

Steve Marshall: Thank you for being here today at the Cortez' Maritime Museum. What is the day today?

Kenneth Everett Jenkins: Saturday the 8th.

Stephanie Collins: Yes, Saturday the 8th.

SM: February 8th, Saturday [laughter] 2014. Cortez' Maritime Museum, 9:00 a.m. I am Steve Marshall.

Jordan Algini: (Jordan Algini?)

SC: Stephanie Collins.

Emily Arthur: Emily Arthur.

SM: Stephanie?

SC: Can you say your name please?

KEJ: (Kenneth Everett?) Jenkins.

SC: So, when and where were you born?

KEJ: I was born in Fort Walton Beach, Florida.

SC: So, what brought you to Cortez?

KEJ: My parents. [laughter] My parents were in the civil service. My mother was in Air Force. My dad was in Air Force. They got in the civil service. I moved here when I was five.

SC: Did you like growing up in Cortez?

KEJ: Yes, absolutely wonderful growing up in Cortez. At times, it wasn't so great, but most of the time, it was joyful. Yes.

SC: What do you think was your favorite part?

KEJ: Hanging out at the fish house. Actually, that's what I did most of the time.

SM: How old were you when you came to Cortez?

KEJ: I was five years old.

SM: Five years old.

KEJ: I mean, I say hanging out at the fish house, Cortez was the type of community that was carefree. You didn't have to worry about it. You just run down the road and go to a friend's house or...

SM: So, you had a lot of freedom?

KEJ: Oh, a lot of freedom in Cortez. If you notice, there's not many fences in Cortez.

SM: It is a little bit different today?

KEJ: It is today. Yes. It's changed quite a bit.

JA: Where did you go to school?

KEJ: I went to school at Anna Maria Elementary.

SM: What about middle and high school?

KEJ: Middle school was Sugg Middle School and high school was Bayshore High School.

SM: Went to Sugg, [laughter] and went to Bayshore.

KEJ: It was the transitionary when Sugg was first built. The high school went to Bayshore in the morning. Then the middle school went to school in the afternoon at Bayshore High School. It was (the session?) Sugg hadn't been built yet.

SM: What year did you graduate high school?

KEJ: 1980.

SM: 1980.

SC: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

KEJ: I have one brother. He passed away two years ago.

SC: What was his name?

KEJ: Chip, Norman. Chip is a nickname.

SC: Did you ever get into any kind of mischief here?

KEJ: Mischief? Let's see. Yes, we did. We used to steal – it wasn't stealing. [laughter] We would borrow the old folks' bicycles down in Sunny Shores. They're three wheelers. We take them out for a ride all night long. We got caught one time. [laughter]

SC: What happened when you got caught?

KEJ: We had to go polish the bikes for a month. [laughter] That's what the judge sent us to. [laughter] There's always mischief in Cortez. It wasn't bad mischief.

SM: Do you have a certain group of friends that you hung out with?

KEJ: Oh, yes, quite a few local kids.

SM: Are those kids still here?

KEJ: Quite a few kids. Yes, quite a few of them are still here. Some of them have gone on the way of drug issues. It's sad but there's a few of them that are still fishing. We've practically fished together and not many around as it used to be, but it's quite a crew.

SM: You have been fishing since you were a little guy?

KEJ: Well, yes. The first real fishing job I had was with Blue Fulford, I think. You've probably heard of him. He's an old timer. I was fishing with him when I was thirteen making \$50 a day. He was the first guy to actually start catching sardines with the first net in Cortez. I happened to be right there when he started it, and \$50 a day was a lot of money to a thirteen-year-old.

SM: When it started?

KEJ: It started summertime. Yes.

SM: What are some of the things that you did with Blue? [laughter]

KEJ: The first thing I remember doing with Blue, as far as building that, was he had bought some webbing. He used to have the dip webbing that preserved it. They dipped it in this black tarry stuff. It is called net dip. They messed up. When they pulled it out of the tar, they wrung it out. When it dried, it dried in clump. So, I was out there for two weeks straight pulling the net apart mesh by mesh.

SM: Wow.

KEJ: So, that was the beginning of my fishing career, I think, with Blue in person.

