-- drift. They can up there because there are different areas, they have what they call an east shore channel, a west shore channel, the boats go on one side, they fish on the other. Here on the Hudson here, along the Verplanck, Peekskill, Rockland area, there is so much traffic with shipping and barges going up and down that drifting is a thing of the past, it's not economically - - you wouldn't be able to repair the nets fast enough to keep them in the water anymore. And I think a lot has to do with the money factor of it, it doesn't pay to put that many hours into shad fishing. Prices of shad haven't - - I haven't got them handy right now, but if I go back 20, 25 years, along towards the middle of the season the prices probably weren't too much different then than they are now, even though fish is a very high priced item in the stores now. You wouldn't see, as far as our end of it, from fishermen to market, we're kind of like the farmer, we're stymied on supply and demand. The supply goes up, the price goes down, and towards the middle of the season you're back to where you were 25 years ago, the price really hasn't changed that much.

INTERVIEWER: So did you support yourself off of the river?

MR. BLEAKLEY: For a time, for a time. Oh, in the early - - well, I would say in the mid-'50s, I was single at the time, I could afford to devote an awful lot of time to the fishing, and I enjoyed it. So, yes, I did, for a time I did support myself off of it. Later on in years I had a family, and other things, so you couldn't depend on the seasons being good or bad. The payments come due on a house or something like that, you had to have them. So in '59 I went to work for (inaudible) Water, and I've been there ever since, and that's quite a span of time. I've been a foreman in the water department here for the last 25 years, but I still fish in my spare time.

INTERVIEWER: Do you ever take the shad season off and try to fish then?

MR. BLEAKLEY: For a good many years I always took the shad season off. I would take the whole shad season off, take my vacation, and fish night and day, yes. I've done that for a good many years. And over the last 5 or 6 years I've done a little sturgeon fishing. Bass, they closed, so that kind of shut us out, I don't take as much time off. And shad, I really haven't done anything with over the past 5 or 6 years because the markets are not there, you can't really make a decent dollar, a decent return to you. A fisherman today that's fishing the river for shad, if he breaks even, he's lucky. He's doing it more because it's tradition than he's doing it to make money because very few guys are - - they're never going to get rich at it. They may survive, but they will never get rich, not with shad fishing, it just isn't there. By the time you figure your time, your repair, your cost of nets, your icing, and shipment, and when you get 35 cents a pound, 30 cents a pound out of the market, you're not going to go no place there. Other than that, the guys that do, do it, and it's in your blood. It's like anything else, some people run because they're happy, some people fish with a fishing pole because they're happy, commercial fishermen fish because that's what they do.

INTERVIEWER: Do you miss it?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Do I miss it? Well, I don't miss it because I'm not that far away from it. I'm on top of it all the time, I know what's happening all the time, and like I say, I do from time to time still do some commercial fishing with sturgeon. So I'm not that far away from it. Shad fishing, if it was more profitable, I would probably be into it still yet. I did it for a good many years because it was a second outlet, it was a little bit, not much, but the whole family was into it. When your family starts to get married and move away, one goes this way, one goes that way, at least I know that they've all had a chance to do it. I have five boys, they've all had a chance to do it.

INTERVIEWER: Do you have any daughters?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yes, I have one.

INTERVIEWER: Were they into it?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah, when she was young and she was in high school, she kept track of the poundage and paperwork for me when I didn't have time to do it myself. Plus they made the boxes, repaired the boxes, they were all into it, they would help me rack nets because I did a lot of that stuff right here at the house, although I have a place at the river.

INTERVIEWER: Where is your place at the river?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, me and Charles White fished together for a good many years, we've been partners for years and years, and his place, we fished right out of his place on the river there. Most of our stuff was done there, other than mending and repairs and stuff like, we did here in the backyard. But Charles and myself did a lot of fishing together. We started off when we were kids in high school.

