

People of the Sturgeon: Wisconsin's Love Affair with an Ancient Fish
Gerald Vanstraten Oral History
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Interviewer: RB – Ronald Bruch
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Gerald Van Straten: Well, I'll start with I was born in 1928 right in Shiocton. I lived across the street here, in [inaudible] straight over here. Then in 1934, we moved out on a farm in [19]76, one mile north of Shiocton. That was about the time I started school at age of six.

Ronald Bruch: Was your schoolhouse out that way somewhere?

GVS: No, it was the same place.

RB: Right in town here?

GVS: Yes, a smaller school. Anyway, we'd walk to school. There was no school buses.

RB: You'd walk to school all the way from out there.

GVS: Walk to school or ride a bike. The bridge was by the funeral home in town here now. I walk across the bridge. The season, the walleye season, opened on April 15th. I walk to school, April 15th, fishing season opened with no boats on the river. It started with they didn't have any boats. The boats they did have were homemade wooden boats. They didn't – they weren't [inaudible] either. They were (barge?). They were together. They were (scull?) boats.

RB: People made their own boats.

GVS: They made their own boats, but they didn't have too many. But talking about fishing, there was no fishing, hook and line. The fishing was the way they were brought up. It was either with a spear or a fish trap or – and they had – so, here, I never see them, but they had a torchlight and a spear. They go out and get what they wanted. If the person didn't have a boat, the neighbors would get them fish they wanted. That was the way it was. I don't even know if there was [inaudible]. I think there were, but –

Kathleen Schmitt Kline: Probably very few.

GVS: I don't think much.

RB: So, the bridge was further –

GVS: South.

RB: – further south.

GVS: Not quite a block. Where [inaudible] riverside is, the [inaudible] street, the roads came right straight to the right.

RB: So, where the landing is now, just about, where the boats [unintelligible] that's where it went?

GVS: Exactly.

RB: Okay. People fish off the bridge then too, I imagine, or would try to a little bit?

GVS: There wasn't much hook and line.

RB: Wasn't much hook and line.

GVS: Yes.

RB: Really? The people, how would they go after the sturgeon?

GVS: It started, they gradually – after that, they got more and more and more. People got boats. They build their own, and then they started hook and line fishing.

RB: When did the raft thing start then?

GVS: Well, that was a lot later.

RB: It was, huh?

GVS: I'd say about 1960 or [19]70.

RB: Really? That late?

GVS: Yes.

RB: But the people went after the sturgeon also at that time, in those early days?

GVS: They go after – they'd have a jerkline they make. They'd weld usually 14 metal hooks or 16 metal hooks on a pipe, three or four on the pipe around. They'd rope through it with a rock in the bottom. They'd sit there. Once [inaudible], they'd jerk it, or they'd spear when they come into the bank.

RB: Yes, when they come in to spawn.

GVS: Of course, this was just for what they're going to eat.

RB: But was that primarily in the spring, or did they also in the fall? Because you guys probably knew that fish were up here in the fall back then, right?

GVS: We knew they were there.

RB: I mean, there's fish in the river all year. Big numbers would come in the fall, right?

GVS: If the water come up.

RB: I see.

GVS: But there's some that stay here all the time. But if you get a raise in water, then we get a bigger [inaudible] sturgeon. Anytime the water comes up quite high, you're going to have a real sturgeon [inaudible]. They'll come up.

RB: Really, even in the summer, if you got good rain, they'd come up.

GVS: No, if they can raise the water. It can raise quite a bit, though. Well, we used to fish from like (triple C?) south there all the way through – we fish those rivers all through it. You'd see the sturgeon once in a while –

[talking simultaneously]

GVS: – in the river when the water is down low.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Yeah, you'd see them.

RB: So, they were probably accessible then too. Could people spear them at that time?

GVS: I don't think they did it.

RB: No?

GVS: No.

RB: Okay.

GVS: But that was a way of life. That's the way they depended on it.

RB: Sure. People use the resources.

GVS: But then gradually, the people started getting boats and then better boats and all, like it is now. I don't know about the amount of like walleyes. I don't know. It seemed to me, years back, there were a lot more walleyes. But how do you know?

RB: A lot more than now?

GVS: It seemed like it.

RB: Really?