SM: With that job, did you get discouraged with fishing because of the long hours you spend, the tedious work?

KEJ: Yes, as a thirteen, fifteen, eighteen-year-old kids, it's hard to stick with something like that. I was no different than any other kids these days that they just want to jump up and go do something else. It's tough. You learned that if you don't sit there and take the time, then it's not going to happen. That's true with fishing. If you don't put the time in, it's not going to work out for you.

SM: That is probably one of the challenges of fishing, just those fixing the net and just all the cosmetic things and the time that you have to put in.

KEJ: A lot of hours.

SM: A lot of hours.

SC: What kinds of methods did you use to catch the fish?

KEJ: I mean, like I said, when I was with Blue, it was first seine fishing. We did some gillnet fishing. As a younger adult, I was a gillnet fisherman, inland, inshore fisherman, gillnets, and seine nets.

SM: What is a gillnet versus a seine net?

KEJ: Well, a gillnet is just what it is. It's a bigger mesh net with lighter twine, and the fish actually get gilled off in it. It's more of a selective type fishing here. The seine net is a smaller mesh net. Usually, it's got a pocket in and the fish you pull it up on the shoreline.

SC: Why did you want to become a fisherman?

KEJ: Why did I want to become a fisherman? [laughter] Because it was there. That's what I grew up in. It was available and just nothing ever appealed to me. I mean, I'm just like anybody else that likes to fish, certain people like to be outside. I actually did have a job on the beach that's called (Chicken Joy?) and I absolutely hated it.

SM: [laughter] Is there like a common thing? Because, I mean, you kind of talk about freedom a little bit, something that just captivates fisherman just to do something that keeps drawing them back to the water and doing what you do. Or is it just because it is there, like you are saying, it is what you have always done, or is there something?

KEJ: I guess when you're younger, I think I was looking at, "Wow, I made \$50 today." Then you see that you can make money. And then it gets [inaudible] in a while, you're putting a lot of hours in it. Then you realized that if you don't put the hours, you're not going to make any money. Then compared to a nine-to-five job, you've got somebody looking over you all the time, somebody pushing you in the things you have to do and within that amount of time. Fishing, I mean, as strenuous as it can be, it's relaxing. Your mind is at ease, I guess. What I'm trying to say is just you don't have to worry about anything. The only thing you have to worry about is you making you go forward and catch fish and get things done that you need to do.

SM: Aside from the netting, what were some other challenges that you faced?

KEJ: Boat billing. Your boat bill. You upkeep your boat. That's a constant variable that you have to keep up with all the time. Mechanic work on the motor and stuff like that. So, it's just not one thing. It's many other, I guess you'd say, art that we have to be somewhat familiar with.

SM: Question number seven.

SC: Can you discuss a typical day of a fisherman, like the whole day? [laughter]

KEJ: A typical day. Well, fishermen need to get up before daylight. It is true, the old saying that if you're not up early on the water before the sun comes up, somebody is going to be ahead of you. Get up in the morning. Sometimes you can have your boat ready the night before to just get it and go, or you have to go get fuel and ice and you just take off down the bay depending on what species you're after. Just ride until you find some. It's just like the old timers used to say that "No blind hog will dig up an acorn every now and then." You just keep going. Then there are techniques to find the fish. You can have an idea about where you want to be and what the fishermen doing from the day prior. So, you just start working.

SM: So, there is that competition, that rivalry?

KEJ: Yes, there is. It's kind of a quiet rivalry, I guess you can call it. You always want to be the first one on a bunch of fish. You always want to be the first one to get the first chance at catching a bunch of fish. I mean, I'm not going to lie, but I always go down the fish house and look around to see who's catching what and try and get information from fishermen. But you never want to listen to a fisherman. [laughter] He might steer you the wrong way. [laughter]

SM: Because you guys are all in the same boat, so to speak.

KEJ: That's right.

SM: Trying to make a living and do what you need to do. Is that correct?

KEJ: Yes. Once there's any typical fish run, you got to look a certain amount of time to catch your share. I guess you'd say, the earlier and the more time you put in, the better you're going to do.

SM: Some of those other guys are your good friends?