INTERVIEWER: That's where you knew each other? You went to high school together?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, yeah, we went to school together. And we fished on and off. Charles went his own way for a couple of years and fished with a couple of people, fished on his own, I did the same. And it seemed like we wouldn't be apart for a year or so, a couple of years, and then we would be back fishing together again. Do you know what I mean? Because we both did the same thing. Charles, however, I can say that he devoted his life to it. He was a guy that really enjoyed it, and he spent a lot of time - - he made a science of it, let's put it that way. We would discuss different areas of the river, different currents in the river, different temperatures at different times of year, and we would sit down and figure out when the fish were going to move and when they weren't going to move, and we did very well by doing that. But Charles, he made a science out of it, he devoted his life to fishing. I had a family, he didn't, so I couldn't, but he did, he enjoyed it so much that he didn't do anything else. However, he was a master carpenter also, a boat builder, he would build his own boats, the two of us together. He did an awful lot of work around the water.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the insights or the knowledge that he had about the river that you really can't get if you're not out there all the time?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I remember a few years back when Texas Instruments first come up here to do a study on the Hudson River, they had all kinds of trawl advice, they had all kinds of equipment, but they could catch no fish. We took a young gentleman, he's a book biologist, I think his name was Tony Brant (?), and a couple of the other fellows, and we took them out and we taught them how to catch fish in the Hudson River, where they had a fish, because they weren't doing very well at all, because, first of all, they were in the wrong areas, secondly, they didn't know how to fish this river, and unless you know how to fish it, you can waste your time out there, an awful lot of time. So they used to buy the fish from Charles, to tag the fish, and for experiments, and for reproduction, until they learned how to do it themselves, and then they cut us both out. (Laughter.)

INTERVIEWER: Did they learn by watching him, or did he teach them?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, they learned by actually - - they have a survey boat that ran along with them because they had to keep a lot of them alive for reproduction and for experimental purposes, and they would take their boat and their fishermen would actually get in the boat and fish with Charles and fish with myself, and we would teach them how to set the net, where to set it, and when to set it, because certain times of year on the Hudson you could have all the net you want, you won't catch nothing. If you

do, it's a mistake. And there are some places you can catch plenty of shad, there are other places you won't catch very much shad.

INTERVIEWER: Like where?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, there are certain areas, in Haverstraw Bay, if you get in too close to shore, you'll catch mainly bass, you won't catch too many shad. If you get out towards the channel more, naturally you'll catch more because they're a channel runner. However, you get up to what we call The Reaches, north of Stony Point, there are different areas, the east shore is very bad for shad, you'll catch very few shad. The west shore is excellent, and it's only due to the direction at which the tide is pushed.

INTERVIEWER: How so?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, the tide will come up the river, if there is a bend in the River, and it goes to the right, the tide will drive into that turn and then glance off and come back out, and it will almost come sometimes diagonally across the river. So if you're on the dead side of that, say the east shore was the slow side of the tide, where it don't push on the flood - - and we all know shad travel mainly on the flood tide, they hover on the ebb tide because they're waiting to move - - and if you're on the dead side of the tide, there is not going to be any fish there, they're going to be moving with the tide.

(Break in tape.)

MR. BLEAKLEY: Where were we?

INTERVIEWER: What happened with the tide, the fish?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Like I was saying, there are a lot of times, if you know how the tide moves in the river, you're going to raise your production as far as catching fish. Every fisherman knows that that fishes the Hudson River. However, the Hudson River is unique in its tides, and the way it cares for itself, which a lot of people will disagree with me, but I've been on it all my life. I fished it all my life, my family fished it. Shad is one of those things that run in cycles, you'll have your good cycles, you'll have your bad cycles. Right now I think they're on a downside, they're going down, and they'll continue to go down until there is barely anything.

(Break in tape.)

