

People of the Sturgeon: Wisconsin's Love Affair with an Ancient Fish
Clement Van Gompel Oral History
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Eugene Herubin: I'm sitting here with Clem Van Gompel in his living room. We're going to spend a little bit of time talking about sturgeon. Why don't you state your name and tell me the year in which you were born?

Clem Van Gompel: My name is Clem Van Gompel. I was born in Kimberly in the year of 1928. That makes me seventy-seven years old. In just a few more days, December 19th, I'll be seventy-eight.

EH: Tell me a little bit now, we've got the time which you were born. Tell us about your family, your brothers, and if you had sisters and your mom and dad.

CVG: I could tell you that my family is of Dutch heritage. My mother was on the water when the Titanic went down. Her ship was fifty miles from the Titanic when it went down. So, they were on their way from Nijmegen, Holland, to [audio distorted]. We went fishing through the year. We had our hotspots on the river. If you didn't get any in one spot, we knew where to go to get along the reefs. The boats used to go through – the coal boats – the browns that used to carry the coal all the way from Green Bay up through Cochrane, Little Chute, Kimberly, Appleton, Menasha, and to Oshkosh.

EH: But you would fish right in that channel then?

CVG: We fished in the channel. We fished below the dam. We would even go right underneath the Kimberly-Clark Mill. There were three big turbines in there – generating turbines in the mill. We would get downstream from them underneath the mill on a rainy day, and we'd fish out of the rain, but under the mill [laughter]. We would catch perch. We'd get rock bass, sunfish, very few walleyes.

EH: Did you ever hook any sturgeon?

CVG: Never hooked a sturgeon. Although, when I was in high school, during the war, they took us high school boys out of school to work in the mill from 2:00 p.m. until 6:00 p.m., every other week. One week, they took the Kimberly High School boys, and the next week they would alternate and use the boys from St. John's Little Chute. We would all work eight hours on Saturday. But I worked my sophomore, junior, and senior year for Kimberly-Clark all through the war years.

EH: Now, like you say, you caught a lot of fish. But you're going to tell me, when you were there, did you ever see any sturgeon in the river?

CVG: The only sturgeon I ever saw is, we used to rake the screens where the turbines were. Every now and then, a sturgeon would be, from the water pressure, locked up against, and we would rake the sturgeon up. Then someone always managed to get it [audio distorted] their personal use [laughter]. The wardens never knew about it and it was always on the QT.

EH: Well, the sturgeon was dead anyway, I imagine.

CVG: Well, some of them had life –

[laughter]

– but they were up against the screens. They couldn't get away from the current, the [audio distorted] going through the grates.

EH: Well, we think back, World War II, you couldn't buy any meat even if you had the ration stamps because all of the meat went to the soldiers. So, a little fresh fish was always a dice to take –

[laughter]

– over a good meal with some animal protein.

CVG: Well, I guess so.

EH: Now, the fish you caught, you would take them back home then and when you were perch fishing. How big a family did your parents have?

CVG: Well, we had three boys and two girls. My brother Jim and my brother who's a year younger than me and my brother Gerald. I had two sisters; Therese and Ann. We did a lot of bullhead fishing too. That was a big thing for us kids. Those days, we couldn't afford a fish pole other than a stick with a line. We didn't even have sinkers. We would tie a nut on for a sinker. We would take a cork and tie it on the line and whirl it out into the river from the riverbank, tied the other end of the line to a willow stick. We would fish evenings for bullheads. Some days, we'd get forty or fifty or sixty bullheads just at sundown when – we worked anywhere on the south side of the river bank from below Kimberly Mill all the way down to the old pulp and Combined Locks pulp mill. It was always a hotspot all along that shore for bullheads. Those days, the water was fairly clean. We even had frogs, bullfrogs, vegetation along the shorelines to harbor these species. I can remember one day, when my dad let a buddy of his use his boat to go fishing, and he says, "Now, whatever you do, don't take my bullfrogs." Well, when the guy came off the water that day from fishing, he had his fish in a bag. My dad took the bag and looked in it, and there were two bullfrogs in it. Well, the guy never got to use dad's boat after that.

