Florida Institute for Saltwater Heritage 1/21/93

Alcee Taylor - Oral History "Vanishing Culture Project" Funded in part by the Florida Humanities Council

Interviewers: Mr. Mike Jepson/Mr. Wayne Nield

**I 1**: Alcee, we were talking about skiffs as another type of boat that your father was building here in Cortez and they were a versatile boat that you could put motors in you would change the design and I think you said that 18 foot was about the normal size for skiffs.

**R:** Oh, yeah. They had 'em kind of a long and narrow more or less because of the weight ya put in the back. By havin' 'em as long as they was because they could keep the bow from flyin' up and the bow from goin' down and puttin' your weight in if ya had fish or something, then the bow would go down and the stern would come up kinda like a see saw.

**I 1**: You said that they had to make this adjustment because of the shallow water and I imagine that was because these bays and estuaries in the State of Florida are much more shallow than they were in North Carolina. Is that true?

**R:** Yeah. There was so much marsh land around Swansboro, Bogue Sound. All down through the Sound they called it up there a Bay _____ so they had to follow through on that. But it got so much rougher in those different areas that they had to use a lot of the old type B boats.

**I 1**: It was rougher up in North Carolina then?

**R:** Yeah, some of 'em tried to get out especially around Marshalberg and in that area. And the straits in Beaufort, North Carolina.

**I 1**: You still have relatives that live in that area in North Carolina?

**R:** Yeah. I have a cowpen full of 'em up there I think. Got first cousins, seconds and thirds.

**I 1**: And have you been up there recently?

**R:** It's been approximately a year and a half I guess since I've been up.

**I 1**: Have you ever fished up there?

**R:** No, but I've bought fish up there. Well, I did too. I helped right after I come out of the service. I was up there with where Jim Guthrie's mother lives at Bear Creek. The fella there had a stationary fishery they call it there. They had just a little seine and they'd row it out around the fish and all. And then I went shrimp fishin' right after the War with my Uncle Tug Lewis out to Marshalberg which they just opened up Pampico Sound and we went out there but we didn't get no shrimp. Just

about a half an oyster can full of shrimp. Some ole fella told us, where're you goin' and he said well, I'm goin' up to Pamlico Sound. He told him, he said you know good and well there ain't no use in goin' up there. He says there ain't been fish since the War. So he proved a point on that.

Then I went up there when I was with the Florida Shrimp Exchange and bought shrimp out to Marshalberg and Beaufort and that type, and hauled mullet even back down to Jacksonville from there.

**I 1**: Well, going back to that story. You said he proved the point. How did he prove the point?

**R:** That the fishin' area hadn't been fished with all the old moss and the bottoms gettin' ... kinda like farm land I call it. It covers up all the shell and that type of thing and there's no place for the shrimp to bed down or your little clams or anything. It smothers it out so they got back in there and cleaned it out and got the bottom clean again, got the scum and stuff off of it and the next year I was out there I was buying shrimp for the Florida Shrimp Exchange and puttin' 'em in the freezer up there. Then they blocked out. Couldn't get 'em up there so we had to haul I think about 36 boxes, a hundred pounds, back. Then I stopped in Swansboro or Bogue Sound rather, and they had made a big haul there. For them it was a big haul. There was 3,800 pounds I believe it was. Then I come on out at Sneads Ferry and got another load there, finished out what I could haul on the truck. So we had two semi trailers in New York. So I called Jack Yeoman, my boss, and we had them converted around. We pulled those out on truck stops and got them turned around and got two trailer loads more.

**I 1**: This is kind of going back to you father's boat building when he first came to Cortez and as you were growing up. Do you remember them talking about fishing in North Carolina and the different types of boats that they used up there in comparison to what they were doing in Florida?

**R:** Well, yeah. I remember they would take and go out on the beach and run the nets, row 'em out. They used kind of a skip jack type boat there in North Carolina out on the Atlantic Beach. And they would take and run the nets out and they would anchor the nets and then watch from the towers the fish that come down in to 'em. Then they would take and put horses or mules and pull the nets in. Work with the mules out there on the beaches. Then in South Carolina, down in that area around Myrtle Beach, they got to usin' their tractors out on the ocean.

**I 1**: So they used to use mules to help haul the nets in and that might bring up another type of boat that you used down here called the donkey boat. Could you explain a little bit about the donkey boat, what it was and how it was used?

**R:** Well, my dad had a stationary engine which had two big fly wheels and your cylinder and your piston is all in the middle in between 'em and it lays down. Well, they was tryin' to get some power so I was havin' to get overboard and get stingray stung and that type of thing to pull the nets. So they come up with the idea of takin' a truck transmission and puttin' it on the crankshaft of one of those big fly wheels and then gettin' a nigger head and puttin' it on the end of the transmission to wrap the rope around and to pull the nets. You'd take say 100 yards of rope and you could take it out and go out and cut so many nets, then pull the donkey to shore and take the stick, we called it, and the rope

back out and tie on again and make another pull. So that's when it come up with what we called the donkey boat.

**I 1**: And that motor was put into what type of a boat usually?

**R:** That was a little bit bigger and a little wider and all because of gettin' up and floatin' it in more shallow water. We had an anchor and eventually in later years they put a spud in there like barges and things use to anchor with. They use a spud size anchor.

**I 1**: This was a skiff? A regular skiff that they would put a motor in?

**R:** Yeah, a type of skiff. But like I say they made 'em a little bit wider because of the motor layin' out and ya had to walk down the side of the motor and that type of thing. And they was air cooled back then and some of 'em was water cooled. Had a pot, we called it, up on the wrapped around part of the cylinder walls, pistons and all to keep it cool. The one they got from my dad, the first one, it had a little ole pump looked like a hydraulic cylinder that would pump water.

