

People of the Sturgeon: Wisconsin's Love Affair with an Ancient Fish  
Vern and Karla Gebhart Oral History

Date of Interview: May 28, 2008

Location: Unknown

Length of Interview: 01:11:19

Interviewer: RB – Ronald Bruch

Transcriber: NCC

Ronald M. Bruch: I guess we could start.

Vern Gebhart: Start.

RMB: Sure. Well, we're here today with Vern Gebhart and Karla, his wife. It's May 28th, 2008. Vern is a longtime sturgeon spearer and decoy carver. So, we're just going to find out about that. I mean, your family has been – I mean, it's an established family in (Calumet County?) for generations now.

VG: Since sturgeon fishing started.

RMB: Really?

VG: My grandpa sturgeon fished before it was illegal.

RMB: Is that right?

VG: Yes. He was a little, let's just say, a violator.

RMB: [laughter]

VG: No. There was no season back in 1900.

RMB: No.

VG: Early 1900s. This is 1900s and [19]20s.

RMB: You're right that you could harvest the fish back then up until 1915. Because in 1915 they put a closed season. But earlier than that, the only regulation was they had an eight-pound minimum size limit that started in 1903. But I think it was legal to harvest so – but your grandpa was out there at that time harvesting?

VG: Yes, he was. Then my dad started when he was probably in the [19]40s – late [19]30s, [19]40s.

RMB: Were you able to get out there and spear with your grandpa too when you were little?

VG: No.

RMB: No?

VG: No. He passed away when I was only nine. So, this is my dad. The only time I ever seen him spearing when was the one he missed. Is that right [laughter]?

RMB: [laughter] Why?

VG: He speared a lot when I was really young. But when we got older, he just didn't – well, he was so busy and just didn't have much luck and kind of gave up.

RMB: Now, the farm we're on today, was this your dad's farm?

VG: No. Across the road.

RMB: Across over here. The red barn there?

VG: Yes. That's –

RMB: You were born and raised right there?

VG: Yes. Then we bought this farm.

RMB: Is your dad still around?

VG: No. He passed away years ago.

RMB: So, spearing was a big thing in your family?

VG: Oh, yes. He actually went sturgeon spearing, but he never went deer hunting years back.

RMB: Really?

VG: Just –

RMB: Just sturgeon spearing.

VG: – sturgeon. That's how he brought up.

RMB: Right. Exactly.

VG: Some people, it's in the blood, some kind of thing.

RMB: Right. So, imagine all your equipment and everything was up with all homemade equipment too, all your spears and shanties and –

VG: We never bought nothing.

RMB: Just made everything.

VG: Made everything. Well –

RMB: You still do?

VG: Yes.

RMB: [laughter]

VG: Still do, pretty much. The first spear my brother made wasn't the greatest, but it worked. But now, he really improved them.

RMB: Those early spears, how did you make those? What are –

VG: He more or less bought – I think we had like little round rods. They were soft metal, but they bent easy. But then we found out later on, we've got dump rake teeth like spring steel. That's still the best steel we found yet.

RMB: Really?

VG: Yes.

RMB: Well, do you just weld the barb on there or something?

VG: No. We put it in the forge, and we flattened it down and put a little curves around them. Then the barbs, that we don't waste. You don't cut nothing on. They all stay there.

RMB: Oh, I see.

VG: It's a little trick to it, but – I mean, it –

RMB: Still the best.

VG: – is the best we found yet.

RMB: Is that right?

VG: Yes.

RMB: So, you don't fish with flying barbs, do you?

VG: No. People ask, "Do you make flying barbs?" I said, "No." I said, "We've steel [inaudible] yet." Some people don't want them, some want strictly fine. Everybody has got what they prefer.

Kathleen Schmitt Kline: Have you used flying barbs before?

VG: I used one once. Somebody had one. It worked. Kind of crude, but it worked. But you hear different stories so –

KSK: Stick to what you know.

Karla Gebhart: So, on your travels, I've used dump rakes. I just want to stay [laughter] in good shape –

RMB: Well –

VG: It has to be pedaled a lot. The tines have to be pedaled a lot, but we found some real nice ones. But you make a lot of spears out of a dump rake. One tine will make –

KG: Three.

VG: One of those tines on the dump rake would probably make one spear.

RMB: Now, that dump rake –

VG: Yes.

RMB: – that's the one with those great big curve.

KG: Yes.

VG: [affirmative] You seen these in the yards usually.

RMB: Oh, sure.

KG: Decorations.

VG: But they go for the [inaudible] people for decorations.

RMB: That was just a hay rake, right?

VG: Yes. Well, it's just a rake farming and also to trip it. That's what they had before the side rakes came out.

RMB: Oh, I see.

VG: See the dump rakes, they're probably –

KG: They don't make them anymore.

VG: They quit probably fifty, sixty years ago.

RMB: Oh, sure. You see those sitting around in the barnyards in that.

VG: That was a lot of work trip.

RMB: Oh, absolutely. Yes.

VG: It was better than forklift but –

RMB: Well, right. But the side rakes –

[talking simultaneously]

When I worked on a farm, we used the side rake all the time. I didn't know what they were called, but I remember seeing those sitting around the farms.

VG: The real dump rakes, but we found out they were – that's good steel and –

RMB: Well, if I've seen it, I will let you know [laughter].

KG: Nobody has come back with the spear that they broke off –

RMB: Really?

KG: – compared to some of these that are done with the flying barbs, right?

RMB: Yes.

KG: Or the flying barbs –

VG: Well, it's what you put in it?

RMB: [affirmative]

VG: But you'll learn by making mistakes. Nobody is perfect. Like, our first ones, but it worked for us the first couple of years.

RMB: So, you started spearing right away when you're –

VG: I've started –

RMB: – young?

VG: – when I was thirteen or fourteen. I went there with my mom.

RMB: Really, your mom has speared too?

VG: Oh, yes. She's speared a couple.

RMB: Really?

VG: Yes.

RMB: There's a lot of women spearers?

KSK: Yes.

RMB: Do you spear, Karla?

KG: Yes. Well, there were seventeen kids, so she had to go on cook on the lake, who had reached out.

RMB: [laughter]

VG: Well, my dad was hauling [inaudible] he couldn't go most of the time. So, he goes, "Come on, buddy. Let's go." [laughter]

KSK: You drive your mother [laughter]?

RMB: Take your mother off to go spearing.

VG: Yes. Well, she speared one or two. She did spear when I missed a couple of nice ones that one day.

RMB: Oh, really?

VG: Yes.

RMB: Oh, boy. I mean, you probably didn't have sled saws back then either, did you?

VG: No.

RMB: It was all by hand?

VG: Everything by hand. Actually –

RMB: Did you have an ice saw or just chop the hole?

VG: Just with the chisel or spuds.

RMB: Spud the whole hole out.

VG: Oh, yes. We did that until we were probably in the [19]70s.

RMB: Wow.

VG: There were a lot of ice saws already. But my brother (Gary?) and us, a lot of times we have half hour, so we have only gotten two chisels going, one to shovel it. It goes pretty –

RMB: It was okay.

VG: It's all right. But today, you're getting old [laughter]. But when you're young, you do anything. But then you did move every half a day either –

RMB: Well, that's true.

VG: – just the first three, four days. You see back then that didn't hurt the lake so much. But look at the technology today, all the equipment, fish don't have a chance. They got them cameras. They looked on before season. They know where they are. Years ago, we didn't have that.

RMB: Did you ever get check for where the red worms were before the season?

VG: No.

RMB: Some guys do that.

VG: Yes. But no, we received only this.

RMB: These were all set up in your traditional spots?

VG: Yes. That's the rule. It varies every year.

RMB: You go right straight out here for [inaudible]?

VG: Into the park and Harbor, Mud Creek area. My dad always likes the Mud Creek area and the Harbor quite a bit. It's freezing in that areas. When we went to these often, but that's when you couldn't see up here. I prefer around here. I know I like the deep water [laughter].

RMB: So, how deep you normally fish over?

VG: Well, here I was eighteen to twenty feet.

RMB: So, you got all the way to the deep, right?

VG: Well, you go to (Coulee Park?), you go up to three, four, [inaudible] over the year in seventeen, eighteen feet.

RMB: Really?

VG: (Coulee Park?) was done fast. I always like to fish half a mile out and further out.



RMB: So, I suppose when you're younger too that maybe almost within the walking distance to you? This is the walk out therapy if you had to?

VG: Yes. We always fish about a mile. In later years, they got better vehicle stuff in about two, three miles. It's always between one and three miles, four miles as a rule.