[laughter]

EH: Well, those bullfrogs, the legs on those were good size. They were pretty good eating.

CVG: Good eating, right.

EH: Yes. Well, I take it then, like everyone, back in that period of time, there weren't many rich people. I believe your dad worked at the Kimberly Mill.

CVG: That's right.

EH: Your mother, did she work at all?

CVG: No, mother stayed home. She worked at home because she did all the canning. Around our place, we had seven apple trees. I think we had nine cherry trees, and we had about five or six plum trees. So, we had rhubarb and black berry bushes and red raspberry bushes and strawberries. Those days, dad would get a team of horses in, in the spring of the year to plow our extra land. He'd get us boys up at 5:00 a.m. to go and do the hoeing before it got too hot. My mother used to can all the products that came [laughter] off of all those bushes and trees. [laughter]

EH: Well, it's obvious your mother had more than enough work to do at home, raising the family, and plus all the canning. We lived in a different era. The young people today would've a hard time living under these conditions. But they wouldn't know how to do this type of canning and living off the land, so to speak, with the fish and whatnot. When did you first get introduced into sturgeon spearing?

CVG: Well, before we get into sturgeon, I'd just like to –

EH: Go ahead.

CVG: – point out something else that when I think back would be of real interest. When we were kids and fishing in the river, I was say about twelve, thirteen years old. At that age, we still didn't have inside plumbing. I think I was about fourteen or fifteen, just about into high school when we first got water and sewer put in on North Pine Street in Kimberly. So, we always had to carry the slop-pail out. That's what we called it, was a slop-pail. It was a five-gallon pail that was underneath the sink in the kitchen. So, whatever the dish water and whatever peelings you did from all the food that you processed; all apples, orange, peelings, whatever, it all got dumped behind the garage. When we went to go fishing, we would only have to take one dig with the fork, and we would get a hundred, 150 worms with one dig. These were all these little yellow manure worms, they called them. Yellow and red-striped manure worms. Very lively and they really attracted the fish. Matter of fact, there were times in the summer when we had a real hot dry spell and it was a little tougher to get a hold of worms. But then we used to go to the honeysuckle bush and pick the little red berries off the honeysuckle bush. We would just put two of those little berries on the tip of the hook, and that's all we needed to catch perch.

EH: [laughter] Who would think that the perch would be vegetarians?

[laughter]

CVG: You got that right. [laughter]

EH: Well, that's great. That's a good story, Clem. Well, let's go back though, did your father go sturgeon spearing?

CVG: My dad never was into sturgeon fishing. I got into sturgeon fishing the year after I got

out of service in – I was discharged October 26th, 1953, after serving four and a half years in the United States Navy.

EH: Was that in the Korean War?

CVG: This was during the Korean War. Well, I had a job working for American Can. At that time, it was –

EH: Was it Marathon then?

CVG: It was Marathon Corporation. I started there in April of 1949. The reason I started there is because when the guys came out of service, they got their jobs back. So, I got laid off from Kimberly-Clark. I was laid off for exactly two days, and I went over to American Can or Marathon. The reason I went there is because one of the other guys I got laid off with was there the day before. He told me he went to their employment office and was hired. He was given a physical in the morning and he started working the 3:00-11:00 shift in the afternoon. So, he let me know about that when he got home from work and I went in the next morning. I went to Menasha and to the employment office, and I was hired the same day. I had a physical and went to work the same day.

EH: Well, that was lucky.

CVG: [laughter] Very lucky. The nice thing about it is I put in forty years with American – Marathon was sold to American Can. I put in forty years with the American Can and was never laid off a day.

EH: That's great. That's great. Well, let's go back though. So, now, you had a job, but how did you get introduced to sturgeon spearing?

