

Dick Ristow: It is December 1st, 2006. I am at Dick Braasch's house in Oshkosh, Wisconsin. We are going to talk about his activities for the *Sturgeon for Tomorrow* booklet that is being published. So, here we go. Dick, why not tell me about your family and your activities as a young guy along the lake here.

Richard Braasch: You want to know when I was born?

DR: Yes, and your family.

RB: I was born in 1935. I come from a family of five kids. My mother and father were farmers, but they got off the farm. My father worked at Winnebago State Hospital. He also was a handyman mechanic. I think that's where I got a lot of my knowledge of building stuff and fixing stuff and got into spearing with him. My mother was like a home lady - housekeeper. She worked part-time at Fernau's Roadside Market in the summertime.

DR: Is your [inaudible] German descent?

RB: They are both of German descent. My mother was a Luepke from the south of Oshkosh. Her relatives were all fishermen and hunters.

DR: You always lived north of town here, near the lake?

RB: I've always lived north of town near Lake Winnebago. It's right off the street by the State Hospital. We used to go back there during the summertime and also wintertime, fishing, hunting, and swimming. We used to fish off the shore on the high banks back there. We also had a fish shanty that my dad, when we were kids, would take down to the lake for us. Then we'd push it out and go fishing. I got into sturgeon fishing with my dad when I was - I think I used to tell the kids at school, nine years old. Anyway, he was a sturgeon spearer. But then he got out of it for a while. I worked at Fernau's Roadside Market as a kid. I used to go out sturgeon fishing with them on weekends when they went. Charlie and Chuck Fernau, they were both big sturgeon spearkers. They're both passed on now. But I got most of my knowledge from them. As I grew older, I built my own shanty. Now, I can't remember exactly what year it was. But it was in the [19]50s. I think I went over on Poygan to the first spearing season they had over there. We built a shanty out of 2x2s and a wood floor. It had runners on, no wheels. The sides were made out of cardboard and black roofing paper. Then we put slats to keep the paper on. It was light enough. Four of us lifted it up on - Teddy Furman, he was the kid I fished with or started fishing with - on his dad's pickup truck. There were farmers north of Oshkosh. We took it over there on Poygan on the back of the pickup truck. We cut the hole by hand, which was natural. We chopped the holes in the corner by hand. Then we had an old, hand wood saw that my dad sharpened and converted into an ice saw. We used that until I got a little bit older. Then I started fishing with Fernaus. They had a group of maybe six, seven, eight guys. Charlie Fernau made the shanties all on runners. We had a trailer that we'd have to winch them on and then take them down to the lake. They were made so that you could hook them all together and pull them. They bought a 1943 surplus army jeep for the farm. They used that in the wintertime. We'd pulled the shanties. It was small and light. They had their own bridge to cross the crack. They used to start by the big island and go east. I would fish with them on weekends when I was

off school.

DR: You were still in high school then?

RB: I was still in high school, yes.

DR: So, how did it go from there? Did you spear a lot of fish back then?

RB: My first fish was a 60-pounder with them. When we went to Poygan, we never got a fish over there. We never saw one. There weren't that many speared that I can recall. But then I was one of the guys that never saw that many fish. I probably got twenty sturgeons in my life. That's about it. Like I said, some guys you hear got fish every year. I was never that lucky.

DR: How long have you been spearing out of there?

RB: Well, you go back. I was 17 when I had my own shanty.

DR: How old are you now?

RB: I'm 71 now. So, it's got over 55 years, 60 years.

DR: So, you got a little less than half the time you have been getting a sturgeon?

RB: Yes, probably 50 percent.

DR: Yes. That is pretty good though.

RB: Yes. But you hear guys that have gone 20 years or 18 years, haven't got a fish.

DR: Tell me about some of the activities that you had and the experiences on the lake that maybe are humorous or of interest to people that are going to be reading this book.

