Robert Stone Oral History
Date of Interview: May 16, 2009
Location: Ponce Inlet, Florida
Length of Interview: 01:29:24
Interviewer: KB – Kenneth Brennan
Transcriber: NCC

Kenneth Brennan: My name's Ken Brennan. I'm conducting the interview. The subject of the interview will be the history of fishing on the East Coast of Florida. I'm with Captain Bob Stone of Ponce Inlet, Florida. The date is May 16th, 2009. Good morning, Captain Bob.

Robert Stone: Good morning. [laughter]

KB: Can you tell me your age and how long you've lived in Florida?

RS: Well, I was born on a kitchen table about a half a mile down the street in 1934 [laughter]. I just celebrated my seventy-fifth birthday in January of this year.

KB: How long have you been a fisherman in Florida?

RS: I started fishing with my dad in 1943 at the age of nine.

KB: Was he a fisherman before you?

RS: Yes. He was fishing out of here back in the [19]30s.

KB: In the [19]30s. What type of fishing did he do?

RS: I would say mostly sport and recreational fishing up until World War II. Then he started commercial fishing to supplement the family income. Then from that point on, he commercial fished in the fall, winter, and spring, and recreational charter fished during the summertime when the tourists were here.

KB: Were there any effects of the submarines? Did he have to consider that during his time fishing in the World War II?

RS: Well, they had a Coast Guard boat stationed in the inlet twenty-four hours a day. You weren't allowed to go out until one hour before daylight and you had to be back in by dark every day.

KB: Did he ever sight one or have any encounters?

RS: Submarines? Not really. Biggest danger we had offshore here was the naval air training planes strafing the fishing boats thinking they were target boats.

KB: [laughter] Oh, goodness.

[laughter]

Did ever any injury or accidents occur or they just close calls?

RS: There were no deaths that I know of. But there were a couple of boats actually damaged by machine-gun fire.

[laughter]

KB: What types of boats were around back then? Mostly, wooden boats or open hull boats?

RS: Wooden boats, but generally, the same type of boat that we have today. Some of them were old, converted yachts. Even back in the twenties, there were boats running out of Daytona Beach, head boat fishing everything that we fished today out there.

KB: They were actually head boats?

RS: Yes.

KB: They charged per person?

RS: Diesel powered, sixty, sixty-five foot boats that some of them were quite fast even back then. Converted rum runners are what they were [laughter].

KB: Is that right? That was in the 1920s?

RS: Yes.

KB: 1920s. Because we've been able to document it back to the [19]40s, but never head boat fishing any farther back than that.

RS: Oh, yes.

KB: So, it's gone back to the – and that was off of here, Ponce Inlet?

RS: Well, the boats ran from right in the center of Daytona Beach on the Halifax River up – at that time, there was a bridge from Broadway on the Oceanside to, I think it was 2nd Avenue. Then they had to turn south for a block to get to the Volusia Avenue to go on the highway for DeLand. But they had a dock built right alongside the bridge, and that's where the boat's docked. My dad had a friend that he commercial fished with occasionally back then that was -- the boat's name was the *Lapwing* and the captain's name was Ralph (Weatherall?). They used to commercial fish shrimp and then carry passenger's snapper fishing in the season when the tourists were in town.

KB: What year was that?

RS: That was from the mid late [19]20s and right on through the thirties.

KB: So, they weren't using sail powered and mostly diesels?

RS: [laughter] They had boats that were as fast as some of them today.

KB: How far out would they range with those boats to make a trip?

RS: Well, they fished what we call the Mango Hole, which is right at, I think twenty-nine nautical miles off back then. I know good and well, they probably fished further than that too on occasion.

KB: What type of navigation did they use?

RS: [laughter]

KB: Dead reckoning or --

RS: They used compasses, time, speed of the boat, and sounding lines.

KB: What did a sounding line consist of?

RS: Just a line marked off in fathoms with about a two to three-pound lead weight on it. Sometimes with soap in the bottom of it to determine the makeup of the bottom.

KB: So, if you hit sand, it would come back up on the soap, sand? Or if you were on hard bottom and –

RS: Yes.

KB: – come up part further?

RS: Come up with shell or rock or gravel or whatever in it.

KB: So, I guess the hard bottom was the desirable fishing area back then?

RS: Well, they always used a hook with a bait on it attached to that.

KB: To the sounding line? [laughter]

RS: To the sounding line. That way –

KB: Answer two questions at once. [laughter]

RS: – they got a bite [laughter]. They threw a buoy and worked the area.

KB: Right. Well, how many people would normally go out on a trip like that back then?

RS: On a party fishing trip? Twenty-five, thirty people.

KB: Okay. So, it was quite popular back then.

RS: Of course, there were probably times when they only had five, six people on the boat too.

KB: Right. Was it –

RS: Fuel was probably six, eight cents a gallon. [laughter] They sold their fish. If they caught an abundance of fish, they shipped them to New York or sold them locally if there was a need for them.

KB: Were they able to carry ice at that point?

RS: Yes.

KB: Blocks of ice, I guess?

RS: Yes.

KB: Were there ever salting fish back then?

RS: No.

KB: No, never. It was always fresh market.

RS: Yes.

KB: What did a catch consist of? What species would you say were the most predominant species in a catch?

RS: Snapper, grouper, sea bass.

KB: So, red snapper and – what type of –

RS: Red snapper, gray snapper, also, they caught them back then. The Mango Hole was named because that was one place in the ocean they always caught big mangrove snapper.

KB: Where is that off of? Daytona?