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, the generation that owned the brickyard was Bleakley, O'Brien, and I forget what it was, they were partners in one brickyard, and the Bleakleys owned another brickyard. The generation that owned it, well, it was a little before my time. The exact family that owned it was probably my grandfather's people that owned the brickyards. They did an awful lot of work along the river in this area. They owned a lot of it, the Bleakley Estate took in the major portion of Verplanck at the time. They built two or three churches because they had different denominations working for them. The built a Catholic Church that's in Verplanck today. They built on Broadway, a Dutch Reform. And I think the other one that they built was a Methodist, I'm not sure, but they built three of them because they had so many different denominations working for them at the time that they felt they had theirs, everybody should have their own, which you look back today, and sometimes they had more sense than we do.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. That's very progressive. Yeah.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, it's also good for business too, you treat somebody decent, you get more out of them. It's like the United States now is talking about lengthening vacation time because a well-rested person works better than a non-rested person, which is very true.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah, which is what the European countries have been doing forever.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah, they've been doing it for years. And we're just catching up.

INTERVIEWER: Yeah. We're all burned out.

MR. BLEAKLEY: We're just catching up.

INTERVIEWER: It's a very lively household. That's great.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, that's only half of them, the rest of them ain't around here.

INTERVIEWER: So you were saying about the cycles in the fish, the shad are in a down cycle.

MR. BLEAKLEY: I would say right now, from what I've been watching the last couple of years, they've been sliding downhill. I've seen it get so bad that you couldn't catch enough fish to even warrant putting nets in the water. There are some years where you would have to take the net out of the water because you were catching too many, but now in the last couple of years, the last few years, they're on a down cycle, and they will taper off, they will taper off to almost nothing, and they'll go like that for a couple of years here and there, and then they'll gradually come back.

INTERVIEWER: When was the last real dip?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, it's quite a while ago. But if you watch them very close, they say 20-year cycles, everybody says 20-year cycles. Well, I think they're pretty close. They'll run uphill, and then they'll run downhill, and they run in about 20-year cycles. I think the experts have got that pretty well narrowed down, they've done a pretty good job on that. However, there will be odd years that don't match up, that happens with everything. But generally I think they're pretty close, I would say they're darn close.

INTERVIEWER: Someone like Bobby Gabrielson was saying that they're not saying very many bucks, they're mostly seeing roes this year. Do you think that's related to the intercept fishery, or do you think that's just part of the cycle as well?

MR. BLEAKLEY: I think that's part of the cycle. I've seen where some years you'll get a lot of bucks and not too many roe, and the roe won't be too big. And then I've seen years where you'll get mostly all roe, and big ones, huge roe. We called the end of the season, when you get the real big fish, the "lilacs", because they're colored like a lilac on the backs of them, very pretty, the backs of them will actually look - - they're usually the end of the season, we call it a lilac shad, and the back of it is colored perfectly like a lilac. However, I've seen them run all year long some years, the great big shad. You say, "Geez, what happened? Something is wrong. They're growing backwards. We're getting the end of the season first." You know what I mean? But it's not, it's a cycle they go through. I think it does probably have a lot to do with the hatchery, probably has a lot to do with what happens outside because we know the fish go down off the coast of Florida, and then they're gone. And when somebody finds out where they go, I want to know.

However, when they come back, I think it has a lot to do with whatever happens out there, the spawn that goes out, the fish that are in transit coming back for the following season to spawn, when they are ready

to spawn, I think it has a lot to do with what happens between here and there, where the years are more productive on the male side or the female side. And I think the spawn here is always fairly good because there are an awful lot of fish in the river, always has been through the years. Like I say, they run in cycles, but I think whatever happens outside has a lot to do with what happens, whether you have a balanced run of roe and buck, or you have more buck than roe. I think that may fit into a cycle where it happens. We used to do an awful lot of tagging years ago when I was younger, they used to do an awful lot of tagging. I used to get tags from all over the coast. And that's when they were following the fish from the Florida coast up. They would tag them down - - we got some from down in South Carolina, Georgia, all over the place. However, in them days they always feel that the shad died like the salmon.

