

Michael Jepson: This is Michael Jepson. Today is April 23, 1993. I am here on Fulford's Dock with Mr. Earl Taylor. We are conducting an oral history with Mr. Taylor as part of the Vanishing Culture Project, funded in part by the Florida Humanities Council. Earl, we start these interviews usually by having you state your full name and your date of birth.

Earl Franklin Taylor: Earl F. Franklin Taylor.

MJ: Your date of birth?

EFT: Date of birth, 22nd November [19]27.

MJ: 1927?

EFT: Yes.

MJ: Can you tell me your parents' names?

EFT: Alvie Taylor and Julia Taylor.

MJ: What was your mother's maiden name?

EFT: Foreman.

MJ: Julia Foreman. Do you have any brothers and sisters?

EFT: I had a sister. She lived to be thirty-seven years old. She passed away with cancer.

MJ: Her name was?

EFT: Christine.

MJ: Christine Taylor?

EFT: Yes.

MJ: Was she married?

EFT: Yes. She was married twice. She was married to Pete (Bacallod?). Then she was married to another guy. Can you remember his name, Mark? I can't remember his name.

Mark Taylor: No. All I remember is Bacallod.

EFT: I can't remember.

MJ: That is okay.

MT: You're thinking about Aunt Christine?

EFT: Yes.

MT: I don't remember no Bacallod.

MJ: Do you have children?

EFT: Yes. I have a son and a daughter. My son is a commercial fisherman. I have three granddaughters by him and his wife, Linda. I have a daughter that has two children, a boy and a girl.

MJ: Your son's name is?

EFT: Mark Taylor.

MJ: Your daughter's name is?

EFT: Deborah Moss.

MJ: Your son is a commercial fisherman?

EFT: Yes.

MJ: His wife, Linda, and they have three children?

EFT: Three girls.

MJ: Your daughter?

EFT: Deborah Moss, she'll be finishing up her RN college in about another two weeks. She just took a four-year course in there.

MJ: Where does she live now?

EFT: She lives in Bradenton.

MJ: Your son, Mark, lives in?

EFT: In Bradenton.

MJ: Well, we kind of like to start out by having you talk a little bit about your parents. If you could start out talking a little bit about your father, tell me what type of a person he was.

EFT: Well, I was a second generation of my father – or rather, he had three children by his first wife. After they divorced, well, he married my mother. They lived in Sarasota at the time. She

was born over on Perico Island and everybody knew each other. My father comes from North Carolina when he was a young man.

MJ: He moved to Cortez, or was he on Perico Island?

EFT: No, he moved to Cortez. He had a brother that came down later and was a boat builder, Neri Taylor.

MJ: Neri Taylor?

EFT: Yes.

MJ: So, your father was a commercial fisherman?

EFT: Oh, yes.

MJ: What are some of your earliest recollections about him and commercial fishing?

EFT: Well, my father was a little older than most fathers because I was his second family, in part. I'm the youngest, younger than my sister. I started fishing with him when school was out with pole skiffs. We had a lot of mosquitoes here then and a lot of mosquito hawks – and cotton nets, few linen nets, whoever could afford them. We used pole skiffs and a little launch. It had a star engine in it to tow around with. So, we'd anchor and take poling oars and tried to outrun the fish, shoving by hand. Prior to that, they used just a skipjack without – just kind of a V-bottom skiff with a little sail they'd put up when the wind was blowing. They didn't use any power at all.

MJ: Did your father fish in a skipjack?

EFT: Yes. Matter of fact, he had one until he was unable to fish when he took ill. I had to quit school and help support our family.

MJ: What year was that?

EFT: I was fifteen years old and got into the ninth grade. But I had been fishing every summer with him from the time I was about ten, eleven years old.

MJ: So, you learned primarily from your father how to fish?

EFT: Oh, definitely, yes.

MJ: Was he a good fisherman?

EFT: Very good. He'd made a lot of money. He owned a lot of property. He owned a water inn around Cortez. He'd give each to the children a piece of land.

MJ: He divided his property among his children?

EFT: Some of it, yes.

MJ: Do you remember the skipjack that he had?

EFT: Oh, yes. I can see it right now.

MJ: Can you describe it?

EFT: Well, it was probably maybe a foot longer than the rest of the flat-bottom skiffs that Uncle Neri built. I don't know who built his skipjack, but it was one that had a quite a bit of tuck in the stern. Whenever you'd shove it, it would just keep going faster. A flat-bottom skiff with tuck in it, no V at all in the boat, well, it would kind of suck down and almost stop when you shove real hard.

MJ: You said it was a foot longer. Approximately, how long would that be?

EFT: Probably about nineteen feet.

MJ: Nineteen feet?

EFT: Yes.

MJ: Now, did it have a centerboard?

EFT: I think it did at one time. I'm not sure if it did or not. But it didn't at the time where we didn't use sails and we were just towing with a little launch.

MJ: Did that boat have a name?

EFT: I don't believe it did. Now, it seemed to me that most of the boats had a name, but I don't think daddy's boat at that time – he'd had bigger, larger boats prior to that. He used to fish with a four or five-man crew, towing four or five skiffs with a larger launch. But as he got older, he wasn't up to doing that.

MJ: The early fishing that you did with him, was that gillnetting or stop-netting?

EFT: Gillnetting.

MJ: Gillnetting?

EFT: Yes.

MJ: I thought that stop-netting was here first, but then from some of the reading that I have done, were fishermen gillnetting and then stop-netters came into Cortez?

EFT: I don't know. I remember there was a feud between them at one time, but the stop-netters never did quit in my lifetime. They always stop-netted up until right here since these laws have been passed that stop-netting is about over with.

MJ: Well, tell me a little bit more about fishing with your father. Do you have any recollections about any special trips that you made fishing with him?

EFT: Oh, yes. We have a catch of fish down at this side of New Pass there off Longboat Key, just out on the shore in a deep cut. Of course, our net back in those days were not over fifty meshes deep. None of the nets would touch the bottom in the cut. We struck a bunch of fish out there. We got overboard, and of course, fish was slow-hitting. It isn't like nowadays where there's monofilament. We'd go around our nets picking them out. The DeSear boys, Marshall and Vernon, had been down to Longboat Pass. Of course, there wasn't no bridge across there then. They hadn't caught anything. They'd come back, and they went around to hit a school's cut at the end. Then they walked out there, and they helped us pick out the mullet. They got all the mullet they wanted and helped us get our net up. That was the last day before school that I went fishing with him that summer. We had twelve-hundred pounds. We were fishing a 5/8 net. They were just medium mullet – medium-class mullet, school mullet. My dad never was, at my time fishing with him, what we call a seine fisherman. There used to be about six crews that didn't do anything but have a cotton seine that fished all the beaches. In the summertime, a lot of fish were usually on the beaches and around the passes. But now, those fish, in the summertime, they have deep holes and cuts and fingers. They've dredged up to where they can stay cool in those, where there's water. Back then, there wasn't anything but the channel. There were a few mud holes when the tide would go low, and those fish would always drop out there. In the evening squall, they'd go around the beach. But you don't see that anymore. There was several families that lived off of just fishing on the beach.

MJ: Really? They would be haul-seining?