**I 1**: Was the donkey boat a Cortez invention?

**R:** As far as I know, that's the only thing that I ever remember hearin' or seein' in all my travels and I've been all the way around from North Carolina buyin' sea food and sellin' it from Key West to New Orleans. So, I never seen nor heard anything to compare with it. The first thing they tried to rig up to pull it ... there was a crate mill over here in East Manatee and they would get those, what some of 'em called a spike or something like that where they peeled the veneer off. There was a piece anywhere from about 6 to 8 inches in diameter and bored holes through the end of it and stuck pipe in it and then they'd wrap a rope around that and then they would take and turn that thing with their hands and pull it in that way. So, I guess in the long run it save a lot of 'em from gettin' stingray stung and that type of thing. Plus gettin' overboard with no waders back then. I can remember my first deal gettin' overboard before daylight and all that and throwin' that wit net over your shoulder, tryin' to walk into shore.

**I 1**: The boat that we have at the Maritime Cultural Center, is that a donkey boat?

**R:** That is the original type that all of 'em wanted. I think back at that particular time that one was around there was about three of those converted. Some of 'em had the boat already and they converted it. Some of 'em had one built to suit the cause.

**I 1**: That boat was built by your father right?

**R:** Right. From what I can think it goes back to 1935 or back in that area. Cause there wasn't no new modern motors or nothin' at that particular time even in the fishin' boats cause they were still the ole Stars and Model T's, tractor motors. They had to put a bar in the fly wheel to crank 'em and one of 'em backfired and throwed that piece of pipe through the side of it.

**I 1**: You mentioned stingray stings a lot and the invention of the donkey boat helped fishermen from getting those stings. Can you explain a little bit about how this whole process, how the donkey boat was used and why it was necessary to put that motor on there. What was the process of fishing with that type of a system?

**R:** Well, to start with ya only had so long to work with your fallin' tide or your risin' tide. If the tide was incomin' then you worked your fish ashore.

**I 1**: Was there a particular name for this type of fishing?

**R:** Stop-netting was one type. But it was also used in the haul seine if they really wanted to and if it was in heavy tide they could take and just run the seine out. We nicknamed it panamain' out on the beach. You make a half moon out then take the donkey and put it on the beach and just run your cable out and just pull that one end ashore with it. That type of thing. So that way if ya run your stop-net when it comes down to that part, ya had nets run down the shorelines, you could get to the end and start. As the tide started fallin' you could start donkeying it down towards the area where ya wanted to put your seine in to haul out that particular spot. It was a little deeper water, there wasn't no grass on the bottom and that of thing is what we looked for ... deeper holes for the fish to settle in. So that's why we named it the donkey.

Then like I say, if you was out there wadin' all night long, pullin' all that stuff down them shorelines ya had to wade off a hundred yards or so out there to get ahold of the other end of the net and pull it ashore down alongside the side ya just pulled ashore and just keep the fish from goin' around. And then that's where the stingrays was.

**I 1**: So you spent a lot of time in the water when you were doing this type of fishing?

**R:** That's right.

**I 1**: How many people would be on a crew that would do this type of fishing?

**R:** Back then there was usually anywhere from four to five to the crew.

**I 1**: And these are what you might call stop-netting crews?

**R:** Stop-netting and seine and gill-netting. Some of the captains had anywhere from two to three to four to five skiffs. Cause then when stop-netting season come to an end after the Fall, then they went into gill-netting or seine fishin'. And they would keep the same crew and fish. So now, with the modern times, since that was done away with, with four or five in a crew they got a kicker boat or some fishin' boat. So that put that many more fishermen in our waters. So it was more stressed that it was with the stop-netting.

**I 1**: Let's go back to stop-netting. What months would you usually do the stop-netting?

**R:** Started usually in October, November, December and January. About four months of it really.

**I 1**: And what type of fish would you try to catch when you were stop-netting usually?

**R:** Well, you would get more a variety. Your mullet usually jumped out till the water got cold enough then they would more or less stop jumpin'. Then you had your trout, you had your sheephead, you had your red fish, snook and all that type stuff. So it wasn't one particular type of fishin' that ya done. It was the variety that made your livin' more than one species.

**I 1**: So then after stop-netting, you would do the haul-seine and gill-netting. And what type of fish would you fish for then?

**R:** Well, that's more or less goin' back to mullet. But then along in that period of time there was some of 'em mackerel fishin', but that didn't last very long around our coast line.

**I 1**: Why is that?

**R:** Well, it seemed like when they was headed south, from here goin' south or comin' back, there was only a matter of just weeks that they was off here. The temperature of the water ... they'd hit that temperature of the water and it was too cold comin' in behind 'em and they'd head on to Key West, Short River and Naples.

**I 1**: I want to go back a little bit and talk about stop-netting or haul-seining. You said there would be several skiffs and you'd have to have net in a lot of these different boats. But how did they haul those skiffs around?

**R:** Towed 'em with a launch. A power boat.

**I 1**: Describe a launch to us?

**R:** Well, that was the biggest boat the captain had with a motor in it. Goin' back to the motors, the modern motors more or less were the DeSoto Motors out of the Flint 55 come a DeSoto Motor. That was in '37 I believe, right in that area. And then some Plymouths and Dodges.

**I 1**: So these were truck and automobile motors?

**R:** Mostly cars out of the junk yard. For $100 or $200.

**I 1**: These were gasoline engines?

**R:** Gasoline. And then about the early '40s they come out with the marine motor. There was some of 'em did come across a Gray Motor or what they called a Marine Motor. They got from one of the marinas where they'd change the motors in.

**I 1**: Did you father build any launches?

**R:** Yeah. He built, I don't know how many. But he built quite a few of 'em.

**I 1**: Did he have any designs for launches?

**R:** No, just goin' back to the same thing. What timbers was and how wide they wanted it and how much flare they wanted on it. He'd try to get timbers to match if you wanted a lot of flare or something. We didn't put a lot of flare on the boats because of bailin' fish in there. If you had a boat with a lot of flare, the boat would lay down so much and you'd have a heck of a time. The fish all run to the side of the boat and that was a problem. Then your bail net would get hung up underneath the bumper rail. So it was a problem. So if you had it straight then you could brace your knees up against it, reach over with a bail net and bail fish in the boat.

I 2: Were they all plank-bottom boats?

**R:** All of 'em was plank-bottom. They never come into plywood until just before the War when one or two had it. But no, they didn't have no plywood in '41 that I know of. It had to be more or less after the War when really any amount of plywood boats were built. They did find plywood in Tampa that was called harbor light plywood, a marine plywood that was used to make cabins for the bigger boats. The 26 to 28 footers more or less. Then they went to about 32 foot.