RS: No. That's about twenty-nine nautical miles east northeast of the inlet and about 105 feet of water off the reef and about ninety-eight or so up on it.

KB: What type of grouper would you catch?

RS: The gag, Warsaws, jewfish, red grouper.

KB: Was there any one species that was more abundant than the other?

RS: The gag.

KB: The gag?

RS: Yes.

KB: More abundant. What –

RS: They were then. They are now.

KB: Were they the blackbelly? The larger gag?

RS: Yes. Both smaller ones and the blackbellies.

KB: Did you ever encounter the black grouper up here?

RS: Not that I know of.

KB: Okay.

RS: Never had.

KB: Yellow tails, snapper, any of those – mutton snapper, did –

RS: Yellow tail, yes. Mutton's, lane, the vermilion. The cuberas. [laughter] There's very few of them. Landed once because your tackle usually isn't heavy enough to handle them when you hook into them.

KB: They were usually, what? Fifty, sixty pounds –

RS: Over more.

KB: – or more?

RS: Yes.

KB: Yes. That's a tough fighting fish.

RS: The jewfish and Warsaws used to be so thick on the reefs that they would literally – most of the time, you used a five hundred-pound test hand line back in those years. Up until the late [19]40s, that's what we used.

KB: What? Hand lines?

RS: Yes.

KB: Strictly, hand lines.

RS: You'd be pulling a twenty, twenty-five pound red snapper up, and the big ones would bite him just like a live bait, crush him. If you didn't lose him or hook the jewfish or Warsaw, then [laughter] he might spit it out and all you'd get would be a crushed –

KB: [laughter]

RS: – twenty, twenty-five pound red snapper to the surface.

KB: Scaled and –

RS: Completely scaled and crushed.

KB: Yes. Those back crunchers in there can do a job on a fish. There's the transition period in there that you went from basically no electronics to using some type of electronics to navigate or to get your depth. What year do you think that occurred?

RS: That was in the mid-[19]50s, late [19]50s. I think probably in the early [19]50s, they first started using fathometers.

KB: Were these military surplus?

RS: No. There may have been a few military surplus. But most of them were small [laughter] fathometers about like what you use on a freshwater bass boat today –

KB: Oh, yes. Just a –

RS: – or less. They had a paper probably three inches wide. Depending on what depth of water you were in, that's what it covered from the surface to the bottom. But it would show the fish. The sound would bounce back off of the fish and record that. But as the technology developed in the mid-[19]50s, then they had paper machines with paper probably six to seven inches wide on it.

KB: Show you more of the bottom profile and –

RS: Yes.

KB: – what was on it?

RS: I remember my dad's first machine was a Bendix DR 7. [laughter] The East 11 out there, when we'd go over the ledge, it looked like he was running over mountains –

[laughter]

– because it has probably twelve, fourteen-foot ledge in some places on it.

KB: Pretty dramatic when you marked that on a machine. Well, what age were you when you started fishing with your dad?

RS: Nine.

KB: Nine?

RS: Yes.

KB: Then you fished with him for how long before you broke out on your own?

RS: Up until I got back home out of the Navy in 1957. Well, I came home in, yes, late [19]56 and fished with my dad in [19]57.

KB: That was part of your –

RS: Then I worked with my cousin, Frank Timmons, in [19]58. Then I got married and the company that I was working for decided I was mature enough to operate a boat myself. So, they gave me a boat to run. That was the old original Snow White II. I ran it for about three or four years. Then my cousin built a boat of his own and moved to his father's business.

KB: That was Frank Timmons?

RS: Yes. They gave me the missal I needed to run for Inlet Harbor and turned the boat I was running over to a fellow by the name Al Klein.

KB: Was Inlet Harbor a corporation?

RS: Yes.

KB: How many boats did they have under their business?

RS: [laughter] Well, they started out with the *Gay Wind*, which was the owner's personal play boat and charter boat. Then they went from the *Gay Wind* to the *Snow White II*, the *Nydia*, and then the *Miss Juanita*.

KB: These were all similar-sized boats?

RS: Thirty-eight to forty foot, yes.

KB: Diesel powered?

RS: Originally, gasoline powered. Then the Gray Marine diesels came on the market surplus from the Navy and they converted to diesel for safety and –

KB: Single screw though?

RS: Yes, single screw boats.

KB: Wood plank. Were there any fiberglass at that point?

RS: No. No fiberglass. It was I would say late sixties, early [19]70s before we ever saw a fiberglass all around there other than a Chris-Craft [laughter].

KB: Right. That was fiberglassed over wood or was it straight fiberglass?

RS: I would say probably, the first ones were fiberglass over wood.

KB: Not molded?

RS: No.

KB: That came much later on. Well, so, you worked with Inlet Harbor from 1958, [19]59 as captain?

RS: From [19]58 up until 1966.

KB: On the Juanita mostly?

RS: Yes. Then *Miss Juanita* got swamped in the inlet. It was unjettied at that time.

KB: Were you on board? Were you captaining?

RS: Yes. About a month later, I went in debt and bought a boat up in the *Broadbill* and started operating it on my own.

KB: Out of Ponce Inlet?

RS: Yes. Out of Inlet Harbor, same place I was running the *Miss Juanita* before.

KB: You had the boat built or did you buy it?

RS: No, I bought it. It was originally brought to Daytona by a fellow by the name of Bobby Lynch (Field?) from Miami.

[laughter]

KB: That's Yankees say [laughter].