RMB: So, what would be your – either craziest or most interesting spearing story of the shack with or without a fish [laughter]?

VG: The craziest?

RMB: More interesting story?

VG: Well, in [19]98, that was a real dandy down the (Coulee Park?) here. I mean, there were a lot of fish down there. Everybody was getting fish. So, one of my brothers got one. He pulled it up in a hole. He only had one tine. It was eighty pounds. When lifted out, my other brother had the gaff hook raised. He's about to lift it out and hear the tine broke off. He only had one tine. It flopped in the hole.

RMB: Oh, my gosh.

VG: He's lucky enough he gaffed it out. That was all right. So, my younger brother, he goes in there with the same spear although one tine is missing. So, he got another about the same size. What does he do, he has one tine again? So, he's braving on. He's got it up. He was by himself. He was going to lift it out of the hole. So, using the gaff hook like he supposed to, he's lifted it up. He's going to set it down on the floor. It fell off spearing and hit the floor, "plok." It goes right back in the hole, went out, made a nice circle, come right to the little hole. Talked about somebody that was mad.

RMB: He didn't have a backup spear?

VG: No.

RMB: Oh, no.

VG: But can you imagine he had it out of the hole, set it back, and it fell off and hit the floor?

RMB: Hit the floor and then bounce in –

VG: But half the fish plopped back in.

RMB: Plopped back in, but then it had –

VG: Then it had the –

RMB: It had the goal of swimming back to [laughter] –

KSK: To try that again.

VG: [laughter] Come back again.

RMB: Oh, my gosh [laughter].

KG: Show me where you've been.

VG: Yes. He had another spear with a head [laughter]. We all fish with one but [laughter] – because Karla had a look like, "Boy, something is wrong with the fish." The doors opened and [laughter] he's walking – my brother Shane. He looks like he's mad [laughter]. He was mad [laughter]. He's a hot-headed guy anyway [laughter].

KG: Oh, that brother [laughter]. He was so mad [laughter].

VG: Oh, he was not a happy man [laughter]. But who would think that in a couple of hours?

RMB: Oh my gosh. In the same shack.

VG: Yes [laughter]. There was how many? There's two or three sturgeon speared. Between that day, I think I've one time [laughter].

KG: Everybody is getting fish. It was just steady.

VG: They would come in the hole in their [inaudible] sides.

RMB: Well, plus the water was –

VG: Oh, so clear.

RMB: – clear.

VG: It was really clear.

RMB: Wasn't that the year that the ice melted early?

VG: Yes.

KG: Yes.

VG: [19]98. We couldn't drive on the lake at all, snowmobiles, and ATVs.

RMB: But the water was really clear.

VG: Yes. About this much ice only, some place is like that.

RMB: A lot of guys use a four-wheelers or walking out there having lightweight checks or –

VG: I think the lake broke up before the season ended.

RMB: It did. That's what actually ended the season –

KG: Yes.

VG: Yes.

RMB: – because the lake broke up.

KG: Yes.

RMB: That was the first time I think that's –

KSK: Wow.

VG: Yes. Ever happened.

RMB: – ever happened.

VG: But that has been –

KG: You have a fish laying outside, you'd walk back in, there goes another one through the hole. It's like, "That's little, let it go," and so another one comes through. It's just crazy.

VG: They were pulling here.

KG: Then when we thought we better start taking some to shore, well, you get to shore and hear there's lots of other people with lots of fish.

KSK: Wow.

KG: It was just like going to Walmart [laughter].

VG: But I mean, that was a hotspot. It was (Coulee Park?) Harbor area that year. They were out there.

RMB: It's funny –

VG: But –

KG: You could pick and choose that day.

VG: But you hear the weirdest fishy stories, but you know some of that is true.

RMB: No. I think there's –

KG: Like that.

RMB: We were talking to (Ken Corbett?). He was a longtime warden for years back in the [19]50s and [19]60s. He said, "You wouldn't believe what goes out in those shacks."

KG: With fish [laughter]?

RMB: Even with people [laughter].

VG: Yes. It is funny.

KSK: Who said yes? I can't [laughter] so much. Karla, did you grow up around her too?

KG: No. I have three brothers and parents and none of them fished or hunted, so we gave them a farming family –

RMB: But in the area?

KG: – near the Fox River.

KSK: Where did you grow up around?

KG: Right [inaudible] area about fifteen miles north. Either you farmed or – some fished, some of the neighbors did, but nothing like this. We just don't go out on a Sunday maybe, but no. Then we got married, it was fishing. The first time I was ever on the ice when my brother sent a lifejacket along, so I knew they cared [laughter]. Well, I was nervous. You hear that noise when you're driving into the hole.

RMB: Some people sent flowers just to show they care, but –

KG: [laughter] I think I like the lifejacket. Well, I was scared too because I isn't crazy about water, but you get used to it the more times you out there.

RMB: Sure.

VG: When you fish every day.

KG: Yes.

VG: So, I used to ice fish a lot. You get used to the lake. Then sometimes you know where the bad spots or the open spots. When sturgeon fishing come, a lot of people forget the danger because they want to go –

KG: Yes.

VG: – sturgeon fishing. That's given them the problem.

RMB: But it's amazing how – at least from what I've seen – the veteran sturgeon spearkers really know how to read ice.

VG: Oh, yes.

KG: Yes.

RMB: I get asked all the time by the media, "Well, how good is the ice or how thick is it or whatever ice is? I said, "First of all, you're asking the wrong person because I don't even go out there [laughter]." I said, "But the sturgeon spearkers, they know what they're doing. So, go to local tavern and ask them."

KG: Yes. Ask the old people.

VG: The worst thing about sturgeon fish is they happen to be an open spot. It freezes over this much depth when you have problems. But I will say, the old timers always said, "As long as there's water on top of the ice, you're good. But once it goes through, then watch it." As soon as it gets black and some more water on top, that's when she's getting pretty. Because when you used all the vehicles and went in, there's for sure three feet of ice, by which we've altered that in. I said, "No. They drove across a crack, that truck stayed up on the shore." We took snowmobiles on. I couldn't believe it that night how many vehicles went through.

RMB: Did you ever go through?

VG: No, but I had some close calls.

KG: Did the front end go in the crack ones or –

VG: Oh, my dad fell. He slipped. He should have just kept going. This much ice was good hard ice, but –

RMB: Slipped into a crack.

VG: Yes. The closest call I ever had was with when we floated off there one day [laughter].

KG: Well, snowmobile, isn't it?

VG: Snowmobile.

KG: Yes.

VG: Weight test fishing by [inaudible]. The wind came up about forty-five, fifty miles north from the northeast. We went back into shore, "Jesus, it seems like the ice moved." The first half mile was gone [inaudible].

KG: They were pulling while they were ice fishing [laughter]. "That is a small one, the other one."

RMB: Woah.

VG: That was bad. So, then –

RMB: You're on the ice flow.

VG: – what are you going to do? Well, one of the guys, "Well, my snowmobile is spinning around it." I said, "Well, go back to Oshkosh." Everything is [inaudible] the wind is going that way. But no, we had to come this way. So, we just kept going north. When we got down to the [inaudible] we got to harvest, getting close to the shore [laughter]. By the time we got to the park, it was open a quarter mile. Then once it was between the park and [inaudible], the cracked was open about a hundred feet but then two big chunks came down –

RMB: Came together.

VG: Came – [laughter]

RMB: You're able to cross. Wow.

KG: Then they got home. All those fish were scaled in. The other two weigh best. They were all killed, and he was missing one fish [laughter].

VG: But then the other guys took off ahead of me because I had to sleigh all the equipment. They were going ahead of me just to see if where they could get off. But as soon as I got there, I always had my snowmobile wide open and then keep coming because they already were across because you see them so –

RMB: You see them come together.

VG: – come together. They want to cross out. Then I'm in a car. It was going like this, but we made across and got off. George and Eric were disappointed [laughter].

KG: They haven't gone since [laughter].

VG: They haven't been on the lake since.

RMB: Really?

VG: Always have enough of that.

KG: Yes.

RMB: Wow.

VG: That was my closest call. Well, the ones with my buddy, Charlie, with the fishing car, that was a bad one too.

RMB: Oh, yes?

KSK: What was that?

VG: He busted it too. (Coulee Park?) at Cedar Springs out here. As you see, well, there was a foot ice wall for the ice. There were guys driving over with four-wheel drive truck with the fish [inaudible] Chevy fishing car, which isn't yet changed on because there's a little snow.

