

People of the Sturgeon: Wisconsin's Love Affair with an Ancient Fish
Dennis Cook Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
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Length of Interview: 47:19
Interviewer: FS – Female Speaker
Transcriber: NCC

Female Speaker: It'll never happen again. Never it's going to happen.

Male Speaker: Your son had to come and shovel you out, literally.

FS: Yes.

FS: To get out the door.

FS: The front door. This has happened before. When you have a patient in the house or someone that you want to make sure you can get out when you have to get out. You have a front door you can't open, and a back door that's that high, you panic.

MS: Yes. I suppose.

FS: I panicked. Then it happened a second time. I could get out the front door, but we couldn't get out the back door.

Dennis Cook: Well, I didn't know that. You should have called me.

FS: You were gone. You were gone. Otherwise, I'd have called you.

MS: Anybody ever have a hot hole that just –

FS: No.

MS: – one person after another? [inaudible]

FS: [inaudible] Yes, no. Like Wilson.

MS: Yes.

FS: Wilson did this year. But no. I've never.

MS: No.

FS: Maybe you guys have. Yes. Maybe you guys have.

FS: I've seen a lot of fish in a hole.

MS: Yes.

FS: Oh, definitely.

MS: We just hear some of the shacks. Oh, it's like one after another after another.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes. I've never ever seen that.

FS: This year I think there was something out here. Because look at Jimmy [inaudible], I mean, that was just like –

MS: Oh, that was two or three of them.

FS: Three of them?

FS: Did he?

FS: Yes. It was just like, how can you be sitting in one spot and see all this fish –

FS: Yes.

FS: – and keep missing?

FS: [inaudible] you are eighty years old, I guess anybody can miss.

FS: Yes. Well, you're eighty [inaudible].

FS: Yes. Yes. [inaudible] Yes.

FS: Never again.

FS: Yes.

FS: [inaudible]

FS: Yes. I guess.

FS: But that was this year. They were out in that area, so that, yeah, makes a difference.

MS: Oh yeah. That year, that was the year that Beaver was trying to spear that board out there. We went by a guy. He was in front of us 2 miles out. We went by him that day. I'm pretty sure the warden was out in the lake from us. This guy had five sturgeons laying out in front of the hole. He didn't give a shit.

MS: Five sturgeons.

MS: Five sturgeons laying out in –

FS: Oh, my God.

MS: – front of the hole.

FS: Yes.

MS: That is true.

MS: That's a hot hole.

FS: Yes.

MS: Good God. Did not [inaudible] year?

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Oh, a lot of times they did with the kids, when the kids were [inaudible]. Yes, they did. They had hot holes.

FS: [inaudible] is a lucky fisherman. He gets to fish almost every year.

FS: Yes.

FS: Yes. He does. He gets to fish almost every year. [inaudible]

FS: Yes.

MS: So, you do not [inaudible]. It is luck. I mean, what do you think about some of these guys that go out with their tin cans and look for worm beds and all this other stuff?

FS: Well, we do that. Yes. But we don't –

FS: But we didn't find that much this year. We didn't find that much this year though.

MS: No?

MS: No. Two or three, the most we found, two or three worms.

MS: Two or three worms.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes. That's the year we didn't get anything down there. Well, remember that swamp hole we went out into?

MS: Oh, yeah.

FS: And got stuck in it?

MS: Oh, yeah. [inaudible]

FS: Well, I don't know. I think we crossed the road.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: You got stuck?

FS: Well, when you're in a swamp, you're in a swamp. You know you're stuck.

MS: [inaudible] Oh, that is fun.

FS: Yes. Yes.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes. That's a lot of work.

MS: [inaudible] I shoveled more out in that leak than I shoveled my entire life.

FS: Yes. He really did. He shoveled and shoveled. [laughter]

MS: Geez.

FS: But it was worth getting those shanties off this year, too.

FS: Yes. That was bad. That was bad.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: And you had to shovel.

MS: [inaudible] through and then you shovel.

FS: And then you had to shovel.

FS: Yes. It was a lot of work.

MS: Of course, the fishing club was trying to conserve a little bit on the plowing because of the price of fuel. I do not blame them. So, there were not as many roads plowed.

MS: No. No.

MS: So, now we're going to start running a few fundraisers to keep up [inaudible].

MS: Yes. Four bucks a gallon or [inaudible] who knows what it'll be by next February?

FS: Yes.

MS: Exactly.

MS: Well, if you had to pick one thing that you like about spearing, I guess, what would it be? What makes you want to keep going back out there? Is it to try and get a fish? Is it the anticipation? Is it the just –

FS: Well, I don't know. The fish are really good to eat, [laughter] the camaraderie of the people.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: [inaudible] are really good, too. There's no doubt about it. It's the best fish there is, if you know how to fix them and clean them. That's the thing. A lot of people don't know how to clean them so – Dorothy taught them how to clean them.