GVS: But I don't know. How are you going to tell?

RB: Right.

GVS: If you go on a marsh, you go on a marsh there, you'd see them like in the daytime, or go there with a light at night, you'd see them all over the place.

RB: Yes. But we take 14,000 this spring.

GVS: Well, that's quite a few.

RB: Yeah, so there seems to be a lot in the system right now.

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Yeah. Have you noticed any changes to the sturgeon population in your lifetime?

GVS: Well, you can see more now because they're along the rocks. Their nature, I guess, to spawn –

RB: Right, in the rocks, yeah.

GVS: But they were along the rocks, like they were along there all the – there was time [inaudible].

RB: How long did they have rocks? Did they have a few rocks there earlier? I mean, now the whole thing is rocks.

GVS: Well, they put the rocks in to stop the road from washing up.

RB: So, before, you'd see them more on this upper end here, they by the road?

GVS: You would see them almost any place along the – it didn't have to be rocks.

RB: Really?

GVS: Yeah. It didn't have to be rocks when the sturgeon was spawning. It didn't have to be rocks then. Because there weren't that many rocks then. Do you know where Peterson Road is, at the end of it?

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Well, there's rocks downstream –

RB: It's called (Conley's Bar?)?

GVS: Conley Bar . There's rocks in there. They would spawn in there like they were nuts. Right along the bay, right when you get down to the road, right to the left there, they'd spawn in

there. There were a few rocks there then but not like it is now.

RB: No. Because we don't even work that site anymore.

GVS: Well, I'd see the – I'd watch the sturgeon when they'd lay their eggs. You could see them right along the bank. Then, here they'd come again later, maybe. You'd see their mouths come out.

RB: Yeah. They're eating them.

GVS: They're eating them. Every other fish come right along there. I used to sit and watch them, carp, suckers, catfish, everything. [inaudible]

RB: Eat the eggs.

GVS: They'd eat the eggs. But I know when a sturgeon was eating their egg. Because were like tilted like this and suck. You'd see their sucker mouth come out. Suck them off right the [inaudible]. That's why these rocks – they get between the rocks, and they can't get them.

RB: They can't get them.

GVS: They can't get them.

RB: Right. Yeah, having that rock –

GVS: It's a lot of help.

RB: Yeah, it's a lot of help. Definitely. Your family would eat sturgeon? What was your favorite way to prepare it? Or how did your wife prepare it?

GVS: [laughter] Sure, we eat them. Everybody ate them.

RB: Everybody ate them, yeah.

GVS: Well, you could bake them. It depends on the cook, of course. Bake them and fry them. You could fry them. Go in flour and then dip them in egg and milk and then roll them in ground cracker crumbs and fry them in butter.

RB: Did you pull the notochord out also, that cord?

GVS: Yeah, we pull the cord out.

RB: You pull the cord? Why did people pull the cord out?

GVS: It was always just the belief that if you cooked them with that cord in it, they would taint the fish. If that's true or not, I don't know.

RB: So, but that's what the belief was. When you pull that cord out, it would end up being a lot longer than the fish, right?

GVS: Like twice as long.

RB: Twice as long. [laughter] We talked to (Hayes Demo?) today. Hayes told us a story how he cleaned some fish up like that, he caught in the spring. He went off someplace. He came back, and his girls were playing jump rope with that cord. [inaudible] driving all over the place.

[laughter]

RB: So, did you ever have any close calls with the wardens around here?

GVS: I got caught for fish traps.

RB: Oh, fish traps.

GVS: Yeah. [inaudible]

RB: But you never saw the sturgeon in the bayous, did you?

GVS: A couple of times. The current was just right, and they won't go in there very far. The current had to be strong to pull them in there. But they would get in there.

RB: No. Pretty much pure walleyes going in there.

GVS: Carp.

RB: Carp later on, yeah.

GVS: White bass sometimes if the current is right.

RB: But a lot of people in Shiocton really relied on fish for their families.

GVS: Everybody helped everybody. If they didn't have a way to get them, somebody would get them some fish, their friends, their neighbors.

RB: I just met with Russell Collar, He told us that people would give fish to the widows and to other people that needed it and would want some. It's almost like a community thing, it sounds like.

