Steve Marshall: All right. So, we are here at the Cortez Maritime Museum. How is the sound? Good?

Stephanie Collins: Yes.

SM: All right. Great. February 8th, right?

SC: Yes. [laughter]

SM: Yes. I keep forgetting the date today. I don't know why. 2014. I am Steve Marshall.

SC: Stephanie Collins.

Emily Arthur: Emily Arthur.

John McDonald: I am John McDonald.

SM: All right. All right. We are going to go ahead and get started. Let us go ahead and have you state your name again.

JM: John McDonald.

SM: Okay. When and where were you born?

JM: Well, I was born here in Cortez in 1933 and we lived over on Palma Sola Bay for a year or so.

SM: Where at, roughly?

JM: Oh, down about…

SM: Palma Sola Boulevard or…

JM: No, right down 115th Street just across the water here. Then we moved right down on the waterfront, where the Star Fish Company is now. My grandfather used to own that property, and it had a dock. He would run one boat like the one up here. Then (Rebecca Felton?), and we would haul fish to Tampa and Cedar Key and hauled salt back. When the fishermen first came here, they had to split all the fish and packed them in salt, layer of fish and layer of salt in the barrel. So he hauled the fish up and hauled salt back, mail, and whatever, I suppose, make a buck. Then we lived on that dock for years, and I had one sister born out on the dock in front of where the Star Fish Company is now. Of course, it is (docks going?). And then dad had an interest in that with his father, and he sold that, this little white house on the corner here across from the school, they put that in there, and we were raised right across from school here. Had five brothers, and so there were six of us. We all went to school here. My dad went to – there is a little school, the (Wood?) School, was built in the 1800s, down on the main drag in Cortez, if you want to call it the main drag. In 1912, that is when he came out here for a few years. Then

he rode the runboat over to Tampa to go to school, to business school. They had eight grades here then. When I went here, we had six grades.

SM: Okay. Go ahead.

SC: Can you talk some about your parents? What was their occupation?

JM: Well, my grandfather was a runboat captain, and then my dad was a fisherman all of his life. I had one brother that stayed here and fished, and I fished with my dad until I was 18. My grandparents came from North Carolina and my –

SM: Who were your grandparents?

JM: Captain Gus McDonald and then Betty Jean Fulford-McDonald. She was my dad's mother. They came from Carolina, little different areas. We went to school there, and it was pretty laid back. Lot of the kids came to school with no shoes. We did not wear shoes. In fact, one time I – they made so much fun of you for wearing shoes. My mother bought me a new pair of sneakers. We used to have ditches around all the houses here, and they drained out into the bay, and I put my new sneakers under the bridge. It went across over our lot there, and it had a big rain. I remember they washed my shoes into the bay, and I was in pretty much trouble over that. Another thing that kind of happened when I first started here, my buddies and I, we all played in school. J. Hartley Blackburn was the principal of the school here then, and the little kids I chummed around with – I was born in January, so I did not get to start school the next year. Of course, a lot of us started before, so I would come over at recess and play with them. As we called him, old man Blackburn, he always chased me out of the school and would not let me play with them. I decided I would better get equalizer, and I come over one day with my garden rake, and he chased me, I chased him a mile. The next year, when I started school, needless to say, I was behind the game.

SM: Right. Is that the same Blackburn that the elementary school is named after in Palmetto?

JM: Yes. Yes.

SM: Yes.

JM: Yes. He was our only teacher in this area.

SM: Okay. Great.

JM: I don't know if I answered you.

SM: Absolutely.

JM: We got off on a different track.

SM: No, no, that's great, and feel free to go off on some side trails here.

SC: You said that you fished with your father until you were eighteen. What did you do after you were eighteen?

JM: Well, I was enlisted in the Navy, and I was in the Navy for twenty-five years. I was an enlisted man for about half of that, and I was master chief electrician. Then I was an officer for remainder part. I retired after twenty-five years.

SC: Then you came back to Cortez?

JM: Well, I worked for anther twenty years for Ford Motor Company, then I retired about 18 years ago for – and then I've been coming back to Cortez here.

SM: When did you go into the Navy? Do you remember what year?

JM: Well, I was in in high school, 1950. Then the Korean War had broken out, and then we were getting called up, so I went in as a regular state for –

SM: Vietnam War era as well?

JM: Yes, I was in Vietnam, and the (river rainforces?) delta and on the rivers. Most of my time in the Navy, I was in the submarine service. I was on destroyers and what have you, but a good part of my time spent in the submarine service.

SM: Did you like living in Cortez?