MS: Yes.

FS: Now, he had no clue when he first started. So, she told him. I remember [inaudible] he called her from Appleton one time when we still lived there, how to clean that fish.

MS: [inaudible]

[talking simultaneously]

FS: We would go up there, and he had no idea how to clean it. So, he'd call Dorothy to have her tell him over the phone. Now, you wonder why I wore out. [laughter]

MS: So, what is the secret? What is the secret to cleaning them?

FS: Well, the secret is you clean them the right way. Take the –

MS: Sharp knife.

FS: – fat off. Sharp knife, that will take all that fat.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Anything that's yellow or pink or off-colored besides white, goes. It seems like you're wasting a lot. But you have to [inaudible].

MS: Yes.

MS: You know that is an amazing fact. Funny thing, too, that fat on the fish, it seems – I would say when the fish is fresh, it's good. Because when you smoke them, that fat's all in there. It tastes really good.

MS: Yes,

MS: Yes. When you smoke [inaudible] when you freeze them, it gets a fishy taste.

MS: Turns a little bit, huh?

MS: What is your favorite way to cook them? Depends on the year, I suppose.

FS: Yes. Just fried. Yes.

MS: Fried.

FS: Fried and just a little flour.

MS: Like a steak?

FS: Yes. Yes, cut in strips.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: And the people around here, like Dorothy and the old-timers, do a cream sturgeon. They fry at first, then pour half and half over it.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: [inaudible] put the cream on mashed potatoes.

MS: Really?

FS: Oh, very good. Excellent.

FS: Yummy.

FS: Excellent.

FS: Yummy, yummy.

FS: Excellent.

FS: But good, mashed potatoes and fish, can't beat it.

FS: And now with all the shad in here, a lot of people that do get big sturgeons, and they're full of shad. My grandkids' both were full of shad. When they clean them, de-fat them. Put them in salt water for maybe an hour. Take out the salt water. Freeze them. When you take them out, you milk them. Put them in milk. Milk for three hours. Takes that shad flavor right out.

MS: Really?

FS: Yes. But people don't take time to do that. But you've got to put them in – I use canning salt when I do the cleaning. I leave them in the canning salt for a couple hours. Rinse it well. Freeze them.

MS: So, you just steak them basically –

FS: Yes.

MS: [inaudible] inch steaks or something.

FS: Well, no, we don't steak them. No. We leave them in little chunks like so much for a meal. No. We don't steak them.

MS: Okay.

FS: But when I do that in the [inaudible]. But then when you make it for the meal, take it out, then steak them. Then put them in milk. But you have to do it at least three hours –

MS: Okay.

FS: – before you – yeah. Then put them in milk and –

MS: And that will take that shad taste off.

FS: There weren't any of those kids. That happened when they fished at Lac. They had one. My sister-in-law said they couldn't eat. They could taste the fishy taste. I had some of the same fish that they gave me. I said, "Well, you didn't soak it in milk." What does milk have to do? I have no – well, I'm sure it takes that shad [inaudible].

MS: Well [inaudible].

FS: Yes, it is.

MS: Yes.

FS: Yes.

FS: It has that [inaudible] yeah.

FS: [inaudible]

MS: A lot of guys who have been fishing in the Fox River at the Pere, Green Bay [inaudible]

FS: So, milk has [inaudible]

FS: It does work and that's a good tip. But it takes time. It's just –

MS: Can't just take it and throw a piece in the pan and –

FS: Yes.

MS: – or microwave it –

[talking simultaneously]

MS: – fast food type [inaudible]

MS: It is going to have a fishy taste.

FS: Yes.

MS: That'll spoil your taste for fish –

FS: Yes.

MS: – if you get a hold of one that taste –

FS: Yes. Fishy. Yes, like that.

FS: But it's such a nice firm meat that –

FS: That you really can't spoil it.

FS: No.

FS: [inaudible] you can put in milk. You're never going to spoil that meat.

FS: And if it's cooked right, you've got to like it.

MS: Run into anybody that never did like it?

FS: Oh, yeah.

MS: Really?

FS: Yes.

FS: I've run into a lot of people that did not.

FS: Because they didn't know how to clean it. They'd leave the red on it.

MS: They'll stick it with the hide on it and try to cook it with the hide on it. Well –

FS: I have a guy that I used to work with that used to run his fish through the car wash before he'd take it home.

MS: I've heard that, too. They –

FS: They'd pressure wash it through a car wash.

MS: Oh, that's okay.

FS: I know. But –

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Take the slime off.

MS: You don't have to worry about the slime.

FS: But then does it not slime up after it sits for a while again? When does it slime up again?

MS: Unless you get it old again.

FS: I don't think so. No. You get out all that slime.

MS: [inaudible]

[laughter]

FS: Well, that's what we always did. We'd go out to the milk house.