GVS: I had a smoker set up in my yard at home there. My mother and I had smoked fish. Well, a couple of guys went down to the (reading flats?), and there was some traps left in there. Here, the white bass are in there. These guys, they bought – they know I had a smoker, and they bought them over to the house, 300 of them. My mother and I started cleaning them up. Later,

they come again, the same two guys, with another 300 or 400.

RB: [laughter]

GVS: Then they came again, and they came again. Before we got done, we had the garage half-full and the basement floor, and just salted them – we [inaudible] salt – salted them, piled them up – this is white bass – and salted them down and the next day, smoked them. They could smoke 300 at a time.

RB: Wow.

GVS: A total of 1300 now. It's hard to believe, but it was the truth.

RB: Wow.

GVS: They went in the traps, see. The current was [inaudible]. My mother is my witness. My mother called people in town here. "Come on and get them for nothing. The cost was the salt. They had to [inaudible]. They come and got them all, ten, fifteen at a time. I think we fed the whole town.

KSK: Yeah, I'm sure. [laughter]

RB: Yeah, no kidding.

KSK: It didn't go to waste.

GVS: I don't know if there's a limit on white bass or not but –

RB: Well, there's no limit, no. There never has been as far as I know. Did you ever have any experiences with small sturgeon down the river? Have you ever run into them?

GVS: We caught one on hook and line one time, about, I'd say 15, 16 inches long.

RB: You did?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: That was it?

GVS: We put down a worm or something.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: He dove within the hook within a couple of minutes.

RB: Really?

GVS: I couldn't even throw it back in. [inaudible] anyway.

RB: Okay. It got hooked?

GVS: No. I don't know why that was, but I'm not going to throw it back [inaudible].

RB: There's nothing on it, right?

GVS: No. Little spiny job, they've got. They're real spiny.

RB: Real sharp.

GVS: Their bones.

RB: You think flathead catfish would eat them?

GVS: I think they would eat almost anything, flathead catfish. They'll eat bullheads, like a foot long. They've got a terrible spine or horns on them. That won't make a difference to them.

RB: Did people have a preference for size of sturgeon, as far as the size that they would take?

GVS: Well, if they got one with eggs, they would – there was two or three guys in town here that would prepare the eggs, if the eggs are good.

RB: Yeah. Did that happen in the fall too, or does that primarily in the spring?

GVS: Not the fall.

RB: Just the spring.

GVS: Just the spring. I saw pictures when I was young ,of sturgeon piled up. A couple of guys had them in town here, where they got them up for the caviar. I'm talking piles of – like piles of wood. Now, where the pictures went, I have no idea. But I saw them.

RB: Well, we're trying to find those pictures.

GVS: You know about them too, huh?

RB: Well, we keep hearing about them.

KSK: Yeah. Because I'd love to see that.

GVS: They're piled right up along the riverbank right in the middle of the town over there.

RB: Wow.

GVS: That would be before [inaudible].

RB: Yeah.

KSK: They were harvesting them for the eggs? For the caviar?

GVS: Caviar and some of the meat, but how could they eat the [inaudible]?

KSK: Right.

GVS: I'm talking piles, maybe 50, 60 feet long, and maybe 5, 6 feet or 4, 5 feet high, according to the pictures.

KSK: Do you know where the caviar was going, where they were sending it to?

GVS: I don't know.

KSK: They couldn't sell it all.

GVS: It was way before my time.

KSK: Yeah.

RB: So, you were just a kid when you saw those pictures.

GVS: Yeah. I don't have no idea where they were. I can't even remember who had them.

KSK: Were they old pictures when you saw them?

GVS: The black and white pictures. They weren't very good.

RB: They probably were from the turn of the century or early nineteen hundreds anyways, huh?

GVS: Probably.

KSK: Yeah. Wow.

GVS: There's a couple of guys in town here who are doing that, making caviar.

RB: More than likely, that was before there were any regulations.

GVS: Yeah, most likely. They could pile them up in (court?) up there.

[talking simultaneously]

RB: Right. The first regulation was in 1903, and it was an 8-pound size limit.

GVS: What, a kilo of a sturgeon?

RB: Yeah, in 1903.

GVS: Eight pounds?

RB: Eight pounds. But at that time, like you said, there weren't many wardens. Eight pounds, you could still go out and harvest the big fish. It wouldn't have mattered.