RB: In the early years, we never got together and had a cookout like we do now, anyway. I can remember having trouble crossing the crack. At those times, we had our own bridge. It wasn't anything elaborate. It was just a couple of planks, blah, blah, blah. Once in a while, the jeep would slide off the planks. One year, it went in the crack. We always had a block and tackle and ropes and stuff along. We pulled it out. They were pretty self-sustaining. They pulled it out by themselves. Other than that, it was just joking around, razzing guys when they missed one. Now when we get together, we have a cookout right on the ice. We got one of our guys, Ricky Bohnert, in the bunch. He's a comedian in the bunch. He does a lot of jokes on guys, razzing, and anything humorous. I can't remember anything real humorous.

DR: What is the biggest fish that you have speared?

RB: 60-pounder.

DR: That was out on?

RB: It was on Winnebago.

DR: By the island here?

RB: Yes. That year the water was gin clear. I bet you could see a dime. We were on 18 feet of water. Charlie got a fish that day. Chuck got a fish. I got a fish. They were all in their 60-pound range. The one I got was I would say maybe a couple of feet off the bottom. We always had corncobs. We had two corncobs on a rod that we'd let down. That was our decoy. They'd come right to that. They'd be coming along. It felt like they were out a mile away. They'd start coming up to that decoy. They'd come just like a submarine right to the decoy and then level off. You let them get about in the middle of the hole and spear them.

DR: How far do you have these corncobs off the bottom?

RB: We'd put them down maybe 8 feet at the most, maybe, sometimes 10.

DR: So, your strategy was to bring the fish up?

RB: Bring the fish up off the bottom, yes, most of the time. A lot of times, they wouldn't even come off the bottom. They would stay, wouldn't even look at the decoy. I've seen them go through way in the bottom and just keep right on going.

DR: Do you still use the same strategy?

RB: Basically, yes.

DR: But now you use a decoy rather than a corncob?

RB: Right. Yes.

DR: So, what kind of a spear do you use?

RB: I have a flying barb now. My dad said, "If you want a spear, you build one." He was handy. He built them out of five-tine pitchforks. So, I got me a pitchfork. He said, "Go at her." I built my first spear out of a pitchfork. I still have it. It's a long time ago.

DR: I think I used it one year.

RB: Yes, you used it as a spare.

DR: It did not bring me any luck though. So, [laughter] it is probably all speared out.

RB: Like I said, our first decoys were cobs of corn on a rod. Then one year, I made one out of a little 2-foot baseball bat I found somewhere. I put fins on it and painted it yellow, blah, blah,

blah.

DR: What is your favorite color?

RB: My favorite color probably is yellow. I would say yellow.

DR: Is it because it is the brightest or most attractive to the fish?

RB: I think it's brighter. That's the one that seems to work for me. I've got different colors that I put down. Green is good sometimes. White with red fins or whatever on it.

DR: Do you ever use more than one decoy?

RB: Yes. Sometimes I use a big one and then I put a small one down. Once in a while, I use that as a swimming decoy. You yank it. Then let it down. It goes around in a circle. There are all kinds of different decoys that they use. I got a collection of some old ones.

DR: Were you in the good old days part of the activity that guys would throw stuff on the bottom and collect them?

RB: Oh, yes.

DR: What was your favorite attractant then?

RB: We started out with noodles and eggshells and potatoes peels. Potatoes, you peel them, and they show up on the water.

DR: Did the fish actually eat them or were just to catch them?

RB: I don't think they ate. No, I don't think. I think they were just for, not attraction, but they were just so you could see from the bottom.

DR: Reflection up.

RB: Yes. Then we went to that mill paper after a while, that white mill paper. It came in rolls. You'd put it down with a stick. Now, I have a PVC pipe. I got a big X. I got a joint in the middle. When I let it down, I open it up with my gaff hook. Then I just let it down in the bottom. That's another thing. Everything I have just about is handmade. Even the gaff hooks I made years ago. Like I said, I made my spears. I made shanties. I've built my own shanties.

DR: How many shanties have you built now over the years?

RB: It's in the forties. Now, we've graduated to the wheels.