RS: Then he didn't do too well with it. So, he took it back to Miami and a local fellow by the name of Ray Fulgham had bought it and brought it up here and ran it for – oh, he ran it for probably six years or so. Then he built a bigger boat called the Miss Daytona, and sold to

Broadbill and I bought it [laughter].

KB: So, you would consider the *Broadbill* a head boat as well?

RS: It was a small head boat. She was about forty-seven foot and had about a sixteen-foot beam on her and twin gray Marine diesels. Actually, World War II surplus tank diesels [laughter]. That's what they were.

KB: It's amazing that you were able to get a transmission on there and direct it into a shaft.

RS: Well, actually, the Bell Housing was the same that the Navy had on the ones that they had attached to manual twin disc clutches. So, the twin discs bolted right up to them.

KB: How fast were they?

RS: [inaudible] She would cruise about fifteen and a half, sixteen knots.

KB: What was the carrying capacity of the *Broadbill*? How many people would you – your maximum load or –

RS: I think it was eighteen people.

KB: Eighteen?

RS: Yes.

KB: What was your average trip? How many people?

RS: Sometimes went with as few as probably eight or ten, and other times with eighteen.

KB: All right. Was that year round or was it a seasonal?

RS: Recreational fishing, like that was pretty much seasonal from probably late January through August, right up until Labor Day in September. [laughter] Back then, the day after Labor Day, you could roll up the streets in Daytona Beach and –

[laughter]

KB: Put them away.

RS: Nobody would know it.

KB: [laughter]

RS: Because all the tourists went home to put their kids in school. Then I guess Chamber Commerce started advertising more year round. When Disney built over in Orlando, it just

opened it up to where it became a year round.

KB: That obviously helped your business.

RS: Oh, yes.

KB: What did you do before then in the off season? Did you use the boat for commercial fishing?

RS: Shrimping, mostly

KB: You would shrimp off the *Broadbill*?

RS: Put a shrimp rig on it and shrimped. Yes.

KB: Booms and –

RS: Yes.

KB: That's interesting. Yes, that's –

RS: Did that with the *Miss Juanita* with the Snow White also.

KB: So, much like today, you had to improvise to survive in fishing.

RS: Yes.

KB: You couldn't sit idle and wait for the season to come around. But the *Broadbill* trip, say a normal trip, you would go how far offshore?

RS: Probably up to thirty miles about the furthest.

KB: You have a lot of pictures of the catches. Looks like it mainly consisted of red snapper and king mackerel and amberjack. Were they the main target species?

RS: That was the target species.

KB: You'd catch additional stuff like black sea bass. What else did you –

RS: We always caught the bass, especially when the water got cold out there. That was the only thing that would bite in cold water, was the sea bass. Usually caught anywhere from maybe fifty, seventy-five pounds depending on the number of people you had fishing, up to around a hundred, two-hundred pounds of them a day every day out there. Right along with the snapper and grouper and amberjack and the other species.

KB: When you were in route, did you trawl for pelagic or kings or anything? Or did you just

steam right to the –

RS: Not with the *Broadbill*. With the *Miss Juanita* and the *Snow White,* I did. Sometimes even just specifically fish for the king mackerel.

KB: How about dolphin, wahoo, sailfish?

RS: That was just incidental bycatch. They might or might not catch [laughter].

KB: Right. Bonus if you do.

RS: Yes.

KB: Well, what natural phenomenon did you see, say in the – I don't want to jump too far ahead. But say from your early youth to when you got out of the Navy, you talked to me earlier about some spills off of here. Were there any other things that you –

RS: Well, actually, the spills weren't when I was in the Navy. Literally, only in the last [laughter] about twenty years or so that those occurred. That was a Navy barge with about five million gallons of caustic soda on it that sank about thirty-five miles northeast of here off of Matanzas. We used to fish up there at that time on bottom up another probably ten, twelve miles north of there, or northeast of there. They put a Texas tower rig over that barge with a team of divers on it and went down daily and invented it allowing the caustic soda to flow out into the water. It literally wiped out the fishing in that area.

KB: What year was that?

RS: I would say in the early [19]80s, somewhere along in there. Early to mid-[19]80s.

KB: I'm sure there's newspaper articles documenting.

RS: Never saw a thing about it in the news.

KB: Oh, is that right?

RS: Yes.

KB: The hush-hush?

RS: Right. Not a thing.

KB: So, you definitely noticed a drop in your catches?

RS: Yes. Absolutely. You just gave up fishing up there because of the lack of fish in the area.

KB: Did you ever see any dead fish or did you hear of any dead fish or anything that ran them

off out of that area?

RS: Well, we were fishing up there at the time they were venting it and catching fairly. But after about a year or so of them venting it, then everything there just kind of vanished to nothing. It's gradually coming back at this time. It's starting to produce fish up there again in that area. But it put a hard on it for I'd say probably seven or eight years or more.

KB: Yes. That definitely is important information when you're looking at the long-time series of effects on fishing and something that we haven't heard in the port.

RS: Our snapper fishing, grouper fishing, and everything else was I would say somewhat depleted because of the lack of any kind of conservation steps being taken up until just the last few years. But another drastic decline in very rapid short period of time was when that space shuttle went down off the Cape. Up until that time, there was nothing to catch. The sea bass, just like we always had at rates of anywhere from fifty to a couple hundred pounds of them a day. Six months after that thing hit the water, you couldn't catch a sea bass in this ocean out here. Still can't today, except for just rare occasions, you might catch a dozen of them or so in one or two places. At the same time, the snapper and grouper had a very sharp decline in the quantity that we caught.