CVG: Well, my pressman was (Joel Wells?) and he was an avid fisherman. He grew up on Lake Winnebago. His father's name was Charles Wells, and they were on Fire Lane five. Anyway, he was into sturgeon fishing. Joel was a big pike fisherman, ice fisherman, tip-up fisherman. He set out – what do they call them? The set lines. In the spring of the year, they'd set line for catfish. So, he was really into it. He's the guy that talked me into trying sturgeon fishing. I got into it in 1954, the year after I got out of service.

EH: Now, Joel Wells, he's just recently passed away, has he not?

CVG: Joel Wells passed away about a year ago. Yes. Yes. He was eighty-seven years old. You might say three quarters of his life, he spent fishing.

EH: Well, you know what they say, you don't have to count for the hours spent fishing when you meet St. Peter at the Pearly Gates.

[laughter]

That's all free time. Did Joel have a shack then?

CVG: Joel had one shanty. There was other fellows that worked in the department in press room that had fish shanties. I didn't have a fish shanty. But then we had a fellow by the name of Pauly St. Peter was a personnel manager. Once, he got onto a day shift, he didn't have a need for his fish shanty. So, I bought his fish shanty, the spears, and the decoys, the whole bit for \$15. That was my start.

EH: Did you sit in the shack at all with Wells to find out how to do this, or you just learned on your own?

CVG: No, we worked together. Those days, we chopped our holes by hand. We used chisels. We would go out and chisel a channel all around, until one day, Joel got a hold of an ice saw, then we'd only chop two holes. One on opposite corners, and we'd saw the hole at a slant. The ice tapered outward from the top down out. We would saw both ways from the two opposite corners. So, we only had to chop two holes at that time. Then those days, we used to bust the block of ice up and we'd lift it out of the hole. It wasn't until years later that we started submersing the cake of ice. But for I'd say the first ten years that we sturgeon fished together, we always pulled the ice out of the hole.

EH: That's quite a job. Now, did it take a long time to saw a hole if the ice was thick with the ice saw?

CVG: Well, you worked up a good sweat, I can tell you that. It could be a zero and it could be a wind. Or it could be ten above and a good wind. When you got through sawing your hole, you were sweating. [laughter] You knew you were working. But you always worked as a team. You were two, three, four guys. Then you'd go and cut the next hole and say, block the shanties up and bank it well, keep it well insulated with snow. Of course, then there was the other thing. It was, you had to have decoys. So, I can remember when we were running press, the operator would get the press started and the helper would sit there and watch while the operator would go over and start cutting a decoy out of a piece of wood.

[laughter]

We used printing inks in order to paint our decoys and dipped them in varnish.

[laughter]

We had all kinds of angles –

EH: But they sure did work.

CVG: – and they all worked.

EH: What was the favorite? There was something about what Joel used to put down the hole that he always said was the best decoy.

CVG: The best decoys he used was (cobber corn?). We used to drill a hole in cobber corn and then screw a bolt into it – a heavy bolt and tie string to it and use just a plain cobber corn. The other good decoy was an orange. There was an orange or two in every shanty he had. There was a cobber corn or two in every shanty he had. The other very popular was anything that looked similar to a sturgeon but was any color but a sturgeon, we painted them red, yellow, orange, blue. We would pound big white pearl buttons down the sides to make it look like white hackles on – put fins and bend the fins in such a manner that when you pull on the string that held that decoy, it would swim in a circular manner.

EH: Pretty much what's still being done today.

CVG: Pretty much what's still being done today. Right.

EH: I can recall here, having been in the shack with you two years ago, when you put that orange down, lo and behold, I forget how big he was, but one came swimming in that you sure did spear nicely, left-handed, I might say.

CVG: [laughter] That was a thirty-eight pound fish, I think it was.

EH: I think so [laughter].

CVG: Yes, thirty-eight pound fish. Yes.

EH: Well, that's great. Yes. So, those old decoys still are good yet today?

CVG: Yes, they are. One of my favorites that I think I got the most fish with was what I always called it red buttons. I had it all painted red. A deep, cardinal red color. I had white pearl buttons, or anywhere from half inch in diameter to inch, inch and a half nailed around the sides down the side of the fish and across the bottom and some across the top. I don't know if it was the pearl that reflected the sunlight that invited the fish in or if it was the red color [laughter].

