

William Casper Oral History
Date of Interview: April 20, 2007
Location: Taycheedah, Wisconsin
Length of Interview: 59:36
Interviewers: KK – Kathleen Kline
Transcriber: NCC

Kathleen Kline: Thank goodness. All right. It is recording.

William Casper: It's recording. Okay.

KK: So, what would you like to start with?

WC: So, well, when I talked to Paul – that was Paul Mucche. That's just a few weeks ago. We went through a number of things when I started the Sturgeon for Tomorrow business. I realized that so many things – well, now, of course would be a duplication if I went through all that again. Because you can surely have the tape that he has.

KK: Right.

WC: What I'd like to show you is some of the paperwork that I have, starting with a book like this where my wife put – I really didn't even know she's doing all this – was – that happens to be the 2/11/77.

KK: [laughter] Seeking volunteers.

WC: Yeah. Seeking volunteers to start a program that it didn't even have a name at the time and not knowing at all – I mean, not knowing at all what we were doing because it was so very new. See, I was on a county board, I think back. Well, maybe I was just off of it. But I knew a reporter. He heard about it. So, he said, "Well, I want to write a little something." I think that's where that thing started right there, that article. You could tell because that's – I've aged a little bit since. I was younger.

KK: [laughter].

WC: Then even on, when I had the first meeting – if you just flip that page, you'll see. Do you know Dan Folz, right?

KK: Yes.

WC: That's Dan Folz standing right there.

KK: Right there?

WC: Yeah.

KK: [laughter]

WC: That's the meeting that I had at the Taycheedah Town Hall, which isn't far from here. In fact, while I was town chairman and on the county board, we built that town hall. So, I had good access to a good building. That's where we went and had that very first meeting.

KK: How many people showed up? Oh, 150.

WC: 150.

KK: Were you expecting that?

WC: Well, I was, in a way. In February, what I did, when I sort of came up with this, I left the lake, hooked my shanty up. I went home. I wanted to catch the fishermen on the lake. So, when they were going home, they all stopped in taverns, this, and that. So, what I did, I went to EconoPrint in Fond du Lac and had a bulletin printed. It's right in that book, way back somewhere. Just flip through and you'll see it. Yeah. Notifying fishermen that - I think that opens up sort of.

KK: Okay.

WC: Anyway, what I did, I took it around the lake and just said, "I'm going to have a meeting. We'll just talk about perhaps learning how to raise the sturgeon." Because I was really concerned that in the whole United States, I had heard that there was no such thing as anyone who knew how to raise sturgeon. In doing so, suddenly, I got a phone call from a gentleman in New London named Reverend Walter Lang. He was a retired minister. He ran a fish hatchery, trout farm type thing. Okay.

KK: In New London?

WC: In New London, right out of New London, little ways, Wilderness Springs Hatchery. He said that he had read an article. He had read something where there was a professor, William Ballard, worked for Dartmouth College. He said he's knowledgeable in raising sturgeon or at least knew something about what the Russians were doing. So, he said, "Why don't you contact him?" So, what I did, I called information, called Dartmouth College, and asked if there was a William Ballard. The girl says, "I think he's in his lab," she says. So, she dialed him and sure enough - so, anyway, that's how I got ahold of William Ballard. I'd never forget it. When I'm on the phone, he said, "My God, man, where are you calling from?" I said, "Wisconsin." He said, "You have sturgeon in Wisconsin?" I said, "We do, surely like Winnebago has got sturgeon." He said, "I've been going to Russia and Romania trying to study sturgeon, and I didn't need to go there." But it was a good thing he went there. Because he learned from them what we would've had to learn from scratch, I mean, from nothing. So, anyway, that's what came of that meeting. We talked. Not that meeting of course, but of that conversation with him. The meeting that we had with the DNR - by saying we, I'm talking about the 150 people that showed up that night. There were 150 fishermen. Two DNR people who were done against what we wanted to do, but 150 fishermen thought it was a good idea.

KK: Why was the DNR against it?

WC: Well, they, first of all said that they didn't have the right to give us any - what I thought we should do. In reading some of this, you'll find what I said was that I felt that if we were given some eggs and milk from the males and could fertilize them and put them into a hatchery and just start learning this, they sort of would write this off. Besides Dan Folz, it was Tom Wirth.