JM: Oh, yes. It was pretty isolated out here because when I was a kid, there was one road out of here. It was Cortez Road, and it was about as ten-foot wide and arched up road. At that time, there was very few tourists. There was a few that came from the whole Indiana, Ohio, and stuff, and lived on the beach, some of the little short trailers, about fifteen-foot long and six-foot wide foot of the bridge on that side and foot of the bridge on the old – that was the old wooden bridge. It went across. I do not know you never noticed that. We did things together. It was fun. I would guess maybe forty-five, fifty kids in the school. I am not quite sure. First grade was right here, second grade, third grade, fourth, fifth, and sixth. That time, in seventh and eighth grade, you went to junior high and right in junior high, but we played. All get together out here, and across the road, that was all tidal flats. When the real high tide, it was flooded with water. It has all been filled in now. On low tide, we would go play football on the – we played tackle right out amongst the mango stumps and barefooted. Just about even the grown-ups, the fishermen, if they wore a pair of sneakers to the dock, when they got on the boat, they took them off and they were barefooted, so it was kind of a different – and we played marbles on those tide flats, down along where all the fish houses are now, and the village across, and that was a tidal area too. A bunch of us boys to push – I know a lot about what the boys did. People did not allow the girls around the docks. It was probably some foul language and stuff like that, I would guess, is the reason, but never really thought about it. But I know the girls were not supposed to go on the docks. You never saw them around the docks.

SM: So, you just kind of roamed around as a kid and kind of did whatever you wanted to?

JM: Yes, we camped out in the palmettos and got swamp cabbage out of the young cabbage ponds and made homemade kites about this high out of sticks of palmetto stems and old paper we would find.

SM: Simple things?

JM: Yes, and we would go after school, even at quite a young age – I do not remember exactly, maybe eight, nine, ten years old, we would go to the docks and certain of the fish had to be gutted. Their innards had to be taken out. So, you got paid. Over one hundred pounds, it was a real job to get one hundred pounds of fish and put a big pile of trout and red fish and stuff as the fishermen brought them in on the docks. The older kids always took all the big fish because you get a basketful, so those younger ones were – you would have to fight to get a basketful. You might make a couple bucks during the week while you are going to school. Then on the weekends, a lot of the kids went fishing with their dads, and that is what I did. I fished with him any chance I got. I played football for Manatee County High School, and they had just made a county high school out of it then. They would let me off at the Cortez Road and forty-one, and there would not be a one car on the road, and I would have to walk that whole distance to get – about 2:00 AM in the morning, I would get out here just before dad left to go fishing so I could make a little money on Saturday. About only thing I saw, there was a couple rattlesnakes each time I walked. They would lay up on the warm road, but it was just kind of isolated here. Well, there was no TVs. When I went off in the Navy, when I finished high school, we did not have a TV, did not have a telephone. A lot of the water in the houses was rainwater. Just about every house had a rainwater tank, and there were very few wells in the village. I still had outhouses when I was quite young. I carried water. There was a well at the school here and one down by the Albion Inn, couple wells around the village, but I carried water over here from the school. Did not have electricity either. You would walk down the main drag, there would be little benches with all of the chimneys from the lamps, kerosene lamps, out there where they washed and cleaned them. I do not know exact date. I will not say the exact date, but around 1940, I think, we must have got electricity out here, before or after that, somewhere in there.

SM: What was that day like?

JM: Well, we threw the (rulebook?) catalogs away. That is what you used for toilet paper you hung in the –before that, down on the docks, there was a little ice storage place up on that far end of town, and they had an ice plant in (Bredding?) at that time. They would haul ice in the truck and put it in there, and then the fish houses, when they wanted ice, they would go up. I think it was a 300-pound block, big blocks, and they would take that down. You had to chisel. Had ice chisels. We had to chisel. That is another job I got on the dock, chiseling ice to ice the fish. At that time, they could not refrigerate them all. They did not have to open them up. Once they had some way of cooling the fish, they could pack them in ice, and they did not have to open them up and take the innards out of the (mullet?). They started getting motor-driven ice chippers to chip the ice. Before that, you had to chip them with – I do not know.

SC: What was your favorite thing about fishing with your dad?