EFT: Yes. They were caught in seines. There was Millard Brown. He didn't do anything – well, he'd stop-net in the wintertime. But Jess Williams, he just seine-fished. Bud (Colberth?), he just seine-fished. Guy Fulford, he just seine-fished. Walter Bell started out – I started out with him. He seine-fished, and his daddy. His daddy never gillnetted. To my knowledge, he stop-netted in the wintertime and seine-fished in the summertime. But fish change and use different. People don't understand that. They look around where they used to fish, and the fish are not there. But you can take them to these big dredge holes like down in (Orovada?) and places they've destroyed. You can go in there, and all year, whenever you don't think you've seen any mullet around, there'd be a couple hundred thousand pounds in there. It's very deep. The very few nets we got, we'd hit bottom in there.

MJ: Do you think it was easier to find fish back then, or was it just that you knew the bottom and the bay so well that you could find them?

EFT: Actually, there's not much of that bay bottom out there that most of us had walked on at one time or another, either scalloping for a living or fishing and dragging old cotton nets around over your shoulder and pulling them around, because they just didn't hit your net like they do

now. We'd work the fish up a lot of times, what we call a corkscrew, and just go around and around with each end and making them hit in mud holes and places. The difference then and now is you'd find fish on a flat, or you didn't find fish. Today, you can ride by and see them in all these fingers. There's times that they're scarce and times you'll have a lot of fish around. You'll have a little freak weather and they'll disappear. I remember one year, I was stop-netting, Joe Capo and I, and we were working up near the mouth of Palma Sola Bay, and a freak storm come out and had a tornado in it. One boy had hauled his fish up, Buster Bell, up there at the mouth of the river, and it turned his skiff – he had a warsherrail skiff with a few thousand pounds of fish on it, and it turned it upside down. Just tied her on the launch, yes. They would just come out of nowhere. In our canals, what we had were tar black with mullet – big mullet. The next week, people up in the Cedar Key area, all up there were wanting to buy some big-mesh gillnets, because their fish are usually small. All them fish we had in our bay just moved right up there during that weather. People don't realize that they got fins and they migrate and they swim. That's what happens to most all of your fish. They pass by, and you have them for a while. We've just had a big run of mackerel this winter, and now, they're catching them up around Port St. Joe and Panama City. They'll have a good run right on, because we've had it here for several months. Last fall, right on through.

MJ: Let me get you to go back a little bit and talk about the early days, growing up here in Cortez. Can you tell me a little bit what that was like?

EFT: Well, it was paradise. It was really paradise. The shoreline along here was different. It was like a white sand fiddler flat, and great place for children to play before it was pumped in. Everybody knew everybody. If anybody got sick, we just took up collections – or somebody did – to help them out. But actually, I never found a place like it. There's an old-timer who'd come here. His name was Earl Jacobs. He says, "I've been all around the world." He said, "I've been at every state in the Union." He says, "Don't go looking for the grass to be any greener anywhere else, because what you got here, everybody will be looking for it, and they'll find it someday," and they have.

MJ: [laughter] They have, all right.

EFT: We had paradise here. But we really didn't realize what we had until we got away from it. I've had some mighty good offers in my life, but I was always homesick for this place. I couldn't stand it.

MJ: When you say, "When we got away from it," what do you mean by that?

EFT: Well, one time, I went to California a couple of years. I didn't intend to stay that long. Well, that's where my wife was from, and her father was ill and was supposed to die. He didn't die and he seemed to get better, so I come back home. We had red tide here several times. I believe it was about [19]47, and right after I got married. New Year's Eve of [19]48 and [19]49, we had a red tide that was about as red as could be. A lot of people think they've seen red tide, but if they haven't seen that red tide, they haven't seen real red tide.

MJ: Really? What year was that?

EFT: This was in [19]49.

MJ: [19]49?

EFT: [19]49. We had had one about three years before that, two or three years. It was pretty bad, but this one was worse than bad. I got on a shrimp boat, and my mother-in-law was in Birmingham, Alabama. We'd never heard of television at the time. So, I went shrimping and made enough money to clear myself of whatever I might have owed, and sent my wife money to pay down the house trailer. I went up there and worked up there a couple of years. I come back, everybody had TV, and they was catching the most fish they'd ever known of. They would build them a co-hop and...

MJ: Walleye. Hang on a second. Okay, go ahead.

EFT: I was in Birmingham. I had about a big an offer as any human being ever had. But I was so homesick I couldn't stand it. Every morning I went to work, I just sat there and dreaming I was on my way to Cortez. So, I come back home, and I was happy to be back, really. I'd been in law enforcement after that in Polk County and Manatee County. I didn't like politics, so I got out of that. I just loved to fish.

MJ: You were telling me a story about your Uncle Neri and what he kept underneath the house there. Can you tell me that again? What was it that he had there?

EFT: Well, when I was a little kid, after school, I'd slip away and come down. My mother didn't want me around the water because I couldn't swim. I'd come down there and I'd watch him build these boats – skiffs, launch, and whatever. I'd watch him use a hand brace and bit. He'd drill a hole for the nail, and then he would have what they call a countersinking bit that kind of went down about a quarter of an inch. Then he'd putty over the nail after he drove it through. I'd try to help him once in a while, but I really enjoyed watching him do all that handwork. He built nice boats. A lot of them, I guess, are still around – the launches, especially. But that was a nice thing. He had a setup where he built a house, and he built his boatways with a track right underneath it where he could build a boat and run it right out into the water. At that time, my dad had a fish house back then. This was part of that, and net camp spreads right next to it. So, it was just the beginning of a good thing back in those days.

MJ: A lot of people describe growing up at that time as being a hard life. Do you think it was hard?

EFT: Well, now, we're talking about in times of the Depression. I think it was hard all over the United States. When I was in California, those people out there that I worked around – I worked for a big company called Keuffel and Esser, K&E Products. They worshiped Roosevelt like he was God because they had been on starvation out there, and the soup lines and things. Shoot, all we did was eat mullet here five days a week. You'd kill a chicken on Saturday and have it for Sunday. We had it good, really. A lot of people come through begging, and my mother never turned one of them down.

MJ: Tell me a little bit about your mother. What type of person was she?

EFT: Well, when I was a little fellow, I remember her being slender. But as she got older, she got bigger. She had muscles about the size of my legs or my arms. She worked night and day. She took in laundry. There was a fellow that drove from Samoset. My aunt had a grocery store. In that grocery store, they had a radio repair shop and a post office. I spent a lot of time out there when I was a little fellow. They had to meet the train twice a day. It was about a mile down the road from there. This man that lived out there, his name was (Desbro?). He used to go to, I believe, Wallace Cleaners. He'd pick up dry cleaning around there. Well, he'd also bring my aunt's laundry down, because they worked there in the grocery store. She'd have a box of groceries. I'd know right where to stick my hand down that big old box to find my sack of candy, my sister and I. A lot of neighbors around would come over and iron. My mother had two mangle ironers where you'd iron the sheets, run them through. I used to do that, and the towels and things like that. I loved to do that.

MJ: Now, what do you call them?

EFT: Mangles, like where they had a big round roller with cloth on it.

MT: I used to do all that. [laughter]

EFT: And a big metal shoe that fit curved around right over that. You just get them started and run them right through there.

MJ: It would press them?

EFT: Yes. It seemed to me like she'd iron maybe to 12:00 to 2:00 in the morning, and she was up before daylight doing washing and hanging clothes in the morning. I can see her now wearing boots out in that grass. Never did have a lawnmower. We always had to sling the grass down. Of course, this was back in the Depression, and everybody didn't have everything they needed. But we did have electricity. A lot of houses didn't have electricity.

