

Ben Burg Oral History
Date of Interview: May 28, 2008
Location: Artist's Home
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Interviewers: RB – Ronald Bruch
Transcriber: NCC

Ronald Bruch: It is 28th of May 2008, and we are with Donnie and Ben Burg in Ben's home. We are going to talk to them about their experiences with sturgeon and sturgeon spearing on the Winnebago system. Anyways, I like to start with when we met and that day – not when we met, but when we were talking that day in 2005, that story that you told about – did you say it was your great uncle?

Don Burg: Yeah. When they –

RB: Oh, okay. How old are you, and when did you start spearing?

DB: 1944, never missed a year. But some years, I shouldn't have gone. It was too dirty. [laughter] But I went anyway. [laughter]

RB: Just for the record, this is Don's voice that you hear. The other guy will be Ben, his brother. Because we got people that transcribe this, write this out for us.

DB: Well, talking first about back in the old days first, how they went out with their shacks and their equipment, different than today. That would be kind of the thing to do, wasn't it?

RB: Yes. But from your family standpoint, your family has been spearing for several generations now.

DB: Yeah. Well, when my dad went with my old uncle, he was 10 years old. He speared a sturgeon, my old uncle did, and put two spears in. They had a pike spear, all of them. He had a sturgeon spear and let him pull it out. That was in 1900. So, they were fishing before that, them old uncles.

RB: This was the old uncle that fished with the Stockbridge Indians then?

DB: Yeah. Them Indians were all along here.

RB: They were fishing –

DB: When my dad come here in 1900, they lived in Calumet first. He went to school in Quinney. There was only 10 percent White people here at that time.

RB: It was all Stockbridge Indians.

DB: It was all pretty well Indians, and there was some Blacks with them. Because a neighbor right over there, he always mentioned and –

RB: But the Indians, they were regular spearers out here for sturgeon --

DB: Yeah. They were spearers.

RB: -- and probably for other fish too, huh?

DB: Everything.

RB: Everything.

Ben Burg: The colored people were the ones who were –

DB: The natives.

BB: When they escaped as slaves, they came up in this area. They were harbored in with the Indians is what happened.

RB: Really?

DB: If you look in this book, you can read it, if you've read the whole book.

Kathleen Kline: I have not read the whole book.

DB: You've got to read the whole book. [laughter] Yeah, because there was one right over here. His name was Jim Elliot. See, they had all English names and everything. They had no Indian names when they come here. Because these were all New York Indians come here 1832, [18]33. That guy used to have a gill net. He'd go fishing. He was a fisherman. He raised the strawberries and vegetables. He'd trade. Nobody had money for food with the other –

RB: Right.

DB: They always remembered him then.

RB: Did your old uncle say how the Indians speared out there? Did they set up a shack or a tent, or what would they do?

DB: John (Dockstader?) and them said at first, they had like a tent and a hide seine – I don't know what type of hides, if they were bear or whatever – on the ice. But mainly they went later, towards about end of March, first part of April, when the ice was – no snow much anymore, easier travel. They got more fish then. Because my old uncle, so my dad's brother – and that was in early days, right around 1900 – and he'd haul the manure down like they did in Germany and put them in the middle piles, tied the team, 10:00 a.m., fish till 2:00 p.m. They'd get four sturgeon every day. That was kind of the spring of the year. They got the most fish at that time.

RB: The last ice.

DB: The last ice. It was easy for him to get around. Imagine you had that much snow, they had nothing to move with.

BB: Now, he wasn't fishing all for himself. He was fishing for all the neighbors.

DB: All the neighbors.

BB: All the local people that didn't fish, well, he'd furnish the fish for all of them. It would probably be a no-no today. [laughter] I don't think they cared or anything because –

DB: But no people, over the top of the hill, never got to the lake. It was just the ones right on the lake shore that fished.

RB: Right on the lake shore.

DB: Yeah, any distance at all.

RB: They probably did not have to go out very far.

DB: No, they never. They never went out very far.

KK: Did the Indians, did you hear if they laid down on their stomachs on the ice or on the –

DB: Okay. I'll tell you more about how the Indians, after they had their shacks, like these Denslows, 4 feet wide, about 7 feet, 8 feet long, one guy shack. They had the shack tight on the ice, no runners, for visibility. They chopped that ice out all the way, so they could see them coming good. Okay. That was Frank Denslow and his brother Harrison. They start fishing that one year, the middle of January until ice out, speared 150 of them, two guys, them two Indians.

RB: Wow.

DB: They sold them to Chicago for a nickel a pound. They took them up to (Suplease?). They could cut all the ice on Winnebago in them days – you probably heard about that – shipped it to Chicago. Because my dad used to help cut ice. They took the sturgeon down there. They got a nickel a pound for them.

RB: Holy cow.

DB: Another thing I was going to ask you about the first early sturgeon tags, did you ever see them? They were round about like that.

BB: Here's a decoy that Frank Denslow made.

DB: That Indian had chopped that out with a hand axe and piece of glass.

RB: This was made by one of the Indians?

BB: Yeah, that was made by Frank Denslow.

DB: You know what they're worth right now?

RB: Whoa.

DB: 300 or more.

BB: I paid \$2.5 for it [laughter] or maybe a little bit more because –

DB: That's the Indian I'm talking about. He speared them.

BB: He always frequented the Gobbler's Knob down in Stockbridge. When I was a young guy, he'd come down there. He'd be sitting there. He'd say, "Well, I'm working on your decoys." Well, I'd buy him a couple. [laughter] He always drank a shot of Brandy. So, I'd buy him a couple shots of Brandy. It was only a quarter for a shot of Brandy at the time.

KK: That is beautiful.

RB: Wow.

DB: I got two of them like that at home. I got them in my safe. [laughter]

RB: We want to send our photographer up here.

BB: By the way, this isn't the one he made for me. The one he made for me, it had a crooked tail like it was –

DB: It's on the bottom.

BB: It's on the bottom. [laughter]

DB: I have one, too. I let somebody use my shack. You always did come back. Here is my decoy. He got one and got excited and broke it and gone.

BB: He was very skilled at doing woodwork and stuff like that.

RB: Well, we are going to send our photographer up here. We want to get pictures of you guys. We will make arrangements ahead of time. But then we would like to have him get some photographs of these decoys too.

KK: Would that be okay?

BB: Is that the sturgeon story?

RB: If that is okay with you.

BB: I think there might be a picture of Frank Denslow in here.

DB: If it isn't Stockbridge, he's in that other book I got in a truck, what Kendall's got, with

making decoys. He's probably in this book. Tommy Quinney was another Indian that got a lot of them.

RB: Oh, really?

DB: Yeah.

RB: So, Quinney is named after him?

DB: Yeah. Quinney, he was one of the – was he the chief? I think he was.

RB: Oh, really? He was a Stockbridge chief.

DB: But not this guy. He was an ancestor. Probably –

RB: I see. Yes, yes. Okay.

DB: But I got a picture of him, a big picture, this big. I can tell you how I got it. My sister had it. This was in the Gobbler Knob tavern. I couldn't have been over about early [19]20s, [19]21 or [19]22. He would sit alongside of me. I used to have to take him home every Sunday, or they'd bring him to town. He worked for farmers but no vehicle. So, then we'd have to take him home. That's how I got to know these Indians pretty good.

BB: He was pretty well drunk by that time. [laughter]

DB: Yeah. Always got his stuff and then talk, talk, talk. When you got there, they didn't want to get out of the vehicle. They had all this time.

RB: Wow. So, when the Stockbridge went up to the reservation, some of them just stayed.

DB: They went back up.

RB: Yes. But did some just stay here then?

DB: Some did. There's still some.

RB: There are.

BB: Only the Dockstader family is about the only that's stayed.

DB: The Jacobs, Steve.

RB: Oh, yes.

DB: Oh, that was the big fish there, you guys.

BB: That's when (Norb Chauvin?) got –

DB: 156 pounds.

BB: I'm seeing that picture. This is not that picture. I haven't seen that fish.

RB: I think I might have an enlarged one that somebody sent me.

DB: Right out about three-tenths of a mile. Right about out from the tavern by Stockbridge there. That wasn't out very far. That shanty only was about this big, not much bigger than a table here. It was a pike shanty. Then Bob Wilson had to help him pull it out of the hole.

RB: So, going back to the early days then on Winnebago, there was – well, statewide, it was illegal to harvest sturgeon from 1915 to 1930.