KEJ: Oh, yes. We're all family, pretty much.

SC: How long would you normally sit on the water?

KEJ: Sunup until past sundown, twenty-four hours sometimes, depending on the year. Like the fall run, there's times that we will stay on the boat for thirty-six hours, twenty, seventy-two hours, or until you just can't go any further. You have to have sleep. You can't just keep...[laughter]

SC: What kind of fish do you catch normally?

KEJ: In the fall, usually, the rouget mullet is the best. It's what most everybody goes after. In the wintertime, we've developed a ladyfish market in the past ten or fifteen years that's pretty

good market to catch ladyfish.

SM: What do you do with the ladyfish?

KEJ: Good question. [laughter] They ship them to, I think, California or maybe up to Canada. I've heard they make fish cake products out of them.

SM: Really?

KEJ: Yes. They want a certain size. They cut the head off. The way they cut the head off, the body, so to speak, is what they want. Now, they ship them up there in 40,000-pound containers. Then this time of year, we're catching ladyfish and sheepshead. There's a few accounts that mullet has spawned by now, so they're catching spawned mullet and stuff.

SM: There is a big market for the rouget?

KEJ: Oh, yes. The biggest market right now in Florida is the rouget, mullet market.

SM: Where does that go?

KEJ: Asian markets. They processed. The female is what they called red, rouget mullet. They packaged the rouget. They freeze it. They shipped it out in containers also. So, the price of mullet goes from forty to 50¢ a pound in the summertime to – we got up to \$2.20 a pound for the red, rouget mullet this year.

SM: Is that better than last season?

KEJ: Price was yes. Well, yes. It was like 40¢ more this year than it was last year.

SM: Do you do well?

KEJ: Yes. Me and my crew, a couple of friends are [inaudible].

SM: How is your fishboat?

KEJ: Depending on who fished together, he's got his boat, I have my boat. Sometimes we'll have a crew work with us. Then there's another crew that we work together.

SC: Who are the most memorable members of your crew?

KEJ: Say that again?

SC: Who are the most memorable members of your crew?

KEJ: Memorable?

SC: Yes.

KEJ: As in, my immediate crew or in the past?

SC: Both. [laughter] Any of them silly or do you –

SM: Anybody sticks out from them?

SC: Yes. [laughter]

KEJ: They all stick out. [laughter] Yes, they're all quite colorful individuals. That makes your day go much better when you've got somebody who can challenge for a show. [laughter] I guess you could say that. We cut out and fool around also. So, the recent guy is (Chris Pringle?). He's quite the piece of work. His crew is even worse. [laughter] Steve Parker, he's a local guy.

SM: Are these crew members, are they local or did they come from here?

KEJ: Chris' family has been here a long time. He actually lives in Jacksonville, but he travels down and fishes two weeks at a time then goes back. He has to have his kids, I guess. Then Steve, he lives here. His family has been here forever too. He's married to a local girl. I'm married to a local girl also.

SM: You are on the boat for a long time with each other. So, I guess it is fair to say that it is important that the personalities kind of click.

KEJ: Yes. It makes for a long day when you don't get along. [laughter] Where are you going to go?

SM: You are throwing anybody off the boat?

KEJ: Oh, yes. I've turned around and take them back to the dock. Yes, I am. Yes, we cover it quite a bit. Obviously, when you catch some fish and make money, it makes things even better.

SC: How long have you been married?

KEJ: Thirty years. [laughter]

SC: Is it difficult to be away from your family during the day?

KEJ: Yes, and no. We got raised three kids. You've got to take time off. You just can't stay away. But my wife and I get along because I think that I've been on the boat as much as I have. She's the type that wants her time and I'm the type of guy that wants my time.

SC: What do your three kids do now?

KEJ: My daughter is a professional server. My oldest son is in the United States Air Force.

He's stationed in Germany. My youngest son is close to graduating from Sarasota Military Academy. He is just enlisted in the United States Marines.

SC: Congratulations.

KEJ: So, needless to say, I've steered them all away from the fishing industry. [laughter] But they're doing quite well.

SM: Good. You must be proud of them.

KEJ: Yes, I am.

SC: Did they ever work on your boat when they were younger?