KSK: Yeah. You could harvest just about any fish [laughter].

RB: Yeah.

GVS: There was a lot of sturgeon caught on [inaudible].

RB: Was that the preferred method?

GVS: Well, you get more that way. You could – if you know how to get them – you could put them any place, up, down the river, if you know what you're doing with it.

RB: When the fish were moving up or moving back.

GVS: Moving up, they could get them very easy because they're swimming like this. They had to hit that hook hard to get caught in their top skin. The hook would get into their skin, and then they can't get off. But going back – with the carp and going back to the lake, that's when they'd catch them. Right now, they'd catch them.

RB: They were easier to catch on the way back.

GVS: Because they're floating with the current. They get the hooks right into their skin.

RB: I see.

GVS: They put those lines and [inaudible], rope lines across the river. Then about every so far, the (smooth line?), about 42-inch smooth line –

RB: Every couple of feet or so or a little less.

GVS: Yeah. Well, up to a foot, a little less than 2-foot, 12 inches maybe. Then about 42-inch smooth line, they call it, and then a 14-knot hook on it with a sinker on the hook. They'd run into that and banged it. They usually get them from the belly to the tail. They must have been going down, sideways. I don't know.

RB: So, would they keep those hooks up in the water somehow, when these fish were coming

back, or were the fish coming back on –

GVS: Just [inaudible] or string the line kind of tight.

RB: I see.

GVS: Going up and hit them, put them down to the bottom of the rock on the deep side, maybe a couple of rocks, heavy rocks.

RB: Well, when the fish were going up, they had to fish them deep.

GVS: Deep.

RB: So, at that time, there probably weren't that many boats to worry about the other guys snagging with fishing lines or anything.

GVS: Not much.

RB: Yeah. So, that'd be a hard business to be in now with all the fishermen out there and all the boats.

GVS: Probably somebody might get caught when they started swimming or something around the boat or something. Because if you got caught, you're done.

RB: Yeah.

KSK: Yeah.

GVS: You don't have another chance.

RB: How many ghost snag lines are out there, do you think? Do you think there's a few left out there that just kind of decayed to the bottom?

GVS: There'd be a few but not much. They'd take them out.

RB: Yeah. That was in the spring.

GVS: Mostly May after they got done spawning, that's when they'd catch the most. But the same guys would get them off the rocks, with the snag line. You just take out about a 30-foot line with a hook and a sinker, just throw it out. You don't even have to see the fish. Just throw it out where they are, pull it back in, or [inaudible]. Because these hooks would swing right into the fish with that sinker on there. It's hooked. It would swing right into them.

RB: So, that's the same hook that they'd have on the snag line.

GVS: Same hook.

RB: Yeah. Interesting.

KSK: The snag lines are really expensive then, with all those hooks.

GVS: Well, they make their own sinkers. The hooks cost and the rope. It would cost them.

RB: Where were they buying their hooks then?

GVS: Hardware stores.

[laughter]

RB: I had them. Were they called sturgeon hooks too?

GVS: Sure. [laughter] I don't think you can buy anymore, can you?

RB: You can buy them, but they probably don't call them sturgeon hooks anymore.

GVS: Fourteen up?

RB: Sure, I think you can buy them, yeah. Probably not in the hardware stores, but there's catalogs in that that you can buy them, I'm sure. Because they probably use them in saltwater for big fish.

GVS: I suppose, sure.

RB: Yeah. That's interesting.

KSK: Did you ever spear a sturgeon from the shore?

GVS: I don't think I ever speared them. Some guys speared them, but it was mostly snake hooks.

KSK: Okay. So, so that wasn't as common.

GVS: Walleyes take spear.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: After they didn't have a torch, then they'd use their spotlights with a battery.

RB: So, what generation are you here now? You said you're second or third generation of your family that travels in the Shiocton area? Your grandfather moved here or your dad? I forgot.

GVS: My grandfather.

RB: Your grandfather.

GVS: Yeah. My dad was born in 1901. In 1902, they moved on to a farm over here on Hooyman Road, about 2 miles up. Then they'd walk to the river. They had a boat down there and a torch and a spear for the walleyes. Then all those fish [inaudible] started.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: That was it. That's why they were –

RB: That's what they lived on, yeah.