RMB: Well, at fishing cars, we had like holes drilled in the backseat so you could fish right in there?

VG: No. We weren't quite that advanced.

RMB: No [laughter].

VG: Well, this is in the early –

KG: Their family has that.

VG: No. This is the early [19]70s, maybe [19]70 or [19]71. We're going to go about [inaudible]. He's always got the heavy foot, good thing. All of a sudden, she crossed, the car went down. What's going on? He popped back up and he somewhat give her some gas. When the next time he went through again, I mean, it was very – I had the door open. I was ready to bail out and obviously came back [inaudible] the whole hundred yards or so away. I said, "I think you went through." "You think so?" So, we went back there and sure as heck, it was only about three, four inches thick when we went through along with that tire.

RMB: Wow.

VG: The guy with that big truck was only about 1000 feet away, so don't go over there.

RMB: Oh, my gosh.

VG: If I had been with somebody with the big truck going slow, he was

RMB: – pulling right through.

VG: – pulled right in. It must have been that spring we must have hit.

RMB: Hit that spring there.

VG: No. One of the first times – first people out there, that's when you run into that because nobody was in that area. That's where you should –

RMB: Well, there's no [inaudible]

VG: That's where you should go. Snowmobile first to check it.

RMB: Or that – [laughter].

VG: No. That was a close one. I mean, there are the two closest I ever had. Now, I always figure to let somebody else go out, make the roads safe once day one over. Well, at least, they didn't go through. But when you go on a new territory, there was nobody before, you got to kind of make sure there's always somebody else which does (half a year?).

RMB: Over the years that you've been involved with sturgeon spearing – I guess, what things have you noticed over the years as far as like changes or as they are things pretty much like they've always been as far as the fish are concerned or the spearers are concerned or – you already mentioned equipment has changed a lot?

VG: The equipment really changed a lot. Well, the fish are getting bigger.

RMB: They seem to be bigger.

[talking simultaneously]

VG: But still I think the sturgeon years ago tasted better than they do today. The flavor years ago was better –

RMB: Much better.

VG: – because I think with the (chad?). They don't have the flavor. So, you do get some good ones yet, but some of them don't taste like they used to. That I noticed.

RMB: So, what's your favorite way to have them prepared?

VG: We usually fry them.

RMB: Fry them. A lot of people smoke them, but –

VG: Usually fried. There's a lot of ways to make them.

RMB: Just chuck them up and deep fry it or –



VG: Just kind of steaks.

RMB: Then just fry them like that?

KG: Fried them.

RMB: Pan fried them?

VG: Pan fried them.

KG: Pan fried.

RMB: Really?

KG: Yes.

VG: Cover with flour and butter. Some put them in a –

RMB: You flour them a little bit?

VG: Yes. Some put in –

KG: Not much. We like to taste our fish –

VG: – cracker crumbs, yes.

KG: – not butter.

VG: Yes. You like years ago when we first started, you know every little group out there. You knew everybody, but it becomes so –

KG: Yes.

VG: – commercialized. You don't know nobody no more. It was just –

RMB: Well, plus people move around so much. I suppose years ago if somebody got into a group, they were there.

VG: Yes. You just kind of stay there because maybe one guy had a saw, and they don't [laughter]. Everybody is holding out. Everybody has got their own.

KG: Then you had your little groups, you are kind of on your own. All of a sudden, here's somebody who pulls in, whose that? Another one pulls over there, you're like –

VG: I don't know nobody no more. I know a lot of people out there yet, but they're all scattered. There are so many strangers. Like in the [19]70s, even the [19]80s weren't bad yet. You knew

everybody. But since we got in the [19]90s – I don't know – well, there's a lot more people on that now.

RMB: There's a lot more people –

VG: Yes.

RMB: – on it.

KG: Even when you go to register room, there's a lot of strangers registering.

VG: There's a lot of – well, look at the tag sales.

RMB: There was a big increase in the [19]90s –

VG: Yes.

RMB: – when we had all that success starting in 1990. That 1990 season just kind of kicked it off –

VG: Oh, yes. [19]90 was a good year.

RMB: – in a lot of people. Then the Conservation Patron tag, it came free with the bag –

KG: Okay.

RMB: – the sturgeon tag bag, and it doesn't anymore. But that brought a lot of people in also.

VG: Now, sturgeon tags I see are \$20, it's fine. But like he's out-of-state one is \$100?

RMB: 65 for out-of-state.

VG: 65. I said, "Here we pay \$20 for a deer tag. You go out and once you hunt, what do you pay, 2, 3, 4, \$500?"

RMB: Yes.

VG: I said, "Sturgeon takes how many years to go out there? That animal will take four, five years. If you're talking about the fishery, it takes twenty-five, thirty years to get legal size, and the sturgeon tags for \$60?" I said, "They should be 2, \$300 anyway for out-of-staters, because we're getting a lot of out-of-staters."

RMB: About 1.5 percent of our license sales are non-resident.

VG: Yes. But if you got, what's it probably the same. But if this – I'm just comparing.

KG: Value in our –

RMB: Well, it's definitely a unique opportunity.

VG: Oh, yes.

RMB: Not too many other places you can do this.

VG: Well, it's the only place in the world. Just like a licensing of different states not for animals but for fish –

RMB: Does the younger generation have the same enthusiasm for spearing? I mean, there's a lot of more people that have moved into the spearing, but I don't know if you've noticed on this side of the lake.

VG: I would say, the families that have kids and they're big in sturgeon, the kids are too.

RMB: The kids are too. So, it is carrying out. So, the tradition is carrying on.

VG: Yes. Somebody like the (Schumachers?) and [inaudible]. All their kids, they're big in it.

KG: The wives too.

[talking simultaneously]

RMB: It seems like we've seen more and more women.

KG: They want their own shanties too. They aren't going to sit with anybody.

VG: No. But I know some women that deal fish more than men.

KG: Yes.

VG: Yes.

RMB: I think they're more patient actually.

VG: Yes, they are.

KG: I've heard several people say that. They think that their wives are more successful because they're more willing to sit here and just look [laughter].

VG: Well, a lot of guys –

RMB: Well, right, yes, [laughter] that they're having a drink.

VG: Good time [laughter].

RMB: They're sitting and drinking beer in each other's shack –

KG: Yes.

RMB: – than looking down the hole.

[talking simultaneously]

VG: I know –

KG: I go to drive. You don't drink much, but some of them. The wives that are driving are so mad.

KSK: Right [laughter].

KG: Oh, men. So that if they made it half the day, they wouldn't get so [inaudible] [laughter].

VG: Well, the only thing like years ago, you always had one shanty. They always had two, three guys. If you get one, then I'll start fishing. Well, today, it isn't that way. Everybody is going to have their own kind of such because you better get out there –

RMB: Because you don't know how long it's going to last.

VG: Right. That's the thing. I said, "It's not actually a sport no more to me. It's actually a job because you got to hurry up and get out there." Years ago, we didn't care if we fish today or on next weekend. Years back, we never fished over the weekend.

RMB: No?

VG: Oh, it was three weeks. Well, we do it in the middle of the week. Let everybody else go out there and make their roads or whatever.

RMB: Sure.

VG: There's no hurry. But now, since ninety out there because –

RMB: With that said, that does change the dynamic. When we went to the harvest cap system in 1997. When do we have those years, a couple of years, there's only two days or three days long. But now, with the half days –

VG: Well, it does help the –

RMB: – that helped that now with people. A lot of people like that because number one, there's a lot of guys that don't like staring down a hole for more than six hours. Then they have the

afternoon to move their shack or to have a party or go to the tavern. A lot of them seem to like to go to the tavern.

VG: They'll find out where they got them [laughter].

RMB: I know where they got them down with few beers. So, the tavern owners really like this half-day stuff?

KG: [affirmative]

VG: Oh, yes. Years ago, the taverns, they kind of made a living in February.

RMB: Oh, absolutely.

VG: Also, it lasts one weekend, that's their done deal.

RMB: Since we went to this half-day format, we've had mostly long seasons. Last year, four days, I think, was, well –

VG: Well, last year was four days as last year. The year before –

RMB: For the year before, it was sixteen.

VG: Yes. That was a closed season.

RMB: We have twelves and tens and – so, I really like to see us get through at least two weekends –

KG: Yes.

VG: [affirmative]

RMB: – which is nice. We've been pretty successful at that now with this half-day format so –

VG: It's all depending upon the clarity of the water.

RMB: The clarity, exactly, that drives the whole thing.

KG: The fellas that take their vacation for that time while they got used to that. We were done the first week and found something else to do the following week.