DR: Is that wheel system something you have created? Or is that something that you have seen?

RB: We saw on the lake different versions of it. Then we just perfected it, made it a little bit better. Each year, we improved it. I think the best that we've ever had is we used to have a pipe going through there with a coupling. Some of those couplings would get tight, blah, blah, blah. Guys would complain. Anyway, we got it now so that we just slide the arm where the wheels are attached to. That can be removed if you have to fix it. Well, I built eighteen shanties for our sturgeon banquet. Plus, I built two for Fond du Lac's banquet. I built one I think for the Appleton banquet one year. So, I've been in it a long time and built a lot of shanties.

DR: What is the size of your shanty?

RB: The shanty now is about 5 feet by 8 feet. The reason we built them like that is so that we can get them across the Otter Street's Bridge. Sometimes we don't use the bridge. We go this side of the crack over here, back in the State Hospital where we spear or down south. But if you go on a big lake, we used to cross the bridges by Otter Street. Then we made them so that they just fit on the bridge.

DR: What is your favorite area to spear? Rock? Mud?

RB: Mud is my favorite area.

DR: Is there a certain depth that you like to stay with?

RB: Most of the years, I've fished behind the State Hospital and up by the Big Island. I like to stay in that 11 or 12 feet. The years when it's clear water, we move to deeper water. But I still think I got most of my fishing 11 to 12 feet.

DR: In mud or rock?

RB: Mostly mud.

DR: Most of them on the north end here?

RB: Yes.

DR: When you refer to the island, you are referring to?

RB: Garlic Island.

DR: Garlic Island.

RB: It's up north of the State Hospital here.

DR: Have you had any foolish activities or known of any illegal things that you have heard guys do over the years?

RB: Oh, yes, I hear - the biggest one was the year they were fishing them. The water you

couldn't see down levels of 2 or 3 feet. Guys who were getting fish didn't know how the heck they were getting them. They were hooking them, fishing, and then they'd bring them up and spear them. I know it went on before that, even years ago. I can remember a shanty out by the island. They're guys I knew well. Anyway, they did the same thing. They'd hook them and bring them up and spear them. I never was that lucky. I could never hook one [laughter].

DR: [laughter] You do not have to worry about it. This is a seven-year reprieve.

RB: Limitations, yes.

DR: Other activities and things you do? Do you hang around with these guys that you spear with? Is this kind of a club?

RB: Yes, we hang around the guys. I'm president of Sturgeon for Tomorrow Chapter in Oshkosh. Like I said, we built a shanty every year. Then I have a shop down from my house. The guys get together when we build the shanty. We'd have a feed down there. They'd come out and help. It's the guys that I know and fish with. I've built shanties for just about every one of the guys that I fish with. They all have shanties with the wheels on them. I think, yes, they all have shanties with wheels on them.

DR: Well, your shanty has got a tip down floor over the hole. So, guys use it for perch fishing too.

RB: Yes. You can use it for perch fishing, yes. Not tip down, the wheels just let it down like a cantilever. It's let down.

DR: We will be taking a picture of that in the shop. That it is a hangout for the Sturgeon for Tomorrow guys that he hangs around with. What have been some of the other things that you have made? You said you made spears. How did you make your spears?

RB: I was a tool and die maker at Triangle Manufacturing Company. So, I had access to all the machines, and I made flying barbed spears. I made a few out of pitchforks, but that was years back. Now, most of the people nowadays like a flying barb. So, I've made – I don't know how many.

DR: Why do they like the flying barbed one?

RB: Well, it's easier to get out, in other words. When they spear the fish, the barbs, you can take them apart and slide them through the fish. Where the other ones, you've got to cut a bigger hole and yank it back out. So, they're more convenient, I guess, to use. Some of the guys use a spear with a wood handle. They say they fly better. I have both. I have one with a wood handle on it. I also have one with a pipe handle on it that's hollow. But you get it weighted with lead. It doesn't fly too bad. But you get pros and cons.