FS: In the milk house and wash it off?

FS: Yes. Well, yes, scrub them all. We do that.

FS: Yes.

FS: Well, those days, it was like five tags you had. So, it was a lot of –

FS: That's a lot of fish, too.

MS: Quarter a piece or whatever they were.

MS: Yes.

FS: Yes.

MS: Man. Anybody did any – well you made caviar. That was last year?

FS: I had it made. I didn't make it. I had it made.

MS: Oh, you got somebody to make it for you.

FS: Yes. I had a Finnish girl that I know that makes it.

MS: Okay.

FS: Yes.

MS: Okay.

FS: But I watched her do it and [inaudible].

MS: Was it a lot of work or not?

FS: Not actually, no. Washing the eggs is just – then she runs it through the colander.

MS: Just kind of pushed them through.

FS: Pushed them through. Yes. I don't think it's time consuming, but no. She made it just like the Russian does for you guys.

MS: Yes [inaudible].

FS: Yes. She uses that same method.

MS: I don't think it's hard now with – the colander is what they used years ago to wash.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: It's good. Yes, to get all that membrane now through the colander. I don't know. It just seems to work really well.

MS: Yes. It does not seem too bad at all. A lot of people kind of got used to the whole secret thing, was it not? I mean –

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Well, it was a secret probably because a lot of that stuff was sold.

FS: Yes.

MS: You know what I mean?

MS: Right. Sure. Yes.

MS: [inaudible] sell games and there are guys that go around and buy your caviar from you and then resell it on the black market or whatever.

MS: Were they making caviar and then they just sold the caviar? Or they were just the middlemen, and they would sell it to somebody else?

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Reselling it.

FS: Reselling it. Yes. Making it –

MS: Yes. Was there a lot of that years ago or not? Or just a few people you think that did it, but –

MS: Oh, it was just a few people. Because you only hear a few names.

FS: But people don't know how to do it.

FS: No.

FS: That's right.

MS: Nobody wanted to fool with it. With –

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Well, you wouldn't have known how to do it. A few brains [inaudible] we could have done it.

FS: Yes.

MS: But who would've thought?

FS: It takes time.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Made good caviar.

FS: The best.

FS: Yes.

MS: Really?

FS: He was the best.

MS: He'd go around a lake picking up [inaudible].

FS: Sure.

MS: Everybody knows.

FS: The best. [inaudible] was the best.

MS: That was good.

FS: [inaudible].

MS: Salty or not? Was it salty or not?

FS: Yes, we just –

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Black raspberry jam. When the last time [inaudible].

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes. How is he doing?

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Now I know you have an affinity for sturgeon parts that most people throw away.

MS: Really?

MS: Yes.

MS: I had a walleye the other morning for breakfast.

MS: I had sturgeon liver the other morning for breakfast.

FS: Oh, yeah.

MS: Yes.

FS: Oh, that must have been good.

MS: Good.

FS: Excellent. He loves it.

MS: My grandson's picking me up a whitefish delivery up at Lake [inaudible].

MS: Really?

MS: Next week. Yes.

MS: So, what do you do with it? Fry it or –

MS: Fry them up. Pour a little magic fry on them. Throw them in the frying pan.

FS: Real slow.

MS: Real slow.

FS: I don't need [inaudible]. He loves them.

MS: Den fries his with eggs.

MS: Chicken eggs.

FS: Oh, yeah. All right.

FS: The liver?

MS: Liver and eggs.

FS: Yes.

MS: I cut it up like a sturgeon liver or while I save all my perch eggs. Well, I ate livers and perch eggs too in the summertime even. Then I just sautéed in a little butter. [inaudible] So, then I add a couple of chicken eggs in there and make a little scrambled egg out of it. It's great.

FS: So, you should try that. Just fry it first and salt it up. Then add chicken [inaudible].

MS: Now, if you're out the night before start monkeying with that, that can start your stomach rolling. But if you freeze it – now I freeze it, sturgeon liver. [inaudible] liver is a lot different than sturgeon liver. They're harder. Sturgeon liver is soft.

MS: Yes.

FS: Yes.

MS: But if you freeze it –

FS: Oh, yeah, slice. Yes.

MS: – by the time – a couple minutes thaw out.

FS: Don't look at it.

MS: Just thaw it and fry it.

FS: Oh, yeah. Don't look at it. I mean, I don't fry it either.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: I have a damn good stomach.

MS: Oh, I don't think so. I think it's anybody that doesn't like it. But I mean, it tastes good.

MS: Well, that's why they don't like it. Because it looks so horrible –

FS: Kathy loves it.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes. Kathy loves it. Jim loves it.

FS: Oh.

FS: Oh, are you kidding? That's –

MS: Yes. I suppose if you like any calf liver or beef liver or any, you'll probably like this.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Fish liver doesn't taste like that.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: No.

MS: No?