MJ: But you did then?

EFT: Yes. We had electric lights, and had a nice, big home – two stories with a big attic, an upstairs-downstairs porch. It went around the front and both sides of the house about halfway. My mother just didn't do anything but work.

MJ: She was a homemaker, plus she took in laundry. Did she ever work outside the home?

EFT: I think, one time, she worked up at a Bradenton Laundry. I don't know if she ever worked at Tropicana or not. A lot of these ladies worked at Tropicana around here as soon as something opened up. But we're talking about back when \$5 would load a pickup truck with groceries. The dealer had to have a truck to haul ice from Bradenton in four-hundred-pound kegs of ice. People who worked at fish houses would take the trucks to go to town to get the major supply of

groceries in a Friendly City Market and one or two more up there. But my mother, she just worked. Saturday, she'd be there mopping the house and on her hands and knees, scrubbing the stairway. She was, I guess, a workaholic.

MJ: Never had a day off.

EFT: I'll tell you what, I never did sleep on a dirty sheet. [laughter] My mother changed my sheet I think about three or four times a week.

MJ: Was she a good cook?

EFT: Oh, yes. I don't think there's any old-timer in this town that wouldn't tell you that about her fried chicken and the cakes and light rolls and pies and biscuits, stuff she made. We had a good principal at our school that become the school superintendent of Manatee County. His name was Hartley Blackburn. He married his wife when I was in the fourth grade. She had taught me the first, second, and third grade. He was good about taking us to Camp Flying Eagle on trips and taking us – he lived over on Anna Maria Island, and we'd go over there on picnics. They'd get all the children out there running sack races, getting on in a croker sack, jumping, and doing all kinds of games. We'd ride over there in those ice trucks the fish houses had. They'd put us out there playing, and we'd come up there to get in line to eat. Well, there wouldn't be any of mama's cakes or anything like that left. Oh, they went and ate those. [laughter]

MJ: They did not put those out?

EFT: Yes. The children would get into her cakes and stuff. I can hear them now. They'd pull up in front of the house in a truck, "Come on, Julia, and bring them cakes." [laughter]

MJ: Did you eat as a family? Did you sit down at the table and eat together as a family?

EFT: Oh, definitely, yes. We had a two-story house, see. Our bedrooms are upstairs. We had the front room and a dining room and the kitchen all in one room. We had a big round table with leaves in it, with a big bear claw placed right in the center, and a big round post about a foot and a half across. Now, we didn't eat there every meal because all of mama's ironing boards and mangles and stuff was in there. But every Sunday, that's where we eat.

MJ: So, Sundays were a day for sort of relaxing, and you would have a big family dinner and...

EFT: Take a nap, yes.

MJ: Take a nap.

EFT: But we went to church.

MJ: What church did you attend growing up?

EFT: Well, we had a church right here that we went to and is in Cortez, the Church of God.

Whenever I was at my aunt's house in Samoset, we'd go to church there on – Sunday school and church on Sunday morning. I go to Sunday school and church. My aunt taught us the Sunday school class.

MJ: Your aunt?

EFT: Yes, my Aunt Josephine.

MJ: Josephine?

EFT: Yes. Then we would go to Sarasota at my grandmother's house, and we'd have a big dinner down there. We'd come back, and then we'd go to church Sunday night – First Baptist Church there in Samoset. I spent some time – before I started fishing with my daddy in the summertime – down there at Sarasota. It was the same thing down there – and go to Bible school. I always went to Bible school. I used to have my diplomas from Bible schools. I don't know where they got off to, but I always kept them for many years. I was raised all my young life in church.

MJ: Were both your mother and father religious people?

EFT: Oh, definitely. I can remember when I was a kid, if a fellow come up to my daddy's door – it wasn't that cigarettes were bad for your health. It was a sin to him. You didn't come in that house smoking a cigarette. No way. No, nothing went on like that. That is him.

MJ: So, neither one of them smoke or probably drank any?

EFT: Neither one, no. I remember they had a garage and had a big car in it, but neither one of them knew how to drive.

MJ: Oh, they did not?

EFT: No.

MJ: [laughter]

EFT: The neighbors across the street had two cars. They had one to go to the beach in, and they had a Buick – that was a Model A, I think, or Model T – had a Buick to go to town in, but neither one of them can drive. Never did learn how to drive, but they'd get somebody else to drive them.

MJ: Who were some of the kids that you were growing up with in Cortez?

EFT: Well, gee whiz, there was Vernon Mora. We were kind of like brothers and sisters, all of us children, really. The Mora family, the whole bunch – Johnny Mora, Vernon Mora, and the older brothers that was older than us. I was accepted in their household by their mother. Their mother used to worry about us just like my mother would worry about them. Then across the street was the Horn family, Billy and Hubert Horn, and Charlie Guthrie, Corsi Boys.

MJ: Now, the Corsi boys did not live on...

EFT: No. They lived down at what we call the shell mound. That's on the point at Palma Sola Bay, right out on that point.

MJ: But they would come over to Cortez and play with you guys all the time?

EFT: Oh, yes. It was just about five-hundred people. It was all one family. The only thing is, we ate at different tables unless you were at their house in suppertime. I can remember one thing distinctly. You could come around any house playing with any of the children about supper time, and you'd smell mullet frying. Everybody had mullet. If I'd have brought a snook home, my daddy might've given me a whipping because that was soap fish to them.

MJ: Soap fish?

EFT: Yes, it tastes like soap. Cook it with skin on it, they said – I've never eaten any either. They found out later that they could skin it, and it was all right. But nobody really give a hoot about snook. I mean, when they passed the law about years ago about snook, we could care less. The only thing we didn't like about blue crab and snook, they caused a lot of net work.

MJ: What is your favorite fish to eat today?

EFT: I guess mullet, to be honest.

MJ: Not a red fish?

EFT: A person asked me one time, "Who would eat mullet up in a market where I sell a lot of mullet?" I said, "Now, let me answer your question." He had started to walk on out. I says, "I'll tell you what, I've been through this years ago." I says, "I love pompano once in a great while. I like most all fish. But if I had to go through and eat fish every day, I could eat mullet every day and enjoy them. I couldn't eat a rich fish, but I can eat mullet because I have done it." Shoot, I could eat them right now if you had some fried up. I'll guarantee you. [laughter]

MJ: Well, you were telling me earlier about some of the games and stuff and where you would play them here in Cortez. You said that there was an old boat house that you used to play some games in.

EFT: Well, it was a big boat house where they built larger boats back during the war. Some of them over there were built. Everybody just thought they were too big. What are you going to do with a boat like that? They built them over there and had apartments up above, a couple apartments, and had a railway going out there, pull the boats out, scrub them off, and paint them. But they tore that down here a few years back. Well, where all that was, and across the street was just a salt flat. Tide would come in, and it'd go out. There was always fiddlers holed there just by the thousands. It'd be red with fiddlers. It was an easy place to pull your boat up, a small launch, or flip your skiff over and paint it in copper paint. It was just a fun place to play.

MJ: What kind of games would you play?

EFT: Well, we'd have mud wars and Cowboys and Indians and all kinds of things, had little guns that shot rubber band. These would be a homemade gun with – take an inner tube and stretch it out and shoot it. But over there, we didn't know anything about playing ball – football or baseball. But we had scrub teams.