**I 1**: So would the fishermen come to your father and say that they'd like to modify the design a little bit because when they were fishing they ... would they help give him ideas for modifications.

**R:** Everybody did. When he was buildin' one boat down there, there was a couple of boats that was in the 22 to 24 length and somebody come in and wanted a boat basically that same length. So he got the keel and got the bow stem out of a cedar tree there and he was settin' it up on the keel. He had it stretched and held it up and was makin' what we call a snoot nose bow boat, the stem stickin' way out forward. So he was puttin' it there and the fella come and looked at it and said this and this and this. So he said that's good right there. And somebody else would come down in the shop and say that's not enough ... so he changed it. Anyway, he got slack on boat buildin' so he was just goin' to build a boat and he was settin' it up to suit what he had with the timber he had and some of 'em walked in after he'd got it goin' pretty good and said well, who ya buildin' this one for? Or who styled this one? And he said this is everybody's boat.

**I 1**: Do you have any estimate of how many boats he might have built in this boat shop here? This boat house?

**R:** I don't know. Twelve to fifteen right off hand that I can remember. Like I say, he built some for Bradenton. I know Perkins there in Bradenton. When he had the automobile place up there, he built one for him, Frank Perkins. Then I think DeSears. Then some up there in Braden River there.

**I 1**: These were recreational boats right?

**R:** Some of 'em yeah.

**I 1**: When did you father pass away?

**R:** '43 I guess it was. That was one of the first letters I got when I went overseas.

**I 1**: You were overseas when he died?

**R:** Yeah.

**I 1**: Was he building boats up until the time of his death?

**R:** Yeah.

**I 1**: And what were some of the last types of boats? You mentioned a kicker boat. Did he build any kicker boats?

**R:** Not that I know of. Cause they wasn't around, not then.

**I 1**: So what was the last style of boat that he might have built?

**R:** Well, see I was overseas two years. So I don't know what was built and never did find out about that period of time.

**I 1**: Before you left what type of boats was he building?

**R:** The launch type. The next to the last big boat that was the cab, that was built in '38. But he built another one and I can't remember. I believe he built Anna Dean for Tink Fulford after that. That was a big launch. It was as big as he could build underneath here.

**I 1**: What length was it?

**R:** I think that was a 30 or 32 foot. It seems to me after the War sometime or another he had that lengthened out some if I remember right.

I 2: How long would it take him to build something like the Anna Dean?

**R:** I really don't have no idea. I mean time wasn't nothin' back in them days. They didn't look at a clock. They worked from sun to sun. If it wasn't rainin' they painted, but as far as time-wise, the time was involved in goin' out and gettin' enough timbers for a boat. They said there was ten sets of timbers in a boat. So you had to have somewhere from between five and ten timbers, natural crooks, cause ya got two out of each one. One would go on opposite sides of the boat to make your flare come out right all the way back. So then sawin' 'em and cuttin' 'em to shape and that type of thing before your planking could ever go on your boat. Ya get all that fastened in there first and then come in and ya got your sides and then put your bottom on. The bottom was last more or less cause ya didn't want to lose the shape of your boat, twisted or anything else. Your sides would hold the shape of your boat. Then that fine art of sawin'.

**I 1**: Your father wasn't using any power tools when he built these boats.

**R:** No. The only thing he ever got powered was a plane or joiner and that was about '39 back along in there. They never had no electric drills or nothing of that type of thing back then. It was all bracin' bit and that type of thing.

**I 1**: We talked about skip jacks, donkey boats and launches. There are a couple other styles of boats that are used here in Cortez. Could you talk a little bit about the scooter boat and tell us that that is?

**R:** Well, a scooter was more or less a converted skiff, a lot of 'em. Then they took an old skiff or something and made a scooter out of it. That was to get up on the shallow spots where we could pull the other big boats, skiffs and net boats around. We could take and get up in the shallow water and that type of thing to haul the fish in and that type of thing. We called that a scooter.

**I 1**: How was it modified? What did you do to it?

**R:** Very shallow water. Didn't have a big motor. Used Studebaker motors in a lot of them. The lightweight motors.

**I 1**: What's a kicker boat? And how is that different from a scooter boat?

**R:** Well, our scooters always had inboard motors in 'em. There weren't no kicker boats around. So when they come in with the kicker boat with a motor up in the bow like that, it was designed where it would run in shallow water.

**I 1**: What year do you remember the first kicker boat arriving in Cortez?

**R:** It was late '40s or early '50s, it seems to me.

**I 1**: It was after you came back after the War?

**R:** Yeah.

**I 1**: Do you remember who had it?

**R:** It seems to me it was a fella named Marlow.

**I 1**: And they put that engine in the front of the boat then?

**R:** It a well, yeah. And then eventually some of 'em got 'em and put 'em on the stern of the boat. The well in the stern. So there's two different types.

Break:

**I 1**: Alcee, we've been talking about boat building and your father's boat building business. I'd like to go back now and talk a little bit about your childhood in Cortez and talk about what you have been doing since that time. When did you first start fishing as an occupation?

**R:** I believe I was 14 years old my first time to go Pompano fishin' with Captain Burns Taylor. We made 7 strikes or sets, whichever one you prefer, down the beach of Long Boat. That was one night I remember well cause a little sleep was gettin' in my eyes. So then after the Pompano season I went fishin' with my Uncle Alvee Taylor and we had the old type skiffs, skip jack type. Some of 'em used 'em in earlier years for sailboats.

**I 1**: Before you go on, go back to that story about when you were fishing with Burns Taylor. You said that you remember that well because a little sleep got in your eyes. What happened during that night?

**R:** Well, we took the net down the beach to make a strike, half mooned the beach and drived the fish in the nets and picked up and went down the beach a little further and make another strike and all. And then I believe that boat only had, it seems to me, a Star motor in it which would do about 5 or 6 miles an hour. So that was a long night. I can't come up with the amount of fish we caught and how much I actually made. That's the part that I would have been interested in.