DB: I was wondering what year they lost – seeing these tags that Denslow had were before that.

RB: They were?

DB: Yeah, from before fifteen. Bill Gazer got them from them when they were about ready to die. I don't know if Bill still got them. Bill's still alive, but he's over at Chilton. Think any of his boys would know if they got him yet?

BB: Well, Bill would know himself.

DB: He probably would.

BB: He's in an assisted living place over in Chilton.

RB: Yes. We have to talk to him.

DB: See, that was his neighbors when they were getting old. I remember looking when they got them. They were round like this, the tags they had in the early days.

RB: Well, the original fishing licenses – and maybe that is what they were. The original fishing license, I believe, was a button like that. About that –

DB: That's the way that sturgeon one was.

BB: The deer tag was originally that one.

RB: Yes. You wore it on your hat or whatever. Yes. So, maybe they made it the same way.

DB: It must have been the same because it was sturgeon that time. I remember, boy, I thought of – wish I could have got some. But he was neighbors to him, Bill was, just a house or two away.

RB: Yes. We should approach Bill Gazer.

BB: I remember when you got five of them for a quarter. I remember that.

DB: Yeah. From 1944 on until about [19]50 or [19]51, that's when they put it down to three.

RB: Yes. But then what you bought at that time, that was a regular metal tag.

DB: Metal tag. Yeah.

RB: It was just like a deer tag.

DB: Yeah. I still got some like that at home. Yeah.

RB: Yes. Did they have – well, we did not have mandatory registration until 1955. But they had these tags. They must have had metal tags right from the beginning.

DB: Oh, all the way. Yeah. As long as I can remember.

RB: From 1932 on that you had –

DB: Yeah. I think they were from [19]32 on, the metal tag.

BB: I remember when I first used to go fishing. If we'd get a sturgeon, we'd want to know what it weighed. We'd take it down to the meat market in Stockbridge. They'd weigh it for us.

DB: Yeah. That was the only way you could find out what they weighed. [laughter]

RB: How much they weighed because –

DB: A lot of big ones never got weighed or nothing.

BB: Well, most of them never got weighed. As far as the count, when they first start registering them, that's not accurate, not at all.

RB: Oh, really?

BB: No. That's –

DB: They wouldn't tell our next-door neighbor until next July. [laughter] They didn't want them moving in, which was really a good thing. If they knew you got fish, they'd come from way up the other end. So, they didn't know they got the fish at all. They kept everything kind of secret. Especially the Indians wouldn't tell you.

RB: Because with the mandatory registration beginning in 1955, I mean, everybody was

required to register, but obviously, some people did not.

BB: It was like a game. If you could sneak as many home as you could, you were the good guy. [laughter]

RB: Yes. So, the harvest was probably higher than what the record says?

DB: Probably three to four times as high.

RB: Really?

DB: I'd say at least, at least that.

RB: Wow. Prior to 1955, there were three or four years that they had what they call census cards. I do not know if you remember those.

DB: Yeah, I remember them. Okay. You could –

RB: They asked you to fill out a card of how many fish you speared.

DB: Yeah, like a postal card. Okay. That was the same when they started charging a dollar for the tag. We'd buy one at a time while we'd spear the fish. Then we'd come back in by (Gibbs Shane?) and buy the next day. [laughter]

BB: A dollar was a dollar.

RB: Do you know of anybody that has it?

DB: A dollar was a dollar.

BB: We wouldn't leave \$3 on the bar for a tip when you have to do that. [laughter]

DB: Then we'd come back in and get another tag.

RB: Right, right. Yes. I have never seen those census cards. I do not know anybody that has them, but –

DB: In 1953, north of the harbor there, there were probably about 20 shanties. By 11:00 a.m. – it was probably about the third or fourth day of the season – every single shanty of sturgeon, some three and some two. I missed one. I'll never forget that. I took my younger brother and neighbor kid along, sitting on my footstool, about 80-pounder come right out. They'd never seen a fish before. See, they were young kids. They stuck their head over the hole.

RB: It was gone.

DB: I never got him. [laughter] I was the only one that didn't get one. But there was an old

schoolteacher. He never owned a shanty. He always used the old blacksmith in town there. He speared three before 10:00 a.m. that day. Well, Marvy Lemke and Bill Lemke fished out there at the same time. You know Marvy.

RB: Yes, yes.

DB: Yeah. They fished out there with us at that time. There probably was –

BB: Marv died last year.

RB: Oh, he did?

BB: I heard he did. Yeah. He fished for the DNR for 8, 10 years.

RB: Yes. On a sheepshead removal, right?

DB: Yeah.

RB: But the water must have been really clear that year in 1953.

DB: It was clear, yeah.

RB: Over the years, what –

DB: You had dirty years too that you couldn't see. Like I said, some of them years, I shouldn't have gone. You couldn't see. You aren't going to get one. Visibility is the main thing. In the clearest I ever remember, we went clear down towards the north end, probably 15 feet of water. It was so clear, it looked like the mud come right up to the ice with the riffles in the mud. You could see –

RB: Really?

DB: Yeah.

RB: Wow.

KK: Oh, wow.

DB: So, that was clear. Oh, here he comes.

BB: He loves swearing a little. That's okay.

DB: I have to get him a chair.

BB: We're being recorded here.

DB: No bad words. No. [laughter]

BB: They want the biggest violator in the world.

Bob Wilson: Shake hands with him. Shake hands with him right there. [laughter]

RB: Yes. But for the record here, we've got another person joining us. Bob Wilson, correct?

DB: Yeah.

RB: Yes. Okay.

DB: Get him a chair there.

RB: Pull the chair. Put it right between Don and Ben. Keep these guys honest then. [laughter]

BW: That's it.

DB: I don't know about that.

BW: That's a half a day's work right there.

DB: I think first he should tell us how good he did this year. First day, tell that story. That's a good one.

BW: I got my fish. [laughter]

DB: First, who went? Your boy and his brother-in-law. Tell him the whole story here. That's really –

RB: Sure. Let us hear the story, Bob.

BW: Well, first, the wife got hers. [laughter] Then I called the boy up. He was roaming around down by the county park someplace. He and his brother-in-law came up. I said, "You're fishing here for a while. I'm going over by Zeke." He was fishing right behind me. I went over there and must have stayed 20 minutes, half an hour. I came out of the shanty. "Man," I said, "they must have got one. Everybody's outside." So, I went back over to the shanty. Here they had three of them laying out there. The son got one. His brother-in-law speared one. So, I made three of them. Oh, you all had seen the mess in the shanty. Slime and everything tangled up and radio laying on the floor buzzing. "Get fishing. Get fishing." I said, "Wait till I get it straightened out in here first." I looked down the hole. Oh, my God, there comes another one. And all I had was that four-tine spear hanging there. So, I used that. Well, then I went over and got Zeke. No, he'd come over.

DB: This is the best part. [laughter]

BW: Zeke came over and, "You fish." "No, I'm going back to my shanty." " No, you're fishing here. I'll go back and hang your stuff up." I went back over. I hung his stuff up. I come back and set fish in the shanty. Oh, Nancy went out in the truck and stayed out there. My God, here comes another one, came just as slow as could be right up the decoy and made a turn. Zeke threw and missed it. [laughter]

BB: The story is just starting to begin. [laughter]

BW: I'm lying on the floor. This must have been about a 11:45 a.m., 12:00 p.m. This was a huge one. I don't know where it came from. All of a sudden, the head was by the decoy. It was moving. He threw, and he missed that one. [laughter] He threw behind that one. Well, he didn't get that one. "No, you get the hell over there. I'm setting by that spear," I said. [laughter] About 12:20 p.m., I'm sitting there getting close to quitting time. Here comes another one off the side. I threw, and I got that one. He tagged that one in.

RB: Wow. [laughter]

BW: Then we were done.

DB: That was this year.

RB: Oh, my God. All out of the same shack?

BW: All in the same shack.

RB: All in one day?

BW: The kid let a little one go through that. He didn't spear it first. So, that was the end.

DB: The guy's right around him, hardly seen nothing. Isn't that something? Just right there.

RB: Oh, Chuck Schneider missed one, did he not?

BW: Chuck, yes. He lost one. He lost a big one. Straightened his duffle coat and his spear was bent.

RB: Really?

BW: Yes.

RB: Holy man. How often does the spear bend? I mean, is that –

DB: If it comes out of the socket, it shouldn't bend any.