GVS: For sure.

RB: Yeah. Probably, fish and venison and geese.

GVS: Well, there were no deer.

RB: There were no deer?

GVS: No deer at all, none.

RB: Really?

GVS: No. I was about a sophomore in high school when I saw the first deer.

RB: Is that right?

GVS: There were all kinds of pheasants and prairie chicken.

RB: Prairie chickens?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Wow.

GVS: There was prairie chicken, lots of them.

RB: So, it was a different landscape at that time, more open, undeveloped land, or unfarmed land, huh?

GVS: Well, some of them, it was pastures with cattle and then keep it down. But that's where the prairie chicken [inaudible].

RB: I see, yeah, the prairie chicken.

GVS: When we moved on to the farm, I was about the last of the prairie chicken dealers. That would have been the 1930s, upper [19]30s.

RB: As far as the river is concerned, have you noticed changes in the river itself over your lifetime? Is it different now than when you were a kid? Or is it pretty much the same? Or is it cleaner? Is there more snags or less snags or more rocks or less rocks?

GVS: Up in here, I think it's about the same. I think the water – I think it raises faster and goes – or raises slower and goes down faster. I think there are better drainage now. It seems like it. It depends on the rain.

RB: Well, it depends on the rain, yeah,

GVS: We get heavy rain up above here now. I see it in June, a lot of things go crazy.

RB: Was the water clear when you were a kid, do you think? Or was it about the same? I know it changes seasonally. Summer is usually more cloudy in the summer.

GVS: Well, it depends where you're at. If you get downstream farther, it gets dirtier. If you go upstream, it's clearer.

RB: Okay.

GVS: You can see that right now. I don't know if that's soil or what it is. It must be the soil.

RB: It could be the soil or what's running into it.

GVS: If you go down [inaudible] it's dirtier.

RB: Yeah. Well, they've got the [inaudible] coming in there, and you've got all (pig?) farms and everything going down there. So, that might cause some problems. Let's see, what else do we need to ask.

KSK: I think, since your grandfather lives here too, any stories that like your dad told you of your grandfather fishing.

RB: Any sturgeon stories from your grandfather.

KSK: Do you remember?

GVS: Well, they'd all get them, just like I said.

KSK: I mean, that's what they were doing.

GVS: Why, sure.

KSK: Yeah,

GVS: Like those hooks and snag them up or spear, but most of them snag them up because it was easier to snag.

RB: Right. Obviously, they didn't have refrigeration back then. So, this was really a seasonal thing. They would get them and just eat them right then. Yeah.

GVS: Or they had ice.

RB: Or they had ice, right. Yeah.

GVS: They used to cut ice in the river here years back. I can remember that a little bit, right in (town?).

RB: Really?

GVS: Yeah. They'd go out on when we got frost-heavy, cut it up –

RB: Make ice.

GVS: – pull them out and slap it as much as they can handle. But they had saws, handsaws, and they put them in storage, piled up, sawdust on top of them.

RB: Yeah. I got to show you a picture that (Butch Bernell?) gave to us for the project. You probably knew Butch's dad, I'm sure.

GVS: Yes, Bud.

RB: Bud. There he is, right there.

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Then the other names are (Rayver Stegen?) and Merlin Lehmann.

GVS: The only one I know is Bud.

RB: Okay. But he said this picture was taken right up off of 187 up here, where they had their farm up there.

GVS: They had their farm right by the stone bridge.

RB: Yeah, that's what he said. This was back in that field. The stone bridge would be like right over here. This is that field. But they must have been holding these fish in the bayou, still got the tail lines on there.

GVS: Yeah.

RB: In the spring, of course. You can see there's no leaves on the trees. But I'm thinking that picture has got to be probably, maybe even during the war. Because this truck or that vehicle, that's got to be 1930 something vintage.

GVS: They bought it in 1930.

RB: They bought it in 1930?

GVS: [19]30, [19]31, or something.

RB: That's Bud. He was born in 1922. So, he looks to be, I'm thinking, maybe eighteen or twenty on there, something like that.

GVS: Something like that [laughter].

RB: Good picture though, huh?

GVS: Yeah. I wish I knew who had the picture where they had them pile up like hardwood.

RB: God. We were searching for it.