JM: Oh, we did a lot of kinds of fishing, and we went a lot of different places, like we would travel over to cross Tampa Bay. Especially in the summertime, when they had ice, they would make an icebox, a homemade icebox, on the back, and we would stay for a couple days. But we would travel all around Mullet Key. On the Mullet Key, what they call Fort De Soto now, my brother and I – that is an old late Spanish-American War, I think, fort, and had several big – I think they are twelve, fourteen inches – mortars, cannons. But we would go up, and when dad would anchor, a lot of time you anchored and waited for a school of fit mullet to go out and you would watch. You could see when a mullet was jumping, you know where he is traveling and you can kind of tell how many there were from the side of the (river the war?). So they would sit and wait, and my brother and I would jump over the side, swim a little and go ashore, play in the fort. So it was quite an experience there. You got pretty young age, and especially after the second World War, a lot of the – my dad, several of his nephews fished with them, but after the second war they got the GI Bill and they got trained, maybe, in electronics and did some other. So a lot of them left, and so those younger kids, what five men used to do, my dad and my brother and I would – you would put out – well, just to give you a little rundown on the fishing, had gill netting, which was you encircle the fish, and the fish swim into the net and get caught in their gills, and they fished for mullet and blue fish and some trout that way. Then they had seine fishing, which you did out on the beaches. Sometimes we would travel all the way up to Clearwater and down way other side of (shore?), so along the beaches in the summertime. You did not catch big schools then. In the wintertime, you would catch big schools of mullet. In the summertime, they were a lot smaller. So, we would fish all day, and you would go down the beach and you would see us following a school of mullet, and you would strike. Then the stop netting, oh, I probably come in in the 1920s or something. I am not sure. That is several miles of net, and you out in the shallow bays. You take in these tidal flats, grass flats and stuff, which might be three foot of water at high tide, and when they go down, they are down to foot and a half or something. The fish all settle out in deeper water area, and then you haul the fish out, but you got to handle all those nets. They got to all be pulled and picked up, and so it was a lot of work. It is just a lot of fun being out on the water, and you learned a lot. I did not realize that until after I went in the Navy. My dad was a pretty regimented individual, and if he had – and we had a line you would throw, jump off the back of the boat when you are seine fishing. You would say, "Let her go," and you would go out in a semicircle, run the net. Well, he did not want that line in the (pot?). He wanted it coiled nicely so he could grab it and it would not get tangled up and things like that. But in the Navy, that helped me out a lot, being an organized type person, and I learned on the boats. You did not realize you was learning at the time. Just your exposure to it, you educated yourself.

SM: Is that unusual for a young person as yourself to learn all those different things and go through that kind of experience?

JM: Well, I would guess, but probably in general, yes, but it would depend on – I started fishing with dad when I was four years old. In fact, that is where – I do not know if you saw this picture in here, big panorama of Cortez, and it shows all of the net spreads and stuff. Well, each crew, like dad had a section of nets for seines and gill nets and stop nets. Well, you would pull those nets on early in the morning before daylight, 2:00 a.m., 3:00 a.m., so you would be out at the pass at daylight so you could get started fishing. So about 4:00 a.m., I was on those net spreads.

They just got little rails that you walk on, and he said, "Son, you are going to be in the water if you are not careful." They were pulling the nets on. I was too small to help them. Next thing you know, I was in the water. I was hanging on to a piling. They had (pine sapling?) pilings for the net spreads, and my dad pulled me up and he covered me out. I can still smell – they had what they call oil skins. That was our raingear, and it was like a canvas material impregnated with linseed oil. They were real gummy and sticky, and they had a real smell to them. When I think about that, sometimes I can kind of smell that linseed oil. But I was more so probably with my dad and stuff than some of the people, but in general, most of the boys. Some of them, when they finished school here, went to fish, and not many, but a few. Most of them went on to school in town, but a few of them started fishing when they finished here. Even when they were young, they were out fishing, something they call (procking?). When a guy goes out at night with just a whole skiff by himself, they go out there in the kitchen. They call that the kitchen because they always get something to eat there, scallops and all sorts of fish and stuff. But we had one kid, (there, Junie Mora?), and he would go out (procking?) with these guys all night and would come in school and he would want to sleep in school, and the teacher was always chewing him out about that, I remember. They get that word (procking?) from – they show you how things trap. When we first opened a museum up here, and I put this one – I think it is still up over there – photo up of a guy out pulling a skiff (procking?). Then I have talked to some people from the Carolinas. They call it when they – around Harkers Island and that area up there, where lot of these people came from, when they chase around a shore with a small boat, picking up stuff, they call that (proguing?). Then we got on the internet. At that time, the director of the whole museum and all the stuff, historic bit was a professional museum operator. He would run the museum in Philadelphia and all that, so he got on. We found out that over in England, I can't pronounce the word, but it is a very similar – sounds just like that, when they go out in a small boat looking for kind of fish in a certain area, so that kind of tells you how vocabulary travels and got changed. I do not know. Where were we?

SM: No, that's fine. That is great. What were some of the challenges that you experienced on the fishing boat as you got older?

JM: Well, you always wanted to be like your dad or the older – your uncles and your –

SM: What's your dad's name again?

JM: Luther McDonald, old Captain Luther.

SM: Okay.

JM: To learn things that they could do, like mending net, for instance, you do not just pick up a mending needle. I do not know if you saw the mending needles over here, but I could show them to you later if you have not. You would get a big tear in the net. There is a certain procedure you got to go through to work on that and make the new meshes and stuff, so something like to learn to mend that. Dad was running the boat and stuff, and he would have a crew of three or four men, and then he was always looking at the water. He knew how the bottom was, where the deep water were, where the holes were. He knew everything about everything, but reading a lot about navigating, using what they call a seaman's eye. In other

words, they did not have a lot of equipment or anything. Just from experience, you knew if you looked and saw a certain thing, you were in a certain position. When going out what they call (Anna?) Sound out here, there is a range light, but then the old search lighthouse on the end of Egmont Key, where if you line that up, that would take you out into the deep water out the channel and stuff. He knew all of that having grown up on that runboat and been out in the – so that was a challenge to learn, and sometime he would tell – you had to dig for information, though. Dad did not line you up and say, "Well, you are going to learn this today," or what have you. You had to ask questions, and I did not ask enough of them because there is a lot of things I am interested in now that I do not know, and I just have to assume certain things. I guess it's probably like any person, they kind of want to be like their parents or something, accomplish things that they do, so that was kind of a challenge to learn the (same?). I volunteered for everything, and I played football in high school. Kind of an interesting thing about bunch of kids from Cortez, I was telling you about they did not wear shoes to school. In high school, a lot of them in the 10th grade and stuff went out for track, and they all went out there barefooted, running around the cinder track. They did not realize that you had track shoes and stuff, and they could run like the wind, most of us around here.