BB: If they're not so hard that they break, it doesn't matter.

BW: It all depends on what kind of material they have, I guess.

RB: So, Bob, how many generations of your family go back spearing?

BW: Well, the dad speared, brothers speared.

RB: So, your grandpa or your dad or –

BB: His dad did.

BW: My dad, me, brothers, ever since I was in high school. That was a long time ago.

DB: Yeah, [laughter] before high school. We were in grade school.

BW: Yeah. Well, no, I think was in high school. Remember we used to go out on our bicycles after school?

DB: Yeah. There's a good story.

BW: Every Thursday and Friday. Well, then you had the whole season to spear. They'd never seen me on Thursday and Friday in high school.

DB: It was 36 below zero that morning. (Cosmon's?) house burned down. We didn't have school because it was too cold. So, it was shortly after dinner. He had his bicycle. Ben and I walked, went out there, and he speared one that day.

BB: Oh, for crying out loud.

DB: It was probably up to 20 below by that time, 1951.

RB: Was it [19]51?

DB: Yeah, it was cold. Rode his bicycle out. Now, how many kids do you think could do that today?

RB: Yes, no kidding.

BB: They aren't getting a walk to the mailbox. [laughter]

RB: Wow.

BB: Now, Mr. Wilson, for the record, also makes spears and decoys. This isn't the only time he's been famous. I think I recall him being in a magazine once when you were a young Willow. He's got a sturgeon flipped over his back walking with it. [laughter]

BW: National Geographic –

RB: Oh, really?

BB: That's how old he is. [laughter]

BW: In the National Geographic. They were trying to take pictures down the hole while nothing came in at that time, just a hit and a miss. Well, I had a 98-pounder at home. So, I carried that through the field, and they took a picture of it.

RB: Oh, jeez. [laughter] When was that?

DB: Fifties.

BW: Oh, boy, in the [19]50s, early [19]50s. But I never caught up to him because he's over the 100 mark. I can't catch him.

DB: I never got 100 either. All I'm hearing –

RB: Really? Well, your chances are improving every year.

DB: In the [19]90s. Yeah. Now, the fish, they're bigger. They're growing faster. I think the shad really helped them to be truthful.

BB: I don't know if it helped them or hindered them. But you can't eat them anymore.
[laughter]

BW: I'll tell you one thing. You can't eat the big ones. No shad in them. Oh, they're terrible.

RB: Really?

BW: I give mine to half of [laughter] the cookie. I gave half to Scott or someone – to Scott. He will smoke it. He'd smoke it and take the oil out of it.

DB: Takes the oil.

BW: It was smelly as soon as –

DB: A lot of lake flies this year here, two to three weeks steady. See, the wind probably was right. I don't know. It makes a difference how the wind is.

RB: Oh, definitely.

BW: We didn't have any on this side, did we?

DB: Oh God, we really have.

BW: All gone for two weeks.

DB: Yeah. When you were in Arizona, they were thick. [laughter]

RB: When you set up the spear, did you just always go back to the kind of traditional spots that you speared?

DB: Kind of the area, yeah.

RB: Did you go out and look for lake flies?

DB: We did this year look for red worms.

BB: If there are red worms in there, they're all over anyway.

DB: If there's a good hatch like –

BB: That's just a farce, I think, that people go and look at the worm.

BW: I think you can get on some heavier beds like we're out there 3 miles, 1990 or 1991. That water was real clear. You could see that every so often, they were feeding there. Then you'd –

RB: You would see the dust rolling up.

BW: Dust was rolling up.

DB: I've got to tell you another story. This was in 1957.

RB: They were there.

DB: We were out probably behind Sunset Beach, about 2 miles out. Every shanty around got a sturgeon here. I set in the middle. It was dusty but mud coming up. Every once in a while, you'd see a tail like that. [laughter] I was right on where they were feeding. So, my younger brother was about 13 or so, 14. I said, "You go about behind Clem Schumacher. See if he can see anything." I said, "I'm not going to stay here. I can't see a thing." He went, didn't come back and didn't come back. Finally, he came back. They speared four sturgeons in that shack. He got the biggest one, 93 pounds.

RB: Really?

DB: Yeah.

RB: So, he left you sitting there?

DB: Yeah. Well, they were having a good time there.

BB: I just left that shanty before Mark went in it. He got it. I'd never seen one there. [laughter]
Then we went way out.

DB: We went way out after that.

BB: Five miles out, five and a half out in the lake, 4, 7, I think.

DB: But you can sit right on top of them.

RB: But the equipment has changed quite a bit over the years, huh?

DB: Three times spear.

RB: What were the early spears like? I mean, those are –

DB: This wide, three tines. [laughter]

RB: Really?

DB: Yeah.

RB: So, they are always about 6 inches now.

DB: I was going to tell you about the equipment.

BW: Five inches, my three-tiner was. I've still got nothing to cover.

RB: That was just a fixed barber? What were they made from?

DB: The blacksmith made them out of Stockbridge.

BB: Well, he hammered them out of one piece. He made them all from this iron.

RB: Oh, really? One piece? Just cut it out.

DB: Cut them out.

BB: Well, yeah. Heated them up and split them with a hammer and a little chisel he had on there.

DB: Alex Gazer made mine. Frank made a lot of the six-tiners. Before that, they were all threes. The equipment for cutting the holes in that property, you had to chop that hole first when they first went out there. Like I said, Frank Denslow had a 4-foot wide in that hole. They beveled it because you had to chop all that ice in it. They didn't move that much. He set flat on the ice.

BB: That was Jim Garretts from Anchorage. He said, "Cookie's coming up." He wasn't all about getting them some halibut. [laughter]

RB: When did you start cutting holes with a machine, with a saw?

DB: Late [19]50s probably, huh?

BB: Diedrich, about [19]58 or [19]57, something like that.

RB: Just with a chainsaw?

DB: With a chainsaw.

BB: We had a Sears Roebuck chainsaw.

RB: Oh, yes, 36-inch bar, probably?

DB: Yeah.

BW: That big round. It was heavy.

RB: Heavy butter.

BW: It was a big, heavy craftsman.

DB: Craftsman, yeah.

BW: Iron bars around it. [laughter]

DB: See, a lot of them didn't have the float carburetor. You'd tip them up, and they wouldn't run then for cutting wood.

BB: At that time, Otis Smith was fishing out of the harbor, Otis in the Peterson. They had the two-way radios out of their boat, one in Bill Diedrich's car and one in the harbor. Then Gib Shane would tell them, "Go, so-and-so and so-and-so, and cut a hole." There were about half a dozen of us on the crew. We'd go around. Sometimes we'd cut forty holes before season opened because no one else had a chainsaw.

DB: Nobody had a saw.

RB: Sure.

KK: What about the sled saws? When did you start seeing them?

DB: In the [19]60s. The guys that invented the first sled saw, Roy and Ralph Buelow, they built

the first one.

RB: So, that is B-U-E-H-L?

DB: B-U-E-L-O-W, Buelow.

RB: Oh, Buelow.

DB: Buelow.

RB: Or Buelow.

DB: They made the first sled saw.

RB: They are out of Stockbridge?

DB: North of Stockbridge.

RB: North of Stockbridge?

DB: Putting her up the high cliff. They were on a farm. They made the first sled saw.

RB: They made the first one.

DB: They're the guys that made the first sled saw.

BB: Because the Craftsman was too hard to hold here.

DB: Because I got his ice chain from him. It was my brother-in-law, after he made the sled saw.

BB: After that, you got home light chainsaws. They were a little bit lighter.

BW: They were heavy.

BB: They were heavy.

DB: Heavy enough too.

BB: In fact, I've got one in the basement, the original one we bought. Yeah.

DB: It's got ice chain on. See, the saws today don't have the ice chain anymore.

RB: So, they actually made a special chain for ice cutting?

DB: Yeah. You know why they made it? All up in Canada when they had all these resorts, there was no generators yet. So, they had to cut their ice and put it up. So, this was about 1966.

I went over. I bought my saw. The salesman, he said, "If you want ice chain, you better buy it now because we quit making it. They've got generators in Canada now. We don't have to make no ice chain anymore."

RB: Really?

DB: Yeah. So, I bought three of them that day.

RB: Really? How is an ice chain different from a regular wood chain?

DB: Why don't you go down and get the saw? [laughter]

RB: It is heavy, is it not?

DB: He held it plenty of times.

RB: Hide the glass one.