MJ: A scrub team?

EFT: Yes. We'd play at Anna Maria. One time, we were supposed to play a scrub team up there in Bradenton. Went up there one Sunday, and we didn't know it, but we were playing the high school team. Boy, they put a shellacking on us. It was real bad.

MJ: Did they really?

EFT: Oh, they were good compared to us, because we didn't know how to block. If you got the ball, you were on your own. [laughter] We never did win too many games, but we had a lot of fun. We'd be sore. I couldn't get out of bed next day, no padding or nothing.

MJ: Now, you said you used to play marbles over there and stuff like that.

EFT: Oh, yes. That was quite a place to play marbles. There was a lot of room for different games of marbles.

MJ: Did that get pretty competitive?

EFT: Oh, yes. I'll tell you, very serious. Very serious. Once in a while, somebody would get upset with the other one and have a little tussle, but they were friends the next day.

MJ: Did any girls play?

EFT: Once in a while. Mostly, it was boys that played. We had a little place down there. After I got up to be – I guess about twelve or thirteen years old, had a little time, we'd go in that little beer joint down there in the evening, before anybody got in from fishing, and play the jukebox. Them girls would teach me how to dance, and most of the boys were too bashful to do it. I don't know, I just felt like all those children back in them days were just part of the family, really.

MJ: So, you could go from house to house. You would spend your days, and you would be in different houses and eating, spending...

EFT: Like walking in your own house, really. It was something that money can't buy. Put it that way.

MJ: You said you were fifteen years old when your father passed away.

EFT: No. That's when he took ill and couldn't fish anymore.

MJ: Oh, he could not fish anymore.

EFT: Yes. He lived a good while longer, but he wasn't able to fish. It was hard times. But we had two grocery stores here, and they knew the situation. I had two open accounts. Of course, I was fishing in a big crew that made money. If anybody made money, well, they knew how many fish you caught. Everybody knew just to the pound just about how many dollars you made Saturday.

MJ: That news spread quickly.

EFT: Oh, yes. If you didn't make any money that week, there's no problem with them. They knew that when our crew caught fish, well, I'd be able to pay the bill. My mother, she was welcome to get anything she wanted at the store. Of course, she used a lot of Hy-Pro back then. They call it Clorox now. She drank a lot of milk. It was just something that I grew up in as a child. This really hurts me for people to be misleading on this net ban thing to think that that's going to solve all their problems. The only thing it would solve if they did that, and that would be just not to be able to see them. We used to get a different class of tourist down here that would love to come out and help you. They knew more about our fishing than we did after they were here a while. Even my daughter's in-laws that live at Anna Maria, they tell me how much they missed going out here, helping pull the seine and getting fresh fish. They'd come out with a bucket. The last years I fished, I'd be around a seawall along the shoreline and I'd have people come out and say, "I own all this property out to the channel, but you can fish here if you fill these buckets up with mullet." "No problem. I know you own the whole world, but I'll still fill the bucket up with fish." I didn't argue with him. If you had all the fish that these fishermen give people, you couldn't pile them in Cortez, unless you had a helicopter that would lift them up there pretty high. It was just nothing.

MJ: You quit school when you were fifteen and started fishing. What type of boat did you have then?

EFT: Well, I went with my cousin. I started fishing with my cousin.

MJ: His name was?

EFT: Leo. That was Uncle Neri's – I don't know if he was his oldest son. Now, he had another son that was a boat builder called Neri, too.

MJ: This was your uncle and Leo Taylor that you fished with then?

EFT: Right. I fished with him for about a year around here. Then we went to Fort Myers Beach to get rich down there.

MJ: Oh, really?

EFT: Yes. I enjoyed it, but I still didn't stay too long. I had to come back to Cortez.

MJ: Did you go down there to fish?

EFT: Oh, yes. We rented a two-story home on the beach. It wasn't right on the beach. It wasn't on Fort Myers Beach. We just left the fish house with a boat, and went right up there and tied up the dock in a canal, right straight across the channel – and just the two of us. We'd come home every weekend. His family was here. We'd come home every weekend, but I just didn't like any place but Cortez.

MJ: What did you do when you came back? Did you then get your own boat? How long was it before you had your own boat?

EFT: No, I fished in big crews – big stop-net crews or big gillnet crews.

MJ: Who were some of the captains that you worked for?

EFT: Joe Capo, Farmer Capo, his brother – his real name was Bernard – and I fished with (Kurt Johns?), Tink Fulford – I fished with a lot of the big crews. Then a little bit later on, another boy and I, Charlie Guthrie, we got us a little boat and a couple of nets and started fishing. After the war, the boys come home. Smiley Guthrie and I, we went in partners fishing. He had a little scooter. He'd fished Tink's big rig for a while. Then he went independent with a little launch, and he fished net off of it. So, I just tied on to him with a skiff and got me a couple of cotton nets. But we were single then, and we didn't fish too hard. We fished hard, but we didn't fish every day. Long about then, I guess I was about twenty-one years old whenever I quit and sold my nets, because I was getting married. I told Smiley, I said, "I got to go to work now." So, I quit, sold my nets and my skiff. I took that money, and my wife and I, we went to Valdosta, Georgia, and got married. On New Year's Eve, we came back to Tampa on the bus. Everybody's waiting. They were expecting us the next day, but I couldn't stand it. So, we caught a cab from Tampa to Cortez for \$20.

MJ: \$20?

EFT: Yes. This taxi driver was telling me he was going to buy his wife that washing machine she wanted for his part of that \$20. So, we went over to the beach from over here, at this little beer joint down here, and we went over the beach and had a big blowout over there.

MJ: Well, tell me, how did you meet your wife?

EFT: Well, she was staying with some friends. She was in nurses training in Tampa. She was at the top of her class. When they found out about her going to leave and getting married, they called her mother, which was in Alabama, in Birmingham. They tried to stop her from leaving because she was the head student in a pretty big class there in Tampa. Her mother and father had some friends that lived here, (LaBretta?) and (Baldy?). She'd come down on weekends – that's why I met her – and spend the weekends with them, and then she'd go back to Tampa, their school. So, that's how I met her. They didn't stop us from getting married. [laughter]

MJ: Now, tell me why did you have to go to Valdosta?

EFT: Well, I think you had to go through a waiting period back then to get your marriage license and all that. Up there, all you had to do was just go up there and go before a JP judge. In about five minutes, it was all over with, and we just hurried back to Cortez.

MJ: Was she familiar with fishing and commercial fishing at all?

EFT: No. This was a new world to her. She wondered what she'd got into after she married me. [laughter]

I was quite a wild person, I guess, in them days. She put up with a lot, but after a number of years, I tried to just dedicate my life more or less to her and the Lord to make up for some bad years she had with me. She put up with a lot, but I thank God about every day for her putting up with me and the Lord putting up with me. Even though I'd been raised in church and all, I'd got – went through my wild teenage days. But she's a pretty good lion tamer, and she did a pretty fair job.

MJ: What would you do after you were married then? You got a job doing what?

EFT: I went to Birmingham, and I took the first job – I didn't have any skills at all. I went to the state unemployment office, and they had five short order cook jobs there. They said, "Well, you can take this one." Of course, I didn't have a car. I had to catch a bus and go through Homewood, Edgewood, down to Birmingham, and then ride eighty-five blocks from a streetcar. I went out there to this restaurant, and I told them that I could fry a hamburger or do whatever. But it was an awful difficult thing to learn, because they had a terrific curb service, with five or six of the fastest curb girls you ever saw in your life.