EH: Maybe the combination.

CVG: Yes.

EH: What did your dad think when you started showing him off the sturgeon? Let's just think back then, you said in the [19]50s, what was the limit on sturgeon at? Were there restrictions at all or what?

CVG: Oh, there were restrictions. In the [19]50s, I think we paid twenty-five cents for a tag. Those years, you could buy up to three. There was a year you could buy five tags. If I recall right, 1954 was when I started fishing sturgeon. The first year I fished was Poygan. It's a shallow lake, and I can remember, we got a lot of fish. I can remember one time, it was illegal. I wouldn't do it today. But I can remember driving with three of us in the car, one driving in the front. There was only one front seat. No seat in the back, seven sturgeon in the car, all their tails

between our legs [laughter] with the tag, and driving off the lake that way and go back fishing the next day.

EH: Good-sized fish, were they?

CVG: Well, they were like thirty-five to forty to forty-five pound fish. Yes.

EH: What was the biggest fish you ever speared, Clem?

CVG: Well, the largest fish I ever speared, it was already speared by a friend I was fishing with, Joel Wells. That was 142 and a half pounds. But the largest fish I ever speared myself was in 1972, 115 pounds. At that time, we were fishing walleyes at the same time. We were allowed to fish with the hook and line. My dad had just left his shanty. I told him, "If you see the shanty door stand open with the chair out there, that means I got a fish on." Well, he went to the car to eat lunch, checked the tip-ups, and then he went to the car to eat lunch. I had to whistle for him because [laughter] he didn't see the chairs and the door wide open. But I did let him pull the fish in. He had never seen a sturgeon in the hole. He was in his mid-seventies when this took place. Anyway, his knees were shaken by the time we got that fish out of the water [laughter]. He had never seen one in the water and he couldn't have believed it when we pulled up 119-pound sturgeon.

EH: Well, that's a nice fish. That's quite the story. Did your dad enjoy feasting on some of the fish?

CVG: Oh, yes. We had part of it smoked here at (Wazinsky's?) [00:23:54]. They used to smoke fish for us. The rest, we would prepare. My wife had her own means of preparing a bigger fish because they had a little more fat in them. She would always parboil the fish. I'd cut it into steaks, and then she would parboil it and pour the water off with the fat that boiled out. Then we would deep fry them or we'd pan fry them. Bread them and deep fry them and pan fry them. Good eating. Very good eating. Ate a lot of fish. Joel Wells used to bring sturgeon to work. Well, he lived right on the lake and he and his whole family fished. His two boys and his wife got as many sturgeon as he did.

EH: Well, you had a good teacher then.

CVG: I had a very good teacher [laughter]. A matter of fact, I think it was 1956 when Joel got that, and I got that 142 and a half pound sturgeon. That was a year when the snow was about foot and a half, two feet deep on the lake. There was only about twenty-four shanties out in front of Waverly Beach at that time. Joel and Gordy Brockman moved that shanty onto a hole that another man moved off the day before. Because they were going to have to work 3:00-11:00 that day, I believe, and they didn't have the time to cut a hole. So, they moved that shanty on top of a hole that another man moved off of. I can recall that day when Joel and I, we were together, drove out together, and we followed each other in our cars. Joel had plowed roads with his tractor the day before on his way out. So, we had a means to get out there with our automobile. That morning that Joel got that fish, he came to my shanty at about 11:00. I was working 3:00-11:00 that week, and he had worked 11:00 to 7:00. He came to my shanty and he says,