KB: That was when the Challenger went down?

RS: Yes.

KB: Did you see any debris out there while you were fishing? Or did you ever encounter any of the wreckage?

RS: No. They closed fishing down. You couldn't even go out for about a week around there.

KB: Until they scoured the area, I'm sure.

RS: Yes. There has been some debris from some of their mishaps down there at the Cape that we've seen occasionally, but not done any great consequences, I would say. Just some of the probably ferry cows and stuff that they put on some of the rockets that blew up.

KB: Jettison parts?

RS: Yes.

KB: You've thought about this for a long time, I'm sure. How do you think that incident affected the fish? Do you think their temperature or radio activity or – [laughter].

RS: I wouldn't have the slightest idea. I mean, I'm not a chemist or a scientist or seen any studies done on it or anything else. But I know that our snapper fishing – it was since then that they instigated the conservation rules and stuff. Our snapper fishing has been on a steady increase in growth even though I think that their laws are somewhat [laughter] discriminatory

when you can go right straight across the state and keep a snapper, a thirteen inch or sixteen inches long, and here, it has to be twenty. You can go over there and keep a grouper twenty inches long, and here, it has to be twenty-four. Things like that, I just think flat discriminatory [laughter]. But it has benefited the fishing. I think that under the present conditions, our fishing has gotten better over the last six or eight years and appears to me to be well on its way to recovery.

KB: Have you seen an increase in effort in that same time period? Do you see more boats?

RS: Oh, yes. Back then, the only thing you had was maybe during the height of the season, fifteen or twenty charter boats operating out here. Now, every weekend, you've got 150 private outboards and chartered and sport fishermen and everything else out there, fishing if the weather's fit. There's no comparison.

KB: How do you think it breaks down? Do you think half of them are fishing for pelagic or half of them are fishing for bottom fish? What do you think is the ratio?

RS: I would say that the sport fishing boats are doing that. They're fishing for dolphin, wahoo, sailfish, marlin; those specific species. Occasionally, they might stop and bottom fish, but not very often. But the outboards, every time they go in the ocean, they'll run around and chase a dolphin or a king mackerel or something for an hour or two, and then they start bottom fishing. I've sat out there many a time on the artificial reefs on half-day trips. Where we're measuring fish and throwing back undersized fish, look over and watch the outboarders throwing them in their coolers. If you say something to them, they just give you a finger. [laughter]

KB: Think you're crazy.

RS: Tell you to mind your own business.

KB: Right. Do you see much law enforcement out there on the water?

RS: No. They harass the people that are in the business and try to obey the law because they don't want to lose their licenses or operators operating for their income, and more or less ignore them. They have caught a few of them here in the last year or so. But in my opinion, when you have someone that their livelihood depends on maintaining a Coast Guard license for operating your vessel and permits from the National Marine Fisheries for all the species that you fish for, and size limits and so forth that are put there for the maintenance of better fishing. A person that's doing it for a living to me, it would be just absolutely dumb to [laughter] violate it and risk the loss of it all. But I guess there might be one or two that wouldn't make any difference what they were doing and just pushing to the limit. But I don't think it's very many people that are involved in it as a full-time profession.

KB: Right. Yes. That's been my experience. I've seen that about everywhere I've been that they treat it as a business and they respect the laws.

RS: It's the ones that you usually find [laughter] have a business or a job that they work five, six

days a week and they get out maybe one or two weekends a month to go fishing. They're going to take everything they can get their hands on instead of considering the consequences of getting caught with it.

KB: Or managing it.

RS: Yes, proper management of it.

KB: Conservation, yes. Oh, I'd like to back up a little bit about technology. Well, we'll start with LORAN-A. When did you start using LORAN-A, or did you?

RS: Started using LORAN-A in about early [19]60s.

KB: [19]60s, and that was on the *Broadbill*?

RS: On the *Miss Juanita.*

KB: *Miss Juanita*. Okay. How effective or how much of a benefit was that to your fishing?

RS: Deadly.

KB: Deadly.

[laughter]

RS: But some people I guess could probably get fouled up with it. But as far as I was concerned, you could put a marker out there in the ocean, take a reading on it, you could go back anytime in the day or night and wind up within fifteen, twenty feet of it.

KB: With LORAN-A?

RS: With LORAN-A.

KB: Do you think your Navy experience helped you understand that, or you just –

RS: No.

KB: – understood it right from –

RS: I had I guess a fairly good machine and –

KB: The aptitude to use it.

RS: Yes, [laughter] used it right.

KB: Yes. So, you used LORAN-A from what year did you say?

RS: I'd say probably around [19]62, [19]63, somewhere along there.

KB: Okay. How long did you stick with LORAN-A?

RS: Until they came out with C LORAN.

KB: That was the early [19]70s?

RS: Automatic reading, back then you had to adjust it to get it. But –

KB: Sounded like it was a fine art to tune those things, LORAN-A.

RS: Sometimes it was. Yes.

KB: Would the signal vary from day to day, cloud cover or –

RS: Yes. The atmosphere ionization and stuff, sunrise and sunset, things like that interfered with them somewhat.

KB: But you were still pleased to have it?

RS: Oh, yes. Well, my dad was one of the first ones around here to get one. Actually, the *Broadbill*, when the fellow brought it up here from Miami, had an old surplus LORAN on it. It was LORAN-A. That was one of the first ones used in this area. But then we found out that they were making them and selling them. So, we started using them. Everyone more or less started using them around the same time.

KB: So, you were able to go back to spots that you routinely caught fish in?