MS: No.

MS: No.

FS: It tastes like fish.

MS: No, it doesn't taste like fish either.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: No. It's got a good taste. It's not a liver taste.

FS: It's more. It's almost like caviar. It's special.

MS: Yes.

FS: Because you really don't get it that often.

MS: Yes.

FS: You get it in the wintertime if somebody's lucky to –

FS: Well, this year you had two from the grandsons.

FS: Or if somebody would be lucky to get you some.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Usually, there isn't any problem for people to get the liver out. You just stick around by me. We'll get you all the livers you want. I don't think that's a problem.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: This year would've been a good year. But you can see that though.

MS: I never really had a bad one.

FS: You can see that when you're cleaning them.

MS: Some of them are green. Some of them are a little brownish. Some of them are red. Some are kind of [inaudible].

FS: Oh, this would've been a good year to sit down there and get some livers.

FS: Yes.

FS: Because we only have those tools.

MS: A good liver's got a good liver color though.

MS: They all taste the same.

[laughter]

MS: Oh, man.

FS: That's as bad as Jim. Jim says, "Ma, you're cleaning this white bass." He said, "Save those livers." "Okay, I will Jim." He said, "Ma, you know those livers were damn good." I like that.

MS: Really? Well, you want fish liver; go get some [inaudible].

MS: Oh, yeah.

MS: Huge.

MS: I do, but they fry way down.

MS: Really?

MS: Yes. They're so full of [inaudible].

MS: Oh.

MS: Yes. But they're so full of [inaudible]. You fry them; they fry away.

MS: Are you kidding?

MS: Yes. I got a whole half of [inaudible] when that guy used to commercial fish out here.

MS: Yes.

MS: That's about ten years ago, whatever it was.

MS: Yes.

MS: It was after I started fishing in early March. He was out here. I went out and asked him, "Do you ever get any lawyers?" He says, "Yes. You want some?" I said, "Yes. How much are

they?" He dumped two of those great big tops – those fish tops on the back of my truck.
[laughter]

FS: He had lawyers.

MS: Well, I gave them to you. I gave them to all the neighbors and everything else. But those lawyers that they had were huge. I mean, some of them were 3-footers.

MS: Yes.

FS: Oh, that's a long time ago.

MS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

MS: I saved all the livers. At work one time, I had a lawyer liver fry. Those guys went nuts over that. But the liver's fried right down though. I mean, they were –

MS: They get real rubbery then too, or not?

MS: Yes, kind of. But they're good. But the oil fries out of them. But it's really good for you.

FS: Well, lawyers have a good kind of oil.

MS: Yes.

MS: I would think. Yes.

MS: Well, I think any fish oil is good for you.

FS: Yes.

MS: Probably, yes.

FS: Yes? I don't think so. Not everything's good for you.

FS: That's what I had this morning. I had fish [inaudible]. You're supposed to eat that.

FS: Oh, I said I always thought it was good for you.

MS: I think that's probably good for you.

FS: I think it's got to be good, too

MS: It's fish.

FS: It's from a fish.

MS: Yes. No kidding.

FS: Fish oil is good for the brain. So, it's got to be good.

MS: That's what they tell you.

FS: Yes.

FS: Take fish oil pills.

MS: Yes. No kidding.

FS: It's got to be good.

MS: Well, you have got anything else that is – you get into it because you – not necessarily fish is always nice to have –

FS: Oh, yes.

FS: Oh, yes.

FS: Oh, gosh. Yes.

MS: Is it a little bit of kind of keeping the tradition alive and you – it is kind of you sit in the shack. You think about maybe when you were a kid or when your dad would take you out or you remember –

FS: When we were young, say like 20, 30 years ago – that's not that long ago – you couldn't wait for February to come. I mean, this was your whole year. February was the year. He would save all his vacations for sturgeon fishing when we had all those weeks.

MS: Really?

FS: He did. Yes.

FS: That's when he took his vacation, all of them. The whole month of sturgeon fishing, he would be off.

MS: February and –

FS: And you couldn't wait for it. It was like –

MS: – a week in March to go to Vegas.

FS: Yes. Right after that we'd go to Vegas. I mean that was a blast.

MS: Yes.

FS: I mean it was. It was just the way –

MS: I was in good shape after the sturgeon fishing season.

MS: Maybe for Vegas.

[laughter]

MS: Well, I literally had women call and want to know – like two, three years ahead, they wanted to know when sturgeon spearing was. I said, "Well, it's always the second weekend in February." But I said, "I guess it could change. But that's traditionally when it was." I said, "Well, what do you need to know?" They were planning a wedding.

FS: Oh, yes.

FS: Oh, yes.

MS: Yes. You don't want to do –

FS: I told my kids, "Never plan anything, family thing –"

MS: Around here that's probably worse than having [inaudible].

MS: Yes?

FS: No, [inaudible] sturgeon fishing.