"Clemmy, you'll never believe what I just saw." He says, "I had the biggest sturgeon I've ever seen go right across the corner of the hole up under the ice." He says, "It was just loaded with lamprey eels." But he says, "I couldn't get the spear up at it." Well, about a half hour later, because I had to go into work, I wrapped up my fishing in my shanty and I went over to his shanty before I left the ice. I knocked on the door and he invited me in. I'm leaning up against the wall in this fish shanty and we're talking. All of a sudden, he grabbed the spear and threw it. To my surprise – because I didn't see a fish. My eyes were not yet dilated from driving in the bright sun and with all that bright snow out there. He says, "Gee, I hope I got him." Then he says, "I think I got him." All of a sudden, we saw the spear move up and around and went around and around. In the meantime, I pulled all the decoys up. When all this is happening, he's pulling on the line and he says, "Boy, this is a big fish." All of a sudden, I could see it come right up through the center of the hole. He says, "The spear. The spear." So, I grabbed the spear onto my right hand side and then I threw the spear. It was a three-tined spear, and all three tines went into the back of the fish. The middle tine right in through the spine. So, it kind of numbed the fish up. That day when we came out onto there, the conservation had a shanty on shore at Waverley, and they said, "If you happen to get a fish, come in and let us know. We've got movie cameras and we'd like to put it back in the water and take pictures." Well, we did go and get the warden and the camera crew. But because the fish was immobilized because of the spear through the spine, it didn't work out too well. But I can tell you though, that how Joel got that fish out of the water, we had that gaff hook in it. But he reached across the hole and he shoved his arm through the fish's mouth and out the gills, and that's how he pulled that fish out of the water.

EH: Wow.

[laughter]

CVG: When we got the fish on the ice, there were twenty-four lamprey eels that fell off of that sturgeon.

EH: So, that must have been the fish he had seen earlier.

CVG: He figures definitely, it was the fish came back and the fish had moved. It was going one direction when he saw it across the corner of his hole. When it came back, it was down near bottom, coming from that direction that it had just exited.

EH: Twenty-four lamprey eels.

CVG: Twenty-four lamprey eels. They were anywhere from about ten inches to about eighteen inches long.

EH: Oh, those are pretty good size.

CVG: Yes.

EH: Good size lamprey eels. That's unbelievable that there was that many on the one fish.

CVG: Well, that fish had white spots all over it where the lamprey eels were anchored to it. It was a site to behold [laughter]. Oh, and any other thing interesting about that was right away, it drew a crowd. All of a sudden, there was five, six people around, and here comes the guy that moved his shanty off the day before. When he saw the size of the fish, he started swearing and cussing and swearing that he'll never leave a hole. He says he'll never leave a hole without pouring oil on it –

[laughter]

– which I think is just poor sportsmanship. But that was his attitude. Oh, he was just shaking because he left the hole [laughter] and we happened to get the fish [laughter].

EH: Well, that's the way it goes. The luck was with you. The fish gods were smiling on you and Joe.

CVG: I guess they were [laughter].

EH: I still can't believe that he put his arm right through the mouth of that fish and out the gill.

CVG: Yes.

EH: Boy, oh boy. I don't know if I could ever do that.

CVG: No. Did I say through the mouth? He went through the gill and out the mouth.

EH: Oh, okay.

CVG: Through the gill and out the mouth.

EH: Either way, I don't know if I want to do that.

CVG: Yes. Well, he got on his knees, he reached across the hole with his left hand, and I can see him reach through with his right hand yet today.

EH: Wow. Wow. What a story. But what a big fish.

CVG: What a big fish. I did have some of that fish. I can remember my mother-in-law's father came down from up north, and I took him out and showed him that fish. All he could see is ugly, ugly, ugly.

[laughter]

EH: Did you have them taste a little of the fish?

CVG: No.

EH: Did you cook up any for them?

CVG: No, I didn't cook any for them. I do know that we had some of it. It wasn't the greatest tasting. It was pretty oily in spite of the fact we prepare ours parboil it. But the smoked portion of the fish – Joe had the tail portion smoked. That was the best eating part of it.

EH: Yes, I would imagine. Big fish.

CVG: I have found through the years that the best tasting of sturgeon is those that you get range in the weight between about forty and sixty, seventy pounds, is your best tasting of your sturgeon.

EH: Well, I would imagine because with other fish too, the giants aren't the best tasting.