RS: Yes. But then when they came out with the automatic reading and C LORAN, [laughter] just about every outboard in the ocean got them. There were no more secrets then. I mean, all they had to do was run by and write down the numbers, and that was it.

KB: Yes. Hit a way point and they had it locked in. But definitely, it was a turning point in fishing. So, you used LORAN-C throughout the [19]70s and into the [19]80s?

RS: Yes.

KB: Most of the [19]80s.

RS: Yes.

KB: When did you –

RS: Right up to the end of the nineties, we were using LORAN-C.

KB: Have you switched to GPS?

RS: Oh, yes.

KB: What year did –

RS: But we still use LORAN-C coordinates because – [laughter]

KB: That's your –

RS: – I got a brain full of the numbers and –

KB: [laughter] Yes. Yes. There's a lot of fishermen that still do that. Just for when you're communicating with other fishermen, you still speak in LORAN-C basically coordinates.

RS: Yes.

KB: But how much more effective do you think GPS has been compared to LORAN-C? Do you think it's been a huge improvement?

RS: No. [laughter]

KB: No. You think it's made fishing more accessible to sport fishing.

RS: Oh, naturally, it has to, to the amateur or weekend fisherman that's made it just all he had to do is take up a local fishing chart with the LORAN coordinates on it and go fishing. Had a fellow pulled into the dock down there the other day. He had a limited big red snapper. I mean, [laughter] probably twelve to eighteen pound fish. My mate asked him where he caught them, and he says, "On the fish haven out there in the ocean they marked on the chart there with the numbers on."

[laughter]

KB: Yes. Between that and the charts and the internet providing those fishing spots, that's a big wealth of information for fishermen too. Yes. You can pretty much buy a GPS now for $200 and go fishing. I mean, you don't –

RS: Yes. [laughter] I know there's places over on the West Coast where they have them nailed to the pilings on [laughter] the docks where they take them away from the people on their boats [laughter].

KB: [laughter]

RS: Just drive a nail right through them.

[laughter]

KB: Yes. That's frowned on, on head boats, isn't it? I would love to see that and get a picture of that. Well, so, that –

RS: I just ask them to turn them off. Or take them until we get back to the dock and [laughter] give them back to them.

KB: Oh, yes. You didn't go to any extremes with them then?

RS: No.

KB: Obviously, you've seen a lot of fishing around here. Do you think management is heading in the right direction? Or do you think it's getting more –

RS: Actually, right now, I think they're headed in the wrong direction. It appears to me that what they're trying to do is just stop fishing in the ocean, period. They claim they got scientific proof that the fish are being over fished. But I've seen a decline in the fish. I've also seen an increase in the fishing and the quantity of fish that we're catching and places that we're catching them in the last few years that is, under the present restrictions, doing a good job.

KB: We're mainly talking about red snapper or most species in general?

RS: Specifically, red snapper because that's been my main target fish for most of my life, and grouper too. I've seen an increase in them here in the last few years.

KB: Gag grouper?

RS: Yes.

KB: I looked at a lot of your pictures and the size distribution of the fish you were catching back in the [19]60s. You caught all sizes. You said there was no –

RS: All sizes.

KB: – limits. If the person wanted –

RS: There were no limits or anything. The people that caught them – I mean, if the fish was six inches long, they wanted it to take home because there was enough meat there for a sandwich. [laughter] Fish sandwich. That might have been their own only fishing trip for the year. So, they wanted everything that they caught.

KB: So, it wasn't always just big fish coming up?

RS: No.

KB: It was a –

RS: You stop in one place, all the fish you caught would be probably from six to eight inches long. You move a few hundred yards or half a mile or so and stop on another spot and everything you call to be eighteen, twenty inches long. They move in schools pretty much according to their size and age. At certain times of the year, I think the big fish become kind of loners or they pair up and swim off to a nest and lay their eggs. Then other times of the year, they school up.

KB: Did you ever fish on spawning aggregations?

RS: Yes. I've seen the water turn absolutely red around the boat with schools of sow snappers.

KB: Did you ever see the actual mating, spawning circle while fishing?

RS: Well, when you caught one of them, they'd be squirting the eggs out as you took them in the boat. I always hated to see it, but then their spawning season spans the height of our tourist season, from June through August here in this area. That's when we're the busiest and that's when they choose to spawn.

KB: Right. What size fish were they mostly?

RS: Well, you see the fish with eggs in them from the time they're probably fifteen, sixteen inches long up until as big as they get. The majority and ones most notable are the sows that weigh anywhere from twenty to thirty pounds. They get smart too. Lose one or two fish in the school, they're gone.

KB: Time to move,

RS: They find out that what they're biting is hurting them and it's time to go. The word gets around to them quickly. You don't just sit there and catch the whole school of fish right down to the last biter [laughter]. They have defensive noises that they make and stuff that I guess warn the other fish not to bite – not to feed.

KB: Well, when you first started captaining, would it just be a time at a day that you would end a trip? Or were there other instances where you say –

RS: We usually started at 8:00 a.m. until 5:00 p.m. That's where we fish today, is between 4:00 and 5:00 p.m.

KB: Didn't matter how many fish you caught?

RS: Oh, no, no, no.

KB: Or sometimes people would have enough –

RS: We'd have a fish box that would hold a reasonable amount of fish for the number of people that we expected to have on the boat. That was usually full capacity. Anytime you got anywhere near that box being full, that was time to quit and go home. Whether it was I've done it in an hour after I started fishing. Then [laughter] there'd been many a day I come home with one or two fish laying on the bottom of the box too. But fishing is not something where you just slaughter the fish every time you go fishing. You just catch them when they bite. When they don't bite, you lick your wounds and try again [laughter].