MJ: Really?

EFT: Oh, they'd catch them coming off of the street and have the order by the time they got to the window. They called off the orders, and then your waitresses and counter girls called off their orders all them girls were handing them. You just had to remember thirty to forty orders. I don't care what was on the order, you had to remember it. Well, I couldn't do that. I worked the day shift, and I worked seven days a week. I worked the double shift on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday, and I got paid \$30 a week. But the guy that did that night shift, he had to go Atlanta, and that left us in a spot. So, they hired a chef, and he didn't know how to do it. We had an air carnival one night, and when that air carnival turned loose, we were swamped. He just kept cooking stuff and didn't know where any of it went. All I was supposed to do was dress sandwiches for him. So, finally, I just got disgusted, and I raked all the stuff in the garbage. He had probably twenty hamburgers laying up there and everything – didn't know where nothing went. I just raked it in the garbage, and I told him, "Just start over one more time." I never missed a beat. It come to me just like you'd snap your finger. I had people sit there and watch me work for hours and hours and hours. Matter of fact, I've to work with a brand-new pair of socks on and my shoes. At night, my toes would be through the end of those socks, sitting there

twisting from the cool table over to the grill. A relative of mine, a truck driver, he married my half-niece – my half-sister by my father. Anyhow, he's coming there, and I didn't know he was there. He was on the counter behind me. See, I worked out in the open. He sat there, and I could have reached around his back and touched him, but I didn't know he was there. He was sitting there for a couple of hours. I never said a word. I turned around and I looked at him, his mouth was wide open. He couldn't believe what he saw. What an operation. But we just had so much business there with a little grill and all, and they had a franchise that was out of this world. It was no Kentucky chicken or famous raspberry or any of that. Boy, I tell you, they had the business.

MJ: Well, I mean, that is a lot different than being a commercial fisherman. How do you feel about going into Alabama and working like that?

EFT: Well, every time I went to work, I'd dream like I'm on my way to Florida. I mean, I'd ride that streetcar, and I'm just going to Cortez. I'll be there pretty soon. I was so darned homesick. But after that night, though, that I took over, I got a double raise in salary.

MJ: Well, that helps.

EFT: Yes. They bought me a car, and anything I wanted, it was mine – anything. I was offered the world. I could have been a millionaire overnight by the state. They offered to give me anything and everything that money could buy if they'd let me let them adopt my family. Matter of fact, they paid for my son being born there.

MJ: They did?

EFT: Yes. Oh, yes. I mean, they beat me to the hospital when my wife was in labor. They sure did. When I called them up at the house, I says, "I ain't got no money. My wife's been walking around out here tonight. Woke me up, she's in labor." I says, "I got to have some money. Well, whatever you want to do, I can meet you there or whatever." So, he says, "Go to the restaurant. Tell them to give you whatever money you want." I run out there. I had a car then. When I got the money and got there, they were there. They were there about the time my wife got there, the hospital. Yes, they offered me everything that money would ever buy, but I was just too homesick.

MJ: How long did you stay?

EFT: I was there almost two years.

MJ: Then where did you move to?

EFT: I came back home, and I'd never seen so many fish in all my life. It seemed like red tide just replenished the fish or something. It was bad for a long time. When I left, I don't believe there was five-hundred pound a week showed up on these docks around here. Like I say, I went shrimping and got enough money to get out of town on. But it's just funny how those fish must have just escaped, went up the rivers and creeks and all. The red tide didn't get them. But the

fish was banked up along the mangroves. Anywhere you went, this bay, around the mouth of the river, anywhere, they were banked up several feet deep, and they reached right on offshore. Talk about a rotten mess.

MJ: That was after that red tide?

EFT: Yes. It was terrible. When we crossed the ship channel going across the bay, it was just like looking at a solid wall of green water and a solid wall of red water as far down as you could see.

MJ: Did you go back to fishing when you came back to Cortez?

EFT: Immediately.

MJ: You did?

EFT: Oh, yes. I had to come home while I was up there. I had to come home for some business. I had to take care of my mother. I walked down here on the dock, this dock right here, at Fulford's, and I had on a suit of clothes. I think Fulford was fixing to go fishing that night. They were fixing to leave. He says, "Run on up there and change your clothes. Let's go fishing." I says, "Okay." I run home, my mother changed clothes, and come back down and jumped on the boat. We rode right outside the pass and caught four or five-thousand mullet just outside the pass. We were back here in about an hour and a half.

MJ: It felt like you never left.

EFT: Oh, yes. I was in heaven, man.

MJ: Where did you live when you moved back?

EFT: Let's see. I think I lived with my mother.

MJ: Did you then keep working with Tink or did you work for somebody else?

EFT: I don't remember just who I did fish with when I come back. I fished in a crew with somebody. It was nothing for us to go from one crew to another.

MJ: Well, that is something that I wondered about. Was there loyalty to the captains you were working with? Did the captains try to get good crew away from other captains?

EFT: I'll tell you how it was. Before the war, just before the war, if you wanted a job with one of these good captains, you didn't put in an application. You just spoke to the captain and told him, when he had an opening, you'd like to go fishing with him. Back in them days, there just wasn't that many jobs open. Usually, you're stuck there with it.

MJ: Could you make a decent living?

EFT: For what you needed, it wasn't anything but just to survive, you might say. Thinking about the first money I withdraw – see, they paid off in cash. Here's a man, lived right over in this big house right here, Mr. Adams. He had about eight or nine children, I guess. He was the bookkeeper over here at Star Fish Company. They chiseled that ice. He was the ice chiseler. He packed fish and weighed fish and loaded trucks. The best I remember, man, there was a fish house making about \$17, \$18 a week, and he had a house full of young'ins. Well, my first week, whenever daddy says, "I'm going to give you what you made –" I think I was about – I'm trying to think. I must have been about thirteen years old. I was either twelve or – I think I was thirteen. We'd caught some fish first day out, and I says, "Lord, if you give us six-hundred pounds of mullet, I'll give the church \$2." \$2 was a lot of money. We went out and we caught eight-hundred pounds of fish. So, I gave Nash Pringle – he was down there sweeping out the church house Sunday morning when I gave him \$2, "Make sure it went in church." Well, anyhow, whenever we've they'd settled up that Saturday in the office, Mr. Adams says, "Alvie," he says, "What do you want to do with Earl's share?" He says, "Give it to him." He counted me out \$29 and something, change. His hands were shaking like that, counting that money out. I'll never forget it. I took (Frankie Johns?) and Johnny Mora – of course, there was no buses or anything then. You'd see a car on Saturday come by up here on the Cortez Road about once every thirty minutes or an hour, but any of them that come by – there wasn't no population on the beach to speak of back then. When they'd come by, they'd always pick you up. So, we'd hitchhiked into town, and we went to a picture show. We ate all the bananas and ice cream and candy and popcorn and fruit we could eat. We hitchhiked down to Sarasota to go to the movie down there, and we still stuffed ourselves. One of the boys had fifty cents. The other one, I think, had a quarter. But you could get in the show for a dime. So, we were trying to just buy everything that we'd think of. We hitchhiked back home, no problem, and I just spent \$2 and something.