CVG: That's right. Yes, that's absolutely right. Even with perch, an oversized perch doesn't have the flavor that about an eight-inch or nine-inch perch has.

EH: Yes, you're right again, Clem. Go right to the head of the class.

CVG: Yes.

EH: Well, let's see. What else can we talk about? Some of the other fish that has a little history with –

CVG: Oh, I've got pictures here of all kinds of fish from through the years. Here's a picture of Joe with the fish. I believe the picture you see here is one that was taken by the camera crew.

EH: Okay. Yes, I see. This is *Milwaukee Journal* here on this news print here. February 10th, 1957. Wow.

CVG: It's got a little story about the fish, then a little piece here. But I've got pictures of fish from through the years.

EH: Well, you got quite a pile here, Clem.

CVG: Here's Pete [Gardsky's?] [00:34:22] fish. Here's a fish that didn't get away. A big one. Pete Gardsky of Menasha is all smiles as he displays the 158-pound sturgeon he speared over the weekend.

EH: Now, these were all in Winnebago and not Poygan, right?

CVG: This was off of Waverly Beach in Winnebago, yes. Pete, according to this write up here, he'd been fishing fifty-one years. Peter Gardsky has been pursuing the mighty lake sturgeon on Winnebago for fifty of those years. Gardsky saw it, but never found a one hundred pound fish until he got this 158 pound.

EH: I wonder how long ago this was.

CVG: I don't know what year. I don't know if it tells in here somewhere.

EH: No, it doesn't say what year this was. It's a Northwestern photo.

CVG: [laughter] Here, it says, "It came in about average speed, about thirteen feet below me and about two feet off the bottom. I knew it was a big one." Yes.

EH: One hundred and fifty-eight pounds. Those are big animals. Well, there's pictures of a hundred and –

CVG: That's 142. That's the one that Joel Wells and I got, that 142 and a half pounds.

EH: Oh, that's a nice fish.

CVG: Somewhere in here, I don't know if it's here anyway. Joel's picture was on the Sturgeon License for two years with that big fish.

EH: Oh, here's the 158 pounder.

CVG: Yes.

EH: It's hard to believe those animals are that big out there; those fish in Winnebago.

CVG: Somewhere in here, I hope I can find it. But it would be nice to display. I got a picture of Chuck Wells here too somewhere with a big fish. It's somewhere in here.

EH: That's Joe's son with –

CVG: One hundred and nine pounder that he got off of Poygan.

EH: A hundred and nine?

CVG: Yes. Somewhere in here.

EH: God. Clem's got assorted news clippings here and pictures, and pictures of pictures that we're kind of shuffling through. But in addition to these giants here, you did also spear many smaller fish too, I'd take it, Clem.

CVG: Oh, yes. We got fish. If I had everything organized, we got a fish just about every year that – oh, here it is. Here's 1972 spearing and netting regulations with Joe's picture with the big –

EH: Oh, yes. I recognize it from looking at these other pictures.

CVG: Yes. There you go.

EH: So, this is a 1972.

CVG: Yes.

EH: Game Laws, 1972 Spearing and Netting Regulations. State of Wisconsin, Department of Natural Resources. That's the one you just described with the twenty-four lampreys on it.

CVG: That's right. Yes. Geez, look what else I found.

EH: What's this? Program?

CVG: That was a safety program. I got (Bard Star's?) [00:39:05] autograph.

[laughter]

EH: Why is that in here with your sturgeon memorabilia?

[laughter]

CVG: That's a good question. Just happens to be there.

EH: Yes, and your boss's night dinner meeting. At Germania Hall, Menasha, 1979, April 18th. That's pretty good. Imagine if you had that, fifty cents would probably buy you a cup of coffee.

[laughter]

CVG: Yes. Yes, it would.

[laughter]

CVG: I guess that's all I got.

EH: This is that 142 that you speared?

CVG: Yes, that's the one.

EH: Oh, 1956. You, were kind of a sharp-looking dude on this one, Clem.

CVG: Yes, that's many long years ago.

[laughter]

That's many long years ago.