DR: You target your spear like putting a plate down on the bottom and throwing them out and see how they fly?

RB: Yes. We used to take and throw a milk jug down there. Fill it with water and then put them down there and see how they fly.

DR: What is the object of that? Is there something –

RB: Well, it gives you some idea of what your spear does. I haven't done it for a long time.

DR: Well, once you know how it flies –

RB: Once you know how it flies, you don't have to guess. But it doesn't fly the same every time you throw it because you're throwing it differently. Each time you throw it, you're not throwing it the same way. You've got variations. You might throw it a little harder, or you might throw it a little softer. Or you might throw it on an angle.

DR: What has been your experience, have most of your fish been speared straight up or down?

RB: Straight up and down, yes.

DR: It is what you prefer for accuracy?

RB: Yes.

DR: How do you keep your shanty warm?

RB: I got a gas heater. Years ago, the first ones we had were kerosene. I'll take that back. The first one was a wood heater. But they were messy and big and heavy and blah, blah, blah. To move the shanty, we used to take the stove out and blah, blah, blah. Then we had a kerosene heater. Well, some days it would work. Some days it wouldn't work. So, then we graduated to these little, gas milkhouse heaters. I used that for a while. Now, I have the modern one that's got a thermostat on it and a whole ball of wax. See, they're much better.

DR: After you get done spearing, do you guys meet at a tavern or something?

RB: Yes. We go to the tavern and get in all the contests the day before. We cut usually on Thursday. You can cut Thursday.

DR: When you say cut, you have a certain way you make the hole or what?

RB: I built a sledge saw of my own.

DR: Oh, you also make sledge saws?

RB: Yes. I built my own sledge saw. I would dare say you could cut a hole in about 5 to 7 minutes with it. There's no chopping. You just go and put the chain down, and it cuts through the ice. You just shove it like a snow blower. Then you back up. You go around the four sides.

It's on an angle. I have it on a 12-degree angle so that when you cut the ice, you can shove the block under. It doesn't wedge. If you cut them straight, then you can't get them. Sometimes they'll freeze back as fast as you –

DR: I imagine you can also see further out with an angle cut rather than at the bottom of the edge of the ice.

RB: Right. You got an angle in that hole. If you set your shanty on there just right and cut the hole right, you don't see any ice inside the shanty at all. That's a plus too.

DR: You must be cutting the ice hole a little bigger than the hole that is in there.

RB: Right. That's in the shanty. Well, my shanty's got a little border on the sides. Then at the ends, you've got quite a bit of a leeway there. You can adjust a shanty over the hole, so you don't even see the ice.

DR: Are your shanties all rubber roofed?

RB: They're all rubber roofed. They're all aluminum sheeted.

DR: No maintenance on the outside?

RB: No maintenance on the outside at all.

DR: Before that spearing activity actually starts, do you go out and scout too?

RB: Yes. Sometimes we've gone out and scouted the water clarity mostly.

DR: How do you check for water clarity?

RB: We drill a hole. Then we get a plastic cup. Some guy's get a little saucer or whatever they put down. We lay on the ice and put a blanket over your head. Then you let it down until you can't see it. Then you bring it up and measure on the string how far down you can see. I can remember years you couldn't see down 2 feet. It was terrible.

DR: So, you think the water clarity has been better in the last years?

RB: Oh, water clarity's 100 percent better some years.

DR: What is the deepest that you could see the bottom that you could recall?

RB: Like I said, when I got my first fish or first years I was fishing, 18 feet you could see the bottom. It was off the Big Island.

DR: Is it real clear?

RB: It was gin clear.

DR: That is all mud?

RB: That was mud bottom, yes.

DR: Did you see other species when you were fishing?

RB: Oh, yes. You see everything, walleyes, perch. I've seen carp [laughter], big northerns. You see all the species. A lot of shad now.

DR: But now that you have got this fish, what do you do with the fish?