MJ: \$2?

EFT: \$2 and something.

MJ: Did all that?

EFT: Oh, yes. Those other boys, they spent fifteen or twenty cents apiece. I met daddy down there after I gave Nash Pringle the \$2. I said, "Daddy, I can't spend all this money. I don't know what to do with it." He says, "Well, son," he says, "What do you want to do? So, you want me to take care of it?" I says, "Yes." I says, "Do whatever you want to do with it." I says, "I can't spend it." [laughter] I says, "I'm going to keep out enough to make it \$5." So, I kept out \$2 and something. It lasted me forever, because you couldn't spend a – you go by yourself to hitchhike up town to a movie on Saturday, you couldn't spend over fifty cents. There was those business along there, they knew my daddy, and they knew me. If I went in there, a little kid by myself, well, Mr. (Grothe?) up there at the fortune shop, he'd always give me money. There was a drug store right down the sidewalk there, two or three doors down. Now, if there was other children – we'd gone up there with the other children around – he'd stick fifty cents in my hand and say, "Red, go buy them an ice cream." I don't know. For some reason, he always liked me real well. I could tell you a lot of stories there about that old man. He was one of the finest old men I ever

knew. There was those people up there. I know my half-sister still got the Bible. They wanted to build a parsonage down here for this same church that's here now, the Church of God. Daddy got this big Bible. My half-sister had it rebound here a few years ago for getting the most money for the collection of building the parsonage. But see, he traded with all those people, and they all knew him and he knew them. He walked the streets up there, I guess, begging for donations to build the parsonage. Of course, they give him the Bible. But back in those days, if you wanted a house, you just had to get you some lumber and start building it. That's the way it was. You might have no ceiling or anything into it for a long time.

MJ: Just rafters and a roof?

EFT: Yes, right. See, I own Hawker's Market, a place that's been in business for about eighty years, been there fifteen years. There was a fellow coming there, Mr. Lewis of the Lewis Lumber Company; had his wife with him. He says, "I want to tell you something about them Cortez people." He says, "They had a storm." He says, "Just before that storm," he said, "I had a whole boxcar-load of lumber coming in." After that storm hit, it washed away a lot of the waterfront, and the net spreads and everything. A lot of the nets went down, the bridges – the old wooden bridge and everything. He says, "Now, I got word to them down there. Whatever they needed, just come on up there and help yourselves, and they can pay me when they got on their feet." He says, "Now, I'm here to tell you, Mr. Taylor, I got every penny that was money for that lumber they got." He says, "They come up here with those ice trucks and they hauled it down there." He says, "I got every penny out of them Cortez people." I got to say we were proud people. I got to say one thing. It was bad news if anybody ever said one bad word about Cortez when I was a young fellow. He was in trouble. [laughter] We had something that's just about non-existable in a lot of areas. You take a lot of places where they fish along the coast, the fishermen are not all in one spot like we were here. Some live uptown, some live out in the woods, and a few might live around the fish house, close by. But this was just like a big family here. We were very envious of each other catching more fish than the other one, making more money, but I tell you how it was when we were single. We'd go to over to the beach in our late teens and drinking and thought we were having a good time, dancing and all. It didn't matter if you didn't make a dime, because all the fishermen knew you didn't make a dime. Of course, you could go to the fish house and bar for \$10, but you never bought a drink that you didn't buy either the bar a drink or you bought the house a drink. That was just the way it was. Especially, if you didn't catch no fish, you always had two or three drinks sitting in front of you. People bought you. Next week, maybe I'd catch fish and they wouldn't, and it was the same thing. That's the way it worked. I never knew what it was for a long time to go into a place and order one drink. Gilbert Mora told me one day, he says, "You've never realized what you're doing?" I says, "What do you mean?" He says, "You buying people drinks, you don't know or anything like that, going over the beach? No? Oh, well." [laughter]

MJ: You say you go over to the beach. What were some of the establishments that you would frequent over there?

EFT: Well, (Art Todd?) had what they call a beach view tavern. Place had a dance floor. We had a lot of friends that were in the service during the wars back in those days. Of course, they didn't have no money, \$21 a month. But we'd buy them all the drinks they wanted. Run across

up here are a couple of soldiers. One of them married a girl from here. Red and (Graves?), they were both master sergeants stationed down near Venice. They could play the piano. Well, we always had a piano like did a car, but we never could play it. So, he comes to the house to play the piano, and he could play. He's still living up there in Jacksonville near my niece up there. Well, it wasn't long before he liked Cortez – and they did, he and Graves. So, it wasn't long before everybody in Cortez had a piano, so they could get him to come to the house and play the piano. He'd had a few drinks one night. We was out there at the church. They got singing and shouting, and old Red, he got playing the boogie-woogie before he knew it. [laughter] He could tickle those keys pretty good now. That was sort of a phase of our lives during the war. I was too young to go, and all of them signed up. They couldn't get out of here fast enough to go whip them Japanese.

MJ: There was a lot of patriotism in this community.

EFT: Oh, God, yes. Well, the Adams family, they got big plaques from Senator Chiles for all of their boys that was in the service – seven of them, I think it was, out of this little village. One of them, the youngest one, CD, we called him Dot. He was a POW. After the war, when they found out that he was alive, Mr. Adams, the same one that paid me off that \$29 that time – I wasn't here, but they said he just went up down the street that night, shouting and hollering, his son was alive.

MJ: Really?

EFT: Yes. So, his son, that boy's son, is the president of OFF right now, Tim Adams – one of the nicest boys you'll ever meet. I've never met a family where there's children as polite and nice as his children now. That's something just to be around them. It's always sir and yes, sir, no, ma'am, to any and everybody, and it's a pleasure. You don't see that much anymore. If I'd have said "Huh" to my daddy, that would have been terrible. [laughter] It was sir. I tried to raise my son that way, and I get a lot of good remarks back because of that, too, from him.

MJ: Well, let us take a minute and talk about the OFF, because you were there when it first started.

EFT: It was easy here, because we was already organized. We had our own group, own membership. Wayne (Meade?), he had a honcho for us. He and Senator Price were good friends. Mr. Price stood up for us, fought for us on all these laws back then. That's twenty-five years ago or so. Mr. Price was the vice president of Tropicana. He's a pretty powerful man.

MJ: What were some of the laws you had to contend with back then that were sort of impinging upon fisherman?

EFT: Well, they just wanted a little more. "Don't fish here. Don't fish there." The pressure was getting great on him at that time.

MJ: Do you feel that the people in this area just were looked down upon, commercial fishermen? What was it about commercial fishermen?

EFT: No, it was a new breed coming in. I'll tell you, I worked up there at the sheriff's office, and I had a lot of juvenile cases. I never have messed with but one case that wasn't a felony case. I worked with Mary Johnson. Every child in Manatee County was scared of Mary Johnson. She was a treating officer. She lived over on Riverview Boulevard. Now, those were the cracker people – I mean, the original people here in Manatee County. I'm talking about doctors and lawyers and merchant and chiefs, people with money. She said anytime that Gene Page – which was on the Bradenton Herald at that time – came out with anything bad against commercial fishers or Cortez, everybody on Riverview Boulevard stopped taking the paper, so they got the message. Now, that's how they looked at Cortez. Old Dr. Sugg, man, all you had to do was take him a mess of smoked mullet and a few scallops and pompano, and he didn't care when you paid him or if you paid him or anything. It was just a world of its own, let me tell you.