MS: Yes.

FS: Because – no.

FS: No. It doesn't work.

FS: It won't work.

FS: Oh, yes. Remember when [inaudible] daughter got married, and we drove over there?

MS: Yes.

FS: Yes.

FS: It was sturgeon fishing.

FS: But his family isn't [inaudible].

FS: Yes. They don't fish.

FS: They don't fish.

FS: But we fish.

FS: Right.

FS: That was the worst weather that we ever really drove in.

FS: But there are other times of the year where you can plan and don't plan to go sturgeon fishing.

FS: But we made the wedding though.

FS: Yes.

MS: That must have been the exception, not the rule.

MS: Yes.

FS: Yes.

MS: The only one that I know of.

FS: Yes. It was the only one. Yes. But we did go.

FS: But it's hard to do other things because you – the people you fish with, you see them sometimes, maybe just that time of year. You don't see them any other time. But –

MS: Well, like John and Judith, the only time I see them is –

FS: Is fishing season.

MS: – probably, usually that first week.

FS: Yes. That's right.

MS: We might see them a couple other times but not –

FS: Not very – no.

MS: I mean, that date is usually – they will be here. If they're going to be here anytime during the year.

FS: Exactly. They're going to be here. So –

MS: The guys that fish here all the time are from – well, where's Arnie from?

FS: Arnie?

FS: Yes.

MS: Arnie – but no. He's from down around –

MS: Oh, yes. Yes.

MS: I don't know.

MS: Oh, the stunt guys?

FS: Yes. No.

MS: Oh, the stunt guy is Arnie.

MS: Oh, Jefferson.

FS: Jefferson.

FS: Jefferson.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Him and his brother were contractors, big time. This was back in the early [19]60s. They'd come up here. They have all that big equipment, big cat, and that. [inaudible] But then his brother died. But Arnie keeps – him and his two kids still come up here.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Now, where are they from?

MS: Jefferson.

FS: Jefferson.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Then there's Watertown. There's people from Watertown.

MS: That comes, yes.

FS: Come up to fish –

MS: [inaudible] absolutely the only time they come out is –

FS: Yes, the only time you see them.

MS: So, it is almost a reunion.

FS: It is.

MS: It is.

FS: Yes.

MS: At the harbor. It's people that belong to our fishing club and stuff.

FS: Yes.

MS: You go into the tavern after the day is done and talk to people that you haven't seen for a year.

MS: Catch up on kids and what's going on.

FS: Just, yeah, life.

MS: That's what I say, more than the fishing part is [inaudible]. It's the people, the camaraderie, the – it's just a good time. I mean, as far as stopping in the tavern after work – afterwards, it isn't that long. You go in there for a couple of hours. We're home in bed by 7:00 p.m. Get up and go back out the next day.

FS: The uniqueness of it, too. When you go to other parts of the country and you talk about sturgeon spearing, they think you're kind of sitting out on the ice, fishing. But –

MS: I have thought this or thought about this – that we are right here. We have this. Do you think that the local people sometimes take it for granted and do not realize how unique and special it is?

FS: Oh, yes.

MS: Or –

FS: I think so.

MS: No, I don't think –

FS: The local people?

MS: I mean, the people that –

MS: Well, because you're right here.

FS: The local, if you don't fish, but we fish. But do we take it for granted? No. No.

MS: But yeah, maybe the people that live here, some of them take it for granted.

FS: Because it is a unique sport.

FS: Yes.

FS: There's nothing like this ever going down in any other part of the world.

FS: When it comes to November, you watch that lake. December, you watch that lake. January, when is this lake going to freeze?

FS: Right. You watch it for the ice.

FS: You kind of watch that whole thing for everybody.

FS: Exactly.

FS: Okay. We had a little ice in January. Oh, boy. Maybe in February we can get ice out there.

FS: Yes.

FS: Guess what? Some years it's not that great.

FS: No.

FS: Yes –

MS: Was there ever a year you could not just get out, period? It just did not freeze well. Or it was just slushy or too much snow?

FS: That one year we didn't get out beyond – out there. Remember when we had open water out beyond us.

FS: About two, three years ago. It was pretty recent. Yes.

FS: Yes. We didn't.

MS: It was one year the family decided not to because of the – it was so bad [inaudible].

FS: [inaudible] we only had the ice in here though.

FS: Yes.

MS: We use snowmobiles a lot [inaudible].

FS: Well, four-wheelers because we went with the kids.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: No. I mean, when we were out here, that was about three, four years ago.

FS: Yes.

MS: That one year we went away over by the island with sleds [inaudible].

FS: No, you and June and Ben.

MS: Yes?

FS: Yes, to the island.

MS: That was 5 miles. There was a great big swamp. We had that marked out there.

FS: Go around and –

FS: Guess who ran into the swamp? [inaudible]

MS: Beaver?