SM: Were you treated different at school because you were from Cortez and had a different lifestyle or culture?

JM: No, I do not think so. It probably was different, the kids that were raised in town as opposed to rural. At that time, the Manatee County High School had just changed over to a county school, and we had people from the cattle ranches and people that lived in the country in Palmetto and Parish and from all over. You had a lot of rural people in the school and along with the city kids.

SM: You had a mixture of just about everybody.

JM: We had quite a mixture there, and I get together now with some of the group, 1949, class of 1949, 1950, 1951, 1952. Maybe a little more than once a month, we will have lunch together, and they went all different directions. Some of them got scholarships to different schools, and I think we learned a lot right here. Well, one thing, if you was in the first grade and you had a second grader next to you, you learn good things and you learn bad things, but you learn a lot, because the teacher was teaching all three classes. I did not realize at the time, but I think you learned from them, and so when you went to second grade, you already had some of that information.

SM: Right. What made you decide to go into the Navy? What was that…

JM: Well, I…

SM: Was there a specific moment that you said to yourself, "I want to go to the Navy?"

JM: Well, a lot of the – during the second World War, there was a lot of people from Cortez were in the military, and most of them were in the Navy. And being on the water, what have you, that is where they wanted to be. Two things, I kind of wanted to be out on a ship, and

secondly, I wanted some technical education. I got out. I had good grades in physics and electronic. They had just started electronics last year, and I was in that, and I did real well in that, and math and all that type thing. So that was one reason, travel, and I did plenty of travel all over the world.

SM: Go ahead,

SC: Did you ever at one point want to be a fisherman like your father for a living?

JM: Well, I may have thought of that, but one of the things I learned when I was out on the water all the time was how much – it was a lot of hard, heavy work. When you fish [inaudible] boat and nets and what have you and you fished on a share, you did not catch any fish, a fourth of zero is not very much. So I kind of figured that out, too, that I wanted to do something different. My brother stayed here, and he is a couple years younger, and he was a fisherman all his life and had a crew and all that. I have a nephew that is still my younger sister's son, and he come and fished with my dad when he was a young kid with his grandfather. He learned. He is a good fisherman. He fishes for bait fish and mullet and that type thing now.

SM: And this was your younger brother that stuck with fishing?

JM: Yes.

SM: What was his name?

JM: Joe.

SM: Joe.

JM: All of the kids in our family were named J. They called us the six J's. In fact, they had a boat named the six J's. Jane – and I was looking at the school records. It was kind of unique. Instead of saying Jane or John McDonald, they said Janey McDonald and Johnny McDonald. I mean, they are kind of the nickname that you had. They did not put your legal name in the school record. This is on attendance records and on grades. Judy, Joe, Jacqueline, Joyce, they were all J's.

SM: Want to do number seven, Stephanie?

SC: Sure.

SM: Second part?

SC: Can you discuss a typical day in the life of a fisherman?

JM: Well, a typical day in the life of a fisherman?

SC: Yes.