KEJ: Oh, yes. [laughter] Actually, my wife used to fish with me quite a bit before she had back issues.

SM: Now, you mentioned the rouget mullet is sort of the money fish. Is that what you considered most profitable fish out there?

KEJ: Yes.

SM: What was the hardest fish to catch out there?

KEJ: A whiting.

SM: Whiting?

KEJ: [laughter] Yes. There's not many people fish for whiting around here. The East Coast has a bigger whiting fishery than we do. But I've developed a little net that I've been using recently, and I figured out actually how to catch them. It works out pretty good.

SC: Where do you normally fish?

KEJ: Mainly in the bay and the inland waters and right along the coastal, right along the beach and the Gulf.

SC: How do you know where to go? Where all the fish are?

SM: You just kind of look for them basically, is what you are saying here?

KEJ: Well, throughout the years, you pick up where fish are going to be or supposed to be. Just a different contours of the bay in certain areas, the fish kind of do their own thing and you learn how they travel and where they go in different tides and where they're going to settle into areas. You just take off and hit your spots.



SM: Starting your fishing with Blue Fulford, did you pick up any traditions that he started with you that you still continue today in terms of methods or maybe places that you go to?

KEJ: Yes. Building and mending net was what Blue taught me the best. I think that it was the best. As far as fishing, Blue had his own way. But as far as things that really stuck with me, and what I've learned from Blue was mending techniques and how he could hold his pocketknife in the mending in the same hand and used both of them. I keep dropping my knife. [laughter] But yes, I would say, mending and building net is what I've learned from the Blue mostly.

SM: Would you say that there is a lot of fishermen that cannot do these particular things? They do not have the skills?

KEJ: This day and age, yes. A lot of fishermen know they'll have somebody else build their nets for him and stuff. It's definitely a dying art that not many of the new fishermen, really, if you want to call them fishermen, can. It's not something that people readily want to go, "Hey, you need to teach me how to mend the net or build the net or something."

SM: So, back then a fisherman did everything except – I mean, obviously, they caught fish, but they did everything, fixing the boat, building a boat, mending a net.

KEJ: The more you can do it for yourself, the less money you have to put out and the more you're going to make.

JA: So, the fishing industry has definitely changed quite a bit?

KEJ: Oh, it has changed tremendously, especially since the net ban in [19]95.

JA: What are living conditions on the boat like?

KEJ: Living conditions on the boat. Well, it's a wide-open boat. My particular boat doesn't have any cover at all on it. So, you're out in the elements the whole time you're on it. My boat is not designed for overnight fishing or a week-long fishing trip. It's daily fishing trip.

JA: What is the name of your boat?

KEJ: Actually, Nita, N-I-T-A.

SM: Where did that name come from?

KEJ: It's my wife's name. Her name is Anita, but everybody calls her Nita.

JA: What did you use to do to entertain yourself and you crew on long days out on the boat?

KEJ: Practical Jokes. [laughter] There's a lot of entertainment out there when you go – when you're fishing. A lot of sights to see. There's always something you can see going on and with all the tourists and other fishermen. People enjoying themselves on the water is always

something to keep you occupied.

JA: What did your wife used to do when she was not out on the boat?

KEJ: United States Postal Service.

SM: Does she ever help you with fishing or anything?

KEJ: Oh, yes. I mean, she'd go out there and pull that net with me.

JA: Did she enjoy fishing too?

KEJ: Yes, until I got on to her about things that she wasn't doing right. [laughter]

SM: Go ahead, Stephanie.

SC: What do you think some of the biggest changes have been in the fishing industry?

KEJ: The fishing gear. The individuals that are so called fishermen that are getting into the industry. They're not the caliber of fishermen they were back in the day. It's not a career choice. If somebody comes out of high school and says, "I want to be a commercial fisherman," it just doesn't happen. You obviously don't have people that move from Michigan or Ohio down to Cortez and saying, "We're moving to Cortez. We're going to be fishermen." It just doesn't happen. I'd say a true fisherman is actually raised into the industry. A lot of the individuals that are still in industry now, you know where they came from. That's where they have come into today is because they grew up in it and they've lived it.