GVS: There's one woman in town years back, for the history of Shiocton, and I don't know if she got any pictures or not. She's dead now I think.

RB: That's that book.

KSK: That book.

RB: We're going to stop at the hardware store to see if – because Hayes told us that that was the last place he knew that had any copies. They probably don't anymore, but we're going to check. We'd like to get a copy of that book. Because there's probably some good information in there.

GVS: The woman that wrote that book had lived here all her life, and she got information – well, she knew a lot.

KSK: Right.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Mrs. Wilkinson or something like that.

RB: Yeah. Well, a lot of good information, a lot of good history. I mean, that was a great tribute to Shiocton that she put that together. Because very few communities have that. Then

you capture that history, especially the early days.

GVS: Well, they're logging – sawmills and everything here. There was one up by the stone bridge I hear. I don't know.

RB: Really?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: So, anyways, I think that's about all the questions that we have. I've got a form that I'd ask you to sign that would just basically allows us to use your interview in the book. I put it here somewhere. Basically, you're giving us the right to use this information in the book.

GVS: Sure.

RB: You ran the gas station here in town, right?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: The one right across the street here, isn't it?

GVS: The first one on the right.

RB: How many years were you in there?

GVS: Not quite fifty-five, fifty-four years and eight months.

RB: Really?

GVS: I started in February of 1947.

RB: Wow.

GVS: Got it out of there in September of 2001.

RB: Wow.

GVS: I have six kids.

RB: Yeah. Wow. That's a long time to run a business.

GVS: Yeah. [inaudible] I didn't have to make boats. I had about a dozen boats that I rented out.

RB: Oh, you rented boats too.

GVS: Yes. [inaudible] fish totally anchoring there.

RB: Would that be people locally, or would people come up to Milwaukee and different places?

GVS: Out of town people.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Local people have their boats.

RB: Have their own boats. Yeah. Yeah, you've seen a lot of changes in your lifetime.

GVS: When I moved out on the farm there, about 1934, it was about half houses and half tractors working the land, big horses, sometimes two, sometimes four pulling the machinery.

RB: Well, my dad was born in 1929. He's still living. He ran a business in Milwaukee for fifty-four years, a construction business. He still has his business yet, but he doesn't do much with it anymore. My brothers, same big – seven kids in my family. I'm the oldest of seven, and I worked for him for a number of years. My brothers all stayed in the business. So, they're in the excavating and grading the business. So, I have a little bit of a feel for what it was like for you to support a family like that.

GVS: There were eleven in our family.

RB: Really?

GVS: Yes. My dad's family had fourteen.

RB: Wow. Well, I know when I looked up Van Stratens in the phonebook, and they took up two pages. [laughter] There's a lot of Van Straten.

GVS: There was a guy who went over to Holland, and he looked in the phonebook. He said, page after page, it was (Verstraten?). The name got changed after they came here.

RB: Really?

GVS: It was Verstraten instead of Van Straten, page after page.

RB: So, did your grandfather come directly to Shiocton from –

GVS: No, his dad did.

RB: Your great grandfather?

GVS: Yeah.

KSK: Wow.

RB: So, that's a long time back.

GVS: Long time back.

RB: Holy man.

GVS: Well, all these guys up Green Bay named Van Straten, that's our close relation. That would be my grandpa's brother's kids. There's a lot of them over there.

RB: Well, there's a Gerald in Green Bay too.

GVS: Yes, I know. He came to the station one day.

RB: Oh, did he?

GVS: Yeah.

KSK: That's amazing.

GVS: He said, "Hello." He said, "I'm Gerald Van Straten." Hello. I'm Gerald Van Straten. [laughter] He's a little taller than I am, but you see the resemblance.