DB: This one isn't put away. We used to have from 10, 12, 14 shanties in the group that saw cut every hole.

RB: Well, we would like to get a picture of that saw, too.

DB: Never ever charged nobody for a saw to cut a hole ever. We never charged nobody, even guys we never knew. So, it's different today.

RB: When you cut them, would you still bevel them underneath that with a chisel?

DB: No, no. You beveled with a saw like this. Like this. You cut where you look down straight, and you sink the cake there. Yeah. You had the whole month. It was like this year. You had that terrible Sunday. They wouldn't even think of going on that day then. All guys said, "Oh, the last week of February is the best."

RB: The best, yes.

DB: A lot of them wouldn't even set up until about the last week. They said the bigger fish had moved then. I don't know, but that was the way –

BB: I think it's because ice was more rotten and easier to chop.

DB: Yeah. That was like the Indians when they went later.

RB: You think that was a part of the reason they went later? Because the ice was easier to go through?

DB: Yeah, and no snow on it probably by then.

RB: No snow. Yes. So, it was more of –

DB: Travel.

RB: It was more of a travel and getting set up.

DB: Well, my dad, they used to take the shanty out with a team of horses and bring the horses back and then walk out. They wouldn't let the horses stand all day out there. They thought more of the horses than they did of anybody.

RB: Horses would get bored, huh?

DB: See if you got the right saw. See, you got that.

BB: No.

DB: Yeah, that's the old one.

RB: Oh, Jesus. [laughter] Oh, yeah. Start her up in here.

DB: [laughter] You can borrow and check that chain out there. That's an ice chain.

RB: So, that is an ice chain.

DB: That's made for ice.

RB: It looks like it has got a wider spacing between the teeth.

DB: Yeah, you just look at it. I got three chains like that.

RB: Yes. It has got a wider spacing between the teeth.

BB: There are no rakers.

DB: I could walk with that saw with 20 inches of ice. It cut that fast.

RB: Really?

DB: Walked with it when that saw was working.

RB: So, you could tip that one up. Then it would not stall out?

DB: No, didn't flat out.

RB: Flat out. That was in 1962 or [19]63, we bought that saw.

BB: Didn't have the diaphragm and carburetor on them.

RB: I can see. If you are going to cut 40 holes a day with that, you are going to be Superman by the end of the day.

DB: Yeah. [laughter] Well, with our group, we had some shoveled off, got the hole already marked. Guys cut, two probably sank the cake, and then the other ones banked the shanty. You went right from one to the other, usually at the end of the day. We set the next day where we were going.

RB: I mean, in the early years –

BB: I think this is the starter on the side. There's no rewind.

BW: Rewind is gone.

BB: The rewind is gone.

DB: Well, Bob was going to get it fixed, wasn't he?

BB: Yeah. He sent it in to –

DB: He sent it in to get a new rewind. That, we used to have a little trouble. You'd have to tap on the side, so they'd dog in again.

RB: So, a lot of guys in the early years, like in the [19]50s and [19]60s, would you be spearing with another guy in the shack?

DB: Most of the time there was a couple in the shack.

RB: Yes, two in the shack.

BB: Six pack too. [laughter]

RB: At least that one.

DB: Okay. The year you've got to tell them about, and that was in 1956. You went and visited them. They were drinking moonshine. [laughter] Ben went in this guy's shack, speared the sturgeon. They never even woke up [laughter] in a guy's shack. They had a different one.

BB: That was Sam Pingle and Joe Wrinkle.

DB: Yeah. You speared an albino sturgeon in one guy's shack about 68 pounds.

RB: He speared an albino in a shack, and they never knew it?

DB: They never knew it.

RB: They were in there.

DB: They were in there.

BB: They were in there beyond help though. [laughter] Henry Sloan up here, he used to make moonshine. Then when the guys would go fish and he'd always bring the moonshine around, and them guys overindulged a little. [laughter] This was a fun thing. It wasn't, "So, how many fish you got?" But everybody got to see all the neighbors once for – and everybody who went to the Stockbridge High School comes back home from fishing. That's like old home week is what it is.

RB: Right. It is like a homecoming. Yes.

BW: It was probably as much social than anything else.

DB: Yes, yes.

BB: More than anything else. Sure.

RB: Well, that is one thing that I have heard from people with the half-day fishing now is that some of the social has come back.

DB: Is gone. Yeah. No.

RB: Or has come back a little bit because they do not have to spear so hard all day. Some time they can move the shack and maybe have a few beers or whatever.

DB: Oh, that way, to move the shack. Usually, it's over with.

BB: It's over by noon. [laughter] By the time the socializing starts, everybody's loaded. They go home. [laughter]

BW: I don't know. Harold Malby, a couple years ago, he was, "I'm not taking mine out the first weekend." [laughter] Monday, she was all done. She never even got a chance. [laughter]

DB: She'd never go right away. I've got to tell you another story. His dad, old dad, they always walked out. The old dog walked with him. Up by Brothertown, they always coiled the rope up like this, and dog laying down on top of the rope. [laughter] All of a sudden, the sturgeon comes. He throws the spear. Old dog jumps up. [laughter] He missed the sturgeon. [laughter]

RB: I remember you guys telling me about going out that late season. Was it Earl Ecker had to come out with a great big old cat or something and dragging everybody off in the ice?

DB: Earl (Pernots?).

RB: Earl Pernots.

BW: We had an end loader.

DB: We were out about 5 miles. There probably was 30 inches of good blue ice that winter. But there also was 30 inches of snow on top. [laughter]

BW: There's snow like this too, though, and a little bit of slushing water.

DB: Yeah. If Arnie went out, he took that. That was 16,000 pounds, that end loader, pushed the snow back and floated the ice up. Well, he could set up pretty good there. The rest of us had that much water under our runners.

RB: So, more than a foot of water?

DB: Oh, more than a foot on the ice.

BB: We jacked the shanties up and set them on these wooden beer cases on the corners.

DB: Each corner, one under. Yeah.

BB: Then we could fish. The floor would be underwater. [laughter]

BW: They'd get a fish and throw it out the door and swim down.

DB: [laughter] Started spearing away, and he said if there's any open holes, he's going to run and caught him, [laughter] throwing up on the snowbank.

RB: Holy cow.

DB: When we went in the ice – I rode with Bill Diedrich, drove – I had a 48 Shiv car. We twisted the axle off. Then we threw the saw on that all in there and pulled her in. That ice was going just like this. Today, I never rode. [laughter] If we made her all the way to shore, the guy that owned it wouldn't drive it. [laughter]

BB: I remember, I think it was about 1958 or 1959, Ray Eckert used to rent fish shanties, as you probably heard that. Earl was the guy who took care of them. So, they got out there. He must have had 50 shanties out there from all the people that he knew. We got a hell of a snowstorm and got it all snowed in. The ice was rotten besides. So, Earl had an old Plymouth. They took a torch, and it cut the roof out of it. So, he would sit up on the roof. It had a hand throttle on it, put it in gear, hook a fish shanty behind it, and steer that thing with his feet and take it to shore. So, in case it went down, he could get out. [laughter]

RB: Holy cow.

BB: You remember that don't you, Bob?

BW: Yeah.

RB: Wow. But he never did go through with it though.

BB: He was a daredevil.

BW: Snowplow, he had to do – there was nothing tight on it. He had everything cabled up and – [laughter]

DB: See, there were no snowplows in the early days until Panter 70, I think.

RB: Oh, yes. Was that when the clubs really got active?

DB: About [19]70, I'd say. Yeah.

RB: Plowing rules?

DB: Yeah, the plowing rules and stuff. Some milk truckdriver had a plow on his truck to get in the farmers yards. That was the only plows ever.

BB: That was it.

DB: Yeah. Some old guys got stranded one night out there. It was Gib Shane's dad and Emery West. Them old guys all had heart trouble. There was no walking in, bad snowstorm. So, they got him with that milk truck, and they went out. They knew where they were and got him in. But they had a plow in front of it. But there were no plows in the earlier days.

RB: So, did you guys ever get stuck overnight out there?

DB: No, not overnight.