JM: Yes. Well, I will start the night before, because usually you got in about dark, especially if you had not caught fish. Then we ate mullet here. I do not know if you know what mullet is, but it is a vegetarian fish that they travel in big schools, and that is what they primarily fished for. I mean, they fished for red fish and trout and all that other. Main catch was mullet. So they always claimed what they called a mess of mullet. They claimed maybe a dozen mullet. Mother would have the cornbread and biscuits and collard greens and grits, and all that would be ready when dad got in. Usually it was after dark, about dark sometimes, and us kids were chomping at the bit. So we would have supper that night, and then you usually had to get up about 2:00 a.m., 3:00 a.m., depending on what type of fishing you were doing. Sometimes you left later in the day, but most of the time you left early in the morning. Then you would go to the dock, and these net spreads I am talking about all out around the waterfront, out form the waterfront. You go and pull the nets on. The reason you had to take those nets off the boat all the time, the early nets were made out of cotton and linen, and they call the linen nets – of course, they are made from flax – flax nets. Usually, the gill nets were made out of the flax. It is soft and fish would go in. The other nets were made out of cotton. But you could not leave them on the boat wet. They would rot, so you had to pull them out on a regular basis, and when you did, you threw lime water on – agricultural lime – you would throw some in the bottom of the boat and throw some water on it. The kids usually got that job of throwing water on it as they pulled those nets up on the spreads, and of course, that would kill the fish, lime, and that stuff in them. You would pull the nets on, and then you would go to the – depending on where you – say if you were seine fishing, you would go to the pass, depending on how the tide was. Tides have a lot to do with (that whole thing?). Dad could look at the moon and says, "Well, it is going to be high tide in an hour." All the fishermen could. Most of the captains, too, because they were kind of in charge of things. They were always looking at those type of thing. But then you would wait until the tides were right, wait for fish to move out of the bays out onto the beach. Then sometime in the wintertime there would be a – well, there was probably twenty or twenty-five crews in the village here. Just about everybody in the village were fishermen or worked at the fish house, had something to do with fishing. So then when a fish – that would be daylight and a fish starts moving up the beach, then you would get in the right position and wait for them to get on the right kind of bottom where weren't any rocks. Then you would what they call making a strike. The captain would say, "Let her go," and then he would encircle a semicircle of the beach. Then I do not know if you looked at bottles we made over here. That kind of depicts that quite a bit. Of course, course, you would work the nets up to the beach, get all the fish in. You would take them over to the side of the boat. They had a big manual dip net, hold about two hundred pounds of fish, and one guy would get on the handle, and then he would dip them out, another guy to grab them. So you would get the fish in the boat, and then you had to pick the net up. Lot of times, it was twisted up. A lot of time, you got a lot of seaweed and stuff, and you had to clear all of that. Then you may travel on up to – if you cannot say [inaudible] you might travel up what they call Beans Point by Anna Maria, the north end of the island. Then you might anchor there, waiting for a school of fish to move in the right position so you could strike them. There is a little not much more than sandbar now called Passage Key. It is between Anna Maria and Egmont. At one time, that had about eight homes on it out there, and it was a fish house out there. I will tell you a story about that later. But anyway, you would go to that area. Sometimes we would make a strike there, and you might all travel all the way to Clearwater or (Pennsylvania?) area, and then you would come in at before dark sometime. Then you had to

throw the fish out, and then you had to clean the boat up, tie it up, pull the nets off, and that is why it was dark when you got home.

SM: What time did you get home, usually?

JM: Oh, it was usually quite late, and not all the fishermen were that way. Some of them were just intent. My dad was not. Especially if he had not caught many fish, he stayed until all chances were eliminated, and then he came home. Then if you were gill netting, a lot of the gill netting was done in the summertime. You might go across Tampa Bay, or at least my dad did. Some of them fish in Sarasota Bay and Palma Sola Bay. Then you would go over – and then same way that you had to spot the fish, and then you would encircle them with the gill nets, and kids get old and [inaudible]. A lot of times over there, we would end up in Sarasota and Palma Sola Bay and break mangrove branches off and throw over the fish, and then throw some water on them to cool them. I do not know if you notice that gill net skiff up there. It has got planks across. Those are called (thorts?), and the fish would be down under them, and they would put the mangrove limbs and leaves down under to cool them. Then the stop netting, you usually did that on a real high tide on a dark night, so you would pull – you would have to – before you got ready to go, you had to get a skiff load of shallow nets, which were about eight foot deep. There might be several miles a net, or a mile a net, some deep nets which were a little bit deeper. Then they had haul nets, and you had the donkey, which was used to pull the nets with. It was a single-cylinder engine, and reason they call that the donkey is those same engines replaced the donkeys in the mines. I run into a guy here while back from West Virginia, worked in the mine, "Oh yes, I know what a donkey is." They call them donkey engines because they replaced the donkeys, and they call that boat the donkey because it had those donkey engines. They use that to pull up – work the nets in, and then you had to pick all of – you get them worked in so far, and then you had something called a haul net you would put inside. It had a great big pocket back in there. The was when you caught a lot of trout and redfish and mullet and little bit of everything, because you took in a whole big area of high tide. When the tide went out, the fish settled into the deeper areas. You haul those up. So it was – caught a lot of fish you did not eat sometimes.

SM: Did you ever catch things that you were not supposed to catch?

JM: Not in general. I cannot remember when I – snook were illegal to catch in nets sometime in my later-ish teen years. Usually, I have always caught several of them. We would take some to eat, but you could not sell them. When I was a youngster, we had what they call a closed season on mullet, and that was usually from November until sometime in January, maybe. That is when they were spawning. The mullet has a great big red roe in it. We had a model here somewhere. I do not know. Anyway, there is some scattered around there, a little model of a mullet. The red roe, all there about a third of the way to the fish, and that is the female. The males have a white roe in them. Then when they are spawning, a lot of them go up – must be something to do with salinity or something in their system. They go up into the heads or the bays or up into the Manatee River, and then they get in big schools, and then they go out to the passes and up off of Anna Maria, out onto the sandbars, and lay their eggs. Females lay the red roe, and those red roe are through a gillion eggs in there. I mean, there are really a ton of them, and it is like grits, or they are a lot smaller than that, the eggs are. Then the males, which have the sperm in them, swim around the outside of them and dump that sperm onto the eggs. So now they fish for

mullet for the roe. I do not know if you're familiar with that. In 1995, they outlawed fishing with all these different kinds of nets I just described. They were allowed five hundred square feet of net, so with a cast net, that fits that category. Before that, cast nets were strictly a recreational thing, but they figured out, of course, when those mullet are in real tight schools spawning, they can catch them. That is when they get several dollars a pound for the mullet. So now they fish for the roe. Then we quit fishing as a conservation measure due to a lot of spawning. I do not know what – got off the track there.