SC: So, do you get along with the new fishermen of these days, like the younger ones that do not have the same techniques as you or do you understand each other?

KEJ: No, you don't understand each other. [laughter] Since I met Dan in [19]95, the fishing industry has changed drastically just because of the type of gear you use. When the gillnets went out, the cast nets came in. If anybody thinks that they can make a living with the cast net, they're sadly mistaken. That's why we developed these seine nets that we use to help us out. We've worked in a way that you can actually utilize them and make money with them, other than just trying to cast net all day. I'm fifty-two years old. I'm not going to throw a cast net from sunup to sun down. It's not going to happen. In the fall run, back in the day, the gillnet days, you knew who the fishermen were. Everybody knew all the fishermen that were gillnetting. Now, in the fall run, when you have all these sport fishermen – recreational guide sport fishermen, they all have products license now. They show up. They're in the fall run when it's lucrative. So, now, you got a small group of, what I call, true commercial fishermen. Having to compete with hundreds of these sport recreational guide fishermen that qualify for a products license, didn't have a cast net and we do not get along.

SM: Any run-ins with some of those guys?

KEJ: I had a run-in this year with one.

SM: What was that about?

KEJ: During the fall when the fish, they school up and they stayed in the passes and they go offshore to spawn. That's when the big bunch of fish goes offshore. You can have as high as three hundred boats on a bunch of fish. Boats will bump into each other. You try to be careful and you got to get position on the fish to throw you overboard. I guess I was going to get this individual's boat broadside, and there were three guys on it. He just started cussing at me and just carrying on and I'll say, "Hey, chill out." I just waited. He was just ranting and raving. Then he says, "Well, I've been fishing since I was three." I just looked at him and shook my head okay. He was probably twenty-two years old. That's the type of stuff that happens when you're involved with those – we call them those type of people.

SM: What was your opinion about the net ban in ninety-five? Is that a good thing, a bad thing?

KEJ: It was one of the worst things that could ever happen to hardworking people in Florida.

SM: Why is that?

KEJ: Mostly because of the propaganda and just the lies and the untruths that were told to fuel the net ban push. It's all unfounded. There's no science behind it. There was no research. At the time, we had self-imposed rules that we imposed ourselves, and they were working. The enforcement was working. The fishery was stable. It's just one user group bullying the other user group out. That's what it was. There's just what it is, I guess, and slice in propaganda, man.

SC: How did it affect you personally, like the profits and everything?

KEJ: It pretty much put me out of business for ten years.

SC: So, you had to find new ways to...

KEJ: No, I actually stopped fishing.

SC: Really?

KEJ: Yes. I stopped fishing and I went and worked at a local Marina for ten years. Somewhat depressed about it, I guess. Then once some of the local guys were developing these seine nets that they used now. They're called 500 square foot nets. So, there's a select few fishermen that were quite ingenious. The way they developed this fishery that we use now, or the seine nets, and the way we used them, they were quite good at what they did. I gradually got back into it.

SC: So, you are happy now again to be back at Cortez?

KEJ: Yes, somewhat, I mean, I never left Cortez. I've never actually just stopped fishing. I kept fishing, but like I said, throwing a cast net is just not going to make money doing it.

SM: You said these nets were five hundred feet?

KEJ: It's what the state considers a legal seine. They're not gillnets. They're legal seines. So, yes, it's just what we get into.

SM: About weather and hurricanes and how that affects your way of life? Because Florida weather can change at any moment.

KEJ: Yes. It is what it is. You just got to work with the weather. If it's too rough today, you just have to put it off and maybe work on your boat or your gear or something until the weather straightens out. Weather changes fishing patterns quite a bit depending on the time of the year and just have to work with it and keep going.

SM: Are you catching more fish now than you were years ago? I mean, the fish population, how was that looking?

KEJ: I couldn't tell you. I can't say I make more money today. On average, probably about the same because of fish prices and fuel and all that stuff at all. So, it's not. I don't think it's any better than it ever was.

SC: Have you had problems with environmental protection laws with?

KEJ: The only problem we're having now was the Manatees Law. So, they've start piling us out in the middle of the bay that say you can't fly on a plane here, and stay away from this beach here. They've restricted us in that way. But as far as environmental laws, I don't think that's an issue yet.