BW: Near, though. [laughter]

BB: I got lost out there once in a snowstorm though, I'll say that. [laughter] That was Beaver. Me and Jack Downe, we were fishing. I was sitting with Jack. We ran out of gas and fish shanties. So, I said, "Well, I'll go over by Beaver and get a drum of gas." It was a whiteout. We were only fishing 200 yards apart, but I missed this shanty. So, I started walking. I finally hit the Christmas tree line. I didn't know. We were maybe a mile and a half offshore. I thought, "Well, I'll start walking for 20 minutes. If I don't hit shore, I'll turn around and walk 40 minutes the other way." [laughter] But I no more got started and Dave Haymore comes by with a truck. He spotted me. Well, he harassed the hell out of me, I'll tell you that. [laughter]

BW: I made one pass with a snow sled that morning. I came down from harbor from town in

the snow sled. It was clear. You could see just like out here. You got on the lake. You couldn't see nothing. I knew where the shanty was. I made one pass and missed the shanty. I snuffed back to the trees. I stopped by Beaver and fished with him. He was only a mile out.

BB: Beaver was actually fishing in my shanty, one of my shanties. I was in the other.

BW: I fished with him then. Oh, that was bad.

DB: Tell them another time.

BW: Maybe I'll get my compass back.

DB: When it was foggy. [laughter]

BB: He says, "I didn't have a compass." I probably had one in my vest. But it was warm out. So, I didn't put the vest on. I walked over to the other shanty. I didn't have a compass. So, I don't know which way the directions were when you're in a whiteout.

RB: Left your compass in the shanty. Holy man.

DB: I'd already seen it was foggy on the ice. You could stand on the roof of the vehicle and the seashore. Just on the ice, we had a fog.

BB: So, Bob had a lensatic compass. He gave it to me. So, I still got it.

BW: He got it back. Yeah.

DB: Yeah. Fog is bad, too, when you get a nap. Remember you and me and Sam Pingle that day? I was driving. They said, "Turn this way." We'd go away. "No, the other one." First thing we wound up, we were by Van Dyke. [laughter] We were supposed to be a little north of the harbor, about four and a half miles out. So, we got back. [laughter]

BB: We did get back, and we met you.

DB: All of a sudden, here Ben passes in front of us, pulling my uncle's fish shanty. I said, "I'm following him." [laughter]

BB: We came off at Van Dyke.

DB: We were over there, and we landed up. [laughter]

RB: Holy man.

DB: Dense fog, but it kind of let up. It got later. We were out there too early in the morning.

BB: Another time, we were out there, and we got tangled up in the fog. We were driving in.

There were about three or four of us together. So, we got – my car was running out of gas. So, I flagged him down. I said, "I'm going to let this thing sit. Otherwise, we –" so, I jumped in with Bob or one of them, and we went to shore. The next morning, we went out there to look for it. It was only sitting 100 yards from shore. [laughter]

RB: But none of you have gone through the one?

DB: No. I come close to going in once, the crack. That ice went down. It was open, probably 20 feet by 60. The guys never marked it. I had a full ton pickup truck, eight-ply tires on the front, and ten on the back. Missed the bumper. If I wouldn't have been going about 30 – that was fog that time. My brother was along. They moved my shanty. We were looking for scratches on the ice to see where they went. All of a sudden, I looked up. There it was. It shared both front wheels right off. [laughter]

RB: Really?

DB: Yeah. That heavy-duty truck and 10-inch dents in the back tires like this in the rims. It was 10-ply tires. We flew out on the other side. If we'd have been down a little lower, we'd have just flipped or – [laughter] so, that was the closest one. That's why I got a lot of respect for the ice after that. [laughter] But it was probably 24 inches of good ice. It was an old crack there. That one must have gone underneath. But they should have Christmas tree marked it or something. But in them days, there was no club or nothing. The guys that were fishing there, they weren't very ambitious guys anyway. So, they wouldn't put nothing up. [laughter]

RB: Wow. Amazing.

BB: Well, I'll tell you a bit. He went out there one morning. He had one before we got out there.

DB: [laughter] We never locked our shanties. [laughter] Well, Ben still doesn't. God darn. I got out. He opens that door. Look, here's a sturgeon laying right on the floor. [laughter] He and his brother came up from Indiana. So, he fished in his shanty. He went over and fished in mine. [laughter]

BW: He speared it and left it in on the floor?

DB: Yeah. Let her lay on the floor in my shanty. [laughter]

RB: Some of the stories you guys have said, what you did to each other and –

DB: They played tricks a lot of times years ago. Bill Gazer always told their – their name was Birk, B-I-R-K. They lived right next to them. They went out when they were young guys fishing. Frank Hunking, he always lived with them guys, their old uncle, and they were fishing. He made a shingle over the stovepipe on the top. First thing, they were watching, and they were choking and coughing in there. [laughter] Open the shanty door up and threw the stove out on the ice. [laughter]

RB: Oh, my God.

BB: That was in the wood stove days.

DB: They were wood stove days. [laughter]

RB: Lots of people probably all used wood stoves in those early days, right?

BW: Wooden coal.

DB: Yeah, everybody. Wooden coal sometimes. Yeah. You had to have them back on the shoulder and walk all the way from town out there.

BB: The ones that are really backwards still use them.

BW: Them backward guys, they still used wood. [laughter]

RB: Like this guy right here?

DB: Yeah, and probably one of the only ones. After you got to fish somebody off in the bottom, you'd think twice. The guy he was fishing with, he got asphyxiated.

BW: He went out with a homemade stove.

RB: He fell in?

DB: Yeah. Dead. Went over to get him. That was the day we'd seen all them sturgeon, 1953.

RB: No kidding.

BB: Bob, I didn't see too many that day.

DB: Well, they were in the service. [laughter]

BW: Arkansas. [laughter]

DB: He bought that – him and Martin Neni, and he got – pushed too much gas through the stove, and he was feeling sick. Phil Westenberger, he was one of them young kids. So, he said, "Look down the hole for me." He speared a 77-pound sturgeon. When he went to wind the decoys up, down the hole he went. He got asphyxiated with the gas stove.

RB: Really?

DB: So, from that day on, I never – no more gas stove. He saved Wimp Saringer's life about two days before when we chopped the holes. You had to chop them. Wimp fell in the god darn

hole, chopping the sturgeon hole. Jim, they all throw it out together over and pull him out. [laughter]

BB: Well, that really wasn't what saved his life. He should have –

DB: Well, yeah, he was damn cold, didn't he? [laughter]

BW: If anybody was going to drown, Kenny Peterson would. Every time he chopped a lift hole or something, he'd fall in, [laughter] push the cake out or something. I had never seen the guy get –

RB: He had an affinity for falling in a hole. [laughter]

BB: Coach Grimm was another one.

DB: Throwing the anchor in. Tell them about that, when they tied them gloves.

BB: No, I was on the sheepshead boat.

DB: Yeah, the sheepshead boat.

BW: Well, they had fresh tar nets. This is in the last part of April. It isn't worn out. Well, first tar net, and he had gloves on. [laughter] He gets back into the old town's old boat there. He had tar on his gloves. Tail anchor's 90 pounds. He was going to throw it and glove stuck. [laughter] He went with it. [laughter]

DB: Cold water loosened him up. He'd come back up. [laughter]

BW: He was loosened right away because – well, I guess they did. But every time they'd pull on the rope, then he'd come up. When they'd have another hole down, he'd go. [laughter] But if anybody was going to have a heart attack, he should have had a ton. Paul Wagner, he'd throw a firecracker on the boat and Grimm needed to run to the end of the boat and stand there and jump up and down, couldn't go no place. [laughter]

RB: Good Lord.

DB: We were pulling a net one day. Otis and Grimm and he then picked – there's a few dead fish with that net. Put them in a barrel there. He got it caught in the reel. [laughter]

BW: We were pulling nets.

DB: Over at bay, he got a net. But he picked it up and threw it over. [laughter]

BW: Oh, he was nervous. He picked it up, missed the hole, and down the drain it went. Another time we were – what the hell was – I think we were pulling. The Seacork froze up on the big boat. That's what it was. Bill and I were on the little boat. We threw him a rope and a

tie-on.

DB: Oh, when he was standing in the coil of rope.

BW: Yeah, and he got his darn foot caught in that coil of rope as we tightened up.

DB: Hung on the side of the boat. The lake was freezing over that day.

BW: Took his boot right off. [laughter]

DB: Right off, barefooted, running back in the cabin, they had a hot plate. [laughter] He was not helping the rest of the day. [laughter]

RB: Geez, good Lord.

DB: That day, all the nets frozen, the ice. They never got them in.

BB: Well, they did freeze in the ice.

DB: That was 1956.