RB: That's funny. I found my dad's family over in Germany. I was over there at a sturgeon meeting actually, in 1997. I did some research into where my great grandfather had come from. My family all came originally in Wisconsin, up in Ashland County, a little town called Butternut. My great grandfather settled there in 1884. I found this village. The village is not even half the size of Shiocton. I went into this tavern to get something to eat and drink. I'm talking to this older gentleman sitting next to me, in my really bad German. I told him who I was, and he says, "Bruch?" He says, "You're a Bruch?" I says, "Yeah." He says, "Irma, come here. We have a Bruch from America." Irma comes out of the kitchen. She's my third cousin. We're sitting in my great grandfather's brother's carpenter workshop that she made into a restaurant. Ever since then, we've traveled back. As a matter of fact, I just talked to my cousin, Ludwig, yesterday on the phone. He called me up. But you said you had the resemblance. When all those Bruchs got in there that night, they all looked like my dad, honest. I showed them a picture of my dad, and they go, "That's a Bruch, genuine Bruch." [laughter] They're all (bull wagon?), got potbellies. Well, that's great. You've got a good family history here. You've got some pretty good representatives running out there, your sons, like Ace.

GVS: Randy was in it.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Older son.

RB: Yeah. Well, Randy lives right off [inaudible].

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Yeah. We take a lot of walleyes in there over the years.

GVS: The second slew there.

RB: The one closer to the river.

GVS: I remember that years back, I was kind of the instigator of that one, open one up, one of the slews in this river.

RB: Now, years ago, when you say open it up, you mean, open that cut up, so the water would come through?

GVS: [inaudible] but they took – I don't know if you see it, when they did it, they took all the trees out there and made that slew.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Took all the trees out and stumped it and everything else.

RB: Right. Yeah. We did that about maybe fifteen, sixteen years ago, right. Is that what you wanted?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: You must shock them like nuts in there [inaudible].

RB: God. It's thick in there.

GVS: Well, sure [laughter].

RB: Yeah. They're thick in there.

GVS: That's so natural, where she comes in, and – that's a good one.

RB: That's a good spot, yeah. But it's a great river. Yes.

GVS: Well, the [inaudible].

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Where they got the structure in there?

RB: Yeah, that water control structure, yeah.

GVS: I was in there with the (Kendall?) They had it backed off, so it just don't work. It can't work.

RB: You've got to get water going through that.

GVS: The sooner they got the structure in, they opened up the upper end of it. Then that feeds right down through (regions?).

RB: Right through regions, yeah. That improved regions then.

GVS: We went in there, Wayne and I and Kendall and some other guy. [inaudible] uppercut there right [inaudible], the upper end of [inaudible]. She got [inaudible]. Then there's little ways, not too far, 100 feet, and turned on [inaudible]. Three hundred something, if I remember right.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: They shut it off. Take them, whatever they're doing. That was [inaudible]. Then we went downstream and got down across from where (Barry Young?) is, his buildings. There's a cut that goes down into regions. You turned around and the same thing, just thick.

RB: We've been taking a lot of them upriver, upward stream with triple C the last few years. Now, I don't know if they always went up there like that. In your experience, did you know –

GVS: I never paid any attention [inaudible].

RB: Because almost half of the fish we've been tagging in the last four or five years, we're taking up there, right in the river, spawning right in the river.

GVS: You think they had a (stir?)?

RB: Yeah, I think so. There's all nice gravel and rocks all the way up through that. They're laying it right in that – right in that grove, you'll find a nice gravel bar [inaudible].

GVS: Just the hook and line [inaudible].

RB: I've seen them spawning right here out on Bamboo Bend, in the low water here, right on the rocks, the walleyes, spawning like crazy. Well, they couldn't get in the marsh.

GVS: Yeah.

RB: As a matter of fact, the walleyes were spawning one day, and the sturgeon was spawning in the next.

GVS: This land bridge just right here, right across over here, that's all – real good spawning ground a few years back. I don't know how it's lately now.

RB: Right back in this bayou here?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Really?

GVS: Yeah. Where the cut it cuts across the island there now, cuts in there. There's a half dozen cuts in there.

RB: Right. Yeah.

GVS: They're spawning there like nuts. They did.

RB: They did, yeah.

GVS: I don't know about now.

RB: I don't know either. Yeah. We never go in there with the boat.

GVS: It depends on the temperature of the water.

RB: Right.

GVS: I mean the height of the water.

RB: Height of the water, yeah. Well, great. Well, thank you so much, Gerald.

KSK: Thanks so much.

GVS: Sure thing.

RB: We really appreciate it very much.

KSK: Nice to meet you.

GVS: Sure thing.

RB: We'll see where we go with this. But we hope to have the book done sometime in 2009. So, we've got a lot of interviews collected.