SM: Do you know, the roe industry today, does that affect the mullet population?

JM: Well, I do not know, but I assume it does, although with gill nets, you can size the mesh on them so that you can catch what the size you want to catch. You do not have – might catch a small one. You cannot use [inaudible]. Originally, see, when they first came in the market for mullet was around Alabama and Georgia and Tennessee, and some of them went to the fish market in New York, where a lot of ethnic groups were. But those people ate mullet, and people here, like doctors and lawyers and everybody, they always talked about a mess of mullet. Occasionally, we would go see the doctor a few times, and I remember going. You would take him a mess of mullet, I think, is how he got paid. I do not know. A mess of mullet was about six mullet cleaned and opened up. I remember Dr. Blake and Dr. [inaudible] both, they loved mullet. Then the people from Cortez always carried a mullet when they went to see them.

SM: Was that the most profitable fish?

JM: Well, no. In fact, during the depression, the mullet population went down for some reason, early [19]30s. But all through the years, I only got a few cents a pound for the mullet. During the second World War, and then about the time the second World War started, mullet were just plenty of them. There was a demand for meat on account of shortage of meat, and they got maybe 18 cents a pound for them, which was 300 percent or 400 percent more than they were getting. So then the fishermen did not great, but quite well. But now they get about $250 a pound on account of these roe. In the summertime, there is a few people that still cashing it for the mullet, what they called (hard hedge?), which are they do not have the roe in them.

SM: Okay. And what else, guys?

SC: What brought you back to Cortez after you retired?

JM: Well, I kind of wanted – my wife has all her brothers and sisters up in Minnesota. My last tour in the Navy, I was in charge of a Navy navigation satellite system, which is a four-rudder of a (gullible?) positioning system. On the base there, we managed a bunch of satellites. So after I retired from that and then my second job, kids were grown, I wanted to come here. So our kids are up there, and her brothers and sisters, so we just kind of a nice life. We are residents of Florida, but we go there for the summer. So I came back just because it was – and it is different. There is people here now. Everywhere you look, there is people, and when I was a youngster, it was pretty sparsely populated around.

SM: Were you a pretty tight-knit community back then?

JM: Yes, I think so. Yes. That has kind of been all in the personality of the villagers, the people is to be here. If you are from Cortez, you are from Cortez.

SM: Yes. That's what makes it really unique.

JM: Yes.

SM: It sort of revolves around fishing.

JM: Yes, and there is still the few descendants of original families here that are fishing. One of them fishing for mullet, they migrate down the coast. Mullet, when they are spawning and stuff, kind of have a tendency to, when you get to cold weather in the northwest front – maybe the pressure has had something to do with it – they kind of move and let the cold weather. A lot of people are not full-time mullet fishermen. Most of them that fish here are, but up and down the coast the – and then they move along. They catch a mullet. They sell them here, and then they move south of here. Maybe they might be up in Panama City somewhere when they first start catching them. But they catch more of them down in the more temperate waters down that stretch.

SC: What has been some of the biggest changes in the fishing industry over the years?

JM: Well, I guess it is like anything. When they had to use sails, I wish that I had the little (skip jack sails, you were kind of limited to what your sailing skiffs. They would sell the skip jack out and had a small net. You could only handle that much, and you had to put that down. You had to pull it up, pick up the fish, sail back in, so it was limited. So once they got engines in the boat, then they could migrate a lot further. They could go across – at that time, the small ones would go across the bay, but then they could pull other boats. So as things got bigger and bigger, and then they got launches and what have you. Then they tried different types of fishing, the seine fishing. Then the stop netting was probably the biggest change, because that took a lot. That took quite a few men. It took a lot of equipment. People that owned the boats, a lot of them would go into the fish house. When they were using the runboats and stuff, there was not a bunch of fish houses around. But then in later years, there were a lot of fish houses, and a captain might borrow money from the fish house to order a bunch of nets. Then, of course, he is kind of obligated the fish house to stay there and work to sell those fish to them. So you had to go into debt for a lot bigger operation, so it was quite a change. But most of them, most all the fishermen, they did not get rich or wealthy. They just made a living. The market was – you have to have a market to sell something. I mean, somebody has to want what you catching. So I think the biggest change was the stop netting and then – years before they had this final net ban, they had outlawed a lot of the stop netting type fishing. I do not know exactly when. I was not around at – I think probably in the '80s was when they started selling the roe in the mid-east and the far east. So when I was young, there was only one grouper boat here. They did not fish for grouper much in this area, although there was plenty of grouper off the shore. They did not have equipment like we got now. This guy's name was (Monty?) Watson, and he would tell my dad or (Tim?) Fulford, he says, "I am going" – he had a boat about 35 foot long, which is a fair size, and he fished by himself. He was what they call a bandit. When you are fishing for grouper,

