

People of the Sturgeon: Wisconsin's Love Affair with an Ancient Fish

Russell Collar Oral History

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Interviewer: RMB – Ronald M. Bruch

Transcriber: NCC

Ronald M. Bruch: Yes. This project that we are working on, we started this a couple years ago actually. Matter of fact how it started, we were working spearing season – all this, that, and just wonderful stories. I am driving home that day, and I am thinking, "We have to capture this history somehow." Because there are people that either have lived through it or their parents or grandparents have lived through all of these experiences. With every passing generation, we are losing information. We are losing a lot of good information of how important the sturgeon resource was to people. Whether it was fishing just for food for the family or whatever, or recreation or whatever, or trade.

Russell Collar: Yes. Guys that we know, they're all dead. If you don't do it every year, you lose contact.

RMB: Right, right. But now your family has been in Shiocton for several generations?

RC: Oh, yes. My dad and I moved to Hortonville, then we moved to Stephenville. Then we moved here, and we've been here for years and years.

RMB: Oh, yes. So, your dad eventually settled in Shiocton?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Oh, yes. In this spot right here where your house is now?

RC: No, no. I bought this when we got married. There used to be a house up by that road going to Lake Park.

RMB: Oh, yes. Right off of here?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Off of 187?

RC: Yes. The house is all gone now. They built like that. My brother bought that.

RMB: Oh, yes. So, you have been on the river your whole life?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: So, what is your earliest recollection in your life of sturgeon when you were just a little guy? What is your earliest memory?

RC: Oh, God. I remember my dad and I was fishing, and the damn wardens used to launch the boats up here by the tavern. My mother used to take the shotgun out and shoot three times. Yes, I was the signal. Yes. I was just a little guy then, but I remember holding the shotgun down for her.

RMB: Really?

RC: Yes.

RMB: She was the signal?

RC: Yes.

RMB: For crying out loud. So, they put their boats in just upstream from Shiocton here? The wardens would?

RC: Yes. They used to put the boat down here in the corner where the bio comes across. Yes. The bio comes across to where the wardens used to launch the boat there.

RMB: Oh, sure. This is past the Stonebridge right up there, huh?

RC: No, no, not that far.

RMB: Was not far? Or down where the shack comes close to the road?

RC: Yes, yes. That bio is just a bio. But when the water is high, then –

RMB: Oh, right here. Yes. Okay.

RC: Oh, yes. It used to be a lot of fun.

RMB: Well, you probably knew some of the wardens, right?

RC: Oh, yes. I knew Hedrick.

RMB: Harold Hedrick?

RC: Yes. He was a good one. He's a good game warden. He could sit down and talk to you and talk you out of anything. [laughter] He's good. He was really good. Yes. He's the only one I ever really got to know, and I liked.

RMB: Yes. But there were guys like O. K. Johnson.

RC: Yes.

[talking simultaneously]

RMB: Ken Corbett?

RC: Oh, yes. Yes. Did he work New London area?

RMB: Yes, it is Clintonville.

RC: Yes. (Ross Martin?).

RMB: (Ross Martin?) Yes. I am not familiar with him. Was there not a (Vandon Bloom?), too? A Vandon Bloom?

RC: Oh, yes. He wasn't here very long, though. I don't know what happened to him.

RMB: Oh, yes. Probably he got run out of town, huh? [laughter]

RC: No, we don't want to live in that town now.

RMB: Yes. Mike Young lives right in town. That is probably a good thing.

RC: That's right. Yes. I never really read it, but the guys talked, and I knew it.

RMB: Well, from what we have seen or heard with people up along the river up here, they would harvest sturgeon, and one of the favorite techniques was the snag line.

RC: Oh, yes. Snag. We got a 60-pounder albino, white one. We were fishing and coming back. I was running the line. I took the gaff off the hook to take her off the line, and there she was lying, the albino.

RMB: Oh, wow.

RC: We parked down in Main Street. There used to be a standard station. I think everybody in town came and looked at that fish. [laughter]

RMB: Is that right?

RC: Yes. I never thought about getting one.

RMB: Oh, sure, sure. What year? What was that? About what year did that happen?

RC: I'm eighty-one now, and that was when I was nineteen, twenty. That's a long time ago.