FS: No [inaudible].

MS: [inaudible]

FS: They had this great big trackster. So, then everybody else started going home.

MS: We had that one [inaudible].

FS: I had to have a [inaudible].

MS: What the hell was that? A yellow and black one.

MS: [inaudible] probably.

FS: No [inaudible].

MS: Different name. They don't even make them anymore.

FS: No. But you'd go out fishing in the morning. You'd come home, and you'd be pulling everybody out.

MS: Yes.

FS: Then you go right back out at it again. There was always a swamp pool out there.

FS: Yes.

FS: It was just like a swamp pool. Looks good. Go in it.

FS: Get it.

MS: [inaudible] I'd been nuts.

FS: Yes, you were.

MS: Well, yeah, that's got to be about 7 miles over there by the time you went from here, I bet.

MS: Harry [inaudible] used to come by. He'd stop, pick me up, and we'd go with Harry out there.

MS: You did not take the shacks and towed them with the snowmobiles.

MS: Sure. Yes.

FS: That's the only way you get them out.

MS: We had big wide runners on them.

FS: Oh, yeah. We had runners on, big wide runners. You'd pull over the top.

MS: Over the top of the –

MS: So, it would float up a little bit.

MS: Yes, right on top of snow.

FS: Everybody had big wide runners on their snowmobiles.

MS: Yes.

MS: Well, how long have you had the [inaudible] on yours?

MS: Since I built it, thirty years.

FS: Yes.

MS: You had the same shack for thirty years?

FS: Yes.

MS: [inaudible] that long?

MS: It is. It's starting to fall apart now. Yes.

MS: It's not that bad.

FS: You had the little guy though for a few years, remember that?

MS: Well, yeah. We had a 5x8 for a few years.

FS: But then when the girls started –

MS: Well, this one is maybe twenty-five years.

FS: Yes. When the girls started going out on the ice with us when they were little. Then they put a –

MS: Put a new floor in. The rest of it's all original. Well, there's a new coat. There's one set of aluminum over the top of the other side here that I –

MS: [inaudible]

[talking simultaneously]

MS: Well, it's got to be thirty-something years ago. Because that's the one I fished in first. That red one.

MS: [inaudible] thirty years ago.

MS: Well, thirty-five, when I first fished.

MS: Well, 1970, I must have got that.

MS: Yes.

FS: I bet. Yes. Probably. Yes. [laughter]

MS: I never put a board in it yet. It was all [inaudible].

FS: Which isn't very good either.

MS: Holy crap.

FS: I wouldn't brag about it.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Well, it wasn't rotten.

MS: He quit fishing. He fished with that [inaudible]. It was all [inaudible]. He quit fishing. I bought the shanty for 600 and something dollars with the spear and the stove in it, the stove, just like new.

FS: Stove was still in. Yes.

FS: Yes. We're still using the same stove too in our shanty that we used when we first started fishing, just a little burning stove.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: That is what it was where you got those flowers planted in the backyard?

MS: Yes.

FS: Well, I've got a birdhouse sitting on it now.

MS: Well, Denny's the only one I know that burns wood yet. Yes.

MS: Yes.

FS: That was your dad's wood burner, right?

MS: Huh?

FS: That was your dad's wood burner, the one that was sitting on the back. Yes.

MS: Yes.

MS: Any traditions you do, like – I do not know. Some baseball players never wash their socks or something because they think they bring good luck or –

FS: When they had time to wash. [laughter] Now you do.

MS: Years ago, [inaudible].

FS: No, I don't have it.

FS: The decoys, I always like my favorite decoy down. But he's always –

MS: You didn't even say it before when you were –

FS: I know. But he's always futzing with decoys all the time in the shanty. I mean, he's constantly putting one down.

MS: Vertical.

FS: So, I chase him out of the shanty, so I can keep my own decoys down. [laughter]

MS: Geez. Well, you do not have two shanties, do you?

FS: No.

MS: No. We did for a while. It was way too much work.

FS: Too much.

MS: Twice everything.

FS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

FS: You will never believe this. I can hardly believe it either. When we both had shanties – he had the red one. I had the little one.

MS: Yes.

FS: I was sitting in that shanty. I still can't believe it. But when that fish came in, it was probably down, 6, 8 feet, I'd say.

MS: Yes.

FS: It came in. It was just beautiful coming in. But it kept coming. I knew it wasn't a sturgeon. It kept coming. I thought, "Can't be a walleye." When that fish came through, here was this big

white tail. It was the most beautiful walleye I've ever seen in my life. We'll never see one again that big. It was so huge that I still can't believe it.

MS: A walleye?

FS: A walleye. It was like –

FS: She got balled out for not spearing it.

FS: [laughter] Yes.

MS: Put that up on the wall with the tines in it.

[laughter]

FS: But I really can't tell the truth.

FS: Right.