EH: Who is this? Is this Joel here?

CVG: That's my dad.

EH: That's your dad, okay.

CVG: That's my dad. Yes.

EH: That's that 142 pounder?

CVG: No, that's 119 pounder.

EH: Boy, oh boy. Yes, you've speared quite a few of these in your life, Clem. Quite a few.

CVG: We used to fish with about seven or eight in our group. We would spread out over the lake in various areas, all the way from High Cliff off the golf course, to Lake Park, to Waverly. Whoever would get the first fish, well, we communicated with each other. We didn't have radios those days. So, it was by car or however you could manage to meet each other. If we went a day or two and no one in other areas hadn't seen anything, we would converge to the area where a fish or two was gotten. Then we'd travel in a group, and we always worked as a team. It wasn't just two or three of us that fished. There was times when we fished with eight, nine, ten people. We'd move all about the lake, whether all the way from (Nimitz's?) [00:41:45] to near Stockbridge [laughter].

EH: Okay. Well, I can remember when I first started fishing in a group with you, and you had then the power saw. The first couple years I was out spearing, I was like you in your early days, cutting a hole with ice chisels and taking about a day to get your hole cut.

CVG: That's right.

EH: We'd go out with Bud Sakalowski and Bernie and Bud's kid. We'd have quite a day of cutting holes and putting up our shanties. That's the big part of fishing, is –

CVG: That's the fun part.

[laughter]

EH: A big part of it, right?

CVG: Yes. The getting the hole cut and getting your shack set up and then just waiting for the opening morning to get out there and get that big fish. I kind of like the setup we have today. When you work 11:00 to 7:00 and then you go right from work out to fish, and you could fish all day long. Well, by the time noon came around, your eyes were pretty heavy. By the time 9:00 a.m. came around, your eyes got pretty heavy. I remember one time, when I was working 11:00 to 7:00 and I went fishing on Poygan, and I was sitting on a nail keg. Those little round nail kegs, you know?

EH: Oh, yes.

CVG: I fell asleep and I fell backwards. I didn't fall forward. I fell backwards. So, my heiner slipped off of that nail keg and caught my chin on it. That woke me up.

EH: [laughter] I bet. A nail keg, people today, I don't know if they would know what we're talking about here.

CVG: A thought went through my mind while I was mentioning that because they don't come in a keg anymore. [laughter] Everything's in a cardboard box today.

EH: Little cardboard box, yes. I forget how many nails came in a keg. I know they were heavy. I was a kid when we were roofing my grandpa's – built a garage and the shingle nails came in a keg. Then that's how nails were purchased.

CVG: But the nice thing about fishing years ago is, we always had a little window on the side of the shanty, we always had two or three tip-ups out. If you fished in pairs, you fished with your kids, you go and set up maybe six tip-ups, and then you'd sit and get your shanty set inside. But today is nothing like it used to be. I can remember years ago, when we didn't have a bottle gas heater. You used wood plugs that they got from the mill, old wood plugs or cores. People had wood burners in their fish shanties. They had oil burners. Then you'd get this oil. The soot from the oil would be all over your water in the hole. So, it'd make it difficult to see. You'd get oil on the water because you'd have an oil leak one place or another.

EH: Or when you fill the stove, someone would overfill, right?

CVG: That's right. The oil can – yes. The olden days are rough and tough. You didn't have the modern conveniences. Today, they've got radios. You've got music. There's people set up with televisions. Those days, you went out to fish, you were hearty because your furnace, your heating system was crude. You were always tinkering with something to keep heating the shanty. Today, you light a nice gas stove and set your control, and you forget about it until you walk out of the door and go home.

EH: Yes. Then also you might mention too, that we didn't have the winter wear that you have today to keep you warm. The clothes today are so much better against the cold.

CVG: That's right. Our feet would get so cold sometimes. It just unbelievable how cold you could get even with the crude heating systems we had [laughter]. Cutting the hole wasn't always so desirable either if there was wind and snow blowing and temperatures that –

[end of transcript]