RMB: Yes. So, right around probably just right after World War II, around that time?

RC: Yes. Just after I got home service.

RMB: Oh, were you in the service during the war?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: What unit did you serve in?

RC: I was in 182nd Japan.

RMB: Really?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Oh, yes. Because they got shifted from Europe to the Pacific Theater.

RC: That was 11th. When they got in Japan, it was 11th airport.

RMB: Yes. Oh, no kidding. So, you were not in Europe then. You did not have to go to Europe. You came in just before the war?

RC: Just after that. In fact, we were getting ready to ship over there when the war ended.  
[laughter] [inaudible]

RMB: Oh, man. I guess so. Well, World War II history is one of my personal hobbies. Yes. So, I kind of follow that.

RC: Yes. I couldn't believe how they're [inaudible] Japan. You were on a little island down the port. There are guns and everything. Yes. If we had to invade that, I wouldn't be here.

RMB: No, that is for sure. That's for sure. But when you came back from the war then, then you settled right in Shiocton?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: So, obviously, you probably had fish as a major part of your diet then.

RC: Oh, yes. Sturgeon.

RMB: So, how did the seasons go? I mean, through the course of the year, you always did not have the same fish throughout the year. Right? I mean, it is like maybe spring was sturgeon. But did you also have sturgeon in the fall?

RC: Oh, yes. Actually, we had a season here, then in the fall.

RMB: Hook and line season.

RC: Hook and line.

RMB: Did you participate in that?

RC: No, never did.

RMB: It was not very well advertised. [laughter]

RC: Yes. There were no seats in there.

RMB: Oh, yes. In the fall of the year, how would people up here harvest them in the fall? Would that –

RC: Same way with snag lines.

RMB: Oh, really?

RC: Oh, yes. It was fun. When it was coming back, you jugged on the line and fished them high. So, that's how we had that white one fishing.

RMB: So, when they are coming back, do you think they are just drifting down?

RC: Yes, it slowed it back.

RMB: But head first.

RC: Yes. It just froze.

RMB: Just drifting back. But on the way up, the lines would be deeper than you fish then? You would fish down the bottom?

RC: Yes. We fished down the bottom.

RMB: But the hook probably was not right on the bottom, was it?

RC: No.

RMB: Just stand it up somehow.

RC: You had three-foot snag lines and the hooks. We probably had twenty-five, thirty hooks, and they would just snag them.

RMB: Yes. The wardens, they used to go out and drake for them, did they not?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: Drake for the lines. [laughter]

RC: Yes.

RMB: I mean, how did you keep up with that? Because when they do that on a quite regular basis or –

RC: Once they found the line, then they done it every day. But we would get them out ahead of them.

RMB: Move them around in that.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Those lines were pretty much – you guys just made all that stuff, right? It was all home-made.

RC: Yes, it was all home-made. Sinkers, and that would take –

RMB: Oh, yes. You probably pour your own lead through the sinkers.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Yes. The hooks, you just ordered from some –

RC: Yes. Hardware stores had sturgeon hooks.

RMB: Oh, is that right? They would sell them as sturgeon hooks?

RC: Oh, sure.

RMB: Really?

Kathleen Schmitt Kline: Really?

KSK: Yes. Size, you wanted 16s or 12s or whatever.

RMB: Is that right?

RC: Yes. Sixteen, that hook, they cost a lot of money. Expensive.

RMB: Were those stainless steel too? No?

RC: No.

RMB: But still in that, that's a big hook. Very expensive.

RC: Yes. They were expensive.

RMB: You think that most of the people that took sturgeon, that it was mostly for families, or the majority was just for eating for the family? Or was more of it for going for sale, somebody was going to buy it from you?

RC: Oh, yes. Once we got too many that we couldn't use, then we'd call – we had a guy named Shawn. He'd come and get a dozen, fifteen, whatever we had, and us guys, we had to butcher them for him.

RMB: Oh, really?

RC: Yes. But he'd take what you had.

RMB: What about the caviar? Did you ever try the caviar?

RC: Oh, yes. I tried it. I spent four hours. I didn't like it. [laughter] To me, it tasted like rotten fish.