KB: Right. Right. The years haven't changed that. That was the way it was since you were a boy.

RS: Right. Absolutely.

KB: I mean, your father probably would say the same thing. Would you agree?

RS: Yes. The only time that you fished, and of course, you had boxes and ice and stuff to take care of the fish. You didn't just catch fish and let them lay on the boat and rot. I stood in my father's cockpit knee deep in sow snappers [laughter]. But we had boxes and ice to take care of them when we had time to stop and gut them down and ice them down.

KB: With the snapper that is being caught now, the red snapper, your classes, do you see like say eighteen to twenty-inch fish, and then twenty-eight to thirty-inch fish? Or is there a break in there where you said they travel according to their size. Are you seeing different sizes in the catch?

RS: Oh, yes. As far as the varied size of the fish goes, I don't see a whole lot of difference in it today than it was thirty, forty years ago. The fish have not recovered to the point that there are plentiful as they were then. But they have increased and are much more plentiful today than they were ten years ago. I'd say that they have reached a point now to where they're probably as plentiful as they were fifteen, eighteen years ago. Under the present restrictions, I think they're gradually increasing.

KB: Would you like to take a pause?

RS: Sure.

KB: We're resuming here with Captain Bob Stone and we're just having a cup of coffee and talking about his career again as a charter boat, head boat captain. You just mentioned that you ran the Critter boats?

RS: Yes. I started out on a boat we call the Little Critter that was Gillikin built in North Carolina. We only kept that one for about two years because it was a dog.

[laughter]

KB: Was it built on Harkers Island?

RS: Yes.

KB: It was [laughter]. I actually know those guys. [laughter]

RS: They built some good boats. But this one wasn't one of them.

KB: Van Gillikin or James Gillikin?

RS: James, pretty sure.

KB: Okay. Now, this was right after the *Broadbill*?

RS: He's the old man that takes a pencil and he draws on a piece of wood, a boat, and he says, "Is this what you want?" [laughter] That's what he builds.

[laughter]

KB: I know. I've seen him scribing lines on wood up there too. They're quite the boat builders. But you got a bad one there, huh?

RS: Well, actually, she was fifty-seven feet long with two 1272 diesels in it, and 1271s. They were just too heavy engines for the size of the boat, actually. It should have been probably sixty-five foot; it would've carried the weight of the engines. When you put the people on it, it wouldn't have – [laughter]

KB: Squatted.

RS: Just made a big hole in the water.

[laughter]

KB: I'm trying to keep chronology of your captain. So, after the *Broadbill*?

RS: Yes.

KB: After the *Broadbill*, you went to –

RS: Well, I still owned the *Broadbill* when I went to work for the Critter Fleet. I'd owned it for nine years and operated it myself. But I turned it over to my first mate who had his license at the time and he ran it out of a dock in New Smyrna. I went to work for the critter fleet running the little critter. We ran it for two years. In the meantime, he had the first super critter aluminum hull built over in Louisiana.

KB: Who was that? Who had the –

RS: (Charlie Chamel?).

KB: Charlie Chamel.

RS: He was the owner of the critter fleet. He had the super critter built. He already owned the little critter and the sea critter, which was a 65-foot (Gilligan?). When they got the aluminum boat, which was an 85-footer and brought it over here, he immediately sold the little critter. We just operated the super critter and the sea critter for about five years. Then he had the (super critter 2?) built and sold the sea critter, which that was a mistake in his favor when he had the super critter built. He ordered an 80-footer. He got an 85-footer. So, he thought he had such a good deal. He'd go get another 80-footer built. When he brought the second 80-footer over and tied it up alongside the first one, it was short.

[laughter]

Except for the bow spread, they changed the design of the bow spread on them. That made it the same length, but then the hull itself was 5 foot shorter.

KB: So, when you ran those boats, you were again bottom fishing?

RS: Just strictly bottom fishing.

KB: Just strictly.

RS: Sniper, grouper, amberjack, cobia. School of dolphins swam up around the boat. We dolphin fished.

KB: The opportunity presented itself.

RS: If king mackerel went through, you put as many of them in the boat as you could.

KB: You were carrying a lot more people than on the boat?

RS: Oh, yes. I think the first trip I ran with the super critter was a hundred eighteen people on it.

KB: How did you keep that straight?

RS: It was a nightmare.

[laughter]

KB: Mates went around cutting lines, didn't they? Stayed busy. I bet an amberjack would cause some trouble, too, wouldn't he?

RS: I think they more or less decided now that even though the boats were licensed for a hundred thirty by the coast guard, they only put about ninety-five people on them anymore, if

they ever get that many to go anymore.

KB: That's something we haven't talked about. Do you think the number of people fishing on head boats has decreased over the years? Have you seen it peak?

RS: Yes. It peaked. Yes.

KB: What year do you think it was?

RS: There are still times like Fourth of July and major holidays that there's crowds. They sometimes turn people away. But as an overall thing, I think it's declined somewhat.

KB: When do you think it peaked, the heyday, or, however?

RS: I would say probably early nineties. Of course, that again all depends on the economy.

KB: Do you think regulations had an effect on people wanting to go fishing?

RS: Somewhat, but they're still (paperlite?). Give it a try.

KB: Because you're mostly dealing with a tourist clientele down here, right?

RS: Yes.