BW: Tavern there, and Art Bow looked up. There goes someone in the ice flow. [laughter]

RB: Well, you guys would catch sturgeon in those nets too? These are trap nets?

DB: Trap nets.

RB: Oh, yes, and these are being fished for sheepshead.

DB: Yeah, on the north shore.

RB: On the north shore?

BW: North shore was the best in the spring.

DB: In the spring.

RB: Is that right? Would you –

DB: Yeah, 40 at least in every net.

RB: Really?

DB: Big. Well, I remember we measured one 6-foot-10 at least, that big around. It took three guys to get him over up in the boat, put a tag on him.

BB: Put three tags on.

DB: Well, no, seven. Seven tags on that one.

RB: So, you guys were part of the original tagging crews out there?

DB: Yeah. Well, we tagged them.

BW: Well, we were supposed to be tagging them, yes, but we know how that went.

RB: Now, were these the spaghetti tags that they had or –

DB: Like on the cores here, the metal tags.

RB: Okay.

BB: What he's saying, that big one?

BW: I'm going to see this one coming through. [laughter]

RB: So, he put a whole bunch of tags on there?

DB: Yeah, on all of his. I never ever heard of – nobody ever got it. I don't know. That fish weighed 167 pounds.

BB: In them days, Otis Smith was supposed to tag every sturgeon he got. So, he would write them down in the book. He'd throw the tags overboard. [laughter] They didn't catch them.

DB: Well, here, you wouldn't really blame him. Ike Colburn was the warden and the guy that checked the boats. But there was no way that you could do all that work and register all them fish. They should have had two guys along to help.

RB: Right, right. So, you think those records from those boats, just not very good?

DB: There were a lot of them tagged.

BW: You didn't tag a lot of them. Some days, you just couldn't keep up.

DB: You couldn't keep up.

BW: But we set a net for Tom Peterson on the north end when he'd come down with his boat and trap nets. We'd set some nets down there. We went down the next day. We had a lift anyway. So, we checked that. One net was set for him overnight, had 54 sturgeons in it.

RB: Wow.

DB: Yeah. There was a lot of –

BW: You commenced to start measuring all that. It's two days' work.

DB: You wouldn't have in a whole day.

RB: This was in the spring?

DB: In the spring, same time they were getting them up the river.

RB: When you were getting these fish at that time of year, I mean, were there any of them that were ripe?

DB: Yeah.

BB: Well, they more likely were, but –

DB: They had to be.

RB: I mean, did you see some that were expressing eggs or anything?

BB: Nothing coming out of them.

DB: Nothing coming out, but they had them in. This was the last part of April, first part of May.

RB: Yes, yes. Because, I mean, it will run every year, of course.

BW: Even male fish, they never got no milk out of them.

RB: Yes. Well, then they might have been fishing between cycles.

DB: Would have been the next year, probably.

BW: But you never know. Maybe the bigger ones are all up the river already, too. At that time, nobody knew what the hell was going on.

DB: Nobody knew that coast at that time.

RB: So, did you guys participate in the Upriver Lakes Fishery at all?

DB: No.

RB: No. Never did.

BB: We went up there one year.

DB: Oh, we fished a couple of times up there.

BB: Up in Poygan. Yeah.

BW: Yeah, I went up there once, come to think of it.

DB: I went up twice.

RB: It started in [19]52.

DB: Fifty-two.

BB: I went in [19]52, the first year they ever had with Bill Gazer and them guys. But we didn't get anything. We were fishing right next to open water. Then we went up with Dave Haymore was around here. Remember when we went up to Tustin?

DB: Yeah.

BB: We fished for two, three days there. But we didn't get nothing that time either.

DB: Gordy Priegel was a biologist. We never left our shack that day.

RB: Really?

DB: So goddamn cold and windy, and it was kind of dirty anyway. I had that wood stove just cracking a tour. He said, "I'm not leaving here. It's warm in here." [laughter]

BW: That's the reason went over there because this lake here was dirty.

DB: Dirty as hell and you couldn't see on this one at all.

BB: Yeah, it was dirty over there.

BW: It was worse over there.

DB: It wasn't good over there.

RB: Oh, yes. So, that would have been like [19]54?

DB: Sixties. [19]68.

RB: Well, the season was –

DB: Sixty-eight.

BB: Would have been in the [19]70s.

RB: Sixty-eight then.

DB: Sixty-eight, that bad year.

RB: Sixty-eight, yes, because they only had 21 fish out of lake here that year.

DB: Yeah, and half of them were only had with a dangle stick. Got them up the spear.
[laughter] That 21 big –

RB: Is that right?

DB: Yeah. That's how we got them. Otherwise, you couldn't see.

BB: I know we hauled about 10 shanties over there on hay wagons.

DB: Hay wagons and that. Yeah. Me and Earl Ecker, and that was about 1953, we fished over there. He got one. Oh, it was longer than hell and only weighed about 30 pounds. We were just about in the river channel on east side. There was 8 inches ice on one side and about that much on the other. It was current, where we were. Earl had to get close. He speared. It wasn't very deep. You can see the print of the fish right in the bottom after he speared it.

RB: Yeah, pin him to the bottom.

DB: Pin him right down.

RB: Have you guys always used spears with detachable heads, or did you have –

DB: Here, we always did. Yeah.

BB: I'll show you something.

RB: Did you ever use the – because some guys I heard had real long spear handles but a cupula through the top.

DB: Through the top of the shanty, yeah.

RB: But you guys did not have that.

DB: Yeah, we didn't. But I fished alongside of the guys that did, the whole Holly.

BB: Matt Burke had one.

DB: Matt Burke and that old Holly.

RB: When they used those, were they just –

DB: They had a sheepskin height off on the top.

RB: Would they go down on the handle and just kind of jig them almost, gig them?

DB: Yeah. They speared them. I guess they held them down a while.

BW: I don't know how that – well, Jesus, the damn spear wasn't 20 feet long though.

DB: They couldn't get the low ones, I guess. They must've only got the high ones.

BW: They never seen nothing. Years ago, they never went out a mile. Rode about a mile, that was about it.

DB: Oh, not, that was (long win?). Yeah, nobody went out there.

RB: Well, you can get to deeper water sooner here.

BW: Well, yeah, but they fished close to the shore a lot.

RB: I mean, back in the [19]50s and [19]60s, most of the spearing pressure was on this side then?

DB: All on this side. I don't think there was nothing in the other areas. Because some guys had come over from there. Well, the Blooms always come over here on this side and fish.

RB: Oh, they did. Yes.

DB: Yeah. They fished at Brothertown and on this side.

BB: These are made by Alex Gazer.

RB: Well, that is Gazer's?

BB: Yeah. I've got one that was made by Bob Wilson. But I've got that hid away. [laughter]

RB: That is worth so much money. [laughter]

BW: I think it's the first one made. That was kind of a weak one.

DB: The reason they got the six-tine spear, Alex and Frank Gazer, their sister always went fishing with them. She kept missing them and never got one. So, they went home. They were blacksmiths. They made a six-tiner.

BB: I've got to have you redo it.

BW: It was a poor idea.

DB: That was, yeah.

BB: My pull is crap.

BW: He just spread his three-quarter-inch rod. He just drilled a hole in. He spread it and fit it down over that.

DB: If you speared a lot of them, you'd spread the hole.

BW: Then they start getting wobbly and hanging there sideways. I had mine. I revamped mine right away after a few misses and a couple. [laughter]

RB: How do you keep a spear from planing?

BB: They won't plane.

DB: They don't plane.

BW: They don't.

RB: They do not?

BB: No. Now they don't have a piece of iron on top of them.

DB: Yeah, that makes the plane.

BB: They all plane now.

BW: The thing is they get too much wood on the handle.

BB: Another thing is don't get too much wood on your handle.

BW: You get too much wood on that handle, that's going to tip the spear off.

BB: These spears will go just like shooting pool.

RB: So, are these metal all the way, your handles?

DB: Pretty well.

BW: About 5.5 feet at the very end.

BB: Like a feather on an arrow.

BW: Five and a half feet or three-quarter-inch rod and then –

RB: How far can you throw one of these accurately?

BB: As far as you can see.

BW: I can throw mine as far as I can see a sturgeon. [laughter] No need to throw any farther than that.

DB: See, the old days, they had them three-tine spears. They probably weighed 8 pounds. They were more for side shots and accuracy.

BW: Straight down.

DB: Once they got them big flying barbs and stuff today, you aren't going to get out too far on the side with that.