**I 1**: So you were fishing from sunset to sunrise then?

**R:** Yeah, at sundown we was puttin' it overboard. Then back along in there that was more or less with the old cotton nets and flax and hemp and that type of nets. So then when we come in we had to pull that net out and put it on the racks, spray it and dry it out and get ready for the next night.

**I 1**: How long did it take you to pull the nets out of the boats and put them on the racks to dry?

**R:** Well, I think back then there was only about 600 yards of net. So it only took probably around 35 to 45 minutes, all dependin' on how much trash was in it. We had to shake it out or pick out what was left in it.

**I 1**: Who would do that? Would that be the crew or does the captain help?

**R:** Well, I was the only one in the crew, so it was me and the captain.

**I 1**: Just you and the captain. So these were basically two-man crews that were fishing at this time?

**R:** Yeah. There was others that had up to five in the crew.

**I 1**: Did they use larger nets?

**R:** Well, some of 'em had more nets. All different types. See back in them years in gill-netting we started out with what we called a three-inch stretch mash net, 5/8, 6/8 and 7/8 and a 4-inch. That was more or less the size of nets. And as the fish growed up and got bigger we went up to a bigger

mash net. Then we had seines. Then we had stop- net and then some of 'em would take some of their stop- nets, deeper ones, and use them for mackerel nets. Convert 'em.

**I 1**: When they used that type of net, the mackerel wouldn't gill into the net. They used it more as a seine?

**R:** No, the mackerel gilled in it cause it was a 3-inch mash net that they used on those. Some of 'em would use their seine wings which would go up to 3 1/2 mash size stretch.

**I 1**: So, you started with Burns Taylor and then you fished with your Uncle Alvee Taylor for awhile. How long did you fish with Alvee?

**R:** I think till school started and I don't know just the period of how long that was.

**I 1**: You were fishing before you started school then?

**R:** While school was out.

**I 1**: How old were you then when you were fishing with Alvee?

**R:** Around 14, 15.

**I 1**: Where did you go to school?

**R:** In Cortez. They had up to six grades back then. They had three rooms. That was first and second, third in one room and fourth, fifth and sixth I believe it was, in the other. And seventh and eighth, it seems to me ... I remember my brother took me to school when he was in what they called a middle room, the auditorium they built on. So then we had to go to junior high over to what they called Manatee Junior High. That was right across, before they tore it down, where the Bradenton Herald's built. Across from the old Coca Cola plant.

**I 1**: How many years of education do you have? Formal education that is.

**R:** Only about eight.

**I 1**: So you went to the sixth grade here in Cortez at the school. And you would spend most of your summers fishing then, while you were going to school?

**R:** Yeah, until I got to be sixteen and got my driver's license and all and then I started drivin' trucks and haulin' fish to Jacksonville or Lakeland back then. And then Savannah, Atlanta.

**I 1**: Did you prefer to drive a truck over fishing?

**R:** Back in them days I would because there wasn't the hassle there is now, the rat race I'll say. Cause traffic wasn't so bad. Back then you could drive all night and not pass over ten to fifteen cars between here and Jacksonville.

I 2: What kind of trucks did they have then for hauling fish?

**R:** My brother started out, Neary, hauling with a '32 or '33 Chevrolet. But the Model A's and Model B's, my brother Leo he fixed one up. Took a spray gun and painted it and fixed it up and hauled fish to more or less Cordeal and Tipton, Georgia. Up through that area. And about 1,000 pounds to 1,500 or 2,000 ... it kept goin' up in size and my dad and my oldest brother built the first body that I remember seein' enclosed like they are today, right in the front yard out here. That was, it seems to me, somewhere around '36.

I 2: So before '36 they were open-body trucks?

**R:** Open bodies with tarps. The first Georgia trucks come down were Model A's and that type of truck. The early '30 models were steak bodies and those Georgia people had routes up there. They'd take cardboard and corn sacks and nail on the sides and we'd ice the fish down in the trucks and stack 'em in. Put a layer of ice, then put a layer of fish, then a layer of ice and a layer of fish.

I 2: Right in the truck?

**R:** Right in the truck. Then put tarps and newspapers or cardboard or anything else to keep the wind off of 'em till they got to Georgia. Then they got the enclosed bodies. Then in '46 my brother and myself we built a truck with an enclosed body that I drove. We was gonna start a fish route but the red tide come in that year and so I went over at St. Augustine with a shrimp company and they bought the truck and I guess me too. So I stayed over there and we hauled fish and shrimp from New York to New Orleans.

**I 1**: That was in 1946?

**R:** '46.

**I 1**: Who did you haul fish for in St. Augustine?

**R:** Well, the company I worked for they was the one that the Salvador Family owned and they got them pink shrimp in Key West. I'd go down to Key West and get fish or shrimp and with mackerel I'd work Palm Beach, Rivero Beach, Ft. Pierce, Cocoa, Fern Dena, Mayport, St. Mary's and then even come over on this coast and buy fish. Grouper, snapper, and go to Pensacola and haul fish to New Orleans. I came back and tried crabbing for about two years till Jim Guthrie got sick and he wanted me to come and work for him again. I worked for him when I was a kid for $7.00 a week.

**I 1**: This was where?

**R:** Here in Cortez.

**I 1**: And what year was that when you came back?

**R:** When I come back to crab it was in the '70s somewhere. Then I worked with Guthrie Fish there for about 3 to 4 years.

**I 1**: What was your job then?

**R:** Haulin' fish and goin' out durin' roe season and buyin' fish from different areas. Pine Island. Over around Clearwater, over on the East Coast.

**I 1**: So you were on the road quite a bit then.

**R:** Yeah. I pretty well worked all of the seaports along both coasts and North Carolina. And like I said, New Orleans. Hauled red fish and stuff out there in '48 I believe it was, and then other companies like Florida Shrimp haulin' red fish and snook back then.

**I 1**: You said your brothers were hauling fish. Were they hauling fish before you started driving?

**R:** Oh, yeah. They started out when they had them '30 model trucks. Model A's and Model T's. I don't really know if any of 'em took Model T's, but I remember the Model A's and the first Chevrolets. In '32 I believe it was. But they had the mountains to go across and they used to call 'em up there around Brooksville back then and some of 'em even had to back their trucks in Brooksville to get over it. There wasn't a floating axle so they'd break axles and they'd have to carry axles with 'em and everything else. The tires was may pops.