FS: Because I'd love to. Somebody was fishing right outside my shanty door – I didn't know him – in a [inaudible]. It was just me here, him over there way away. Here's this guy, from here to that tree, with a whole fishing walleye or chicken.

FS: Chicken, yeah.

FS: I had no clue who he was. This fish kept coming and coming.

FS: How far away did you see it?

FS: I could see it because it came in from the front. So, I could see it all come in. It just kept coming and coming.

FS: So, it was moving very fast.

FS: No. [inaudible] Are you kidding? That baby was just as happy as he could be. He says [inaudible].

FS: [inaudible].

MS: Yes. It would have been a record.

FS: Oh, he would have been a record. He was just –

FS: It would've been great.

FS: When the tail – well, I figured it was a walleye. But when I saw that great big white spot, I mean, the white spot on the tail was just like –never seen again in my life. But that I will never forget.

FS: Oh, gosh. That is –

MS: So, how long ago was that?

FS: Oh, well, when I fished in the shanty alone? Oh, that's many years ago.

MS: Yes?

FS: That's a lot of years ago when I fished on that silver shanty.

MS: But you can still just picture it like it was yesterday.

FS: I can still see him coming in. [laughter]

MS: I used to take a vacation in January to [inaudible], always the first week in January [inaudible].

FS: Yes.

MS: First week in January.

MS: Yes. Well, the end of December and the first day was just like crazy.

FS: But do you know what's fun too is to hear all the stories from the people you meet in the bar after, how many fish have they've seen, walleyes [inaudible]. It's just fun to hear all those things after.

MS: I took a vacation [inaudible] that's the first time in my life.

MS: You guys [inaudible].

MS: No.

MS: The good old days.

FS: Oh, that's cold. It's cold.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: All tight. So, any final thoughts? Any final comments here? We are closing in on an hour of tape here.

MS: It's a great life.

FS: Yes. It's fun.

FS: Yes.

FS: Sturgeon fishing really is – it's just a good way to spend a couple of weeks in February.
[laughter]

MS: What else is there to do?

[laughter]

MS: I think –

FS: To get outside.

MS: – the four people you're talking to here are just lucky enough to be able to spend some time on Lake Winnebago.

FS: Right.

FS: Yes.

MS: It's like you said before, it's very unique, and it's great. It really is.

MS: It is like you guys said. I mean, I have it from a different perspective sitting there and listening to all the stories of people who are out on the lake. Now, I am not out there. I am sitting there in my little shack waiting for you to bring me a fish. But I have just as much fun. I am talking to people and got to meet you guys and the Bergs and Parsons and all the people in that. Well, here is a question. Do you think there are as many younger kids getting into it? Or is there too much other stuff going on that is pulling their time away?

FS: No. I think there are a lot of young kids –

MS: No. I think in this area, family comes first.

FS: – their families –

FS: Family comes first. You can go through the birth family, our family, anybody's family.

FS: Yes. The young people in the family –

FS: Sturgeon fishing is number one.

FS: Yes.

FS: Number one.

FS: Yes. Definitely. I don't think in Stockbridge, it'll ever be [inaudible]. I think young people will always be doing it.

FS: They put their heart into it. That's what the good thing is about this. But they go build these shanties. "Now Tyler, did you get the right spears?" Well, they bought spears from – what's his name up there?

MS: Vern.

FS: Vern. Yes. Vern spears. Yes. I mean, they're there, and that's it. Yes.

FS: I think that's kind of going to be where the problem is, is people not building spears anymore. We have a couple old-timers that build the spears. But that's got to be something that's going to be – have to be passed out. Yes.

MS: A lot of people build spears –

FS: They build them, but they don't know how to build them right. They don't know how to build the right ones. So –

MS: Yes. It is funny the differences you see between the east shore and the west shore. Over here, almost every shack has runners. Over on the east shore, they have got wheels. The spears over there, I see a lot more of the old style. I call them a pitchfork spear over here. Over there, you have got the straight bar stock and the screw in tins with the hex keys on them and the flying barb. Over here, it's more the traditional, old pitchfork-type spears.

FS: Yes. That's the way it always was. I guess –

FS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

FS: Because we laugh at people that have the other ones. They laugh at us for what we have.

FS: Yes.

MS: Yes. It's almost like a culture clash.

FS: It is.

FS: It is. Almost is, yes. Then you talk to them and see how many fish they miss [laughter] with those kinds of spears.

MS: Fish they miss and get off and everything else –

[talking simultaneously]

FS: [inaudible] big.

KK: Really?

FS: And you wonder –

FS: What kind of equipment?

FS: Huh? No. You wonder – no. I don't even have to wonder anymore. How many big fish are on Lake Winnebago? Lots.

MS: Yes. I think we saw that this year.

FS: We're going to have a really big record coming out of here .

MS: Yes. That 188-pounder might not be as long as old Elroy Schroeder's.