SM: It was interesting that you brought up the ladyfish market because I have never heard of that. Do you sort of make adjustments based on consumer differences, like there is now obviously, a market for ladyfish? Have there been other examples of those kinds of changes of the different kind of market? Obviously, the mullet has been around a long time.

KEJ: Yes. There are some markets that have come up that just are not sustainable, I guess. They want so many, or they want this amount, and we just can't reach them because the fish just aren't here right now or they're in a different area. Yes, there's some markets that are available, that the fish just aren't in this area for us to be able to make them viable, I guess, you'd say.

SM: When you go back to the seine net, do you catch fish like snug, for example? I mean, are you able to release them?

KEJ: Oh, absolutely.

SM: How does that work?

KEJ: Yes. So, the seine is a very small mesh net.

SM: So, they do not get stuck.

KEJ: They don't get gilled off and stuck and pretty much drown, I guess, in site.

SM: So, it is very safe.

KEJ: Very safe, yes. But the thing about seine is it's a small mesh that we don't catch the bigger fish, we catch the small fish. They just had issues with a judge in Alachua County. I believe it was the same. They're actually just a small gillnet. They catch juvenile fish. They just don't catch the bigger fish.

SC: On average, how much do you think you make each trip?

KEJ: On average?

SM: Like you come out in the black or are you in the red sometime?

KEJ: Yes, there's days when you're not going to make any money, and you try to adjust your fuel consumption. You got to set a standard. In summertime, I always set my standard. I have to catch five hundred pounds of mullet that day to make money. After \$75 worth of fuel, that's not making a whole lot of money.

SM: Then you are going to pay your crew.

KEJ: You got to pay the crew, usually a third or whatever. So, you can't base it on one day. You got to base it on a year. If I make money, then I'm happy.

SM: Do you ever get to go on vacation?

KEJ: Oh, yes. You'll know which time to go on vacation when there's not much going on.

SM: Where do you enjoy going? I mean, a lot of people enjoy going fishing for a vacation. So, where do you like to get away to?

KEJ: Keys.

SM: Disney World?

KEJ: No. [laughter] I avoid those places. Yes, we go to places like Donna Key and just act like a tourist, or go in the middle of state somewhere and hang out. We don't go to a resort. It's just not our style.

SM: We think about all the development and things going around Cortez. I mean, is it a bad thing? Is it getting worse?

KEJ: Well, it's terrible. You can't hardly even drive at Cortez Road to go get a sandwich anymore. It'd take an hour. Just too many people. Development has always been a bad thing in this type of area. In a sensitive environment, it's always been bad. It's even worse now.

SM: Are they talking about doing something with the bridge?

KEJ: I think they're going to have to do something with the bridge. It's at the point now where the bridge is so old, and they just can't keep up with it. They're putting more money on the bridge now than what it's worth. So, they probably end up putting a new bridge in.

SC: Have you ever suffered any injuries or health issues from being out in the water?

KEJ: No, just stingrays stung every now and then. Nothing, sunburn, no. I've been quite fortunate.

SC: What about your crew? Have they ever suffered?

KEJ: No, I'm very careful when I'm working.

SM: What is the thing that you value the most as a fisherman over the years? I mean, you have a long history of fishing and being around people like Mr. Blue Fulford. So, what is something that just kind of sticks out?

KEJ: As far as memories, yes.

SM: In terms of being a fisherman, something that has been the most important thing that you have learned over the years?

KEJ: Freedom. I think a lot of you will understand what I have to say by freedom is. I can get up in the morning and put my boots on and get on my boat and go fishing. Nobody tells me that I have to be here at this time. I don't have to be there at that time. I just go fishing and do my thing.

SM: Is that what you are going to do today?

KEJ: I sure hope so.

SM: Well, is there anything else you would like to tell us before we close anything that we may be left out or that you left out?

KEJ: No. I guess you're going to interview some more people?

SM: Yes. Yes, sir.

KEJ: Quite powerful individuals are going to come your way.

SM: We thank you for your time.

SC: Thank you.

KEJ: All right.

[end of transcript]