RB: Well, I smoke my own fish. Well, I smoke all the fish that we get in our group. I got into smoking fish, oh, a long time back. I got my own little smokehouse. I experimented for years and years with different brines. I have my brine down now. Everybody likes it. I smoke chickens, turkeys, ducks, and you name it, salmon. I smoke our sturgeon when we get them.

DR: How do you prepare a fish for smoking?

RB: Well, you cut it in pieces the crossway like steaking in it. About 2-inches wide I cut them. You wash them good. We cut them up before we put them in the freezer. I freeze mine in water because I don't like that dry freezing because I think it takes away from the quality of the fish. Then when I get them out of the freezer, I thaw them out. When you throw them out, it takes all that black stuff on the outside off from freezing them. They're squeaky clean when you get them done. Then I brine them.

DR: What is brine? What does that consist of?

RB: Well, the brine is the salt. I put brown sugar in my brine and molasses. I put a curing agent, Prague 1 or 2 Powder, in there to kill the bacteria. Also, it helps the shelf life of the fish. You could keep it a little bit longer. I soak it for 12 to 14 hours.

DR: When you make your brine, do you float an egg in it?

RB: No.

DR: How do you determine how much –

RB: I had a salt meter I used to use. Now, I just measure it. It's all measured right the same brine every time I smoke.

DR: Now, how long do you soak this?

RB: 12 to 14 hours. You mentioned the egg thing. I don't like the egg thing because some eggs don't float the same. They don't all float the same. It comes close for some guys, but you can

also get it too salty.

DR: But your history has proven that the amount you measure is what?

RB: I measure the same amount each time I do it, same brine. It's never changed.

DR: I understand you also make caviar.

RB: Yes, I do.

DR: Explain the process of making caviar. It is quite a process.

RB: It's a lengthy process. You also have to have the utensils to make it with. The screens? I made a box with a plastic screen on it. That's the 8-inch mesh. I also have a screen that's a quarter-inch mesh. I take the eggs. I separate the big part of the membrane out of there. You pull it out of there and get it so that the eggs are separated, so you can run it through the screen. Then I put it on the screen. I take my hand, and I kind of swish them back and forth lightly. The eggs will go through the screen, and all the membrane stays on the screen. So, then I take it.

DR: How many times do you have to do that?

RB: I do that twice so that I make sure I get all the stuff out of them. Then I get the 16-inch screen. I put them in there and I run them through there. That takes out the real fine stuff. Then I wash them.

DR: Well, are all the eggs, when you get them out of a fish, the same circumference?

RB: No, I don't think so. I think out of the fish, when you get them, for fish, they are. But different fish have a little bit different size but not that much that you can notice it.

DR: So, they all will fit through this –

RB: They'll all fit through the screen, yes.

DR: – quarter-inch mesh screen?

RB: Right.

DR: This is just like a box with a screen on the bottom.

RB: Screen on the bottom, yes. Then I take it and wash them. I clean the screen off . I put them in another colander that I have. It's got little slots and holes in it. I run it through there. I rinse them all off, and I let them drain. Then I put my salt to them. Weigh my salt and weigh the eggs. Then I mix them. Let them stand about 10, 15 minutes. Then I mix them again, and they're done. I put them in pint jars, and I put them in the freezer. I like them better fresh. But freezing keeps them because the shelf life on those isn't that long.

DR: Well, there is not enough preservative in them?

RB: Well, I don't think that the salt preserves them. But you have a chance of getting mold on them, I've noticed. I kept some in the refrigerator in the basement to find out what would happen to them if you kept them. They get moldy after a while. So, then they've got to throw them away. You put them in the freezer; they don't taste as good. The quality isn't there. But they're not bad. It keeps them from getting moldy.

DR: Do you eat all of them? Are they not protein-rich?

RB: Well, they're rich, yes. I eat them. When people come over, I have caviar. Most of the time, I give them back to the guy. I keep half, maybe even sometimes less than half, for doing them for the guy. But then I give them away. Like Ron Brooks, I give him some. I give the guys that come a jar here and there. It doesn't take long. All of a sudden, they're gone.