RMB: Speaking of the water clarity, over your experience on this side of the lake, have you noticed any changes in that over the years?

VG: I see that later years now has been better. The [19]70s are really bad. Also, in the [19]70s, well and about five years, we could hardly see nothing. They get one good here.

RMB: Because looking back now at the records of the sturgeon population growth, there was really high harvest in the [19]50s. Were you old enough to fish in the [19]50s?

VG: No.

RMB: No. I didn't think you were.

VG: No. I've been in the late [19]60s.

RMB: We were literally on the verge of crashing the population by the end of the [19]50s. Then the water started turning cloudy in the [19]60s –

VG: Oh, okay.

RMB: – and [19]70s, and that literally saved this population.

VG: When you talked to (Danny Burg? 00:27:11), he'll tell you in the [19]50s. There's a lot of stories of guys on how they got them in the [19]50s.

RMB: Oh, yes?

VG: [affirmative]

RMB: [laughter]

KG: Hope you got an update for that.

[talking simultaneously]

VG: I don't know if they were allowed two tanks. I think they were allowed two tanks in the [19]50s.

RMB: It went from five to three –

VG: Two and one.

RMB: – to two to one. I think, in 1959, it finally went to one.

VG: Okay.

RMB: So, that was a couple of years there, [19]57, [19]58, that it was two tanks.

VG: Okay. But in early [19]50s, probably it was almost –

RMB: Just five. It was still five.

VG: Five in the [19]50s. My dad told me you get five for a quarter.

RMB: They were a nickel apiece.

VG: Yes.

RMB: When it first opened in 1932, they were a nickel apiece.

VG: Okay.

RMB: So, your dad was a spearer in those first seasons, right?

VG: Yes.

RMB: 1932?

VG: He probably would have been – no, he was probably ten to twelve then. I would say he's in late [19]30s and [19]40s when he was out there.

RMB: He would have been out there then.

VG: I don't know if they had five then or not.

RMB: Yes.

VG: They then –

RMB: They had five until –

VG: Okay.

RMB: I think that change in 1954, [19]55.

VG: Okay.

RMB: It changed.

VG: But it was different back then because you knew – I mean, you just spoke a call to shanties because there are so few. You knew everybody. So, somebody did get five, big deal, because there's hardly nobody fishing, because you do want like this. If you move to a spot in such a week and then see nothing, I know –

RMB: You don't want to –

VG: – I got to move again. But now –

RMB: You have to spot that all over again.

VG: But now, it'll take eight years before we had closed season, sometimes we move twice a day. You don't see done two, three hours, "bingo." It takes you, what, fifteen minutes, half hour to set up. But years ago, you didn't.

KG: Look at the fish they got years ago with a lot less shanties out there, and they came home with two, three fish. Now, you got 8,000 shanties out there – 4,000, and you don't have near the amount of fish gotten as back then.

RMB: I mean, there's a lot more fish right now, but the success rate on Winnebago is about 15, 16 percent. So, that's been pretty steady for the last few years.

KG: But this year all these little guys see, "Oh, I got new three, four, five fish in the season [inaudible] can get one [laughter]. You got that many more out there.

RMB: Well, you probably don't hear about the days where they didn't get any.

KG: Indeed [laughter].

[talking simultaneously]

RMB: Really?

KG: Yes.

RMB: I mean, it's easier to remember the years you got them –

KG: That's true.

RMB: – and the years that you might have got too.

KG: Yes.

VG: Now, why is it one day you can be out there and – well, this one guy, I kind of believe him now because he drank a lot. He said that one day he's speared twelve sturgeon [laughter]. Well, this was way back, and the next day everybody moved around when he was out there, nothing.

RMB: Nothing.

VG: They're all like, you see [inaudible] just going through that day, or what?

RMB: All the activity might have driven them out of there too.

VG: Whether this is back or how do you – yes, maybe.



RMB: I mean if there's spud holes –

VG: Yes, that's make it –

RMB: – they call them and call them and call them.

VG: Yes, that's true.

RMB: They might have driven them out.

VG: But then I thought, "Boy, he must have really been drinking [laughter]." (Bob Wilson?) is here seeing six and then a half a day.

RMB: Bob Wilson?

KG: On the opening day.

VG: Yes.

KG: Yes.

VG: Or was it seven? They got five. They missed a couple.

KG: It was like saw a seven and got five or saw a nine and got seven.

VG: They didn't even wonder, well maybe [inaudible].

RMB: I don't know why. I think it's possible. He may be exaggerating a couple of fish.

VG: Yes, but –

RMB: He had to make it an even [inaudible].

KG: He's not a windy one [laughter].

RMB: There you go [laughter]. They might have been two beers short of –

[talking simultaneously]

We had to make it even two six [laughter].

VG: But that's one guy that said, "Years ago, my dad's – " they're kind of related to him. He used to get a lot of sturgeon way back.

RMB: What was his name?

VG: (Frank Goeser?).

RMB: Frank Goeser?

VG: Goeser.

RMB: Goeser.

VG: Well, the boards were after him big time. He used to run [inaudible]. So, as long as I remember, Frank, that goes back thirty, forty years, I never see him spear sturgeon.

RMB: Really?

VG: I took him out a few times, put him in my shanty and stuff. But I don't know if he's nicer or getting better or what, but he said, "There's easier ways [laughter]."

RMB: [laughter] There's easier ways.

VG: I just want you to make it look good in census [laughter]. He had bad back in his days.

KSK: How would you take them?

VG: Set lines.

KSK: Oh, he had set lines in the lake.

KG: There is a bag of firewood out there to heat the stove and the bag was all coming back.

VG: They came right up to his house, already went to his house. They said, "If we ever catch you with another sturgeon – this was before he was married here. Really bad to him and Alex. They went all to the Catalina Island in California –

RMB: Is that right?

VG: – for sturgeon.

RMB: Really?

VG: Because the words are watching. It's so bad out here.

RMB: Wow, for crying out loud. But that was an open water or through the ice?

VG: Open water, set lines.

RMB: Set lines.

VG: Well, my grandpa used to run them.

RMB: Oh, I think a lot of people around.

VG: I think there were less fish in the [19]30s than there ever were because everybody has set-lines, gillnets. They used to go with gillnets. Well, Schumachers did too. I don't blame them if they live and have to eat.

[talking simultaneously]

RMB: Actually, when the sturgeon season opened, (Kathy?) has done a lot of research on this looking at the statutes and laws that were passed to open the first sturgeon season. It was opened as an economic relief package for the depression so that people had access to the fish.

VG: Yes. Okay.

RMB: Or legal access to the fish.

KG: Legal access.

RMB: Because I'm sure that even though the season was closed from 1915 to 1932, I'm sure there were a lot of people that were still out there going in to fish because they needed them to survive.

VG: Yes. Let someone pay the taxes, I admit that, but not only actually lived on fish. Can you imagine taking gillnets out there –

RMB: Oh, my goodness. Oh, my gosh.

VG: – full of pike. I think that's a really [inaudible]. Like I said, now, you see more big fish than ever.

RMB: Yes.

VG: I know there are more sturgeon out there when I started because you see a lot more.

RMB: See a lot more.

VG: We talked with all the people, all different sizes they see.

RMB: Do you see the real small ones out here much?

VG: I never did see a lot of small ones. No. I see some were big enough or a lot of gold.

KG: It's kind of like this?

VG: Yes.

KG: Long but skinny and –

VG: Yes. I'll let them go.

RMB: Because it does seem like the youngstock lives in the rivers and the upper of the lakes.

VG: Okay.

RMB: Then they don't really recruit heavily down to Winnebago until they're about maybe thirty-six, forty inches long. Then they start coming down here.

KG: Coming down here.

VG: Okay. How much percent is spawn in this lake? A couple of percent of sturgeon? They see some do.

RMB: There's probably a few that do. I've never seen it, but I've had people that have seen it that have told me about it –

VG: Okay.

RMB: – over the years. We had a report from Lake Winneconne this year, a fish that sound from all that they described that they were spawning in Lake Winneconne. Well, a rocky brick wall that we put out in the lake.

VG: Okay.

RMB: So, it's a small percentage at Asylum Point – picnic point rather across the lake there.

VG: I was going to see the whole place.

RMB: That's one place that we've got a pretty reliable story that fish had been spawning there over the years.

KG: They live in Algoma and Winneconne.

RMB: So –

VG: How was spawning this year really?

RMB: It was good year this year.

VG: You had a big fish?

RMB: Oh, yes. We had probably twenty to thirty fish that were over 160 pounds. Big fish. There were some 200 pounds that we couldn't get them. They were further on the river.