you fish in real deep water. So he would go off in the morning. He would tell my dad, he would say, "I am going southeast down the pass," and all they had was a little compass in a box, no radio, nothing. Then he says, "If I do not get back by a certain time tonight, somebody come looking for me." I went with my dad one time way offshore, about twenty miles. We found him just by dead reckoning and on a certain course. So that grouper fishing built – and there was no Red Lobster selling grouper, marketing grouper stuff. So once the demand was there for the grouper, and especially – and they used hooks. So you hook, and you do not use nets for grouper. When they first started in that, they used what they call a bandit, and that was just a reel. You fished in real deep water, so it took a long time to lower a line down and haul it back up by hand. So then they realized that they could use a little – take a generator and run it as a motor off the battery, and then use that as a motor to run the thing up and down. Then they got some hydraulics, so they did that type fishing. But then they started – when I was a (real to ban?) for grouper using long line, what they call long line, and it probably six, seven miles long. Then they hook up pre-baited short piece of line onto this long line clip, we call it, onto the line, and that locks onto the line and every thirty feet or something. They run it – bait it, have the pre-baited hooks, run it over, pick it up, go back and pick it up, and it is time to run it over again. So it does not take too much technology to do that. You can run it over and be in the right area. So that was a big change I have had. So, the thing that is left now is this cash netting, primarily in the fall and early winter months for mullet and the grouper fishing offshore. There is a bait fishery here. Like I said, my nephew did, and they kept what they call thread herring and sardines, and they are used for bait on these long liners. Some of the mullet carcasses are – they save those carcasses, and there is a market in Haiti and some other places where they got some money from other countries helping Haiti out. There is nothing wrong. They are good fish are sold there, but some of it is little bit of a smoke, but there is not very much of an argument on all that. But some of that goes for bait on these fishing long liners.

SM: What was your opinion about the 1995 net ban?

JM: Well, I think it was decided by the wrong people. It was put out as a general amendment for the voters to vote on, and doctors and lawyers and all. It was kind of a recreational versus a commercial fishing thing, and I think there was a lot of misinformation put out commercial fishing did about how it affected the fish and the stocks and what have you. I think they should have had a study and maybe restricted certain commercial fishing more and some recreational fishing. But the money was with the recreational people. They had all the money and numbers. At that time, there was probably only a few thousand fishermen around the coastal Florida, and they had already passed these laws over in Texas and Louisiana, and then they were here. So I think a person voted yes for a lot of it. In fact, my cousin, she is from Georgia and she had moved down here, and I asked her what she voted. She said, "Well, I voted yes. That has got to be the best thing," and I was explaining to her why she did not even realize how it affected the whole thing. So, it should have been studied a long time, and that is the way with a lot of fishing. Fishermen are like farmers. They are very independent, and they do not naturally get together and even the four thousand or five thousand are scattered. They had an organization called Organized Fishermen of Florida, but they just did not have the money and the lobbying capabilities and stuff.

SM: Was it all in the name of environmental protection, conservation that this net ban was

created?

JM: I do not think it was so much environmental as it was stocks. Naturally, I would say people that are in the tourist business were interested in having plenty of trout and redfish and type of things you catch on a boat. Most of the mullet – it affected most the mullets. They do not bite hooks. They are a vegetarian type thing. So it could have been handled, is all I can say. There is something going. Some judge made the ruling to rescind that law to some degree, and that another judge is looking at it, so we will see if that is going to take effect.

SM: How do you feel about the development in Cortez? How do you feel about that?

JM: Well, it is kind of nice that at this state, it is not coming over the country. When I was a kid, you could go to the lake and the beach, have big, long stretches of island that was not developed. Now it is one end to the other is people. So naturally, it does not appeal to me, having been involved in the older part. But I would guess it should be regulated to some – if you are going to have people here and they are going to buy property, you got to deal with that situation and the roads and the traffic and what have you. So I guess you cannot be opposed to it, but on the other hand, not necessarily be thrilled about it.

SM: Right. How are you involved with Cortez today? I know you're a volunteer for the museum.

JM: When they were just starting the museum up, I just happened to stop by and talk to this Roger Allen, and he had been in the museum business. He was going to be in charge of it. So we could talk, and I said, "Well, I know the people around here," and it was kind of on his first journey kind of down there. I said, "I will go around and look for photographs and stuff of artifacts that we can," – and so I have kind of helped make a lot of displays. Lot of them are taken down now. They have changed stuff around. I got involved with the museum, and then I am involved with the historical society. We have a Cortez Village Historical Society that we are trying to – we do not have as much cultural history and information in Cortez as we would like to have, and we have got a little cottage that was moved from the beach. They put a parking lot in it, and it had been designated historical building. It has been moved over here, it is right behind the museum here, and process of working on that now that we have photos of Cortez early families through the years, different families and hopefully some information about the history of fishing, how it developed, so just general cultural things about Cortez. So involved in that, trying to get that going.