DR: You have made all these screens on your own?

RB: Yes. I have a couple boughten ones. But the boxes with the big screen on, I made my own. I've got a pan that I put them on. I made the screen and the box to fit on this stainless-steel pan that I have. So, it works pretty good.

DR: How many pounds do you normally get out of a fish?

RB: You probably get 18 to 20 pounds out of a big fish.

DR: Really?

RB: Sometimes more, 25.

DR: How many million eggs is that?

RB: Well, I don't even have a clue. It's got to be millions and millions of eggs.

DR: Do they come out of a sack or what?

RB: They're kind of like in membrane. Yes, they're in a sack in the fish. There's a membrane that they get their blood or whatever from the female. They're all attached to this membrane by the millions.

DR: Do they have to be a certain color?

RB: Well, yes. The best ones are the black. The blacker they are, the better they are.

DR: That means that –

RB: That means that they're ripe to spawn. Sometimes you get some that are gray. If you get some that are real light gray or on the yellowish-white side, you can't do those. I've never done them. But I imagine somebody's tried it. But the best are the black ones.

DR: Later on, we will go out to the shop and take pictures of all these things that you made. Dick is a rather clever fellow. He likes to make it on his own. As you grew into this sturgeon spearing business, how did you get involved with Sturgeon for Tomorrow?

RB: They started Sturgeon for Tomorrow across the lake over at Pipe or Malone area. Then they branched off from there, and the Fond du Lac group started down at Fond du Lac. I went to their banquet. Then Appleton started. I went to their banquet. So, anyway, one day, we're sitting somewhere having a beer or whatever it was. I was talking to this other guy. I said, "I think we need a Sturgeon for Tomorrow Chapter in Oshkosh. We've got enough people. They're going to these other banquets." I said, "Why don't we start a chapter?" So, we went to a meeting across the lake. We call it the Main Chapter. They were the ones that started it, what was it, back in [19]76 or something? I can't remember exactly when it was. Well, 30 years ago, what would that be? Yes, it'd be [19]76, about there.

DR: [19]76, yes.

RB: Anyway, a couple of us went over there. The three of us went over to the meeting. We mentioned that we would like to start a chapter in Oshkosh. They said, "Fine. We're behind you, 100 percent." We asked them how they got started. The Main Chapter across the lake, they got started from a donation from a guy that owned Blanck's Supper Club. I said, "Well, we'd have to go out and get some funds from somebody." Well, they said, "Tell you what we'll do. We'll give you 1,200 bucks to start, and you could pay us back." So, I said, "Okay." So, we got \$1,200 from them. We started our banquet. We didn't know how many people we were going to have. We didn't have a clue. We sent out applications to sports clubs and blah, blah, blah. I dare say, we had, I think, almost seven hundred the first year down at the convention center in Oshkosh. I never in my wildest dreams thought it would be that big. Then the next year, we had the same or maybe a little more people. It grew to over seven hundred people. But now, it's fallen off. Most banquets are backing down. People don't have the money. I think that the area is saturated with banquets, and people are getting sick of it.

DR: Sports banquets.

RB: Sports banquets are a dime a dozen nowadays.

DR: When you raise all this money, all these chapters, what do you do with the money?

RB: Well, the money that we raise, we donate to the DNR for projects. Now, the projects can be fish projects. It can be habitat projects. It can be projects on the river like riprapping projects.

DR: All sturgeon related?

RB: All sturgeon related. We do it for sturgeon. But also the other fish species benefit from

what we do. We also are in research with Fred Binkowski who runs the lab down at the Great Lakes Water Institute in Milwaukee. He's a professor down there. He raises fish in his lab. We got hooked up with Fred. He's raising sturgeon down there for us.

DR: What do they do with the sturgeon?

RB: The sturgeons are put in the Fox and the Wolf River. Now, we have a project going on at the Fox where they are putting radio tags in them. They're monitoring their movements and their habitat, where they move from and where they move to.