[talking simultaneously]

GVS: Hook and line season on sturgeon in the river probably is the thing.

RB: Well, we actually proposed to have a hook and line season. I shouldn't say we proposed, we discussed. I have a citizens committee. As a matter of fact, we've got a representative from (shadows?) on the Wolf that's on that committee. A few years ago, we discussed the proposal for open hook and line season up here in the fall. But the committee didn't support it.

GVS: They could really regulate it though. Because you don't want to hurt the fish.

RB: Right. You could regulate it, definitely.

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Yeah. You could even have a slot size or whatever. Because you could catch it and throw it back.

GVS: Yeah.

RB: But at that time, it wasn't very favorably viewed. It's not off the table. We could bring it back on the table again. But for now, we've got the spearing.

KSK: Can I just ask you one more question? People were still spearing down in Lake Winnebago. But then there started to be more wardens around here and patrolling more maybe. Did people feel kind of like, "Hey, those people down at Lake Winnebago, they get to spear fish. Why can't we legally take our sturgeon?"

GVS: That's another reason why they got them here. Because they couldn't get them at all.

KSK: Right?

GVS: But a lot of these guys would go down there and spear too. They did it for years.

RB: They did?

GVS: Yeah.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: I was down there a lot of times, but I never saw that.

RB: Yeah.

KSK: Yeah.

GVS: I was with a bunch from Stockbridge. My cousin had relations there, as one of the guys from Stockbridge married his daughter. Anyway, we went down there, and we were with those

guys. They were getting them. They would take me out of my hut there, and they hook me another one. This is a better one. I did this for five or six years, and I never saw one. [laughter] I was supposed to get that.

RB: Maybe they weren't putting you in the good huts.

GVS: No, I think they are. But I hadn't gotten one out there.

RB: Yeah. Well, at least they were trying for you.

KSK: Yeah. [laughter]

GVS: Yeah, they were trying, but it didn't work out.

RB: Yeah. So, what did you think of that, staring down the hole?

GVS: Well, you get goofy after a while, [laughter] [inaudible] in the hole.

RB: It's a lot easier up here, isn't it?

[laughter]

KSK: Yeah. You go down there and just stare.

GVS: There's nothing, [inaudible].

RB: Well, it's different now.

GVS: We used to drag the river here, three, four, five, six times a day for lines.

KSK: [inaudible]

GVS: No, no, the wardens.

RB: The wardens did, yeah, looking for lines.

GVS: Sure.

KSK: Five or six times a day?

GVS: We had a special drag thing there with a pipe with little hooks on it. You've got to see them.

RB: Yeah. I've got pictures of it. Yeah.

KSK: Yeah, times have changed.

RB: Well, what is the name of that fellow that Ken Corbett was telling us about –

GVS: Ken Corbett?

RB: Yeah, we interviewed Ken Corbett this morning, but he was telling us a story about a fellow that Ken shot a flare off one time, and there was a fellow that –

KSK: Gabe?

RB: Gabby Paul?

GVS: Gabby Paul?

KSK: Yeah.

RB: Gabby Paul.

GVS: Could be.

KSK: Yeah.

RB: Well, he was out running a line or something. Ken shot a flare off, just to test the flare. He didn't even know that Gabby was down there.

GVS: It must have been the Embarrass River.

RB: On the Embarrass, I think. He shot the flare off. Gabby had a brand-new Buick and thought that the flare was coming after him. He got in his car and took off and ran his car right into the ditch. Corbett didn't even know until a couple of weeks later, somebody says, "Well, you sure did a number on Gabby Paul." He says, "What?" He says, "When you shot that flare off, the flare followed him and ran him into the ditch."

GVS: Shoot it right at them.

RB: Is Gabby Paul still around?

GVS: I think he is. I never heard that he died.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: He lives on Double X, the east of Bear Creek.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Northeast, I guess.

RB: Yeah.

GVS: Southeast of Clintonville.

RB: Right.

GVS: He's getting up on age. June 1st, I'll be 80.

RB: Yeah? My dad will be 80 in September. Well, he'll be 79, I'm sorry, 79. Same generation. Well, very good. Thank you so much.

KSK: Thanks so much. Thanks for coming down on such short notice.

GVS: Sure thing. That's okay.

[end of transcript]