SM: You're always looking for more people to be involved with that?

JM: Yes, we always need more volunteers for that, be involved with. Even though we are not knowledgeable and did not grow up here or have been exposed to a lot of the history, the new generation with computers can do a lot of research. Me, it takes me a while to find something on the computer.

SM: I grew up down the road.

JM: Did you?

SM: Actually, in the San Remo Shores is where I grew up.

JM: Yes.

SM: Yes.

JM: We always volunteers, and there is always some job to be done. If you want to make a display, somebody that is good with photographs and putting things together like that. So there is plenty of work around.

SM: Well, in the years that you spent in Cortez, what has been the biggest thing that you've learned or cherished in these many years in Cortez? What's something that has really stuck out for you as maybe [inaudible]?

JM: Change in what direction?

SM: Well, just maybe what's one impression that sticks out in your mind in the past years, something that you think about from time to time? There is probably more than one, but is there anything that sticks out?

JM: Well, I think the urge of the people in general here to continue a type of life that is fast being eliminated by other pressures like – well, money had a lot to do with everything. If there is money to be made with tourists, that pressure eliminates concern about historic things and preserving things. I realize that people have to make a living.

SM: So there's this sort of clash between preserving history and the new growth and development and (laws?)?

JM: We got so many people here now that – I notice that giving tours around here, especially this time of the year, people come down for two or three weeks from New Jersey and Chicago and Maine and wherever. They are really interested in the history of this place. They are interested in – if you take time to explain how fishing developed over, you can tell that they are really fired up about what you are telling them and they are interested in knowing about it. So I think that if we can keep this place this way and not to let it get overdeveloped commercially, that is a good tourist attraction, too, I mean, for something people to do that tells a story from years, century past. So I think it is very worthwhile, both like our historical society and the museum and what nave you. Then we got this fish preserve here that the fishermen organization bought and has preserved that and keep it from getting developed. I am sure through the years it will be – as open land becomes more and more scarce, that will be used a lot for education and for tourism, people just to go and visit. They got walking trails down through the (fishery?) now. You can walk and see how the mangroves and palmetto savannas are growing.

SM: Right. Is there anything else that you guys want to ask or…

SC: Covered a lot.

SM: Yes, we did. Is there anything else you'd like to add? I know there's probably a bunch of stuff that you'll remember later, but that's okay. Was there anything else you want to throw at us before we conclude, something we forgot to ask?

JM: Well, I guess I really do not have anything to add to that.

SM: I mean, we covered a lot of good information and –

SC: We did. A lot of good details and stories.

JM: What are you going to do with this?

SM: What we're going to do is we're going to put it on a database with the NOAA fisheries. They're helping us. We're partnered with NOAA, with the Manatee School for the Arts. There's going to be a database of the interviews, and what we're doing is just purely educational. This is a Florida history class that we teach.

JM: Oh, I see. Yes.

SM: We're one of the only high schools in the state that teach Florida history, which is kind of sad. But we like doing these kinds of things. This is what we do on a normal basis. We get out and experience the real Florida, and we try to emphasize local history a lot.

JM: Well, I think that is great.

SM: The oral history is something that I'm trying to expose more and more students to.

JM: See, one of the things with the history of – all these little tidbits are not written down anywhere. We have a lot original displays. Had this one girl we worked with, professor from college out here, and she was really good with the computer and composing and putting together. I say, "Well, we want to put something together on this," and I either get somebody that had the information, or if I knew about it, we would recorded that. Even if it is not 100 percent correct, it is in general. You have got that information recorded because nobody ever – especially in a place like this, fishermen did not. So it will never be recorded.

SM: Absolutely. And this is why we're doing this, too, is because it's about preserving your story and how that's important in the study of history, coming to appreciating history more, because everybody's got a story.

JM: I am sure if you – all the different little – [inaudible] that was a big – they shipped cattle out of Punta Gorda – cattle drives to Punta Gorda, and they shipped cattle to Cuba. Now I am sure there has been very little written down about that unless somebody wrote a book.

SM: Our textbook is *A Land Remembered* by Patrick Smith. So that's all about the cattle

industry and exactly what you're talking about.

JM: So it will never get recorded unless somebody…

SM: Absolutely. So this is why we are here.

JM: A very important project you guys are doing.

SM: This is why we are here. But anyways, we want to thank you for your time.

JM: You are welcome.

SM: We appreciate your information.

JM: Was not very formal but…

SM: No, that is fine. That's the way we like it. Thank you.

JM: Yes. Thanks. Thank you, guys.

SC: Thank you.

JM: Good luck to all…

[end of transcript]