DR: How do they monitor them? Is there something that is implanted in the fish?

RB: Yes. They have a radio implant in the fish, and it sends off a signal. Then they have these scanners that pick it up along the river. They're also doing it from the air. They have a DNR plane. They have a monitor in the DNR plane. They fly over the lake. They can pick up those radio-tagged fish. It's worked out pretty good. You're getting a lot of results of how far this fish travels, where they stay, do they stay in one place, blah, blah, blah. How long does it take them to go from the river to the lake?

DR: How long do these monitors last in a fish?

RB: Now, some of them I think are good for 2, 3 years. The first ones out were only maybe a year or so, if they were lucky. It's worked.

DR: How big are these fish when they install the monitors?

RB: Some of these fish are probably 12, 14 inches, the small ones. But some of them are up to 2-feet long, maybe 30 inches. He has some down there that are larger that he's also put tags in. But most of them are the smaller – I would say around the 3-foot area. They also put a lot of fish in without the tags. Now, we're into raising fish at the hatchery at Wild Rose also. We gave them \$5,000. We've been giving \$5,000 a year for the food to feed the sturgeon. Those sturgeon are sent to states all over the United States for their projects. Some are sent for rehabilitation in lakes and streams where the sturgeon is non-existent. Some of them are new, put in lakes and rivers for experimental purposes to see if they'll take.

DR: The DNR has been doing a lot of stuff up in Green Bay and the Bay. Are the sturgeons being used up there too, the planting of them?

RB: They're also planting them in the Great Lakes, yes. They put some in Green Bay. They put some up by Lake Superior in the river up there. I think it was the St. Louis River. They've put them in there. So, those fish go into Lake Superior. They just started a program in Milwaukee that they're putting them in Milwaukee River. They cleaned up the Milwaukee River. I think they dumped some in there that are going to go into Lake Michigan. So, it's an ongoing project.

DR: These fish, there is no spearing season yet in those areas.

RB: No.

DR: So, how big will they grow up to?

RB: Well, I imagine they would grow as big as they get in Winnebago, up to 200 pounds. There's some in the lake they did say are over 200 pounds.

DR: In Lake Winnebago?

RB: In Lake Winnebago, yes. Now, getting back to our money. Our money is also used for riprapping.

DR: What is riprapping?

RB: Riprapping is rebuilding the shorelines and keeping the water from scouring out holes and washing away riverbanks.

DR: Oh, it actually keeps the water cleaner.

RB: Keeps the water cleaner also. We put some big projects like the one at Shiocton on the bend up there. It's right on Highway 54. It's just right in Shiocton. That was a big project. We were in there with the state and the county and federal, I think. Then Sturgeon for Tomorrow donated a lot of money.

DR: Were you involved in any of this international activity that they had the big powwow here years ago?

RB: Yes. You mean in Oshkosh?

DR: Yes.

RB: They had the National Sturgeon Symposium. We were involved. We were hosts. We attended some of the meetings. We had fish fry out to the fish camp. There were about one-thirty people that we fried fish for them.

DR: Fry sturgeon?

RB: No, perch.

DR: Perch?

RB: No, they were walleyes. I'll take that back. Walleye fry, we had for them. We donated some of the money for that. I think we're into about 600,000 that we've donated.

DR: Over the years?

RB: Over 30 years for sturgeon.

DR: That is quite a large amount of money for fish.

RB: Yes, it is.

DR: In conclusion, Dick, what have you gained by all this spearing and the activity with Sturgeon for Tomorrow? Personally, what has it meant to you?

RB: Well, I think that the biggest thing is the satisfaction that I get seeing that they are controlling the sturgeon population by republication and laws that they made and whatever. It's satisfying to see that we're doing something. Now, we've helped the state out where they can't fund some of these projects. So, it makes you feel good to do it. I don't have any regrets that I've spent hours and hours and years working with the state and Sturgeon for Tomorrow. It's been a lengthy thing, but it's been enjoyable.

DR: Has your wife been involved in this?