Tom Wirth used to work for the department years ago, and Gordy Priegel. He wasn't there that night. But I mean, these are people that were –

KK: I have seen all these names.

WC: Yeah.

KK: [laughter]

WC: So, anyway, that's where so much of that started.

KK: But they were against it because they were – was it the challenge of collecting the eggs or the –

WC: Honestly, the feeling I had - I don't know if this is proper or not. You can ask Dan Folz.

KK: [laughter] That is true.

WC: It seemed to me that we were sort of treading on sacred ground here. This is DNR's work. Who are you as a machinist working in a machine shop at Giddings & Lewis in Fond du Lac, think that you can do this? I mean, this is the honest feeling that I have. So, that's where it started. We had no name. You'll read that. I had an uncle; his name was Henry Langenfeld. He was a priest, a Catholic priest. He read this article and called me and said – I was saying that I wanted a name. But I didn't want the name to be like Ducks Unlimited or the Unlimited thing.

KK: [laughter]

WC: He called me, and he said, "What you're trying to do is learn to raise sturgeon for tomorrow," basically is what he meant.

KK: So, Uncle Henry basically named it?

WC: Yeah. Father Henry Langenfeld. He's the one that named the thing. It's been Sturgeon for Tomorrow ever since. Now, there's Walleye for Tomorrow. There's Trees for Tomorrow. There's everything.

KK: Everything for tomorrow.

WC: But that's where that started a long time ago. So, anyway, what happened basically is that we had a number of meetings and with the Department. We had a meeting in Oshkosh shortly after that. This is something that I came across just yesterday. This is some notes that were written. Fact, it says that Vern Hacker was there, Conservation Congress, Vern Hacker, Gordon Priegel, and Dan Folz. Anyway, by that time, after the meeting at the Taycheedah Town Hall, people came forward and said, "Bill, I'll help you. You need a committee of whatever to do this." So, it was Bob Blanck who came and wound up being our vice president. I turned out to be president of it. Dan Groeschel runs the Groeschel company up here. Lloyd Lemke was our

secretary. Dan Groeschel was our treasurer, who we didn't have any money.

KK: [laughter]

WC: But we needed a treasurer. Vic Schneider, he was the director of it. It was that group that started it. Jim Addis was at that meeting. I don't know if you ever met Jim Addis?

KK: I do not think so.

WC: Well, I don't know if he's with the department any longer. But Jim, just to give you an idea – and I'm going to give you this set of minutes – he stated that he was entering the meeting with an open mind. If Sturgeon for Tomorrow could produce a workable program, he'd be glad to assist them in any way. He wanted to know what the program of Sturgeon for Tomorrow was and asked Bill Casper to explain it. So, it goes on here, this whole story. Lloyd, who's exactly my age right now, he sat and wrote notes. It's amazing how this guy could write all of this. It's all right there of all the arguments.

KK: That is terrific.

WC: So, in fact, I can't even see that he put a date on this. I can't find a date for it. But it was very early in the beginning of this program. Vern Hacker spoke, stated that he was afraid Sturgeon for Tomorrow was giving the group – wanting the sturgeon placed on the endangered species list. See, it was sort of a method of trying to talk us out of doing this. We were circulating petitions and just saying, "Just let us do this." I even said any number of times it wouldn't cost any tax dollars, that we would do it. The fishermen would sponsor a thing and pay for it and just learn to do it. Well, it turned out that when I found Professor Ballard and brought him, we didn't have any money. I mean, we didn't have nothing. He said, "If you can get me a plane ticket, I'll come to Fond du Lac and talk to these people." So, Bob Blanck, who at the time ran Blanck Supper Club in Johnsburg, he said, "I'll give you \$1,000, Bill." He said, "Someday, you can pay me back. If you can't, don't worry about it." So, eventually we paid him back. What we did was I called Bill Ballard back and sent him a plane ticket, so he could fly into Oshkosh. In fact, had to be for him and his wife. He was almost 80 years old at the time. So, he came and talked to the department. We had a meeting at the Holiday Inn in Fond du Lac. That's just sort of how the story went. I was going to find something just to show you. In doing this, I came across the receipt from the Holiday Inn I didn't know I had.