**I 1**: They were may pops?

**R:** Yeah. They may pop any time! It didn't matter how new they was or how old. The worse tire they got now is better than all them back in them years.

I 2: When you hauled fish as far away as New York was there an arrangement ahead of time for a buyer or did you have to find a buyer and agree upon a price once you got there?

**R:** Most of 'em was sold before we got there. They had orders. We have tried to start routes and that type of thing through Georgia more or less. But then at times we'd have extra fish we'd put on the truck and try to sell 'em before we got to New York. Like markets we done business with that we couldn't get ahold of at that time, so we'd throw in a few boxes of something that they could use.

**I 1**: Was it hard to keep the fish fresh when you were traveling such a long distance?

**R:** No, cause we knew how much ice to put and how to stack 'em in boxes. They were laid in straight and iced properly and so it was more or less ... well it was about 28 hours or something from here to New York years ago. With the new routes they've got today and all the power they've got in the trucks they can make better time. It used to take me about ... I have drove from here to North

Carolina and back by myself ... 18 hours. From here to Morehead City. I was haulin' fish up to Morehead City.

**I 1**: What kind of fish did you take up the East Coast, up to New York?

**R:** Just about every variety. But most of it was the mackerel, the kings and trout.

**I 1**: Was there a market for red fish or snook at that time?

**R:** Yeah. But it wasn't as good there as it was in the New Orleans area. In New Orleans we could sell barrels shipped express. There was 200 pounds put in a barrel. Then we'd have to take 'em to the express office. But the last amount I hauled out there in a load I think was 5,000 or 5,200 pounds in it. Back then we weighed snook and red fish together if there wasn't many snook. Because they would be sold somewhere else. So this load I carried out there, plus some trout and all ... it was about 8,000 pounds of fish if I remember right altogether. So they was dumpin' 'em out checkin' the quality and all of this, weighin' it and then there was some snook in the load so they was throwin' 'em out to the side and I thought they was doin' that on purpose. And directly the manager come up and he looked and pointed to 'em and says we don't want them ole gar fish. I was kinda shocked. It surprised me so much. I didn't know where them come from cause we had fish on there from two or three dealers. So I says they're not gar fish, them's snook or rovale whichever one you want to call 'em. I said, you never heard of 'em. And this was one of the biggest companies over there and the oldest one too. So he says, no. He says they're bony aren't they. I says no they're not. I asked him if he ever ate any and he said no. I said wouldn't ya eat some if I cleaned some and cooked 'em. He says yeah. So I got one and cleaned him and cut him up in pieces and he sent 'em to get cooked and they brought it back on a big platter with some of that good bread they fix out there. And they got to tastin' it, all the fish house crew, and I didn't have to haul it back. That was the first snook that company ever bought I guess. That's always been a hot spot. Ocala handles a lot of red fish and up through the Carolinas, different places. So that was a big setback for our commercial part of it.

**I 1**: So you said that you came back here in the '70s and started crabbing for the Guthries.

**R:** Yeah, mostly. Then after that I come back and then me and Goose started fishin' together. But back in the earlier days of fishin', goin' back about '40 or '41, me and Walter Bell were partners in a fishin' outfit. Jim Guthrie helped us get started. He had a boat named the Jeep. My dad had built it, a smaller one. And my oldest brother built us a couple of skiffs and we was fishin' when the War broke out so ...

**I 1**: The Jeep was a launch or a scooter?

**R:** It was a launch.

**I 1**: And you and Walter were fishing those boats then?

**R:** Yeah. So, we wouldn't have had to went to War I guess if we wanted to stay fishin' but he volunteered I think and I got drafted. I got drafted more or less because my eye, I had a bad left eye.

And boys that were goin' had worse eyes than I did so I was gone about 2 1/2 years and he was gone I don't really know how many years.

**I 1**: Where did you serve during the War?

**R:** In the Pacific.

**I 1**: What was your job in the service?

**R:** I was in the Sea Bees and we was buildin' airports, ship repair bases, seaplane ramps, any part out there that needed done we was there.

**I 1**: Were you ever in any danger?

**R:** Yeah, I think so. Ridin' them ships as much as I did. We left New Orleans, went through the Panama Canal, we went to _____, _____, Russell Island, Guadalcanal, _____, back to Guadalcanal and to Okinawa. We went on the invasion of Okinawa with the Third Amphibious Corps. Guadalcanal was secure when we got there. There were a few snipers still on it, but then we went to the _____ and built a seaplane base and things there. That was just about secured. We had taken the Philipines back and we built seaplane ramps and ship repair bases and water facilities.

**I 1**: Did you operate machinery?

**R:** Anything I thought I could run I run it, from bull dozers to cranes.

**I 1**: Did you observe any fishermen over there on the Islands when you were there?

**R:** No, just us with dynamite.

**I 1**: You fished with dynamite?

**R:** Yeah. We wanted a mess of fish, we got us some sticks of dynamite and went huntin'. No, I don't remember seeing no fishin'. Now, on Okinawa we took our crew there. We had one outfit that more or less handled all the explosives. We was on the China Sea side and they would take and set charges out in the water and wait for those herring or what type of fish they was. Something like glass minnows we call 'em here. And then the natives had got together there and put them out there with anything they could scoop 'em up with. Then they'd take and salt 'em and dry'em out on boards. Then durin' the day they'd go out and turn 'em just like you would potato chips or something. They smell like blind robins.

**I 1**: Did you eat those fish, any of those dried fish?

**R:** No, I never did try none of 'em. We found some five gallon cans, the square type of five gallon cans, and we was kinda hesitatin' as to what was gonna be in them things. We couldn't read the

Japanese so we finally got nerve up to pop a knife in 'em or a bayonet or somethin' there and that smell come out and it was dried fish and rice. That was kind of a strong odor! Our survey crew found some Jap saki. That was good though.