RMB: But were there people interested in caviar?

RC: Oh, yes. We had a hardware store. Did you ever know of (Donnie Andrews?)?

RMB: Is that the hardware store that's here now?

RC: No, that's torn out now. It's a garage and hardware store. He had a basement in there. He used to be in the garage, and he would dominate the caviar. [laughter] That's when we unloaded them there. We drove in the garage and unloaded them. Yes. There wasn't a very big basement, but he had everything ready.

RMB: Everything ready down there.

RC: Screens and everything and screen them.

RMB: How did your family prepare them? What was your favorite way to eat them? Smoked or –

RC: Smoked, and I like it fried.

RMB: Fried?

RC: Yes. We steaked them. You got to get all that yellow fat off. You have to trim that all off. They had it labeled baby food. I know that. I heard them talking there. This is all hearsay, but they used to ship it out in boxes.

RMB: For crying out loud. Right out of the shack?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Well, now, where did the train come through Shiocton?



RC: Right on Main Street, going up.

RMB: Oh, yes, yes. That one there.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Oh, sure.

RC: See, that's all gone now. Years ago, they fought for. Now they took them out.

RMB: Yes. That is where the track is, right down there by the lumberyard.

RC: Yes. That's right.

RMB: Did they have a depot down there then?

RC: Yes. There used to be a depot there. In fact, we took the last ride to school. It was in school that we rode to New London.

RMB: Oh, yes. For crying out loud. Was depot on the west side then, or was on the east side?

RC: North side tracks.

RMB: On the north side? On the north side of the tracks?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Right by the river rail there.

RC: Well, beyond that, yes. Then it closes the tracks. In fact, when it wasn't going to stop on this track, then he had a wire that he pulled the switch list down and then catch it. Now we're stopped. Yes. We used to watch that a lot.

RMB: As you were growing up, did you notice any changes in the sturgeon population as you were – through all your years with the sturgeon as far as the number of fish or the size of the fish or – did you notice anything like?

RC: I think the size of the fish got smaller. But as far as many, I think there's more now.

RMB: Yes. Right.

RC: But they clamped down on it. Took the fun out of it. [laughter] Yes.

RMB: Well, how many snag lines could a person – actually, from a practical standpoint, how many lines could you actually run?

RC: Well, we had three down and then moved in. There's three snag lines and there was no line. We had one and some other guys had one and then another bunch had one. We all fish in groups. So, if one guy got caught, the rest got away. That's the way it was. Yes.

RMB: But you probably had to be careful about when you checked them. Probably more at night or didn't –

RC: Or you check them. When the fish is really here, you rock them every ten minutes.

RMB: Oh, really?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: Well, I suppose they snag up with leaves and stuff, too. Would that be a problem in the spring?

RC: Not too much. I'm just frank. No, after that was all cleaned up. You had some, but not there.

RMB: Yes. Did people run them in the fall at all or no? Did they run the snag lines in the fall?

RC: No, no. While the water was lower than in the fall, you grabbed a spear and you caught them on the sandbar.

RMB: Oh, you would see them and spear them.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Oh, yes.

KSK: What type of spear did you use?

RC: Regular walleye spear. A little heavier than the walleye spear. Yes.

RMB: Do you think there are any of those spears around anymore?

RC: I don't think so.

RMB: No. Those are all home-made too probably. If you got fish and had to hold them, how would you hold the fish, or how would you keep them alive?

RC: You tie them by the tail.

RMB: Right by the tail.

RC: Slip knot. Yes. You couldn't leave them over four or five days. Otherwise, the tails are

right off.

RMB: Really?

RC: Yes. Did you ever see a surgeon with the tail off?

RMB: Yes. [laughter] I have seen a few without tails.

RC: Oh, yes. See that? If they had a slip knot on their tail, I don't know.

RMB: Just kept tightening up and tightening up.

RC: Yes. Come right off.

RMB: For crying out loud. Holy cow. They would stay alive on that?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: But you probably could not put them right out in strong current. You would have to put them in –

RC: Oh, yes. Bio. It was good water but not stretched.

RMB: Yes. Holy cow. In your recollection, was there sturgeon ever go up the Shioc River?

RC: Not that I know of.