KK: [laughter]

WC: I mean, it's crazy about how you put things away. Yeah. Right here. So, you get an idea when all this happened. That was February of 1978. So, we set up tables in a room in kind of a square. They were sitting there. Ballard, he said, "I'd like to sit right in the middle of this." So, we opened this table thing up. He sat with his chair right in the middle. We were all around him. I'm never forgetting. [laughter] He sat and talked. So, that's how it went. Where do we go from here? It's how things happen.

KK: With Ballard had been doing –

WC: Ballard?

KK: How did he get access to the –

WC: Ballard, he's dead now. He was an embryologist studying sturgeon eggs. That was his thing. He would go to Russia. He went there a number of times, he told me, and just studied what they were doing. What happened in Russia was you have the Caspian Sea. You have the Volga River running up through Russia for thousands of miles. The sturgeon lived in the Caspian Sea, would migrate up the Volga to spawn, and back down. The Russians would take the eggs from the sturgeon. It's almost like our Winnebago and Wolf River on a smaller scale. They would take the eggs. They had started something. He told me they had like fish factories. They had a ship that was out on the Caspian Sea where they would seine these sturgeons when they would gather and come. They would just net them out. They'd cut them open. They'd take the black eggs. They'd harvest the meat. The ship was like a giant fish butcher shop, you might say. They were taking the eggs that way. Caviar was a monstrous market. Suddenly comes the industrial age where they build hydroelectric dams across the Volga River. They shut down the spawning area for the sturgeon. They built a number of these hydroelectric dams. So, they kept taking, the sturgeon kept going, trying to get up to Volga, but it took just so many years. They were just depleting the crop of fish so terrible that they were in a panic situation, had to learn how to raise these fish. They did not know. Ballard told me that it took the Russians 15 years to learn how to do it. What happens to sturgeon eggs – we're doing the same thing now in Wild Rose Hatchery. Fred Binkowski does it down in Milwaukee at the Great Lake Center. They take the sturgeon eggs. What took 15 years was to keep the eggs from glomming together. They take red clay, which is anywhere around here, red clay in the farmland. Put it in a bowl of water. Mix it up. Make a slurry out of it. Put the eggs in there. It takes all the stickiness off the eggs. Then they can put it into jars in the hatcheries and hatch the fish. They don't stick together in the fungi. That took that long. This is what Ballard passed on to the DNR that time. So, the meeting that we had in Fond du Lac, Ballard told the DNR that he knew – he said, "I know the recipe for doing this." So, they said, "Well, if you can give us this recipe, then we will try it." So, when I picked him up to fly back home to the East Coast, him and his wife – I picked him up early in the next morning after we had our evening meetings and whatever – he came walking out with a paper. It was like, when I found this, it was just like this. In fact, it's in this box somewhere. He said to me, "You guard this with your life because this is that recipe I'm going to give these people." He had written everything up, handed it to me. I took them to Oshkosh, and they flew away. They went home. So, I took that. I happened to work at Giddings & Lewis. I was a maintenance foreman at the time. The girl that was working for me, she typed it up. So, we'd have it in a – instead of a handwritten form, we have it in a typed form. So, she sat and typed all this for us. That's what I gave then to – I think I gave it to Dan Foltz. So, when we finally took eggs, the DNR took eggs, Bill Ballard flew out here then on his own. I didn't even know it. But he went to the hatchery at Wild Rose and stayed there. He would stay there all night with the eggs. I mean, they said they couldn't believe the man would stay there all the time. He was so involved in the first hatch of eggs. Worked beautifully. So, we did have, originally, one other time we tried eggs was at this Wilderness Springs Hatchery with Reverend Lang's little hatchery. He said he knew Dan Foltz. He knew these people very well. He said, "Why don't you just give me some eggs, and I'll try it in my trout hatchery?" That whole story is

here. It's a story that –

KK: This was earlier on?

WC: That's the year before. That happens to be right here. If you just make a note on the outside of it, on that envelope, if you'd like. That's from Reverend Lang. Dan Folz sent that to me and thought I would like to see it. It sort of tells you what happened. Yeah, you can read that.