**I 1**: That's rice wine?

**R:** Yeah, right. Talking about loaded! Good thing the War was over at that time.

**I 1**: Are there any other experiences that you had over there that you'd like to tell us about?

**R:** Well, I just wished I had a battalion of people that I could have in the United States to do contract work with. I guarantee ya, I could build anything, tear down anything, and it wouldn't cost half as much as what it costs today. And if our government wants to find out how to get around all this bureaucrat stuff, if they'll hire the two commanders that I served under when I was in the battalions ... we didn't pay no attention to bureaucrats or Army regulations or anything. If we could do it we done it. Where they wanted to holler about dress codes and that type of thing, that didn't mean nothin'. We had it dry, we had it clean, that's what we wore. They criticized us as a well-dressed Sea Bee. If we had blue, pink, purples or whatever.

Really, everybody went to work. Nobody was walkin' around with serial numbers and tellin' ya what to do or when ya could do it or anything else. You was out there and ya done it. It didn't matter whether you had been up all night long, goin' just as hard day and night. We had the heavy equipment and if I needed a bulldozer and I could run it, I went over and got on it and pulled somethin' out or done somethin' and I didn't have to go get serial numbers, see the corporal and the general to see if I could move it. So that's why I guess we ended up Can Do, Will Do or something. That was our motto.

**I 1**: Let's go back to after the War. You came back here to Cortez and you were fishing with Walter Bell. Tell us a little bit about what it was like to come back to Cortez at that time.

**R:** Well, everybody was really good and fishin' more or less the old fashioned way. They were bein' friendly enough. If we needed help out there everybody didn't mind and I've been in ports there just like eating fish. You caught the fish and you went there before ya weighed 'em up and got four or five fish. Nobody said nothin' to ya about it, you got it. As long as you was eatin' it or givin' it to somebody else that was sick or somethin'. But I've been in ports where they'd take and count the scales on a fish before they'd give it to ya.

I 2: Had things changed much in Cortez when you came back from the War?

**R:** Yeah. Not in such a manner as bein' in a city. In the cities where there were big factories and that type of thing. A lot of the fishermen had better boats and better this and better that. But they earned every bit of that. But you take in some of the cities where some of 'em had like the underground and stuff goin' black market and that type of thing. That's like I heard in North Carolina where Camp Lejune and Cherry Point and all those was, that some of 'em wanted sugar to make moonshine and they found a sergeant and he was supposed to get them some sugar. So they wanted

I don't know how many bags of sugar, 10 or 15. So they went over on the bank and got that sugar sand from over there and filled them bags full and got their money. When they got there they had a load of sand. So there was all kinds of deals pulled. So I guess it wasn't as bad as a lot of places.

**I 1**: So how old were you when you got back after the War?

**R:** 22 I guess. In that neighborhood.

**I 1**: And how long did you fish with Walter?

**R:** Well, I even chauffeured sometime right after the War.

**I 1**: You chauffeured? What do you mean?

**R:** There was a lady over here at the Albion Inn. Her sister stayed over here at the Albion Inn and then Mabel Guthrie was the cook over there, and Joe Guthrie and all. So through connections, I guess, or bein' around over there her other sister come down and she had a place rented on the beach and they asked me about bein' a chauffeur. So I said yeah.

**I 1**: So, you were chauffeuring a little bit and you were fishing with Walter?

**R:** Well, no. I was chauffeuring before the War. What am I talkin' about? I was thinkin' that come after.

**I 1**: So you had done that before the War?

**R:** Before the War, yeah. Before I went in the service. Actually, after I was turned down the first time on account of my left eye and then the next time they dropped the thing and I got drafted.

**I 1**: So after you fished with Walter, then what did you do?

**R:** Well that was the time I had went fishin' with Tink Fulford and we decided, or he did, to start a route up in Georgia somewhere. So that's when we got the truck and that was in '46 I believe.

**I 1**: How did you meet your wife?

**R:** Up in Mayport. I was workin' for the Florida Shrimp Exchange then and her aunt married David Jones. The Jones family was over in the Gulfport area, fishin' over there. He was workin' for some other fish company and we come in contact with one another. I hadn't seen or known of him for a long period of time except for more or less his dad, Amos Jones, who lived over in Bunches Pass. So we was in Mayport and I was out one night workin' the shrimp docks and he lived in Mayport, David Jones did. Betty was there with her aunt, David Jones' wife.

**I 1**: So did you start dating her then? From that time?

**R:** Yeah. When I could come back through there. I'd stop in and all. But as far as goin' together I guess it was '52 or '53, somewhere along in there. Then we took off to Georgia and got married. And for 40 years.

**I 1**: Your daughter Jean Ann, when was she born?

**R:** In '54 I believe.

**I 1**: And you were living where then?

**R:** I was still workin' for Florida Shrimp Exchange but we had moved down here. She was born in Bradenton. Junior was born, the boy was born in Jacksonville in '57 or '58 I think it was. Maybe '55.

**I 1**: Let's talk a little bit about Cortez and growing up here and what it means to you? And fishing and the changes that you've seen as far as the number of fish or types of fish. What changes have you seen? Or the type of fishing that's done? What would you say is the biggest change that you've seen in fishing around Cortez?

**R:** The way they fish. In my generation we waited for the tides and worked with the tides, the high or low. Where today they go fishin' regardless what it is, just runnin' regardless of what. But today they've got so much competition against your jet skis, your ski boats and what they call pleasure boats. But anything goin' down across the inland waterways that don't know the roads, runnin' aground at 40 or 50 miles an hour, it's put more stress on our waterways.

**I 1**: Do you think it has affected the fish and the fishing?

**R:** Yeah, it keeps 'em scattered out so bad. Spread out all over the flats and run on out to deep waters and under bridges or anywhere. So, it's changed the pattern of our workin' fish a lot. Like fish used to come out of the river and come down in here to the south in our bays but anymore they come in such little quantities out of the river, just little dabbles at a time, that that's why they don't see the big bunches of fish to gather up. There's no place because your inlets down here now and your passes are full of boats just continuously runnin' all the time. And then they build boat ramps and things right by the pass and that puts a lot of pressure on the fish getting in to the bays or out of the bays.

**I 1**: So you think it's two things. One, it's a lot of recreational boats and also, you said something about the way the commercial fishermen fish these days.