VG: Always.

RMB: So, they're there. But one of these years, matter of fact, we're going to get new scales for next year. Digital readout scales that go over 200 pounds, but right now our scales don't go over 200 pounds.

KG: But when you get those big ones like that, aren't you afraid they're going to whip you and –

VG: They don't do much.

KG: – knock you over?

VG: It all depends on who's speared them.

KG: No. When your –

RMB: You mean when we're there?

KG: Yes.

VG: Oh, yes.

RMB: Actually, all they know is beat the hell out of you [laughter]. I'm beat up. After that week, I'm bruised all over.

KG: You could hit your head on a rock and there you go.

RMB: I saw stars from one in one set that came up with this head like this and hit me right in the jaw like that. I blacked out for a second. So, they're powerful fish. No question about that. But, well, when you get –

KG: With a stun gun?

RMB: – them up on the shanty, I mean, they can really knock stuff around in the shanty camp.

KG: Yes.

VG: They can trash.

RMB: A lot of people will get them on – or I've heard people, they get them on and then they'll just leave on the spear and start folding up their chairs and put the stuff outside.

VG: Yes. But everybody does it different. When I got one guy, he'll spear them and just let them go. He said 90 percent of the time he's got a hundred-foot rope. Even if he takes the rope or he just screw a month later.

RMB: Really?

VG: Which ones that he pulls them in, because I know I –

RMB: No. You've got to get them in.

VG: Yes [laughter].

RMB: How many have you speared over the years?

VG: I don't know. Thirties, about thirty.

KG: One of these said thirty.

RMB: Really?

VG: Yes.

RMB: Wow. So, you put your time in them?

VG: Oh, yes.

RMB: I mean, that's really the key.

KG: I guess.

VG: Oh, yes. I used fishing tool a little almost every day unless it's really a blizzard.

RMB: Well, not sturgeon, but the sauger I know was the mainstay of the fishery out here for many years of sampling.

VG: Yes.

RMB: We're trying to bring them back now and we're having some success so –

VG: But most of the time, it's mostly bass and some perch. The only common thing was the two always this one and that was it.

KG: It never bites.

RMB: No. The molly doesn't bite all that well.

VG: They did last week just before [inaudible]. They did good over by Oshkosh.

RMB: They did?

VG: Yes. Well, then guys are getting more limiting out. They're getting paid to call somebody to come out and film up [laughter].

RMB: So, tell us about your decoy carving. How you got into it? How many years you've been doing that?

VG: I think it was 1999, I started to see if I could make one.

RMB: So, really, just been ten years now.

KG: This is it.

RMB: That was your first one?

VG: That's my very first [laughter].

KSK: Oh.

RMB: Really?

VG: Kind of crude but –

KG: That's Jake style.

KSK: That's beautiful.

VG: That was kind of –

RMB: Oh, this is the Jake [inaudible] style.

VG: I kind of his style. I kind of square.

KG: He made his own burn.

RMB: Neat.

VG: I made all my own tools for that for a different designs.

RMB: For designing?

VG: [affirmative]

RMB: Wow, that's neat.

KSK: That's really beautiful.

RMB: Wow.

VG: That's nothing compared to what I got now.

RMB: Oh, I know. I was telling Kathy about the decoys you have now.

VG: I also –

RMB: Is this something in you that your dad makes decoys or did anybody else in your family do it?

VG: I don't know if he made any or if we just saw kind of look like a decoy, but nobody ever did. No. But I heard other people making them, so then I thought, well, I just try it.

RMB: I mean, you make weathervanes and all kind of different things.

VG: Yes. Gary does it. He's the metal guy. I'm the wood guy. I make the decoys. He does the spear.

RMB: Gary is your brother?

VG: Yes. He does spears and the metal. He's good at metal.

RMB: I see. You're the wood guy.

KSK: It's a good team.

VG: Oh, yes, maybe we should make our stuff. I mean, it's made as a rule.

RMB: So, you collect a few old decoys to them?

VG: Yes, I did. I got, well, Jake's collection.

KG: Jakes's and (R.D. Lewis? 00:39:08).

VG: Yes.

KG: We've been to some auctions and saw (R.D.'s?).

VG: Oh, you got (R.D.?) Although we bought one from (Donnie Ecker?), while I tried to get one decoy from every carvers.



RMB: Oh, I see.

VG: Get a lot of people – some people are big on certain –

RMB: Oh, sure.

VG: – carvers.

KG: Well, being from the community too, you want.

VG: Oh, yes.

KSK: Oh, yes.

RMB: Yes, I thought so. So, in the book that you have here that lists some of the more prominent carvers.

VG: Carvers.

RMB: Are those still the same prominent carvers to this day?

VG: (Erica Steerwood?).

RMB: But just like your name would have to be added to that list.

VG: This book came up probably a year or so before I started. I wasn't concern –

RMB: Are there others that are doing it like you, or coming into the craft or –

VG: My [inaudible] down the road here started about the last forty-five years. He's started now, but I always knew – I don't know. You see it's time-consuming. People don't have time for that. That's the thing.

RMB: Very time consuming.

VG: Yes. For what you get out of it.

KG: When he started making and got more and more, I thought, "What are we going to do with all these fish? I don't want fish all over everything."

RMB: [laughter]

KG: You just kept making and making, and God dammit.

VG: Well, you find that –

KG: You start dusting them now [laughter].

VG: Well, every piece of wood is different somewhat. I told you I've tried to make a decoy in every kind of wood I could think of, but I gave up on that because there's so many different kinds.

KG: Four thousand kinds they say of domestic wood.

RMB: Really?

KG: Yes.

KSK: Oh, wow.

VG: I did –

KG: We have thirty-five. We thought we have a lot [laughter].

VG: Yes.

RMB: Wow.

KG: Then we go 4,000.

VG: Some woods are easier to work on than others. Some woods you file, plug up, and –

KG: Apple wood is like concrete, he says.

VG: Oh, yes.

RMB: Really?

VG: That's hard.

RMB: It is hard?

KG: Yes.

VG: I just made two decoys a couple of weeks ago of tulipwood. That's kind of miserable. It's a nice, gorgeous wood, but your files, they plugged up. I don't know if it's the texture of the wood.

RMB: Beautiful.

VG: But that's tulip.

RMB: That's tulipwood?

VG: [affirmative]

RMB: From a tulip tree?

VG: Yes.

KG: Yes.

VG: It's from a tree.

RMB: Wow.

VG: That's the color. That's original –

KSK: Oh, wow.

VG: Yes.

RMB: Everyone is balanced then too, right? So, they swim?

VG: Right. Yes.

RMB: So, I mean, you got to balance that lead. That's probably different for different woods too, more or less, or –

VG: No. I poured the lead in, and then the fins are molted into the lead so the fins will come out. You see like here now has – let's say there's no lead in here. You see I got the fins in here now.

RMB: Oh, I see him –

VG: Then I got them –

RMB: – poured the lead in.

VG: Right then I got bent the back. This sort of fins will pull off. Then they stay tight.

RMB: Then they stay tight.

VG: Then when I'm done then I put them in the water. They get a string and then try to balance.

KG: [inaudible] feet in first so they're sealed from the water, which is five or six times over –

VG: It might be off a little a bit now because in the water it balanced it.

RMB: So, in the water, it balanced this up.

VG: You see like this was up a little bit, but you're getting a lot of those [inaudible].

RMB: The tail will float up a little bit.

KSK: Yup.

VG: Boat like this will stay.

RMB: Then when you pull them in the water, they'll actually swim around.

VG: Yes, they will.

RMB: This looks kind of [inaudible] crooked. It got its tails curved. Kind of go on the curve.

KG: They're pretty in the water. They get a little bigger as they go down. If it's a sunny day, they glitter just through the filtering.

RMB: So, a lot of guys had success with your decoys?

VG: Well, some guy, oh, yes.

RMB: Yes?

VG: [affirmative]

RMB: [laughter]

KSK: Do you use your own decoys?

VG: Oh, yes. Then I hang them where the typical stuff down [laughter].

KSK: Yes and started running. [laughter]

VG: Cava corn or whatever you name it.

KSK: [laughter]

RMB: A lot of other guys using bowling balls or washing machine agitators or –

KSK: Tea kettles, gel hands.

RMB: Tea kettles or a white coffee cup. That would be a favorite.

VG: I used that already.

RMB: Yes?

VG: Oh, yes.