KK: I will take a look at it.

WC: Sure. That's typed and written up. That's written up by Walter Lang. It went to Dan Folz as a report on what he did the first time. It was –

KK: Everything.

WC: –everything. It's a whole thing on it. So, when I started going through some of this the other day, that's why I thought, there's just a little too much here to –

KK: This is great.

WC: –to have Muche try to record it. I mean, I couldn't pass it on to him. It was easier if you can just perhaps study some of that and say –and that happened to be a failure. What happened was the eggs all glommed together, and they got a fungus in them. That's what, the next year, we learned from Ballard, how to get –

KK: The secret.

WC: Yes. That's the way it's done now. That's the way we still do it.

KK: Wow. So, that came from Ballard, basically from Russia. He learned that in Russia.

WC: From Russia. I heard from someone that *National Geographics* knew something about sturgeon being raised. So, I got a hold of *National Geographics*. I got a letter from Mary Palmer, I think. She sent me some Russian newspapers, translated papers. They're in here. She said, "They're raising sturgeons." They were raising 15 million and up to 75 million. It's in all these Russian newspapers – translated newspapers that are here, you see.

KK: That is terrific.

WC: In fact, this year's about eight or ten years ago I was fishing on Lake Winnebago. Two people from *National Geographics* came to my shanty and wanted to see what this was all about and see if they should do a story about sturgeon fishing on the lake. So, I never heard anymore from them, which is fine. I mean, I just –

KK: That is funny though, that they just came by and wrapped on you –

WC: Yes.

KK: -in your shanty.

WC: Yeah. I got a call. Well, later on, in later years, I went to New York with Ron Brooks and with Fred Bukowski. They asked me to go along to a world fisheries sub-conference. I was sitting in the back of this big auditorium with all these people, talking scientists, whatever. I sat right in the back row and, I mean, just sitting and listening. Doroshov was there, Serge Doroshov. He lives in California. He's a Russian that migrated here, escaped from Russia. He is also an embryologist. He works at the University of Davis, California.

KK: That is right. I have heard about him a bit.

WC: Yeah. Anyway, he was behind me talking to someone. Suddenly, this guy that he was talking to came and sat with me and said, "Are you Bill Casper?" I said, "Yeah." Well, he said, "Tell me what you're doing in Lake Winnebago in Wisconsin." I started talking to him in this auditorium. I couldn't talk loudly. We're just chatting. He's jotting some things down and telling him what we're doing. I probably told him about Ballard. I probably told him this story I'm telling you. So, anyway, he said, "You might as well stop." He said, "Stop." He said, "I'm coming to Wisconsin." He is a writer for Sports Illustrated. He says, "I'm going to do a story on you fishing on Winnebago. Anyway, they sent a photographer out. They sent Robert Boyle here. I have one for you I could show you. If you want to stop [inaudible]. I didn't make the cover, you notice.

KK: [laughter]

WC: That was in 1996. Dennis Robbins made the cover. But anyway, I don't know where I am here. But I wanted to give you this book.

KK: So, no one was really aware of the Sturgeon population in Winnebago? That is what it sounds like outside of the area.

WC: Well, I don't think so. I don't think it was publicized all that well. Not, not at all.

KK: I just find that interesting that when you called it Ballard.

WC: That was a surprise to me. Because at the time, we had been going fishing here all the time. It was one of those things we did. I don't even know who wrote this. "Great picture, Bill." I'll give you a different one.

KK: Is that a packer? [laughter]

WC: Yeah. Well, I have one signed by Mike Holmgren.

KK: Oh, you do?

WC: Yeah.

KK: Terrific.

WC: I don't know this guy. That's Mike Holmgren right there.

KK: You are right.

WC: That's Mike's signature. Yeah.

KK: Where did you get this from?

WC: Well, my daughter played golf with Mike Holmgren. She's a golf pro type teacher and whatever. She played in a tournament with him somewhere. She knew she was going to do that, and she took one of them magazines along. That's the book. I'll give you a different -

KK: Yeah. You better hang on to this one.

WC: Yeah. I'll give you another one. I got another.

KK: That is terrific.