KB: I bet you still have locals that are regulars.

RS: Fishing on them. Yes.

KB: As far as head boats, do you think there's a decrease in the interest to fish, say, younger kids not going, or maybe we could be losing a generation of fishermen?

RS: No. I would say probably the makeup of the crowds is generally you have your older people that come down here and spend two or three months in the wintertime, but fish every chance they get. I mean, day after day, when the weather's fit. Then during the tourist seasons, you have your families come down. Of course, with the cost of it, I would say since fuel went up and the price of the trips had to go up to pay for the fuel and cost of the bait and all that, it probably had more to do with the decline in the number of people that went instead of a man taking his whole family fishing, just one or two of them would go. Things like that.

KB: So, you ran the critter boats throughout, what would that be, the [19]80s and [19]90s?

RS: It started in [19]75 and ran them for about twenty-eight years. I'd be about (two?), somewhere along there.

KB: Are you still running any boats or –

RS: Yes. I still run a 42-foot charter boat. We troll and bottom fish most of the time. Sometimes people just strictly want to troll, so we troll. Other times, they strictly want to bottom fish, so we bottom fish.

KB: You pretty much ask them before you leave the dock, what are you interested in?

RS: Pretty much, yes. Or if we carry what we call a make-up trip, that's where we have people just –

KB: Don't know each other.

RS: – one or a couple of couples or something like that get together and make enough to charter the boat or pay enough to cover the price of the boat. Then I just tell them they're going to troll and bottom fish.

[laughter]

KB: Keep everybody happy.

RS: Yes. That's if the trolling fish are biting. But trolling, we troll until we catch our limit of trolling fish. Then we bottom fish and usually catch our limit of bottom fish. Come on.

KB: That's a six-pack boat, maximum of six passengers. Do you own that boat?

RS: No, thank you.

[laughter]

Not anymore.

KB: Do you own any boats now?

RS: I sleep good at night. Let the worries go to the owner.

KB: You tie it up and let him worry about it?

RS: Yes. Well, I'm in the process of renewing my captain's license. This will be my twelfth issue when I get it back this time.

[laughter]

KB: Sixty years. Yes, I'm in the process myself right now. Not quite that many issues. I think I'm on my fourth.

RS: (Pup?).

[laughter]

KB: Yes.

RS: Where do you fish out of?

KB: I fish out of North Carolina, Moorhead City area.

RS: Down the lower end of the –

KB: Yes, below Cape Hatteras. I started there in the early [19]80s and saw quite a few changes myself.

RS: My son fishes out of Oregon Inlet up there now.

KB: Oh, he does? Charters?

RS: Yes. He built him a home in Manns Harbor up there.

KB: That's pretty up there. You ever go up and visit him?

RS: Oh, yes.

KB: Fish with him?

RS: Just about like being home when you go up there, especially in the summertime. A little cooler in the winter.

RS: Yes. We had a really cold winter this year. It snowed, at least flurries to accumulation. It snowed five times, five different times. We had two or three-inch accumulation at one time. This is pretty. It goes away the next day. But it's still, while it's happening, it's a lot of fun. So, you got your son into business, or he found his own way into the business?

KB: Kind of. He graduated from high school and he worked on boats for a few years and got his license. At first, he thought he was going to become a firefighter. He tried that. He comes out of all of his classes, right at the top of his class. Then he went to work as a part-time firefighter for a while. The first time he was in the emergency room, brought a guy in with his scalp laid back from his forehead right to the back of his head. He just –

[laughter]

KB: That's it. Yes. You got to be cut out for that one.

RS: Then he got called out on a couple of cardiac arrest calls and stuff like that. He just said, "I can't stand having people's lives depend on my every move." He just walked away from it.

KB: Yes. That's an honest realization. I admire people that can deal with it because we need them. We sure need them.

RS: Oh, yes.

KB: Well, did he ever mate on the boat with you?

RS: Oh, yes. He went to work for a tugboat company. He went to Brownsville, Texas to bring a tugboat and some barges back over here. He made it as far as Sanibel up on the panhandle. He got blown in there with a hurricane. He comes home for a couple of days. In the meantime, some guy on the tug that didn't like him talked to management into laying him off. So, the next day, I drove him to Miami to fly to Cancun, Mexico to relieve a buddy of his on a charter boat over there. He was over there for about two months, I guess. Then they came back and brought the boat from there to Wrightsville, North Carolina. He got off of it there and went from there to Manteo. Then found him a job on a boat out of the fishing center there. That's where he's been ever since.

KB: How many years has that been up there?

RS: Probably about twelve, fifteen years now.

KB: That's good fishing up there, isn't it?

RS: He married a girl from up there, built him a home there in Manns Harbor.

KB: North Carolinian now.

RS: No. I think he's getting a little homesick.

[laughter]

KB: Oh, is he?

RS: He's still recording all this personal.

KB: Well, we talked about early history. I don't want to jump around too much, but how about your grandfather? Was he into fishing?

RS: No. He was a railroad man. Both of my grandfathers were.

KB: From Florida?

RS: Well, one of them was a Florida cracker and the other one was a railroad man from Ohio or Missouri or Oregon.

[laughter]

Depending on where you –

KB: Well-traveled.

RS: He went from Ohio or Missouri in a covered wagon, from Missouri to Florida in a covered wagon, turned around in a covered wagon, went back to Missouri, out to Oregon, left a pile of the family out there and came back to Missouri and then back to Florida and married my grandmother.

KB: Oh, my God. History there. In this area? He settled in this area?