MJ: It has changed, do you think?

EFT: Yes. Well, you see these people come out of these big cities. I understand them. I really do, because they don't even know their neighbors, a lot of them, and could care less. It's dog-eat-dog in this world today. One thing I don't like about this is this is becoming a crime capital. I think they've shipped all their criminals down here. It's really become a dangerous place to live.

MJ: Well, let us go back to the formation of the OFF. You said you had your organization here, then you were approached by someone trying to start the state organization.

EFT: Yes. They called up Wilbur Lewis from Everglades City and kind of set up a meeting with our organization down at Wilbur's fish house; not Bayshore Seafood at that time. So, the lady that come up, I knew of her little fish business down there, her father's. She had this idea of going statewide in order to form an organization to make rules and regulations and have an organization for all the fishermen to protect themselves. Bless her heart. She worked hard, Ms. Robinson, I believe was her name.

MJ: Ms. Jimmy Robinson.

EFT: Right.

MJ: She was called Ms. Jimmy, was not she?

EFT: Right. There was a lot of the old-timers that – like I say, back then, many fishermen have much money as they don't today. They pitched in. George Saunders had a fish house up in Dunedin, and people from the East Coast and all got involved. They helped get a charter through up in Tallahassee. It took a lot of work, a lot of leg work, a lot of trips up there, and they got this thing off the ground. I was more or less listened to by a lot of the fishermen at that time, because we had tried unions and everything else around here, and I always pushed for it. I would go around fishing places in Fort Myers and around, trying to organize them before OFF. Then whenever I talked to them that I thought this was the best thing for us, they all went for it. That was one of the smartest things that ever happened to the commercial fishermen, or we'd have been history seven or eight years ago.

MJ: You think that this organization, the OFF, has been helpful to commercial fishing in Florida?

EFT: Yes. I don't think that we would have survived. You see, we're not one-sided people. We want to save our bays and our seagrass and everything. We'd like to have it like it was without the seawalls and the canals and all that stuff. But there's been so much hatred created by these so-called sports writers against our fellow men. I think they should go to church and learn something about their fellow men and realize what they're doing. Some people are blind and don't realize what they're doing. There's other ideals of it is greed. Some people that live along the water don't ever see you out there to start with. Most people have never heard the other side of the story, who's in trouble. But hopefully, they will get the message before it's ever voted upon to ban the nets.

MJ: Your son, Mark, is very active in the OFF.

EFT: Well, he's just about dedicated his life to it, really. He's given up an awful lot. He's worked hard. Most people couldn't imagine how hard he's worked at this or what he's given up and everything. I fished with him last fall. We'd come in tired 12:00 at night, and he'd had calls to make that night, return calls. It's just like that every day, just about it.

MJ: Did you ever envision that that is what it would take to remain in fishing, Earl?

EFT: No. I had no idea. But I had no idea of the progress, they call it, here in this county and state. It's kind of like the real estate people. A lot of them that did have the foresight and the ones that didn't have the foresight made a difference. The progress has really hurt me in my business because of the competition uptown there with the market.

MJ: When you say the competition, what do you mean, as far as...

EFT: Well, you see, the place that I have is an old established fish market that once started out on the pier down at the river. It got burnt down, the pier did.

MJ: This is Hawker's Fish Market in Bradenton.

EFT: Right. Then the old man, he moved up there to where we're at now. His son took it over after he died. He stayed there, and he was later retired. A friend of mine that got killed after we bought the place left me holding the bag. Anyhow, we've had quite an experience of fifteen years of our life up there. We were making a lot of money, too. For me, it was a lot of money. At that time, I went and sold it for half a million dollars. I figured I was going to be a millionaire. We were doing some good. Anyhow, all the grocery stores are selling some kind of a seafood. We had a great tackle business. A man who worked for us built custom rods for movie stars to ball players like Willie Stargell and Dave Parker. Dave Parker said he'd never been to his house here without coming to Hawker's Market on his way home first. He said he'd go down Manatee Avenue, and he told his wife, he says, "I've never done this before." She says, "What?" He says, "Go home without stopping at Hawker's Market." He always liked to drop a

hundred-dollar bill across the counter every time.

MJ: Who was the rod builder?

EFT: Reverend Fuller. He was a retired minister. He was working there when I bought the market. He'd been working there for a while. He's really become a top professional rod builder, and a friend of Don Johnson's there with Miami Vice – actor now in the movies. He had a friend here. The preacher would build him a couple of rods. We called him the preacher. He went down there bone-fishing with him. He used one of his rods. Whenever he'd come back, when he'd come in, and he was coming home, Don Johnson told him, he says, "You'll get these rods back when you bring two more just like them." So, as soon as he got here, he says, "Hurry up, build me two more of them rods." Of course, he's got a record of every rod he's ever built, for what number blank he used and everything. So, it was easy for him. He does a good job. He's done jobs that's unbelievable. He's a popular man all around the state.

MJ: Well, now, your market's for sale, and you are getting ready to sort of retire from that.

EFT: I'll never stop work as long as I'm able, but I am ready to retire from retail work and just kind of be out on the water like always.

MJ: Would you rather be fishing? I mean, would you rather have been fishing in those years that you spent in the market?

EFT: See, I was supposed to be. I had a boat and everything when I got to the market. I was fishing quite a bit, and I was catching a lot of fish.

MJ: For the market?

EFT: Well, all I wanted, and then mainly mullet and some bottom fish stuff. But my partner got killed in it. I had to just forget it. I had to sell my boat and nets because I couldn't fish anymore.

MJ: What is it about fishing that you like the most?

EFT: It's hard work. But that's all I've ever done was hard work. What I like most about it, or used to, was it was so quiet and peaceful on the water back before these outboard motors got zooming up and down. Even the commercial fishing or the sport fisherman, you didn't see all that years ago out there. If you was out there in an outboard motor, you had to tow them in. I've towed in and strung up three or four in a row. This fellow around here that had a marina told me not to bring them in there anymore.

MJ: Really?

EFT: Oh, really, even with my kicker boat. But they've got them perfected now to where they're more dependable. But gee whiz, if you saw somebody broke down out there with an outboard motor, you just about knew, when you come by, you'd have to be towing him home.

MJ: Well, what do you think is the biggest change that you have seen out there on the water?

EFT: Seawalls.

MJ: Seawalls?

EFT: You know what used to give me the best pleasure – not getting off subject – of driving to work, right down 51st Street, there was a pasture out there. I'd go by there every morning, and I'd see those horses out there. It just give you a relaxation, a pleasantness when you'd go to work. That same place today, it has a seawall – a cotton-picking seawall about six foot high. All you can see is rooftops everywhere. Now, you drive around here, and all you see is seawalls in the bay. I was out in the boat – I don't get out too often – about a year or so ago, and I went up there at Perico Bayou. I saw where they had been doing some digging that I didn't approve of over there on Perico Island. But I got up there at Perico Bayou. I just stopped there and I said, "I wished I had a movie camera to take a picture of this now before it gets destroyed." It was just like being in tranquility to sit there and look at that. No high rises, no docks, no nothing there, just something like...

MJ: Unspoiled shoreline.

EFT: Yes. There's not many places like it left. I sat there for about thirty minutes, I guess, just thinking about old times.

MJ: What do you think is the biggest change you have seen in Cortez?