WC: So anyway that's -

KK: Is that the shanty that you are still using?

WC: I still use it, yeah. After that, the story was written. Here's another one. So, I mean, I got a mic there. [inaudible]

KK: [laughter]

WC: You can take that one if you're interested in it. It helps. But not that it's something you need to write about. But it's even someone called me from flying across the country with Midwest Express. Someone called me and said, "You're in the -"

KK: -the *Midwest Express Magazine*." [laughter].

WC: Yeah. So, anyway, someone got this out of the plane for you. Here.

KK: Can I keep that too?

WC: Sure.

KK: I mean, borrow it for now.

WC: Yeah. It doesn't matter. Do whatever. Even I should show you this stuff. This is -

KK: Wait, your shanty went to the Smithsonian?

WC: Yeah. I was at the Smithsonian for Sesqui-Centennial. I was there two weeks.

KK: You took the shanty out there?

WC: Yeah. They hauled it out.

KK: [laughter].

WC: Smithsonian hauled it there. How many people were there? Oh, Lord. There were all different things that happened in Wisconsin. We were at the Smithsonian. I was on the Washington between the Washington Monument and the Capitol on The Mall. That's where they set it all up. So, I spent two weeks there talking to people about fishing on Lake Winnebago.

KK: I bet they ate it up.

WC: I started the first morning with a group of people waiting. This professor from the - I shouldn't call him a professor. It was a Smithsonian director, whatever, an older man. He was sitting on the wheel of my shanty on the side. He said, "Well, here he comes right now. I just got off the bus." That was the first morning. This happened to be a group of schoolteachers, like above twenty-five of them from that area, Washington, D.C. area. They were all traveling together and just wanted to look around and go on this, whatever. I talked to them for twenty minutes almost, before I got my shanty opened up and got my things out. But it was amazing how they -

KK: Did you let people go in?

WC: Oh, yeah.

KK: [laughter]

WC: I would open. We have a picture of a sturgeon that someone had taken that was swimming through the hall. Smithsonian blew that up. It's about this big. We laid that down in the hole of my shanty so people could walk in there and see what it looked like. So, yeah.

KK: That is neat.

WC: Yeah. That worked out good. This happened too. This is *Outdoor Life* magazine. They gave an award. They do that every year.

KK: Wow.

WC: At that time, we had given about 300,000 to the DNR. Now it's over 600,000. Someone

that was involved with that award said that went to Jimmy Carter, I got it, and Aldo Leopold.

KK: Really?

WC: Yeah.

KK: So, you share the same award as Aldo Leopold –

WC: Yeah.

KK: – and Jimmy Carter. That is terrific. I am just thinking about you out there on The Mall. So, you did that every day?

WC: Every day.

KK: You would show up and just talk to people [inaudible].

WC: I get on a bus –

Cathy Casper: [inaudible] how hot it was.

KK: [laughter]

WC: It was hot. Cathy went with me. She stayed one week and then went back home. But it was hot. But I didn't really mind it at all. I pushed my shanty over under a tree, and there were always people there. But what would happen almost every day, sometimes twice a day, I would be asked, as all other people were asked, to go sit in a conference area where people could come. We would talk about to this audience. It was recorded. So, it could be in the Smithsonian Archives, the story about Wisconsin. I talked about fishing. I talked about my great grandparents, how they migrated to this area, and farming and whatever they did. It was just basically that. That's all. Every day would be almost a different subject. You get, "Can you come and talk now about this?" So, that's how the thing was.

KK: Wow. How neat.

WC: Yeah. Ruth was there.

KK: So, you have known her since?

WC: I've known her since we went to the Smithsonian.

KK: Okay. All right.

WC: Then after the article in *Sports Illustrated*, I got a call from New York. Cathy called me. I was just walking home. We had built a little golf course across the road here. I was just coming home to eat lunch. She says, "Get in here. There's somebody calling from New York. I can't

tell who it was." It was Robert Kennedy. He called me.

KK: Oh, yeah. I've heard of - okay.

WC: Anyway, send me that picture up there. See that top one?