RMB: No. Mostly stayed right in the main stem of the wall.

RC: Yes. Walleyes used to walk there, but not sturgeon.

RMB: Oh, yes. So, walleyes did?

RC: Oh, yes. In fact, Paul Weber, I think he was in his eighties the last time he got caught. He had just come out by the vine of the high water. Yes. I forget his name now. He's a Weber, I know that.

RMB: We just met with Haze Diemel, and he had a fun story about how he had taken some fish. You know Haze.

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: He said when they cleaned them, they would not cut through by the back of the head. They would leave it attached in there and then they twist the head so they could pull the notochord off. Did you clean them the same way?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Pull a notochord out?

RC: You had to pull them off the head because the chord on the head was bigger than it was on the tail.

RMB: Yes. Did that notochord, did it leave a bad taste or something or why did you pull it out?

RC: You leave it in, it gives a bad taste to the fish.

RMB: It would, huh?

RC: Oh yes.

RMB: Did you cut the scutes off the side too? The roll scutes?

RC: No.

RMB: No?

RC: No. Well, we had to clean them. We always took the head off and the guts.

RMB: Oh, yes.

RC: The rest stayed on.

RMB: Oh, yes. Well, Haze said that he had cleaned some fish like that, and it was in the spring. There were a lot of wardens around. He would come home, and his dogs were playing jump rope with one of those notochords.

RC: Oh, yes. [laughter] Oh, yes. That was years ago.

RMB: Do you know if anybody used the heads to make soup?

RC: No.

RMB: No? Some people didn't really have a use for the head or anything?

RC: No. Bullheads, and they made soup out of them.

RMB: Oh, really?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: The Mississippi's?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Out of the heads of the Mississippi?

RC: Yes.

RMB: There are a lot of meat on their cheeks in that, is it not?

RC: Yes. She'd pull a lot. She made fish soup all the time.

RMB: Really?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Did you fish Mississippi's too? Did you fish flatheads also?

RC: Oh, yes. I had a picture of the biggest one we got. I don't know what I've done to that. It was a big one.

RMB: So, that was with set lines? Oh, really?

RC: Yes.

RMB: That was with set lines too, huh?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Live bait. What did you use for bait then?

RC: Bullheads, about 10, 12-inch bullheads. You could use them bigger too. There wasn't –

RMB: Oh, yes. Do you think those flatheads would eat small sturgeon too?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: Yes. Did you ever find any in the stomach of a flathead? Did you ever find a sturgeon in the stomach?

RC: Never did.

RMB: No.

RC: We fished flatheads, it takes a lot of time. You get the bait and if you had to buy it, it cost too much to buy.

RMB: Oh, yes. Right.

RC: Oh, yes. That was fun years ago.

KSK: So, did your dad go out? Did your dad go out and get sturgeon too?

RC: Oh, yes. Years ago. Yes. I remember when I was a boy, they'd come in by the lumberyard where the office is now, there used to be a big building there. God, he was down there one day, and he was hooking them up. We're standing all back and watching him. He hooked the big one and in the water he went. [laughter]

KSK: Pulled him in?

RC: Pulled him in. Yes.

RMB: Oh my gosh. So, he is just hooking them with a fishing pole and snag line?

RC: No, he had a snood line tied on to the rest with a hook in his hand.

RMB: So, he was attached to the line, so he couldn't let go. [laughter]

[talking simultaneously]

RMB: Holy cow.

KSK: So, he was in the water wrestling around, pulling in? [laughter]

RC: Yes. He was over in our shack and scared as it were, but not once he got out.

RMB: That was your dad. Wow. Well, I do not imagine that was the last time – he did not stop hooking after that.

RC: Oh, no. He had a sturgeon down by the lumberyard. Yes. I never went out.

RMB: Well, that is a deep hole there too by the lumberyard. There is a lot of junk down in that hole. There is a whole car down there. I mean, people just threw that stuff in there or how did it –

RC: Years ago, Curtis Jones had a John Deere shop. Man, all that crap went in the river.

RMB: Really? Just went in the river.

RC: Yes. They throw it on the bank, and they'd go wash. Them days, they didn't care.