**R:** That's right. That's right. The old sayin' everybody, commercial and sports, have got to slow down and smell the roses if they want the sea production for our habitats and things to get better.

**I 1**: Is there anything specifically that you think should be done that would help the fisheries and the fishery stocks out there?

**R:** Yeah. Like I just said about the pressure bein' put on by everybody. There's no pleasure no more. There's not pleasure when you're beatin' yourself against the waves and just a pound, a pound, a pound. And you see some of the sports and some of the commercial fishermen buying back braces and kidney braces and all such things because they're takin' such a beating goin' down the bays. In my time, a yacht or a pleasure boat they called it then, it didn't matter if it took two days to go to Sarasota cause they wanted to enjoy it and they was out on the water. They was relaxin' and I've seen amany of 'em ... I run a yacht for about a year ... and I've seen people come down and just the minute they hit the boat they kick off their shoes and say boy I'm glad to get this sand back in my shoes again. Then they didn't care if they didn't even care if they didn't untie from the stake or dock. But when it took off, they wanted to go out deep sea fishin' or whatever in the Gulf. They'd go out and fish awhile and come back in. If they caught fish they might have 'em for supper or somethin'. But nowadays, boy they want to be there yesterday.

And so I can't see the pleasure. And it was so nice to go out on the beach with our seines and see the people, how they enjoyed comin' down on our beach and see us fish. But this hassling of the commercial fishermen that's been goin' on for many years, it's not just started. Ya take down on Longboat. A fella there built some cabins out there on the beach. Well, all the people that rented 'em come out there. We made sets around there with the seines and all. They'd come out and enjoyed it with cameras and everything. But he built a home back in the bay side in an open harbor or creek that went back in there, a bayou. Well around his place and all up and down it, he took cement blocks and put reinforcin' rods in them. This was back in the early '30s I'm talkin' about, or middle '30s.

But then the same thing happened up there in Anna Maria. Many seine fish has been caught between them piers and the people watched. Then they built some houses in there and the people who had the houses would run out there sayin' shoo, get out of here. You can't fish here. And all this kind of thing. Like a bunch of chickens.

**I 1**: So all this started back in the '30s.

**R:** That's right. Late '30s that I know of. The minute the people who built, not the ones that come down for vacation. But once they built that's when we began to get the hassle.

**I 1**: How has all of this changed Cortez?

**R:** Well, in a lot of ways it's just like anything else. You go fightin' somebody's job. I don't go up north and say you shouldn't do that without knowing. A fella told me one time. He said he bought some property up in Illinois, farm property, a flower farm thing. And he says I couldn't stand it. Them people there waited till March or April before they ever started plowin'. He says I couldn't understand why they didn't go to plowin', the snow and freeze was over. Get their gardens ready and everything. So he said somethin' to one of the farmers. He said, no you don't want to plow it till a certain time because the ground will be in lumps. The soil won't be light. So he said I was hard-headed enough to prove him wrong. He said I plowed that, and I had lumps and I had to beat and fram and cultivate and everything else.

So that's like the people comin' here who think our fish is in a chicken pen. They fished in lakes and ponds and that type of thing. They don't know how big the ocean is and they don't know how fish migrate and move up and down our coastlines. And when the big fish is here ... that's like the red fish ... we've had a world of red fish around here and the big ones was here and they moved out and here was the smaller fish. They was around 3 pound size. Well, that's the size the people really enjoy. It broils nice. The big ones is nice for chowder and broilin' and it flakes up. Ya can blacken it. It's run the price of fish up out in New Orleans for 'em to have been taken off the market. They had to go to salmon which was higher price. So it hurt the people who love seafood.

Anytime they take somethin' away, it puts a stress on another type of fish. And then it helps out the other countries, importing more seafood into our country.

**I 1**: Did the people of Cortez back in the '30s ... how did they get along with the tourists that came down here?

**R:** Good. I mean, we had friends that come out here and walk the docks and help us with fish and seinein' out on the beaches and all of that, in their good clothes. Man, they just got a kick out of it. Like, if we had any old trash fish or somethin', we'd throw it off of the beach. We didn't want nobody to get catfish finned or stingray stung. But we'd start to throw that type of fish off and some of 'em would run up there, no, no, don't throw it back. They'd go home and get a pail or basket or somethin' and they'd want to plant it around their trees, bury it around their trees.

But now if they see somethin' on the beach you'd think an atomic bomb come up on the beach.

**I 1**: Do you think Cortez is different from other communities in this area? Or other fishing communities?

**R:** Well, I'm gonna say this. In the olden days the people here were better off in the long run, not financial-wise, than just about anyplace that I've been in the country. I lived in Chicago about six months. So I know what that's like. And I thought Chicago was a good city. I never had any fault, I didn't go there to look for fault. I went there to live at that particular time and I was there when the War broke out. But still, there's somethin' about it that the old people they accepted it as a way of life. They did not want to hurt nobody in the manner where if you got sick, they was there to stay up all night with ya, or go to town. And they kept their boats painted, they kept a clean boat inside.

But nowadays everybody's in such a rush they don't keep their fish equipment like the old days. Because easy come, easy go I guess repeats itself.

**I 1**: So you think the fishermen in Cortez have changed then?

**R:** To that effect, yeah. Because like I say, the younger generation don't have the value. They don't value nothin'. Not just in Cortez. This is the whole part of the country that I see. There is no value in ... not 100 percent or anything ... but I don't know the percent or what even to comment on. But still, there's such a great percent that I see ... if it gets dirty throw it away. If it blows overboard, throw it away.

**I 1**: What do you mean there's no value?

**R:** Well, when we come in from fishin' we had the nets to mend, we went down there and mended the nets. If we had to pack the stuffin' box on the boat, we kept that without 'em sinkin'. Now they can't even keep a boat afloat with two or three pumps on 'em, automatic pumps. Where we had an old hand pump. You went down there before dark and pumped it out and the next mornin' I guarantee ya they didn't leak even if they was built out of wood.

There's more fiberglass boats sunk around here than there ever was wood from leaks and things. No value to check somethin'.