RB: My wife is just as active as I am. She is very active. She does a lot of the legwork and the paperwork and the appointments. You name it, Pat does it. She is very helpful.

DR: Well, I can say this with surety that Dick has got the same memory that I have. So, Pat, is his right-hand person.

RB: [laughter] Yes.

DR: So, what do you plan on doing with all of this now? Are you going to pass it on?

RB: Well, I'm going to have to pass it on because I'm getting old, let's face it. My health is changing. So, I have to pass it on to somebody someday, Sturgeon for Tomorrow and also the projects that I do and work on and my thinking. I have to find somebody that will carry it on that I'm going to be happy with. I think there's somebody out there. You're always replaceable. You're not infallible. There's always somebody who's going to take your place.

DR: What would you like to say to the people who are interested in getting into spearing? What do they have to do? How much is it going to cost? How should they get started?

RB: Well, I would say hook up with somebody that's doing it. Then go out and do it with them. Go out in the shanty and spend a weekend out there with them or a day out there with them. Start by cutting the hole when you first set up and blah, blah, blah. Then talk to them and find out what it costs.

DR: What does it cost?

RB: Yes, I would say –

DR: What are the ballpark figures?

RB: Ballpark figures?

DR: The spear?

RB: Well, the spear is \$150.

DR: You have to have one or two.

RB: I would have two. I'd have one good one and one backup and a saw. Nowadays, it's the chainsaw. You have to buy a chainsaw to cut the hole. Nobody cuts them by hand anymore, unless he's a giant. But I think the chainsaw's going to cost you 5-, \$600 by the time you get set up. You could get a shanty, I would say, from 250 on up to – the ones that I'm making now, I wouldn't sell for less than \$1,200. It's whatever you want. Then you've got to have a vehicle to pull a shanty. The shanty with the heater and the blah, blah, blah, all the equipment in there, I would say it would be 12- to \$1,400 if you want one that's on wheels.

DR: What do they sell decoys for?

RB: Decoys are 40, \$45, some of them are.

DR: You should have –

RB: You should have two, three decoys, different colors.

DR: How do you dress for this?

RB: When you cut the holes and you're out in the elements, you have to dress like you're hunting. In other words, it's cold. It's cold. But once you get the shanty set up, you get the heater in there, it's warm enough to sit in your street clothes. But you've still got to be able to dress to go back and forth. In other words, if you have to go out and get in your car or you get stuck with your truck or whatever, you still have to dress according to the elements.

DR: When you are in the shanty, I take it I is warm.

RB: Yes. The shanty's warm if you have a good heating system, and it's insulated. The shanties I make are insulated. So, it's fairly warm in there.

DR: Is there anything you want to caution people on?

RB: Well, the biggest caution is the ice conditions. I think you've got to watch the ice conditions. Lake Winnebago is not friendly when it's comes to safety. You have to watch the open holes. I've seen years when it's been below 0 and cold. I have a friend that flies an airplane. We used to go up and look at the lake over before sturgeon fishing. One year, it was –

DR: Is that Mr. Corbett?

RB: Mr. Kenny Corbett. He's the flying warden. He was a flying warden for the DNR. Anyway, we went over the lake that one year. There were ten, twelve large open holes, and it was below 0 weather. So, the lake is changing. I can't remember that we never had ice on Thanksgiving Day, very seldom. But now, we don't get ice until after the first of the year sometimes, if we're lucky. Some years we don't get over 6 or 8 inches on the lake. Then you have to go with four wheelers. So, I can see the changes in my 60 years of fishing. I've seen the changes on the Winnebago change. Like right now, I'm sitting here in my kitchen looking out on the lake. It's December 1st. It's wide open. There isn't a spec of ice on the lake. Years ago, when I was a kid, we were skating on the lake at Thanksgiving time. So, those are the changes. The lake is the number one thing you have to watch.

DR: Well, we will see you on the ice.

RB: I'll be there.

DR: Thank you, Dick.

RB: You bet you.

[end of transcript]