BB: I'll tell you how we start using these six-tine spears. Bob was working the first year we got out of service. So, I was using his fish shanty. I didn't have a fish shanty. So, I was sitting in Bob's fish shanty. He had a little spear, about three-tiner, and in came a sturgeon. Well, it's kind of off the side a little bit. I threw, and I saw that thing going right over the top. Holy man, sitting there just nervous about that. [laughter] Here came another one from the other way. It might have been the same one. I missed that one, too. So, I went down by Bill Gazer. I told him, I said, "I missed two of them son of a guns today." He said, "Go down by Alex Gazer." He says, "He'll fix you up." So, I went.

DB: He worked all night on her.

RB: Really? Or made you one then.

BB: Well, all the rest of the guys in the group, they all got one like it then after that. So, we all use – our spears, Bob makes them. Everybody else, they're all patterned after these spears.

DB: He made them out of 1934 international conference.

BB: He made both of these spears –

RB: Out of the leaf spring?

BB: He made this one first and this one a couple of years later. He had it improved quite a bit by that.

BW: Did Alex or Frank make them?

BB: Alex made both of them.

DB: I got a four-tine now.

BB: I bought this one for Jeff when Jeff was living then. Then when Jeff died, they gave it to me because they –

BW: I only paid 27 bucks for that.

DB: \$22 would handle everything, 22.

BB: Twenty-two was \$22. We were working at Arps and 40 bucks a week.

DB: Eighty cents an hour. Yeah.

RB: Now, over here, would you say – because from being in the shack, you do not see as many flying barbs over on this side. It's this traditional pitchfork-type style. That is more of a western –

BB: I'll tell you what. There's no way in hell a sturgeon should ever get off a spear like that. If you hit them and the tine goes through them, there's no way you can get it off. But you can't horse them. You've got to –

DB: I never lost a fish in my life that got off the spear. Never.

BW: There was only one tine and 80-some-pounder. He'd get them. It'll hang on. Main thing is don't get these things sharp.

RB: Do not get those sharp?

BW: Keep them blunt. Keep them dull.

RB: Oh, really? So, the tips of the barbs, they have got to be blunt?

DB: The bears.

BW: The bears. You keep these ears dull.

DB: On the top.

BW: They won't cut in then.

BB: Otherwise, they cut –

BW: No, it won't cut in, it'll cut out. Once it's in there, it's there. You can keep the point sharp if you had a hack on it.

DB: Some of the guys, they'd stagger them.

BW: It'll slide off maybe then.

DB: So, they penetrate better. [laughter]

BW: Oh, my goodness.

RB: Jesus.

DB: Oh, God.

KK: She said she has got a lot to go through. I said, "I will bet you she will have more fun looking through."

RB: We still get those pictures out of –

KSK: That is on camcorder.

BB: Burn that. [laughter]

RB: No, save that for Kendall's retirement. [laughter]

KSK: I do have pictures of the dog.

DB: Down the hole, yeah.

RB: That's perfect. Look at the dog looking down the hole.

DB: I had a springer that did the same thing.

RB: Really?

DB: Afterwards, I couldn't let him look because he got too excited when one was coming. [laughter] He had to lay back by the stove.

RB: No kidding. Well, I thought it was for the picture.

DB: I always fish flat on the floor. I always lay flat on the floor.

RB: You do still up to this day?

DB: Pretty well, yes.

RB: Holy man. Would you just prop yourself up on your elbows or what?

DB: Elbows. Little cushion ahead of you, and they got a mattress. You always had a mattress

to lay on. That's the only way the old Indians fished.

RB: Yes, just laying right on the ice or right on the bottom.

BW: Yeah. If you're setting up your stuff, you can't see around that if you're laying right tight on the floor.

RB: You lay on the floor too, Bob?

BW: Well, most of the time, biggest share of the time.

DB: Now we're getting a little old. But all my life, I laid flat down like them Indians did. They were right. You could see way better than –

RB: Really? Is it not hard to reach up and grab that spear?

BW: It doesn't take long to get up on your knees [laughter] once you see a fish in there.

DB: One old guy said, "When they're coming towards you, look at their eyes."

RB: Oh, really?

DB: Yeah. When they get by, then you aren't going to spook them.

RB: Oh, when the eyes get by.

DB: When the eyes get by, then you aren't going to spook them.

BB: That one was trying to become famous.

BW: I don't know about that theory because when I see them coming, I don't have a chance.

RB: You do not give them a chance.

BW: No. I hit them when they're out there yet. When they're coming in, they're looking at that decoy. They aren't looking at the –

DB: Once they get by that though.

BW: They're looking at the decoy, it's my theory.

RB: So, did you ever conk one in the head?

DB: No.

BW: Yeah, I did.

DB: You did?

BW: Yep.

BB: I think I did.

BW: I didn't get it either. [laughter]

DB: In my shanty, one got lumped on the head. My older brother, and there was an old guy fishing alongside of us. He was an old Englishman. He said, "My God, by the time I got up, he was gone." [laughter] He had about a head and was going through like this. He said, "I was about ready to sit back down and come in again. Here it had one tine in the head." Didn't go through.

RB: We see them in the spring with mark in their heads every once in a while.

DB: Well, I got to tell you another story. I don't know. Were you along that day when we had that big one, four tines, missed the backbone by that much? This fish was at least 160 or so. There were round holes, four of them like that, where that spear pulled out. A guy had four tines in it. That big fish, it pulled out because you could see the markings.

RB: He must have really horsed it then.

DB: He horsed it or something.

BB: Probably had a flying bird.

DB: Probably. I don't know what he had. Who was that?

BB: It must be a big Republican.

DB: Who was that? Who sent you that?

RB: John Bloom.

DB: John Bloom?

RB: What about talking about the social stuff? Why don't you talk about the blue ox for a second?

BB: June?

RB: June, that is up your category. [laughter]

BB: Tell about the blue ox.

RB: Let us hear about the blue ox.

June Burg: She's had all the pictures in there.

BB: But she wants to know about how it became about.

KK: It would be great, actually, if you would sit down and just –

JB: I told her how it all came about. [laughter]

RB: We need to record you. This is June Burg.

KSK: If you could just sit down.

JB: Yeah, I got it all wrote out. I'm going to send her.

RB: Oh, you are going to write it out?

JB: Yeah.

RB: Oh, okay. That is good.

BB: I took a shower today. [laughter]

JB: I know how you operate, Ben. [laughter] That would get you in trouble.

KK: The blue ox sounds like good times.

RB: Did that even have a hole in the floor?

JB: Yes, it did.

RB: It did?

JB: One time, we almost thought we saw one, too. [laughter]

RB: So, this was a –

BB: It was a party. There are probably parties, yeah.

KSK: This is the entertainment center.

BB: Sometimes there were 30 people in the thing at one time.

RB: Oh, my God.

DB: Are there any pictures of Dick Staine there?

BB: I don't know.

RB: The warden? He would stop the gun belt. A belt would go out in the car.

BB: The back door and the back seat.

RB: Is that right?

BB: Give me two. I'm behind. [laughter]

RB: Holy man. So, over the years, speaking of the wardens –

DB: For the best one we ever had, he was.

RB: Dick Staine?

DB: Yeah. He picked up all the car keys. He started the sportsman club and everything like that, and for people liking him, everybody in the whole area.

BB: If you violated, you got pinched. But he had common sense. He didn't get your forever little thing.

RB: Right. But over the years, were you visited by wardens often?

BB: Oh, yeah. Almost every year.

RB: Almost every year?

BB: Ideal.

BW: Most of the time.

BB: I remember one year, it was in the [19]50s, too. I was sitting there. Angie was just after us all the time because everybody took him to shore. So, he committed. He was sitting on a bench right beside me. We bought a 50-pounder and a nice spear. He nudged me. He says, "I bet you're going to take this one." [laughter]

RB: You remember when the first biologists came on the scene? You mentioned Gordy Priegel.

DB: Gordy Priegel was the first that I remember.

RB: First one you remember? Yes. Because there was some work done here in the [19]40s by Charles Schlump was his name.

DB: Oh, yeah, I heard of him.

RB: He was not a biologist. But he actually did do some actually biological type work with the sturgeon out here.

DB: See, the fish camp was at Stockbridge in them days.

BB: What was his name? Harris, Dick Harris.

RB: Yes, Dick Harris.

BB: He ran the fish camp.