KG: (Butch Raider?) was the deputy from town. He was always lucky getting fish. "What do you get for decoy?" Well, it was a gallon jug with his name written on it – his name written on it [laughter]. So, we got to be on the Bob Trader on]. I don't think that helped either [laughter].

VG: No. At the Bob Trader, it builds there, and all the guys are getting fish. I did get two that under 400-pound fish speared at 1980 –

RMB: [19]82?

VG: [19]82.

RMB: Yes. That was kind of dirty year.

VG: Right.

RMB: We got two of them.

RMB: Wow.

VG: Then next, you can see now like ten, twelve feet. Just that you could make it out. I had the big white pill, almost about three galloon pill [00:43:47], It came right up to that sucker.

RMB: No kidding. I mean, they really are curious, the fish?

VG: Oh, yes.

RMB: They'll come right up to the decoy?

VG: Oh, yes. But that was just luck that year, I got that one. But in that one spot there, everybody was doing pretty good. Clarity of the water, we're doing pretty good.

RMB: When the sturgeon comes up to the decoy, your decoy or whatever you got down the hole, do they generally just come up and bump it?

VG: I've never seen one sturgeon do that yet. A lot of times they'll just come up and then do this.

RMB: Oh, so they kind of come up just to get a look at. Then they –

[talking simultaneously]

VG: But I had people already seen. They take it right on. My brother, that's two years ago. He couldn't see down too good. They were hard to see the fish –

RMB: They were hard.

VG: – almost –

RMB: About two years ago, in 2006, the water was growing sea, that was six, seven feet, but as far decoy line move.

VG: Yes.

KG: Yes.

VG: No, that was seven. That was 2006. You could see down about ten feet – ten, twelve but he was going out. He already had one today. What was it? That one shanty – they had three, four shanties out there and what week was it? That first week, they had probably one, two, three. They got [inaudible] sucker in six days.

RMB: Wow.

VG: So, we were fishing down here with my brother. We're going to go up there if we get any [laughter]. The day we were up there, the first day of fish, I watched my brother comes walking over. We all go fishing myself, what for, when you got one already [laughter]. What? We weren't fishing very far away. He said, "Yes." He said, "They didn't see it coming, all the decoy is going out. He has buddy with him. So, each one to a different spot where they got it.

RMB: Really? They got him?

VG: One time in the tail or something [laughter].

RMB: Oh, for crying out loud, wow.

VG: [laughter] Once you hear what kind of throw here, okay.

KG: Somebody should get it?

RMB: Never see you guys after they get their fish. I'm sure you've seen a lot of different celebrations, but the ones you always hear about and the guys that bring your fish into the tavern and set it up on the barstool and never afford a drink. Ever see any of that going on?

VG: I never see one in the barn. No.

RMB: No [laughter]?

VG: No.

KG: We usually come right home with it.

VG: Yes, we do.

RMB: Oh, yes, we do now?

[talking simultaneously]

VG: But I already see where you coming to register when – I got one that somebody that had one of those bigger a hundred pound was then having a good time.

RMB: I actually could tell.

VG: But then a lot of times you wanted to trust that fish out in the truck or in the parking lot where they have people out there because I already heard him taking already.

RMB: Really?

VG: Oh, yes.

KG: Wasn't there one this year a big one missing?

VG: I don't know, but I heard of it already.

KG: One of the tablets that were –

VG: [inaudible] true that when you're going to tour [inaudible] one in there and came back up.

KSK: All that?

KG: Yes.

KSK: Terrible.

VG: They're gone [laughter].

KG: Yes. If you're forgetful, how do you remember if you got a fish?

VG: Right, well, the funniest part is when you come off the lake, you don't want to [inaudible] fish. [laughter]

RMB: No. I've seen that already.

VG: Yes.

RMB: I've seen working that [inaudible] when it was dead laying on the road.

VG: Yes.

RMB: The guy comes in and says, "Where's your fish," which is in the back of the truck this morning? We had to go back out and find it.

KSK: If it wasn't dead from the spear, it was dead now.

RMB: It was a mile down the road laying on the side of the road yet. He went back and got it [laughter].

KG: I heard some friends say they went around when you're nearby [inaudible]. He said, "Here was the one laying on the side of the road."

VG: Yes.

KSK: Gosh.

VG: That always scared me that –

RMB: When you come in with your fish then what's your ritual as far as cleaning up them? What do you normally do? Some people I hear they leave and sit on the snowbank for a couple of days and –

VG: Come home and just kind of wash them down and get some of the slime off. Didn't just get them out and they've hang overnight in a cool place. The next day, we'll just take care of it.

RMB: Do you pull the notochord out? The cord out of the back?

VG: What do you mean?

RMB: The lateral spine? That cord out of the spine because –

KSK: That white –

RMB: Yes.

VG: No.

RMB: Because some people say –

VG: The noodle thing?

RMB: Yes. The [inaudible]. You don't pull that out.



VG: No.

RMB: So, you leave that in.

VG: Well, we fillet everything out so –

RMB: Well, you fillet out.

[talking simultaneously]

VG: I skinned it. Then I take it down and just slit it right on that. He has got a stinker. They leave in chunks and package it, but it's fillet out. Then before we fry it, we will steak it out because it keeps better in seasoned water. Just so many. Some guys have just taken chunk [inaudible] everything on this suite case. Everybody's got different ways, but that's the way I do it.

RMB: That's probably the way your dad did it.

VG: He used to always cut it up, but I leave it whole. It keeps better.

KSK: What's the value in that – would you call it?

RMB: The notochord? There's no value in it, just that some people take it out because they seem to think that if they steak their fish up and leave the notochord in there –

VG: Okay.

RMB: – they think that these put a taste into the fish but I doubt it.

VG: No, we don't have. Anything is so valuable. But then old Frank Goeser, he likes – some guys, if you don't clean the sturgeon fat off good enough that really gets fishy phase. Frank, that's the best part.

RMB: Really, he likes that. Is he still alive?

VG: No. He died about ten, twelve years. Now, that's the [inaudible].

RMB: Gazer, G-A-Z-E-R.

KG: G-O-E-S-ER.

RMB: Oh, G-O-E-S –

KG: G-O-E-S-E-R, Frank.

[talking simultaneously]

KSK: He introduced I think his son –

RMB: You interviewed his son.

KG: I know that.

RMB: Oh, that's Alex Goeser, Dan Goeser or – what his younger brother – David Goeser, Dave.

KSK: One of them.

RMB: He's one of Alex' boys.

KG: Fraklin [inaudible].

KSK: I know that last name, Goeser.

RMB: I think you did.

KSK: From Stockbridge or –

RMB: A matter of fact, can we get a picture of their family several generations or something?

KSK: I'm thinking.

RMB: I think we did.

VG: Goeser.

KSK: Because Frank doesn't have a son.

VG: No.

RMB: No?

VG: He just had girls.

KSK: But his brother Alex.

KG: Well, they will be –

VG: His brother Alex, he wasn't –

KSK: – quite as bad.

VG: Not quite as bad. Frank was bad [laughter].

KSK: Well, Frank was better at it [laughter].

VG: At this too. When I ever saw on the lake when they were ice fishing, (Buddy Mike?) came up. He likes to drink. Well, he had a bottle of Southern Comfort, big quart bottle. Now, fishing with Frank. He comes up, and "You want to pull [laughter]." "Okay. You're going to learn [laughter]." You know Frank, he likes these many kinds of drinks. He gave him a pole. He took that sucker down [inaudible] in a bunch of tourist, and the guy look [laughter].

KSK: He just stayed up.

VG: Yes. I mean, Frank, he didn't swallow it, just poured it in. The guy looked down and then Frank said, "Anything wrong?" He met his match [laughter] like a jackal.

KSK: [inaudible]

RMB: Oh, my God. Really, like bring [inaudible] here.

VG: But Frank will drink anything. There was alcohol, he drank it all. Because the funniest part, the one-time with us, the fishing by fishing, they –

KG: Six pack of beer – or six or twelve pack.

VG: This will just help yourself. A couple of days, it was what's gone. I said I don't care, but he replaced it.

RMB: Really?

VG: I should know that.

KSK: It's for when they get company.

RMB: Absolutely.

VG: But he said no. He said that this –

KG: It bothered him.

VG: "I got one bad habit," he says. If there's a six pack of beer in the refrigerator at night at home, he said, "I won't be able to sleep until it's all gone. So, I'm not –"

KG: No. If there's one can left in to the six pack?

VG: Into the six pack – or one or two cans left.

KG: If he wakes up at 2:00 a.m.

VG: He said, "I got to drink at least, and then I can sleep."

RMP: Then he can sleep.