RMB: What is your recollection of sturgeon spawning in the Shioc or on the river here? Any place that you have an experience because years ago, there probably were only a handful of

areas where the fish would actually spawn. Close here to Conley's Bar down here.

RC: Conley Bar, yes. Oh, yes. They used to spawn there a lot in the rocks. Then when they're in Bamboo Bend there, that's what they're doing. They're spawning in the rocks.

RMB: Oh, yes, they are spawning. Yes. But the rocks were not always there at Bamboo, were they? Or were there always a few rocks there?

RC: Well, they've been there for years, and they started dumping in there. Started out with old sidewalks and stuff. Finally, they said no more sidewalks for the rocks. Clean rocks, and all that new rocks, that's what they like. They like the small rocks.

RMB: They like the new rocks. Yes.

RC: Now the rocks go halfway out in the river, so they got a lot of chance to –

RMB: Right. Do you think those rocks are good for flatheads too? Do you think those flatheads like the rocks in the river?

RC: Yes. I think so. Yes. Because that's when we got that big one down in Bamboo Bend right on the rocks.

RMB: Right on the rocks.

KSK: What did you do with that? You said you got that white fish, that albino fish that one time, what did you do with it? Did you eat it, or did you sell it?

RC: Yes, there's the guy who wanted it, but he had to take it to the fish hatchery. What was the name of that over here? West. He wanted to have it mounted. But when they got back to get it, I had it cut up because I had ordered a couple of chunks and I wanted some. So, I had cut it up and he got it. But we probably would never have gotten our share if they took it over there.

RMB: Oh, yes. Oh, man.

RC: We used to have a lot of fun. It used to be good.

RMB: You had a lot of good experiences on the river.

RC: Oh, yes. Kids nowadays, they don't know what that is.

RMB: No. Well, you probably fish walleyes too in the spring, during the winter?

RC: Oh, yes. Christ. Yes.

KSK: How would you say the river has changed over the years?

RC: The river? Oh, it's new beds all the time. It's cutting through it.

KSK: Moving around.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Do you think that the river overall has improved or stayed the same or –

RC: Oh, I think it's improved a lot. Oh, yes. Yes. It's a lot cleaner than all it was.

RMB: Oh, really?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: So, it was dirty or –

RC: Years ago, raw sewage in the river. Yes.

RMB: Yes. Have you ever seen DNR crews tagging the sturgeon? I am sure you have seen them.

RC: Tagging?

RMB: Yes.

RC: Oh, yes. We watched them tag them down at Bamboo Bend.

RMB: Oh, yes. Do you recall your first memory of seeing the biologist up there doing that tagging? Do you recall that?

RC: Do I what?

RMB: Do you recall when you first saw that happening, the tagging?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Was that recently or back in the [19]50s?

RC: Oh, no. It's way back. In fact, I don't think they tagged in the last ten years. Have they?

RMB: Oh, yes. We have been tagging every year now since 1975.

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: But they did some tagging back in the [19]50s and the [19]60s. I am trying to find out if people have any recollection of that when they were doing that back then.



RC: Yes, I can remember that.

RMB: Oh, yes. Right here at Bamboo Bend?

RC: Yes, Bamboo Bend. Where else? Oh, at Conley Bar.

RMB: Conley Bar.

KSK: What did people think about that around here? Did they think that was –

RC: Tagging them, you mean?

KSK: Yes. Do you think it was kind of weird or strange to see people, see the biologists coming up here and being in the water and getting things?

RC: I think they all liked it, and they all watched it to see what's going on.

KSK: Thought it was interesting?

RC: Yes, it was interesting to watch.

RMB: Do you ever go down and spearfish on Winnebago?

RC: No, no. Never. Well, I shouldn't say no. I was down there twice. First time, I didn't even see a walleye. [laughter] Oh, man. The next time I was there, I'd seen a few walleyes and white bass and stuff like that. Never seen a sturgeon.

RMB: No.

RC: Christ, go down there and watch and never see one.

RMB: It is like going to the meat market here.

RC: Yes.

RMB: So, back in the kind of the glory days of harvesting fish up here with set lines or snag lines, do you think that most families participated in that in Shiocton or just 50 percent of the families? Or was it a lot of people that participated in them?