BW: He was the head of the outfit, Harris. When he was on the boat working on the –

DB: He was the head man.

BW: What's his name?

DB: Gordy Priegel?

BB: McLeod?

BW: McLeod ran the camp?

RB: Yes, McLeod ran camp down there.

BB: McLeod's still living? He stops and sees me every six months or so. He'd stop for fun.

BW: Every time he'd come down there and ordered us to say, "Now, what the hell you want to know? [laughter] The only time you come down here is you want information." [laughter]

RB: Well, did you ever think through your life that we – I guess early on, when you were taking or spearing sturgeon back in the [19]50s, did you have any thoughts about how long can this continue, or will it go on?

DB: Well, I didn't think it would ever last this long years ago. Never figured it would.

RB: Just because so many fish were being harvested or –

DB: Up the river was the worst.

BW: Well, yeah, but they –

DB: They harvested a lot of them.

BW: They harvest them, but they harvest them the wrong way. Up there was –

BB: I didn't think they were going because there was nowhere near the fishermen in our early days. You could have fished forever with the fishermen we had back in them days. It never affected them.

DB: When we first went out there probably with ten shanties at Quinney and ten at Brothertown. Stockbridge probably had 25 to 30. County Park had probably eight or ten guys and four or five at Fairy Springs. That was it. Only the shanties. The guys lived tight along the shoreline.

BB: The farmers would go out. They had to do their chores in the morning. Everything wasn't automatic. They'd do their chores. They'd get out there at 10:00 a.m. They'd have to go back in 2:30 p.m., 3:00 p.m. to start their evening chores.

RB: Right. One period that we have zero information is during World War II. Do you have any stories or any recollection of people that may have told you or experiences about what spring was like out here then? Probably wasn't –

BB: I remember World War II.

BW: It was about the same as it was –

DB: In 1944, we start fishing, me and Ben. So, that was –

RB: So, that was during the war?

DB: During the war, yeah. They didn't really kill them because you had to work so much harder to push the shanty or get it out there, chop the hole. You didn't move much. You waited until they come to you. My dad, 1938, the season was 45 days then. He fished every day in February, crystal clear. Never seen a fish. In the first five days in March, he got five. So, I got a picture of my mom with one there. I looked through the old thing. But I never found his picture then. But he speared the fish. It was 73 pounds that my mom was there. I could remember, we were little kids, me and Ben, and that – our sister set us on the table, kitchen table, out the window, taking the picture. All of a sudden, the leaf and that broke off. We were out on the floor. [laughter]

BB: You've a got memory like an elephant. [laughter]

DB: The girls got the rim while I broke the table. [laughter]

RB: Well, what about the caviar? Was that ever a big thing over here in the north shore?

DB: Nothing here. You had to go to Winneconne there at Eddie Friggs. He always bought it when you've got a fish. He bought the caviar.

BW: Van Dyne.

BB: Van Dyne. What's his name?

DB: Johnny Goike.

BB: Johnny Goike.

DB: Afterwards, Goike, but first, it was –

BB: There are probably some pictures in that book of Johnny Goike taking spawn out of a fish. I think the one that Mark –

RB: Probably early, yes.

BW: Another guy from Menasha and you probably –

BB: Oh, what the heck was his name? Smiley Miller.

DB: Smiley Miller.

KSK: That is a birthday celebration with the belly dancer.

RB: That's at the harbor.

BB: That's Cork's birthday. [laughter]

RB: Oh, good.

BB: They hired a belly dancer for him.

KK: Where is Johnny Gerk from?

RB: Goike?

KK: Goike.

DB: By the big island over there. He had a tavern. He was for ducks and everything. He took the guys out. He carved memory smoke and sold it. He was a guide for duck hunting and stuff like that.

BB: His family still has a bar over there.

DB: I think his daughter but she might be dead by now.

RB: I do not know if they have a bar. But it was not long ago.

BB: Yeah, I know. I heard something that they still had the place there.

DB: Probably some of the grandkid.

BB: He used to sell smoked fish all the time. Well, you were allowed to sell smoked catfish, I think.

RB: For sure. I think you should right now.

DB: The car, red car.

BW: Would come around smoking it.

BB: He had a regular rope that he'd come around every so often.

RB: Well, you've got any other questions, Kathleen?

BB: Holy Jupiter. Did that split open?

DB: When our lake opened up, and when the lake dies, forced in and wiped out the places.

BW: I got you this year, did I not?

BB: Yes, you did.

BW: You opened up only a couple days late. [laughter]

DB: Pretty nice decoy, this one, isn't it? [laughter] You better hang on to it.

BB: Frankenstein.

DB: \$300.

BB: I had a chance to sell it a couple times.

DB: Jake Trubin called me about last March. He went to that –

BB: Well, I think if somebody offered me \$300 –

DB: \$300 a piece for the damn decoy, Frank Denslow's.

BW: Frank would go.

BB: Frank would be going.

DB: No, I'm keeping it. I don't need the money that bad, I figured. I don't know if we told you

all the stuff that we were – on the fishing and stuff.

BB: A whole lot more lies in this.

DB: No, I meant the equipment and how they –

BW: I didn't make them like that one.

DB: Because a lot of them walked out. There weren't no vehicles. There was no one there.

BB: I don't know. I don't think so.

BW: Or maybe not.

[talking simultaneously].

DB: Saws and four-wheel drive trucks and everything. Them days, you'd walk with a dog out there. So, there's a lot of difference. They'd never hurt the population.

BB: Another thing we used to do when we got done fishing –

DB: Always had a party.

BB: We always had a party at the end. In case somebody didn't get a fish, everybody would throw a chunk of fish in. We'd have a party.

RB: Oh, really? At the end of the season.

BB: Yeah, at the end of the season or during the summer.

RB: Where would you hold? Just at somebody's house or wherever?

DB: Yeah.

BW: I think that still goes on a little bit, doesn't it? Yes.

DB: Gets looking through the books, he can't quit.

BW: Put them away before they get lost.

BB: So, they fall on one or something.

BW: Yeah. I'm short. I had a good four-tiner on the landing going down the basement and disappeared.

RB: Oh, no.

BW: Somebody needed – they left the rope. They cut the rope off and took the spear. I got the handle.

BB: How are things in Arizona, Bob?

BW: I'll tell you one thing; it was 85 degrees out there on Saturday.

BB: I was watching the TV –

BW: But then two days later after I left, it was 40 above in Flagstaff, about 100 miles. It was hot.

RB: Well, I'm going to have our photographer, Ben, he'll call you. Bob Rashid is his name, really good guy. He is out in Madison, and –

DB: You mean you want to look at some older decoys or stuff like that?

RB: Yes. We would like to get pictures like these.

DB: These decoys?

RB: I mean, this is priceless right here because it was made by one of the champions.

DB: The old Indians, yeah.

RB: Yes. So, that kind of stuff, we would like to have them get – it would be pictures of you guys. So, we need your headshot.

DB: I know who's got the gaff hook. He made me a gaff hook. I had to haul him home for two years. It'd come up missing out of my gun cabinet. My younger brother went fishing with a different guy and went by his place. There it was.

RB: Did you get it back?

DB: No, not yet, but I'm going to go now and tell him that the guy has got – he's got to give it back to get the pictures taken.

RB: Yes. So, he will give you a call. It will probably be within the next month.

DB: Yeah. I hauled him home every night for two years for the gaff hook. It took about that long, but really good. [laughter] Whatever they did, they were in no hurry. But they did good.

BB: Your buddy gave me a gaff hook down south here, one of your coffee-clutchers down there by Pete.

BW: Lenny?

BB: No.

DB: Crop? Bob Crop?

BW: Did he give it to you?

BB: Yeah.

BW: Oh, my God. [laughter] He's got that good big hook on there, too, doesn't he?

BB: Yeah. It's real big.

DB: They talked about the sand pike back in the old days too. They'd go with a grain bag. They'd get a grain bag from there.

BB: I never caught a grain bag.

DB: No, no, here's what they said. [laughter] But then they give all the neighbors – they go out with the horse and the sleigh. Did you ever see the old copper minnow?

BB: No.

DB: It was a snake hook deal.

BB: It was a snake hook?

DB: Yeah, that's what it was. Then old guys, they'd go out. They'd get the – but they were the only guys probably on the lake that day.

BB: I got one someplace. But I don't know where it is.

DB: Bob had one once.

BW: No, in the basement.

DB: You've got one yet?

BB: They had like –

[end of transcript]