VG: No one bothers me.

RMP: It bothers him for my image.

VG: He said that's my bad habit. When it's gone, he's all right.

RMP: He's okay.

VG: But he noticed the nurse – [laughter]. Got to have a gallon of minor. That one time too.

RMP: Are you in the gym or something?

KG: That was gone.

RMB: Wow.

VG: I already used to go to a [inaudible] one day out there himself. Another guy is –

KG: Not fall in.

RMB: Not fall in.

VG: I got girls.

RMB: Wow.

VG: Well, he has what is called binges. She used to call it for three weeks. You're drunk every day for three weeks.

KSK: Wow.

RMB: Wow.

VG: Yes.

RMB: Wow.

VG: He kind of get –

KSK: Then you get over that –

VG: [inaudible] would kick all both sides [laughter].

RMB: Do you ever have a situation in your shack where you had a visitor come and the fish got threw on you and your visitor came in? You hear about guys that –

VG: Yes.

KG: Yes.

VG: I had a close call at one time that two buddies of mine were going to come over. This is an early [19]70s. You're about ten feet from my shanty, and there's one guy making a snowball inside the shanty. This other guy said, "No, you better not. The wind might be coming in." They heard me throw a spear.

RMB: Really [laughter]?

VG: That's a close town. I mean, maybe if you were to bang it, maybe –

[talking simultaneously]

Eighty-five probably that feels like all six, all that come and so nice. I think it was still splashing the hole when they open the door.

RMB: Oh, my God.

VG: Yes. That was my closest call [laughter]. I had somebody in the shanty where they wanted to spear one but that was [laughter] nice. [laughter] I said, "You mean you heard me throw the spears?" "Yes."

RMB: Oh, boy.

VG: They're going to throw a snowball to see if it's [inaudible] or not [laughter]. They try to pull pranks out there.

KG: Yes. You really want to have respect for people out there.

RMB: Oh, yes.

KG: If they got one already, yes, a little different, but –

VG: You know, if they're coming with the vehicle, but when they walk –

RMB: Walking.

VG: Oh, yes. That was the close one there.

KSK: What do you think your grandfather started spearing? Do you think he had time in the winter or –

VG: For food.

RMB: For food.

VG: Food back then because we're poor.

KSK: But I mean, spearing for sturgeon rather than – well, he probably had to pop, and he's probably doing everything.

VG: Yes. They did some tip of fishing now. But we ever hear way back when they used to go to a spear pike years ago.

RMB: Really?

VG: [affirmative]

RMB: Oh, I didn't hear about that, walleye?

VG: Walleyes are set back, whenever you said you heard. The big old copper metals –

RMB: Yes?

VG: [inaudible] that come in. Let's see. That's when there was no sturgeons fishing. There was no sturgeon fishing back then. They want to walk there and sit in there, but the little bee didn't have sturgeon spear when it called. I have one like a soccer spear. You see how they go through in a half day to lift any sack full. This is way back.

RMB: Wow.

VG: Remember, when my dad told me [inaudible]. If I do that, now, I starve [laughter].

RMB: No kidding. I mean, there's a lot of walleyes in the lake, but they don't see them now.

VG: But I agree with that copper metal, you heard of that too already. [inaudible] didn't bite it. Many pike in that lake back then or there's a shortage of food or that's like that.

RMB: Not at all. We've got a lot of walleyes in the lake, but we don't have any records of how many were in the lake way back then, whether there was more than there is now. I mean, there's a lot of walleyes out there now. I can imagine that would be more back then but –

VG: But a lot of like –

RMB: The behavior may have been different.

VG: I think a lot of them just went out there for they love fish. I think someone paid some of the taxes with it, because usually now they have a hard time paying their property taxes. There might only be a few \$100 or whatever, but I know a lot of them –

RMB: So, basically, they get some fish for eating, but also to sell it and pay your taxes.

VG: That's it. I heard that quite a bit being back in the tough.

RMB: Then do things [inaudible].

VG: The weather was rough all day.

KG: But back then they didn't have a season, they just want fishing day-to-day, wait until the first weekend of February like –

RMB: I think it was open in January and February –

VG: Back then –

RMB: I think it was earlier.

KG: It was early.

VG: I talked to (Jake Shogun?) Well, he's still alive. He's eighty-nine. I said when was pike fishing close? He said March – no, February 1st. My dad said the same thing. You fish the month of January for pike. Then when sturgeon fishing started, the pike was close. Sturgeon fishing last from the 1st of March – 1st of February until the 15th of March. That's six weeks. I taught three weeks is bad. Back then everything you want [inaudible] or you walk out. Like this old guy talking about all morning long it needs decoys. Well, those guys, they are tall guys, big long-legged guys. He said they walked out to three miles every day, them guys.

RMB: Wow.

VG: You walked out because it was called the sturgeon city three miles off the county park. That's where a lot of boys always fished.

RMB: Oh, really, that's where they fished?

VG: [affirmative] That's when my dad first started fishing. They were older, my dad – they're all blocked off. Then a lot of the biggest job was if the lake was too bad, you didn't go, and [inaudible] a bit. Then they take their horses and sit and take a sled to [inaudible] and go to half a mile or a mile. The big kill is getting the shack out there, getting it off. You could always walkout.

RMB: Right. You couldn't get the shack out.

VG: There were no roads or no bridges. You just were kind of on your own.

RMB: You found a spot to get across the doors.

VG: If you didn't fish out, the weather was bad, you stayed home. But nowadays, it could be foggy or blizzard, they're all out there with the GPS or the modern technology that shows that did [inaudible] fishing, but maybe half the time they weren't fishing and lot less people. I got a kick out and some people said, "You had the family tradition. I wish we could do the family tradition." I said, "What do you mean family tradition?" They said, "If you want to do that, okay, give it all your modern equipment, so you might be able to fish more than two, three days or a week [laughter]." I said, "You shot your hole by hand. Since you go out there, maybe take the snowmobile or something on, maybe get the shanties out and start walking." I said, "Do everything by hand." I said to other people to not do it. It's just too easy because it was work. Because I remember in the [19]70s when we started, we had junky old snowmobiles. Now, you get two, three feet of snow. That's working on water underneath. I mean, actually, it's work. They shot the holes by hand, oh, boy.

RMB: You're pretty worn out by the end of that.

VG: But then it was work. But now, this has been so easy. Like I think, "Well, this is piece of cake. Bring a buddy out, big fancy truck, and experience on the right way. So, what goes three, four, five years without one?" Get a couple of ten years, and all they need to start thinking. I remember the years when actually it has worked. But you did it because we always got some. But in some years –

KG: One of our neighbors had his grandson out in the course kit. The kid was old enough to get one, and he got one. He comes off great. There was nothing –

VG: Nothing to this.

KG: (Wilmer?) comes down and h shook his head. He said, "Boys, he got a lot of them [laughter]."

RMB: (Wilmer Schultz?)?

VG: Yes, Willy.

RMB: Oh, yes.

KG: We fished with him once in a while. But he just shook his head.

[talking simultaneously]

VG: I remember that when Wilmers' grandson got that fish.



KG: Wasn't that many years ago?

VG: Wasn't that many years ago, yes. It was nothing to this. It's like shooting a ten-point buck first year. I never going to do that again in your lifetime.

RMB: Well, I did that. First buck I ever shot in my life is a ten pointer.

[talking simultaneously]

RMB: [inaudible] ever since [laughter].

KG: But if he gets a deer, he'll get a sturgeon. It's been going like that.

RMB: Oh, is that right?

KG: Yes. It's –

RMB: I like [inaudible] packers with.

VG: But the last few years, I've been getting some deer and no sturgeon.

KG: Yes. He did a lot of [inaudible] off kilter on that one, but –

VG: I just got enough of my days already. It really doesn't bother me that much.

KSK: If you had to choose between deer hunting and sturgeon spearing, what would you take?

VG: I would take the deer hunting today. Today, I would because as such you don't have – it's just a rush getting out there and then [inaudible]. I was [inaudible] sturgeon years back. Actually, we used to get more sturgeons than deer.

KSK: You shouldn't say that because you make decoys. You shouldn't say that.

VG: But we always got sturgeon [laughter]. But years back, we had to move slug guns. I mean, they weren't much. You missed [inaudible].

RMB: Oh, sure. I mean, now, the rifle barrels –

VG: A hundred yards.

RMB: [inaudible] are getting off.

VG: This did nothing to it. If this kind of turned around a little bit – I still like sturgeon fish. It's in you. But it's just that the season is short and deer hunting is just the opposite. You can shoot more and it's longer. Everything is just with the cycles. But I love my ice fishing in

wintertime. I love pan fishing.