RC: I think them days, if there's a warden around, you didn't see them. Somebody had to come and tell you, "Watch out, they're laying somewhere." In fact, we used to get a call from up when a new one come around and stayed at the motel. He used to call us.

RMB: Is that right?

RC: Give us a card number. Yes.

RMB: Yes. Wow.

RC: Oh, yes. Actually, you lose contact with everything. You don't want to quit. But now, I know what to do.

RMB: But a lot of people participated in the fishery.

RC: But we've seen that everybody had fish, too.

RMB: Yes. Right.

KSK: So, most families would be eating sturgeon?

RC: Oh, yes. It cost them nothing.

RMB: Great. Those are some good memories.

RC: Oh, yes. That was good old days.

RMB: Yes. I am sure you are familiar with Shadows of the Wolf, with the club?

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: I mean, they have done a lot of good work in the Shiocton area here.

RC: Oh, yes.

RMB: I do not think I have any other questions. So, that is great.

KSK: Thanks so much.

RMB: Yes. We have got a release form that basically our lawyers said that we have to have you sign so we can use this information in the book. It just allows us to use the information in the interview. The book is going to be out, let us see what is here. Too many zippers on this thing.

RC: Do I have to use my pencil?

RMB: Pencil or a pen.

KSK: So, was your dad a farmer? Did your dad farm around here?

RC: No. He worked different jobs.

KSK: Oh, different jobs. Okay.

RC: Me, when I went to work in the mill, I stayed there forty years.

RMB: Okay. Today is the 27th. Basically, this just says that we can use the information in the interview in the book. That is all we are going to use it for.

RC: I can sign here? Anywhere?

RMB: Yes, anywhere. Right below there.

RC: Oh, okay.

RMB: Great. Thank you very much.

RC: Yes. Say that I get a copy.

RMB: Oh, I will make sure you get a copy.

RC: Okay.

RMB: Yes. Well, we will have a chapter just on general information about sturgeon, a chapter on management program over the years, a chapter on the Wolf River and Shiocton. I do not think there will be a full chapter or how we're going to fit that in yet.

KSK: It is actually going to be part of the management chapter.

RMB: It will be part of the management chapter. So, there will be information there about recipes and everything, all the interesting stuff about sturgeon. So, we feel what happened here over the years in Shiocton, this is an important part of the history.

RC: Oh, yes.

KSK: It is.

RC: Yes. I believe that. Yes.

KSK: This has been really good for me to talk to people in this area because it is very different than down by the lake.

RMB: Butch Burnell just gave us this picture. This is Butch's dad right there, Bud Burnell.

RC: Oh, yes, that's Bud.

RMB: The other guys are Ray Verstegen and Merlin Lehman. So, I think that is Merlin Lehman and Ray Verstegen. They got the tail lines on like you said. This was taken, he said, right up here, right up on 187, up by Stonebridge, just to the left, way in the back of that field. Right in

there. They had held the fish in there and that bayou back in there.

KSK: You tie them up by the tail just to keep them in the water for a couple days until you were ready to –

RC: Three, four days, you keep them. After losing the tail, it's time.

KSK: Okay. So, you just had a couple days then.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Just to hold them. So, we figured this picture has got to be – because he was born in 1922, Butch's dad. It has got to be maybe even during the war. I don't know, but that vehicle there looks like it's got to be a [19]30s vintage vehicle. Would you not say?

RC: Yes. That's old but yes.

RMB: It is old. We are going to put this in the book too. Butch looks like his dad.

RC: Oh, yes. [laughter]

RMB: Did you know his dad?

RC: Oh, yes. Yes.

RMB: What did his dad do? Was he –

RC: He was a farmer. Yes. I don't know anything else about them. Oh, yes. Bud's dad, we had a low line of stairs up there. He lived there, off there.

RMB: Oh, by the old Stonebridge.

RC: Yes, yes.

RMB: Oh, that is where their farm was.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Okay. Well, that is real close to this picture then.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Right across the road.

RC: Just across on the right. There used to be a big house there.

RMB: Oh, okay. For crying out loud. Well, great. Well, thank you so much again.

RC: Okay. We had a guy named Shawn where he'd come and get a dozen, fifteen, whatever we had. The ice guys there, we had to butcher them for them.