EFT: Well, I guess about twenty years ago, it started one or two grouper boats. Now, they have a couple of shrimp boats. Swordfish boats come in once in a while. I guess Walter got about twelve of his own grouper boats over there. That would probably keep him going if they'd ban the nets. I don't know half the people here anymore, because I don't live here, see. I live about halfway to town, in Bradenton. It is not a lot different from what it was.

MJ: Do you still feel at home when you come down here?

EFT: Oh, yes.

MJ: You do?

EFT: God, yes. All the old-timers right here where we're at, a lot of them died off in the last few years. You see them down here. Now this fish house is closed down, I think Mr. Bell might open it back up. But this fish house closed down. All the old-timers that wasn't able to fish, retired and all, they'd come down here and sit around, maybe mend net and talk and all. Yes, it's a peaceful place right now while we're talking. I'm enjoying this.

MJ: Yes, it is nice. How does it make you feel with what is been happening with the net ban and that movement and things like that? Because fishing has been a big part of your life. I mean, it has been your life.

EFT: I think it's one of the most ridiculous things that was ever come up in the United States of America. These women holler about their rights and everybody's rights. I just wish that everybody that is for the net ban had to earn a living for a year or six months out of that water without a net. They'd feel so sorry for you, they wouldn't do it. There's been a lot of people, friends, who come down and want to go fishing with Mark. Boy, they couldn't wait. But they've never been back a second time. My barber's telling me about going fishing with somebody. He is up there all night in cold, freezing rain, wet and everything, miserable. He'll never get on another boat.

MJ: Well, Earl, why is that? I mean, there are a lot of people who come out here and go out, and that will be the last time they will go out. Why do you and why do you think other fishermen just keep going?

EFT: I've analyzed that through law enforcement that I've experienced. I'll never get it out of my blood. You hire a waitress that's been waitressing for ten or fifteen years, you're not going to keep her very long. She'll go back to waitressing. It's just like fishing. Now, you take law enforcement. I have a great interest in law enforcement. When I was in law enforcement, I loved investigation work. I should have really stayed in investigation or stayed with the sheriff law enforcement, but I couldn't stand politics. I think I got one of the greatest records that was ever in Manatee County in law enforcement. If they still got the docket up there, I can prove it. You couldn't see the juvenile docket, but you could see the other if it's available. You get something like that in your blood – like right now, I chair an advisory board for the sheriff of this county. I worked real hard for a friend of mine that run against him. He was the chief of police right next door to my building. But we're lucky to have him, even though we didn't get my buddy that I worked with when I was the deputy sheriff. Anything you get in your blood, it's hard to get out of. The old saying, "You can take the boy out of the country, but you don't take the country out of the boy," and that's the same way with this water. It's just there. Of course, I'm old now, about ready to retire, but I could live away from the water. It wouldn't bother me like it used to, because I've been off of it for about fifteen years, you see. It wouldn't hurt me like it would anybody else younger.

MJ: What is special about Cortez?

EFT: Just no place like it. Just no place like it. There's no place like home. The reason I'm not living here is I had a chance to buy a nice home with \$400 down for \$12,000. I think I could probably sell it for \$70,000 today. I had \$200 to put down on it. A friend of Alcee's mother, he was a bricklayer in Chicago. Nate Taylor used to come down here and room there. I was walking up the street from here, and he walked up alongside of me and says, "Earl," he says, "You ever thought about buying a home?" I says, "Yes, sir. I'm working on a deal right now." He says, "Well, I like to do things like that," he says, "to help people get started on a home." He says, "I've been trying to bargain with some people over on the beach to buy you a home over there." I said, "No, I wouldn't live over there if you give me a home, Nate." I said, "I don't live on that beach." He says, "Well, what you got in mind?" I told him. He says, "Well, I'd sure like to be of some help to you. What could I do?" I said, "Well, if you'd loan me \$200, I can get in that house, and I'll pay you \$200 back when I make it." He says, "No." He says, "I don't want to

give you \$200." I said, "Well, I got some money coming pretty soon," and I says, "I'll be able to pay you." "No." He says, "I don't want to ever hear from it." Well, you know what I did after? I got up and went to the market. I took \$200 for some reason and hid it in my billfold. I had a lady working for me and her husband. They were trying to buy a house out at Bayshore Gardens. I didn't know it. Well, her husband didn't work for me, but his wife did. We went down to eat lunch, and he was telling me about it. I said, "Well, what you waiting on?" He said, "I got to have \$200." I says, "I'm going to tell you something." I says, "That's the best news I could hear." I pulled out them two \$100 bills. I says, "Now, you didn't get this money from Earl Taylor, and I never ever want to hear one word about it." I says, "The good Lord's giving you this money because he sure gave me mine. You go get that house." So, that was an opportunity I just wanted and been waiting for.

MJ: Well, I am running short on tape, but I wanted to ask you, what do you feel is the future of commercial fishing and what is the future for Cortez?

EFT: I personally believe that if people find out the truth, the facts about net fishing, that they don't stand a chance with the net ban. A lot of people signed to save our sea life, not knowing what they were signing. I don't think they'll vote that way. They are having a hard struggle, I understand, getting enough people to sign. When they find out the truth of what the real story is on our side, a lot of those people that did sign will not vote for the net ban. As far as the future of Cortez, I think it'll be here from now on. I really do. A lot of people get disgusted. But you see, a lot of these younger people didn't go through those hard times like we did. We went through some real hard times back during the Depression, and we went through hard times around here in red tides. See, we've been lucky here. My uncle, he's an avid sport fisherman. His brother put him through school commercial fishing. His father was killed by lightning commercial fishing down there. Now, right there in Sarasota, they had red tide two years in a row. Now, there might have been a year in between those two red tides, and it got right around New Pass, down there at Longboat. It come right around, and just a little seeped in Longboat, and it come ashore at Indian Rocks. It went up in those fingers and slaughtered the fish according to one of my salesmen that lives in Clearwater. He has businesses up there that I buy fishing tackle from, Stanley sporting goods. Anyhow, a year or two later, we had the same thing happen identically. We had more redfish here than we knew what to do with. I'm not telling you no lie. Mr. Hawker went right down there at that island, him and his daughter, and caught fourteen or fifteen-hundred pound of redfish, and he had had two heart attacks and a stroke. He had so many in his boat, he couldn't bring them to me. He had to sell them to Walter Bell. Then my uncle called me up and told me he got no redfish. I said, "You people forget these things." I said, "Don't you know you had red tide down there two years in a row, or maybe a year apart?" I said, "It just pushed them redfish right up here in our bay." I said, "It's unbelievable redfish around here." Well, he talked to me two hours. The reason I know it was two hours was Miami Vice was coming on and having a back-to-back program. It started, he called me, and whenever the two-hour program was over with, he says, "This is the most intelligent conversation I ever had on the telephone in my life." Now, he was eighty-something years old. You have to educate these people to bring them up to the point to where they don't forget. People forget, and they don't know. Gosh, I could tell people the real truth of things, and it would open their minds. But a lot of them got their mind already made up. There's nothing you can do about it.

MJ: Well, listen, let me stop this, and I want to thank you for taking the time to do this. I hope that we could possibly sit down again with maybe a few others and have a conversation like this again.

EFT: I enjoy it. Really, I just wish that everybody had the knowledge of a lot of the old-timers have had on the water that's been on the water all their life.

[end of transcript]