RS: Yes. He got a handwritten journal from the whole journey.

KB: Oh, that's wonderful. That's wonderful.

RS: I got a journal that was written on a fishing trip from Miami to down in the Keys back in 1915 in there. That was written by a journalist from New York City on the cruise with this great uncle of mine, just the description that he gives of how beautiful it was and pristine and everything. But there was one notation in that whole transcript of the pollution in the atmosphere that he could see even then. This was in 1950. I mean, you'd probably notice it up there, just like we do here when you get up early in the morning and watch the sun come up over the horizon on a clear day. You got that black layer. Yes. Like I say, I relate just about everything I see and smell and do and everything to what I read in the Bible. In the Bible, it speaks of a bottomless pit. It says, "Out of it, bore fire and smoke. The smoke covered the face of the Earth." Back in the 1940s, the scientific community said that the carbon dioxide buildup in the Earth's atmosphere from man's industrialization of the Earth and burning of fossil fuels has completely covered the entire face of the Earth, including the polar caps. Smoke from the bottomless pit covering the face of the Earth. To me, that's man's never-ending attempt to avoid God and do things without God. He could have done with God without his technology to start with. I'm just going to do it my way. [laughter] The way he created it to be done.

KB: We've seen over history what man's way has gotten us. But do you plan on retiring from fishing or are you going to –

RS: Just as soon as I can.

[laughter]

I tried once on Social Security, but that don't work. I found out my family still likes to eat.

KB: Yes. That's a fortunate thing about fishing.

RS: It's a good, clean life. Yes. I have reasonably good health. Thanks to God.

KB: You look like you're in good shape yet. Yes. I admire you for still going out on the water

and doing what you love to do. We need more testimonies like yours, so we can keep this information available to everyone. Your pictures are wonderful. They're invaluable as far as I'm concerned. I know a lot of other people feel the same way. It tells a story. Those pictures with your story mean a lot to Chronicle, how fishing has been over the past sixty, seventy, eighty years. We're going to make sure that they are presented in the right way. Everybody gets a look at the past through your eyes and through your pictures and the words you say. So, it's that point, Bob, if you have anything else you'd like to add. We can certainly do another session at some point if you think of things that we may have missed. I'm new at this myself. So, I wanted to start early on in the history of your fishing career and your dad's fishing history and try and work my way up to the present. I think we did that. We probably missed some things in there. If you think of anything else, I'm going to be down here. I'll certainly come back. We can sit down and talk about it. I want to thank you very much for the opportunity to hear your history and your family's history and the history in this area.

RS: I don't know. It just seems to me that with these restrictions, that the National Marine Fisheries, under this Magnuson-Stevens Act, appear to me to be something instigated by globalists that want to stop fishing in the wild entirely, so that they can farm, raise fish, and market them at their price. That's all well and good. But they're in the process destroying a whole way of life and people's economy that people have enjoyed for the better part of a century or more in this area, nowhere else. But from what I see and perceive, people around the world fish primarily to have fish to eat. Granted, in some cases, like these factory ships that just catch hundreds of tons of fish daily and process them and market them and everything is a way of just absolutely wiping out and annihilating complete stocks and buy stocks and everything else of fish. But hook and line fishing, there have never been enough hooks made or people to use them to deplete the fish with some commonsense restrictions and all applied properly. I can see the need for restrictions. But as far as I'm using it to just stop an entire industry or way of life, it's not right.

KB: Well, I appreciate that. It might be a good point to stop this session anyway. Like I said, if you think anything else that we can talk about that we might have missed or you remember later, we'll be glad to get back together with you. We'll certainly sit down and talk some more. I want to talk to you more about your pictures.

RS: I've still got that other album somewhere. [laughter]

KB: Well, it'll come to you. You've got too good a memory to –

RS: I had the thing just a month or so ago. I took it down to the dock to show to one of the people that work in the office down there.

RS: Yes. They're beautiful pictures, right? Priceless as far as documenting the past.

RS: I just misplaced the thing somehow. [laughter]

KB: Yes. You'll find it. Well, thanks again, Bob. I appreciate the conversation and all your knowledge and history in the fishery. Thank you.

RS: My pleasure.

KB: This is another –

RS: This might just be an afterthought. But with these rules that they're trying to instigate and the economy of this country being in the shape that it's in right now, they haven't even considered the fact of the number of fishermen and their families that they're getting ready to put out of business, the mom-and-pop tackle stores that sell tackle to private recreational fishermen all over this East Coast from North Carolina to Key West, Walmart, Kmart, Sears and Roebuck that all have tackle departments where they sell thousands and hundreds of thousands of dollars' worth of tackle a year, plus your tackle stores like BAS World and Gander Mountain and so forth like that to people in this State of Florida and probably along the coast of Carolinas and Georgia to go fishing for snapper and grouper. They probably spend more dollars for the tackle than the dollar value of the fish that are caught by them. But that isn't an economy in itself that runs into the millions and millions of dollars every year that they haven't even considered. They're getting ready to just wipe it out. It's just ridiculous.

KB: Well, we'll say that it is part of the equation that they look at the effects to the economy. Now, how it's factored into the actual regulations, I can't speak to. But it definitely has a huge impact on people's lives. From those large stores right on down to the –

RS: That's not even considering the boats that are built for it. [laughter]

KB: Yes. There's a trickle-down effect in many directions with fishing.

RS: That was just something. [laughter]

KB: Yes. I have it on that same folder, so we'll have that as well. But thanks again, Bob. We'll conclude right there.

[end of transcript]