KK: [laughter]

WC: I wouldn't believe it. I thought it was Robert Boyle calling me just kind of putting the crap on me. But it was Kennedy. In fact, there's another sturgeon general he calls. [laughter] He wanted to know if he could get a sturgeon from us. He asked Robert Boyle where he could get a sturgeon. Boyle said, "Call Bill Casper in Wisconsin. I'm sure he'll get you a fish." So, I found that in a tavern. In fact, it's Bob Blanck I was telling you about, Blanck Supper Club.

KK: He got this in -

WC: That was hanging in the Supper Club in a big case. Some woman speared it. Her name was Gwen (Bowl?). She speared that sturgeon. Anyway, she still owned the fish. I said, "Well, I'm looking for a big one to take to New York." We took it out of there, took it back to the taxidermy, and had it gone over, touched up and everything. Then Cathy and I hauled it to New York in a van to Kennedy's house. [laughter]

KK: Why did he want it?

WC: This is hanging in a little museum that he built. He teaches at Pace University. That's where the sturgeon's hanging in there on that wall right there.

KK: Wow. You took it to his house?

WC: Took it right to his house.

KK: [laughter]

WC: She could tell you about that.

KK: [laughter]

WC: We got there at night. It was dark. It was quite late. I said, "Well, let's go find his place anyway." So, we were going to get to a motel. I saw, here's his driveway and the address on the post. So, I wheel in there. She says, "You can't go in there this time of night." I know it was late, happened to be the night before Halloween, I think, October something. I drove in on the circle and went up to the door and rang the bell. A young guy came to the door. I told him that I was bringing a sturgeon from Wisconsin, and I just wanted to tell Robert Kennedy, if he's there. So, he said, "Well, he's going to want to know this." So, he was upstairs getting ready to go out to somewhere that evening, came down, and took us to where our motel was. The next day, we went back there. Then we took the sturgeon over to the university and unpacked it, because he

wanted to see it. That was in a big cardboard box with peanut packing around that way. Then he took us to New York in his car. I told him, "We want to see New York City." Well, he said, "You're not driving to New York City. So -"

KK: "- in the van." [laughter] So, he took you around?

WC: He took us in his van, in his Plymouth Voyager type thing. It wasn't that big a deal car. Then he said, "If you want to go to a show, go see Blue Man (Tubes?)." We went to that. He told us where to go have dinner. Then we were going to tour New York City. He got out of the car. There was a tour bus going by. He waved at him. The guy knew him.

KK: [laughter]

WC: So, got us on a bus. Never did pay for that bus ride. But anyway, the guy just got us on it and took us on a tour to New York. Then we went to have dinner. Then we went to a show. Then we caught a train from Grand Central back up to White Plains where they lived. Then the following day, we spent the day with him.

KK: How nice.

WC: Met his neighbor, Glenn Close.

KK: [laughter]

WC: So, I mean, what a sturgeon will do for you.

KK: [laughter]

WC: Just stick around the sturgeon, see. This is all because of a sturgeon.

KK: He is just fascinated with them?

WC: Oh, yeah, he is. He's just fascinated with nature things.

KK: A lot of things. Yeah.

WC: Yeah. The environment is just big. In fact, he has an aquarium in this museum. It's not all that big. He's got an aquarium with the bottom sand in the aquarium with all different things in it that he took out at the bottom of the Hudson River that he's been working on the Hudson. The fact is, after we were there and we spent - he gets to know you, and I get to know him. He came to Oshkosh to speak at the university. They had him as a guest speaker. He was flying in across to come across Lake Winnebago to land in Oshkosh. He said to whoever was with him, "What's this big lake?" The guy said, "That's Lake Winnebago." He said, "That's where Bill lives."

KK: [laughter]

WC: He had my phone number in his – and called here and said that Cathy and I should come and have dinner with him. But we weren't here. So, he left a message. I tried getting back to him, which was too late because he was already going to go to dinner by the time we got over there. But he said, "You come anyway." He was doing a book signing after his talking and this and that. So, she and I went over, sat through his conference thing. It's amazing. Not all part of your sturgeon story.

KK: No. That was really interesting. [laughter]

WC: So, anyway, it's just a little side thing.

KK: [laughter] So, Bill, I am sure everybody asks you this, but I mean, you have been spearing for so long.