**I 1**: So they don't spend the time maintaining their equipment or boats or nets like they used to?

**R:** That's right. Really. Easy come, easy go. But the nets last so much longer now and that type of thing, and it's like you've got to keep it out of the sun and all this kind of thing. They're just happy go lucky. I'll say the biggest percent of 'em throw it out on the ground and that's where it stays. In the sun or on the boat without covering it up with somethin' or other to keep the sun off of it. And that's why, just like I think, in construction or anything else. All this bunch out there that are doin' heavy equipment work and all, and they don't have anyone workin' for 'em that really cares about maintenance. And that's what run our cost up on our whole country.

**I 1**: So you don't think this is just Cortez fishermen, this is all over?

**R:** This is all over. Any place I've been. And I appreciate all of the places that I have been. I never went into a place to look for bad. But if you stumble into it all the time, you can't help it. As far as maintenance on equipment or takin' values of an old car or anything. If you've got to have an old car, you can at least have it serviced once in awhile so as not to let the universal squeak or somethin' else. Or the battery goes dead and you come down and you've got to take the battery out of your car and put it in your boat. Something is wrong somewhere.

**I 1**: I want to go back to the question about living here in Cortez. Do you like living here?

**R:** I do.

**I 1**: And why is that? What is it about Cortez that you like?

**R:** Well, the best part of it is like when I lived in Chicago. I was talkin' to some boys up there. And they asked me about it. I says, ya know the place I like is a city or anyplace I live if I can be out of the city within 30 minutes or so and be to the water, to a beach or to a lake or to a river. I said, I don't want to be all day long or someplace that I can't go. After I was in the service and I went back up there and seen one of 'em. One of 'em got killed. So he told me. He says Taylor, you said the one thing. He says about little cities and all this. And he told me he never would want no little place and would never go. He said, but one time after he got in the service and went all around he says, just

as soon as I get enough money I'm gettin' out of here. There's a lot more pleasant and freedom stuff than bein' hemmed up into a city. He wanted to be lookin' at the sunshine.

Like Clinton last night tryin' to see the damn lights beamin' down. I bet his eyeballs burnt red this mornin'.

**I 1**: We didn't spend much time talking about your mother. Would you like to say a little bit about her? She seemed to be kind of a special person in this community from some of the stories that I hear.

**R:** Well, she had sisters. Two of 'em lived right here. And it didn't matter who my brothers or myself or my sister met. Total strangers out there on that road or over on the beach or anywhere they was. And if they didn't have a place to go that night, or eat, they'd come here. We had friends from Philadelphia. Well, in fact two of 'em. One was the boy whose dad owned the Studebaker agency in Philadelphia. And they hitchhiked down here, him and another friend of his. And they ended up here. And this one kept comin' back. Bill Durris kept comin' back and he even got the first Studebaker motors down here that went into one of our scooters.

And then there was another fella, how he come I don't remember all the details. But he worked for Squibb Medical or Medicine. Then Massachusetts and just all over. And there was never no argument ... "well, we ain't got enough to eat" ... there was more water put in the soup I guess. But there was always plenty of something and she washed clothes for 'em and everything else.

**I 1**: Was your mother a good cook?

**R:** She was a good cook.

**I 1**: What was meal time like?

**R:** Well, there was three meals a day back in my earlier time. There was breakfast, dinner and supper. There wasn't no hotdog lunch.

**I 1**: What time did you eat breakfast?

**R:** Well, it was usually pretty early. Around 7:00 more or less.

**I 1**: What would you usually have for breakfast?

**R:** Anywhere from grits 'n eggs to fish 'n eggs or whatever. Then we had oatmeal too, but a big dinner. The big dinners was more or less on Sunday. Ya could walk down the street in Cortez and tell on Saturday what they was havin'. If it was hamburgers or steak. Then Sunday was roast and chicken. And occasionally you could smell some what we call light rolls. Some of 'em called 'em wasps nests, the old timers who loved biscuits. They wanted a biscuit, they didn't want none of this light bread. That was another thing.

We went to North Carolina back in about '35 and everything was a biscuit up there. I got accustomed to some of this "oh boy" bread back in them days. We'd tear the end off. It wasn't sliced. Reach in there and grab a handful of that center out and then pour a can of campbell's pork 'n beans in it and make a sandwich. So I was up there and I wanted me some light bread. So I told mama can't we get a loaf of bread. You want some of that ole wasp nest? I said I sure do.

**I 1**: How old was your mother when she died?

**R:** A matter of just a few hours of bein' 95.

**I 1**: And what year was that?

**R:** I don't know. Here comes the Queen now. She can tell. What year did mama die?

R 2: What year did she die?

**R:** Gotta get literature out to tell I guess.

**I 1**: Did she bake a lot?

R 2: It was 1983.

**I 1**: Did she bake a lot?

**R:** Yep. Done quite a bit.

**I 1**: What did she bake usually?

**R:** Well anywhere from pumpkin pies to lemon pies to coconut pies, sweet potato pies.

**I 1**: What was your favorite?

**R:** Well, back in my young days I liked my pumpkin pie. In fact, Jim Camo, one of the guys, would ask me what we was gonna have for Christmas or Thanksgiving dinner and I'd tell him pu..pumpkin pie. Kinda stuttered a little bit. So he always called me pumpkin pie.

**I 1**: Well, that brings up another subject that I forgot to ask you about. You have a nickname. What do people call you?

**R:** Boogie. That's from spendin' all my nickels and puttin' 'em in the juke box and playin' the boogie songs more or less.

**I 1**: Who gave you that nickname?

**R:** I think it was Geri Guthrie back then before she married. Maybe Betty Lou Turner and some of 'em.

**I 1**: How old were you when you adopted that name?

**R:** Oh, about 18, 19.

**I 1**: Well, is there anything that you'd like to say about Cortez and our project or what's happening to commercial fishing today?

**R:** No, I just hope the commercial fishermen stay together and we get our museum in and heritage all stuff together and maybe State and Federal officials will realize how proud we are of it regardless where pleasure are, some of 'em. I notice a lot of 'em are. So maybe we're gonna get some help from somebody.

**I 1**: Well, thank you Alcee. We'll conclude this interview.