RMB: Well, that's been improving on the lake with the perch. We've got more weeds in the lake now, which is really keeping up in our perch population and [inaudible]. I don't know if you're getting [inaudible] on this side at all.

VG: I'm never fished in the summer.

RMB: But I mean, in the winter, are you making any –

VG: No. The only thing I caught this one, it was one crappy. That was it.

KSK: So, you had any summer fishing?

VG: No.

KSK: Just winter?

VG: Yes. Just ice.

RMB: Too busy working in the summer.

KSK: Well, that's just interesting because some of the research I've done in the early [19]30s, the Conservation Commission tried to shut down ice fishing altogether. The uproar around Lake Winnebago was pretty –

KG: Loud.

KSK: – loud.

KG: It's like the wind turbine uproar, ha?

KSK: Yes. They were just no way. You can't take away our ice fishing, because they said a lot of them were farmers and they didn't have time to fish in the summer. So, that's the only time they get to fish. It was in the winter.

VG: Well, back then you go years back, not every farmer had a boat or like she would fish off the pier or right offshore. But ice fishing, you could always walk out.

RMB: You can walk out, so that makes sense.

VG: That made a difference.

KSK: Everybody can go do it.

RMB: That was when you really had access to your time to go and you had access to the fish.

KG: When the weather is nice you're bailing in. That's when the fish are biting. So, if you're a farmer –

VG: Well, early in the morning [inaudible] late at night, there are some more milk. I never got one. Let's see, my dad never did it. My grandpa, maybe he did a little for he had to run otherwise. But my dad never summer fish, so I never got hooked on it.

RMB: No?

VG: But ice fishing, I did. I love my ice. I know a lot of guys that do summer fish. They're big also, but he said they prefer ice fishing. They love it the best. They're like, "Boy, you're out there. You're cold and you'll freeze." Be prepared for it.

RMB: Yes. You just [inaudible]. Be prepared for it.

KSK: You just like it because it's quiet or just –

RMB: It's fun. I used to ice fish a lot though here too.

VG: It's fun.

RMB: It's fun. Getting that bite and getting tip ups and whatever, I mean, it's exciting.

VG: To me, fishing or like ice fishing, take it from me, when he feels the hit, that's –

RMB: Yes.

KSK: That's the saying.

VG: Some friends of mine took me on the border, and he got these running boards. I said, "All you're doing is dragging in that half-dead fish." That don't throw me.

RMB: No. I'd rather feel that hit.

VG: You want to feel them hit?

RMB: Yes.

VG: That's always hold there [laughter] –

RMB: That doesn't excite me either.

VG: No. It doesn't excite me. But a lot of guys [inaudible] just wonderful.

RMB: [laughter] Whatever.

VG: I like to feel them hit. So, that's the difference there. They'd be just like going sturgeon fishing and settling down in the morning and just pull them out. Same thing.

RMB: Exactly.

VG: Exactly. Of course, they did try doing that over the other side there.

RMB: In [19]92. Yes.

VG: I remember that [19]92, I was –

RMB: It was cloudy year too.

VG: Yes, and [inaudible] four feet. I think I was white bass fishing, and I didn't even – did I buy license that year or not. I don't know if I did, but I didn't go. So, I just did white bass fishing or pan fishing. My brother said, "Well, if you want to go sturgeon fishing –" I said to him, "I'll just go right over there with the hook and line." I said, "It's only about a mile from where I'm fishing." We see everybody going by. Every once in a while, truck comes back with tailgate on. He got it four feet [inaudible] [laughter]. You know that ended very quick.

RMB: Well, that's what ended the fishing in the shack.

VG: Oh, yes. Well, that, but those guys they're using a big heavy rods than mine. They were using [inaudible] equipment if they were doing it. But here in net fishing, you got your little [inaudible] four, five [inaudible]. You're not going to have much of a chance.

RMB: No.

VG: That's going to be pink. But they just eliminated a lot. They made a bet for all of us. That's what they did. Those few people on – or same thing with the like deal. That I never [inaudible]. I said, "Do you got to fish at night?" I said, "I'm not that desperate to get a sturgeon [laughter]. Some people go to extremes. To me, what they're doing, they're trying to push how far they can push it before you break the law. That's what they're doing. I always figured, well, if I get out there at 8:00 a.m., 9:00 a.m., you quit when it gets dark. All the lights were usable. That's good enough. You only fish so long so much. That's the way I look at it.

RMB: Well, we probably should wrap up. We're going to go down the interview with Dan Goeser next. So, we got to meet him at 11:00 a.m.

KSK: Oh, a donut –

RMB: Donut pipe?

KSK: – pipe.

RMB: But I want to look at your decoys because I want to buy one today.

KG: I got out the sturgeon that you're looking [inaudible].

RMB: Great. Finally, do you have any last questions, Kathy?

KSK: No. I think that's good. It's interesting to talk to people on different sides of the lake and up the river and just different perspectives on it. So, it's been good. Thanks so much.

RMB: We really appreciate it.

KG: Thanks so much for having an interest [laughter].

RMB: I got a form. I got to have you sign where that says – it basically is a release form. It just says we can use the information –

VG: I even made a decoy snake with one time that some don't want to buy it.

RMB: Was that right?

VG: Expensive.

KSK: Terribly crazy.

VG: It all depends how much you want to spend on some of the exotic wooden stuff. I didn't want to try to turn it on some to decoy. I mean, I just not [laughter] –

RMB: You can pay so much for the wood but then –

VG: No. This tool was just about \$20 with the wood right here.

RMB: Really?

VG: Just the wood right here –

RMB: Oh, my goodness.

VG: – in the box.

RMB: Wow.

KSK: Here we've got tree-of-heaven, desert palm. I was looking for that snakewood one. Here it is. Wow, snakewood. If you look really close –

VG: You can see scales but –

KSK: – there was a portion of it that you can see scales. But you really have to have an imagination.

VG: I totally have a different one. A lot of these are just different kinds of woods.

KG: That we kept.

VG: – that we kind of kept.

KSK: Oh, yes.

VG: I don't know what's this one's here. I just saw them.

KG: Ebony –

VG: Ebony –

KG: – from Africa.

VG: – from Africa.

KSK: Oh, my gosh. Where are you getting all this wood from? Just different suppliers?

KG: Yes.

VG: Just kind of [inaudible] people.

KG: Wood craft store in Appleton farm.

KSK: Wow.

KG: That's where that came from. That's heavy enough by itself.

VG: A lot of them.

KG: You don't need lead to put it in the – that would stay.

KSK: Just the wood?

RMB: Really?

KG: Just the wood.

RMB: Wow.

VG: A lot of the exotic ones are heavy enough. You don't have to – they would [inaudible].

RMB: There's a place where it says signature right below that sign or right around there.

KSK: What's that?

KG: I don't know. Read the label.

KSK: Does it come –

RMB: Well, literally, that just gives us the right to use the information from the interview in the book.

VG: Here's my address and stuff.

KSK: [inaudible]

RMB: Pardon me.

VG: My address here.

RMB: Yes. You could put your address down right away. Sure.

KSK: I need to see some of the wood.

KG: Tree-of-heaven.

RMB: That's cool.

KG: Tree-of-heaven, I think that's what's this one is from China.

RMB: Wow.

KG: That's the yellow kind.

RMB: Well, there was letter there. All of the different woods.

KG: Here's the tulipwood like you saw there. We ordered it through the catalog. It only came that white. If you look close at the design, or maybe this side of it, what do you see in the design?

KSK: In the wood?

KG: Yes. We thought it was like a chicken –

KSK: It looks like a duck. Yes.

KG: – and duck.

RMB: Chicken.

VG: It does look chicken either or something.

KG: Yes. The other side is the same way. Now, who would think one little narrow piece of wood.

KSK: Wow.

KG: So, this is our keeping box.

VG: This is the one I did over here not that one.

RMB: Well, that's fine.

KSK: That's fine.

RMB: That works. Well, we probably have to have Karla sign that too.

KSK: Because the girls on trees are –

VG: Okay.

KG: [inaudible] or else we don't have

[talking simultaneously]

That is the prettiest wood they say.

KSK: Oh.

RMB: Oh, sure. Look at that.

KG: That's one. It's how it changes in such a closed area. Sumac is the prettiest. I think like butternut also. It's the same. So, you do this every day?

RMB: Well, we're just [laughter] doing like a little marathon right now and have Karla sign this too.

[end of transcript]