WC: [laughter] How many fish?

KK: Well, no, not how many fish, but what was it that kind of made it click in your mind, "Wow, we really need to do something because –"

WC: Well, I started going fishing when I was just young. I mean, my uncles would come out from Milwaukee. They'd come out on a Friday night. Stay at our home up here on the farm. Early Saturday morning, we'd go out on the lake. When I first wanted to go, I was 7. My mom said, "There's a rule. You can't go on the lake until you're 8," she says. She was just putting this off a year.

KK: [laughter]

WC: Anyway, so, I started going with my uncles. Times were tough then. Then there were no snowplows. It was before World War II. There were no four-wheel drive trucks. They all sort of came to be during the war, the Jeeps and the four-wheel drive Dodge trucks and things we use. So, it was a matter of taking shovels along. You'd drive out to the lake and shovel a path if you got stuck and whatever to get out there. But day after day, we'd go. Then when I was 14, my uncle gave me a shanty, and I started fishing by myself. He built a new shanty and built new equipment, gave me his spear, same spear I have there. So, it was later on, 1976, something like that, when I just sitting there not having seen anything for a long time, I just thought, "God, you wonder what will happen to this lake if the sturgeon would become – let's say a disease would hit the lake. Let's say something would happen." That's sort of what got it going. I read an article that happens to be right here. I shouldn't keep all this stuff, but I do.

KK: No, I am glad you did. [laughter]

WC: This bulletin right here came out from the DNR at that time. They said in this article right here, they were talking about, see, when I first started fishing, you could spear five fish. Tags were a nickel a piece. I remember my dad saying, "Don't waste a quarter on buying five tags." He said, "Just buy two for a dime." Times were tough. He said, "When you get your fish, you can always go back. You could always stop in the tavern and buy another tag, say, for a nickel."

So, anyway, suddenly they decided to cut down on the number of fish. To cut it down from five to three, two, and a one. I thought, "Well, there's nowhere to go now. You got it down to one." So, then what the DNR started doing was increasing the size that you could spear. It was at 40 inches. They made it 45. Gordy Priegel or Tom Wirth, I don't know which one, from Madison was suggesting that the way to really curb this thing was to raise it up even higher, to allow you only to spear - I don't know if the number was 50-some inches or whatever. But that fish had to be that big before you take it. Well, my impression has always been that if you're hook and line fishing, you can have catch and release. But if you're sturgeon spearing and the fish is undersized, you have to throw it back. Because there's going to be a big fine, if you don't. That fish is going to die anyway. So, all these things that go through your mind. So, that's where all of it started from.

KK: So, were you thinking, well -

WC: I was thinking that it was wrong to curb this thing by raising that. Because I knew they were killing a lot of fish out here.

KK: Just throwing them back.

WC: They had to throw them back because they'd be fined over \$1,000. So, what I did when Sturgeon for Tomorrow was started - it's about just ten years ago. I knew this didn't go over too big with a lot of people. But what I did at one of our dinners - because we have 560 people come to the dinner. So, what I did, I circulated a little ballot at the dinner. What I did was ask people. I'll show you this here. It's somewhere right here. This is exactly what I circulated right here.

KK: You still have all of this?

WC: I kept it.

KK: [laughter]

WC: In fact, Brooks wanted to keep them. Now, I knew he was against this that night. He thought, "What in the hell are you doing, Bill?" But I asked sturgeon spears survey, individual response only. So, see, there were a lot of people at the dinners that were husband and wife. I said if they fish together, I don't want both of them to fill one out. I want from one family. So, what I'm saying was, "During this 1995 sturgeon spearing season on Lake Winnebago, were you forced to return any sturgeon less than 45 inches? Then please circle yes or no." I gave out 300 of these. Whoever helped me, they circulated them out. Just passed them out. We went and picked them up. A lot of people said, "No, they didn't."

KK: Those are all the nos.

WC: These are the nos. These are the yes. This guy said they threw back more than four. When this survey came out, see, there was 3, 3, 4, 2, 2, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1, 1. All these were one. This was all at this one dinner.

KK: These are just the Sturgeon for Tomorrow people.