RMB: Oh, really? Yes. What about the caviar? Did you ever try the caviar?

RC: Oh, yes. No, I tried it. I spent four hours. I didn't like it. To me, it tasted like rotten fish.

RMB: But were there people interested in caviar?

RC: Oh, yes. We had a hardware store. Did you ever know of Donnie Andrews?

RMB: Is that the hardware store that is here now?

RC: No, that's torn out now. It's a garage and a hardware store. He had a basement in there. He used to be in the garage, and he would dominate the caviar. [laughter] That's when we unloaded them there. We drove in the garage and unloaded them. Yes. There wasn't a very big basement, but he had everything ready.

RMB: Everything ready down there.

RC: Screens and everything and screen them.

RMB: How did your family prepare them? What was your favorite way to eat them? Smoked or –

RC: Smoked, and I like it fried.

RMB: Fried?

RC: Yes. We steaked them. You got to get all that yellow fat off. You have to trim that all off and then it was good to eat. Yes. Now you got to know how to fix them.

RMB: Sure, sure. So, what was your closest call with the wardens?

RC: Oh, God, I had some mad at me. I spent forty days in jail.

RMB: Oh, really?

KSK: You did. Forty days?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Who was the warden that did that to you?

RC: I don't know. It was a fish warden, I think.

RMB: Fish warden.

RC: We were fishing up by Carpenter. We were coming back, and we had jugs on them. A blind man could have seen him, but we had one little 40-pound surgeon when he caught us.

RMB: Is that right?

RC: Yes, spent forty days in jail. [laughter]

RMB: Wow.

RC: We had a lot of fun, though. It's really like a vacation.

RMB: Yes, right. So, what was your profession? I mean, were you able to take off of work?

RC: At that time, I didn't have a steady job. Work picked up when we quit. Then I went to work in the paper mill. Forty years, I worked there.

RMB: Oh, really? In?

RC: Kimberly.

RMB: In Kimberly. Oh, okay. Okay.

RC: Yes. I settled down after I met my wife. She settled me.

RMB: I would guess that people probably did not waste much back then either, did they, when fishing?

RC: Oh, no.

RMB: If you got fish, you used them.

RC: The generation or two before me, they used to ship it out.

RMB: Really?

RC: Oh, yes. That's where Clintons made their money.

RMB: Is that right?

RC: Oh, yes.

KSK: Where did they ship it to? Where did they ship it to?

RC: I don't know. I guess they had it labeled baby food. I know that. I heard them talking. This is all hearsay, but they used to ship it out in boxes.

RMB: For crying out of loud. Right out of shack?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Well, now, where did the train come through Shioc?

RC: Right on Main Street. On the other end of Main Street going out.

RMB: Oh, yes, yes. That one there.

RC: Yes.

RMB: Oh, sure.

RC: See, that's all gone now. Years ago, they fought for. Now, they took them out.

RMB: Yes. Right. That is where the track is, right down there by the lumberyard.

RC: Yes, yes. That's right.

RMB: Do they have a depot down there then?

RC: Yes. There used to be a depot there. In fact, we took the last ride to school. It was in school, and we rode to New London.

RMB: Oh, yes. For crying out loud. Was the depot on the west side then, or was on the east side?

RC: North side tracks.

RMB: On the north side of the tracks?

RC: Yes.

RMB: Right by the river rail there.

RC: Well, beyond that, yes. Then across the tracks, there was a track. In fact, when it wasn't going to stop, the guy came out of a shack. He had a wire that he pulled the switch list down and then caught it.

RMB: For crying out loud.

RC: Now we're stopped. Yes. We used to watch that a lot.

RMB: As you were growing up, did you notice any changes in the sturgeon population as you were – through all your years with the sturgeon as far as the number of fish or the size of the fish or did you notice anything like that?

RC: I think the size of the fish got smaller. But as far as many, I think there's more now than ever.

RMB: Yes. Right.

RC: But they clamped down on it. Took the fun out of it. [laughter] Yes.

RMB: Well, actually, from a practical standpoint, how many lines could you actually run? I mean, two, three?

RC: Well, we had three down and then moved in. There's three snag lines and there –

[end of transcript]