[talking simultaneously]

Fifty, sixty years, that fish, forty-seven, I think over 100 pounds this year.

FS: Yes.

MS: Forty-four.

MS: I think forty-seven. They dug two, and they found three more that somebody didn't count in the first time.

FS: But look at the good food they got.

MS: 80- or 90- pounder [inaudible].

FS: When you're eating that good out there, they're going to get paid.

FS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

FS: I really don't know if you know or if anybody knows the ones I knew that had shad in them. How many really were full of red worms? See now – and there's a lot of red worms out there. Now, the same walleyes we're getting are full of red worms. So, they're eating them.

MS: I hadn't heard that.

FS: Oh, yes.

MS: Really?

FS: Yes.

MS: No kidding.

FS: Yes.

MS: Sure. That's true. They'll eat –

[talking simultaneously]

FS: So, everybody feeds us.

MS: Oh, [inaudible] they'll eat them.

MS: When they're emerging, when those things are swimming up to the top.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Something will grab them. Yes.

FS: So, why wouldn't they? We have a bigger record for sturgeons.

FS: We've got good food out there. Yes.

FS: I've never seen so many fish here –

MS: Well [inaudible].

FS: – that had that many shad in.

MS: Unbelievable.

FS: It's usually [inaudible].

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes.

MS: Where do they get that fluff from?

MS: I've heard this from some guys. They got like some 16, 17, they said even 18-inch fish on the west shore early – well, not early, but I mean in May.

MS: Yes.

MS: They said, "God, how can these things get so much fat in them?" I think what those are, are immature females that haven't run yet. They aren't mature. So, they've got nothing to do but put on weight. They aren't expending energy swimming up the rivers to a marsh. They aren't expending energy making eggs yet. Now that's not all of them. But I think some of those are when you start getting to be a 17 or 18-inch fish. It's full of fat. If that was a male, that thing's mature. That would've been up the river. It would've had a bunch of – it would've been a milker. But when they're that fat and they're that back in the lake that quick with that much fat, I'm almost thinking those are immature females that hadn't started going in.

FS: Yes.

MS: But the sturgeon, some years they're skinny. Other years, they're –

FS: Well, they've been good the last few years. The last couple years, they've been really – one year, Beaver had one. Remember how sticky that one fish was he caught?

FS: He had AIDS.

FS: He did have AIDS.

FS: That's why we brought AIDS in. We brought AIDS in and then – actually AIDS came, I mean, around the country.

FS: It was so bad. He wouldn't even –

FS: Oh, well, he brought it. Now, we were supposed to clean it.

FS: Yes.

FS: I threw it in the garbage.

MS: Oh.

FS: That's a shame. I wouldn't –

[talking simultaneously]

MS: It was really skinny. It had like a [inaudible] swimming head.

FS: Yes.

FS: Yes. It was a head with a body.

KK: Geez.

FS: Oh, yuck.

FS: Awful. But that was a mistake, big time mistake.

MS: I suppose you don't know when your [inaudible].

FS: No.

FS: Yes.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: If you went by the head, it was probably huge.

FS: Yes. It was a really huge fish, that's for sure. But it was just so sick [inaudible].

MS: Well, I think that is pretty good, actually. We are just about out of tape anyway. So, we might as well call it a day. I've got to be – in about an hour. I don't even have an hour, so I'll go grab a sandwich.

MS: When are they going to legalize [inaudible].

MS: The spear?

MS: I don't know. That's bad. You see a fish going down there about 13, 14 feet, and you can't tell what it is. Are you going to let them go? Oh, it's got that same color as a sturgeon. Yes. Then you spear them there. That is sick.

MS: Oh, if it was up to me, I'd tell you to spear every darn one of them.

MS: Yes. Right.

MS: Yes. I do not know. That is a rule you have got to ask [inaudible].

MS: I can't figure that one out.

FS: Well, I can tell you why. I mean, because they'll be [inaudible].

[talking simultaneously]

MS: I don't think that's true.

MS: Yes. [inaudible] that you're going to break the bladder on them. They sink down anyway.

FS: Yes

MS: Right. You could spear every one of them as far as I'm concerned. Get rid of them because they are a problem.

FS: There's a lot of them.

MS: I saw some big ones yesterday.

FS: Did you?

[talking simultaneously]

MS: They weren't in today.

FS: But they weren't that many. Were there yesterday?

MS: He watched them on the pier.

[talking simultaneously]

MS: [inaudible] somebody got seven catfish down at twenty.

FS: Off the pier.

MS: Off the pier last.

KK: Really?

MS: Really.

KK: [inaudible]

MS: Yes.

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Yes. That's right. Paul had that big [inaudible].

[talking simultaneously]

FS: Oh.

MS: Oh, yeah.

FS: I think they're coming in.

[talking simultaneously]

[end of transcript]