WC: Yeah. These are people that go fishing. When you're sitting there sturgeon fishing and that fish comes in, you can't tell the murky water. You cannot tell. A lot of people wrote on there, "If it's too small, don't throw." They'd write a note on there for me. But these are the people that said, "Yeah, we did." When Ron Brooks happened to be at that – with Fred – at our dinner, when he heard the results of this survey that night, he was sitting calculating out what was happening in Lake Winnebago. He told me after a while, he said, "I believe if 500 or 300-some people voted on it that night, in this group, there's 5,000 shanties going in the lake." He estimated that every year we were throwing back 2,000 fish and killing them. Where a lot of times people get a fish, they'll take it. They go home. They tag it. They're done. Then I went and talked to the Natural Resources Board with Ron and convinced that rather than raise this thing to 45 to 50 inches, these fish, let's lower it. Let's take it off. If a guy's satisfied with a little fish and will be embarrassed walking into a tavern carrying this little sturgeon, but he put his tag on it, he's going home. He's finished fishing. Where what they were doing was spearing them, wasn't big enough, they throw it back, spear another one. This is ten years, 1995 to 2005. It was more than ten years. But if Brooks is right that we were throwing back that many fish, do you imagine every year there's that many fish added to this. Our population of fish is up in this lake right now. So, I think it's one of the best things that happened. I didn't know what I was doing at the time, but it turned out to be a very good thing.

KK: I guess when you think too that it is usually most of the females, that you are looking for a 50-inch fish, or a lot of them are females and then you end up –

WC: I know.

KK: That was a big change.

WC: That's a big change. That was a monstrous change.

KK: So, what is the size limit now? You cannot remember.

WC: Thirty-six.

KK: Thirty-six. Okay.

WC: Then now you can tell. Now they're small. Forty-five looks big, but it might be 44.5.

KK: Or 42 or –

WC: You can nail. You can throw it back. You've got to. You can't take a chance. To me, it has saved more fish than – and of course our sturgeon patrol that we have in the river. You'll see. You're part of it tomorrow or whenever?

KK: Wednesday night.

WC: Wednesday?

KK: Yeah.

WC: You'd be lucky if they're still spawning.

KK: So, are they -

WC: They're spawning.

KK: Right now?

WC: They're spawning right now.

KK: Well, it is a good thing we came up then.

WC: So, you better get up there.

KK: [laughter]

WC: You better go over there tomorrow.

KK: Yeah, I am going to go. That is why I decided to come up tonight, so that if Ron and the guys were out tagging, I would be around.

WC: This guy was interviewed too. This is what the violators of the (Wolf?) used to use, this hook like this. They tie a string on here, a cord about that long. They have these separated in the river about this far apart with a heavy rope on it across the river. Well, the sturgeons are up there. They're in there right now. They're so thick. Well, with this weight hanging on it, when the fish swims by, it'll rotate around. It'll catch that fish right in the stomach. It'll have them caught. He'll fight, and maybe get two of these in them. But just look what a brutal thing that is.

KK: Is that a lead weight?

WC: That's a lead weight hanging under the hook. So, you can see what will happen to these. These are big set lines. They're mainly looking for the big spawners that are in the river. They want those black eggs. They want that caviar.

KK: So, how did the guard idea start?

WC: Well, I don't know if we started it. I mean we supported it since day one. I can't even say. I know that they talk about having a sturgeon guard. I mean, I wouldn't want to take credit for it. I honestly can't.

KK: Was it the DNR though, or was it someone -

WC: Well, the DNR, yeah, definitely said, "Hey, like if you people are so interested -"

KK: If you are really serious about -

CC: Students at Stevens Point.

WC: Pardon?

CC: The DNR got the students at Stevens Point.

WC: Yeah. They used to come down. We used to send them money.

CC: They are the ones that were the first -

WC: Yeah. They used to be there.

CC: - patrol.

KK: Stevens Point undergrads?

WC: Right. We would send money to them for gas money to get here. We would send them 600, \$700, whatever to get the kids down here. Then we had caps made. You know that. I should give you a cap. I got so many of them.

KK: [laughter]

WC: You should wear one when you go over there tomorrow, the long cap. Because they'll give you one tomorrow.

[end of transcript]