kids climbing on it or something like that. It's kind of beyond that now.

I 1: There are only a few left. As a matter of fact, Joe MacDonald had one next to his house and it's gone too.

R: Oh. Well you see that's why we won't let Albert tear it down.

I 1: You won't let him tear it down.

R: It's his place but we tell him what to do. Yeah. I tell you, I've thoroughly enjoyed Cortez. Every year I think oh, golly. I don't know whether I can come down again or not. It's just the idea of securing the house up there and gettin' down here you know and packing up to go. After awhile it gets to be an old story.

I 1: I wanted to ask you before we finish. When did Emerson pass away?

R: '85. He died down here. He'd not been well for five years. He had cardiomyopathy which was the deterioration of the heart muscle. It was from rheumatic fever when he was a kid. But he played all his high school and college basketball after he had that. But nowadays they would never have let him near a basketball court. But he lived ... he was 77, so he was not a young man when he died. He lived 60 years with that old heart. But I think sometimes working as hard as he did, construction work and farming and all that, it maybe prolonged his life some.

I 1: Did you have a funeral here?

R: No.

I 1: Did you have any services here for him?

R: No. Just took him home. But he sure loved Cortez. But the last five years he got to where, well the doctors wouldn't even let him cast because his heart was so enlarged and so fragile. It was just like a flimsy bag. He just lived on medication really. It was not unexpected but it was a shock when it happened. But he had a good life. He lived to be 77.

I 1: And he really loved fishing.

R: Oh, he loved it. He loved Cortez. Oh, he liked where we lived in Michigan. Now see that was out of his whole line of expertise of where he was raised. He was raised in the mountains and of course he always loved to hunt. He was a

great hunter too. And he loved to fish. But we live in a very close community up there. Very, very close. Of course, I went to school with most of the people we live around. Country people. And that makes a difference too.

I 1: Well, is there anything else you'd like to say before we end this?

R: Just keep Cortez going and get that museum going.

I 1: We're going to try. Thank you.

R: And then the meeting the other night. They had some real good ideas if they could just get that building settled someplace because there's the possibility of having even a gift shop or a snack bar. There are lots of people interested in these little backwater communities. Like up home where I live, we did a history of Allegheny County but now we're thinking about doing a history of Casco Township. But up there you know how it is. You're divided into townships and Casco Township is where I live. We're all interested in getting the Township history going.

I 1: They're great projects. They really are. A lot of fun but a lot of work.

R: They sure are, but so worthwhile. This history business is great I think.