Now we know totally different, we know they go to the Bay of Fundy, rejuvenate, and they go back down the coast. For a good many years they never fished for the spawn, what they call the spawners, after they were done spawning; if they did, they were fishing for bait. They were doing an awful lot of bait fishing and ship it for bait. Now they don't do that, which is good because now we know the shad don't die like the salmon. That's got to help the species. But as far as the difference in one from the other, there is only one problem with Hudson River shad, they're too big. Actually for sale, they're too big, because when you sell them to the restaurants, the roe is so big that to take a plate sized portion for a restaurant - - and if you've been in the south and seen the smaller shad that you will get in different areas - - Hudson River shad run is probably the finest shad run in the country, but the problem, what it is, the sale of it is not really appetizing because it's so large that you can put only one - - you have to split a set of roe to make a dinner out of it. As a matter of fact, some shad you could cut it four times to make a dinner out of it, where they're looking for that small set of roe for the appetizing effect on a table. But the shad in the Hudson River, I've been told sometimes that are actually too big, they produce too much roe, they're too big.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have people who were buying from you turn them away because they were too much?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, no market will turn them away because they're paying too much, because in all the years that I've fished, none of the markets have ever given the actual fishermen a fair shake with the roe, they never have. The minute they see a lot of fish come out of the pound nets - - and there used to be a lot of pound nets down along the coast in the past years, there are a few of them being fished now, but not very many - - the minute the outside fishery starts to hit shad heavy, you'll see the price on shad in the Hudson River drop immediately because they know the minute they start hitting it, and the heavy shipments start coming in, that the Hudson is going to start hitting them, and they pull the price down for one of two reasons: number one, they don't want to spoil the fishermen in the Hudson River and give them too much money because they'll want it all the time, and number two, it's because the pound nets catch so many fish, in great quantity, and they flood the market. So it's twofold, not one. Everybody always said, "If the pound nets are catching them, that's going to be the end of us." No, there are two ways of looking at it. If you give me a good price this year, then I'm going to be looking for it next year, so they don't overextend themselves as far as price goes, hoping that the pound nets will catch them. They do it two ways.

INTERVIEWER: Who did you sell to?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, gee, I've sold to almost everybody in Fulton Fish Market at one time or another. I shipped to Philadelphia, I shipped to Maryland, I've even shipped fish as far as Florida.

INTERVIEWER: You shipped shad to Florida?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yes.

INTERVIEWER: Isn't that where they start their trip?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Right. But by the time they leave Florida, Florida is out of fish and need fish.

INTERVIEWER: When was that? That's great.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, it was a few years back. They had a trucker that was running the coast, and he had a reefer, and he said he would take it and see what he could do with it. He did very well with it. I mean, we didn't make a whole lot of money on it, but it was a good experiment. I think one time they wanted to set a co-op up, Bill Dovel, a very renowned biologist in the field, had contacted some people up in the Massachusetts area, someplace up there, I forget where it was now. I'm trying to think of who was involved in it now, but there was some people that were involved with the airlines, who was an ex-airline executive.

INTERVIEWER: Eric Laka (?)?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah. And it wasn't one of the Kennedy's, it was someone else that was involved in it, wanted to set up a co-op and take all the fish from the Hudson River, and they were going to disperse it throughout the country, because there was a lot of call for it out west now. And the fellows on the Hudson River - - myself, I would have went for it 100 percent because I think it was a very good idea, there were a few other ones - - we needed really a couple of fellows that were involved in fishing at that time, Gabrielson was one, Ingolds was another one, and they wouldn't go along with it, and they had good reason because for a good many years, the Ingolds fished for years and years and years, but they were mainly subsidized by the market, so they had commitments in Fulton. Years ago, I know my father had told me that one time, even up here we had it, the market would buy the net, supply you with the net, supply you with what you had to have, and then during the season they would take so much out of the fish money to pay for whatever gear they gave you. So they're actually subsidizing you. And they did that for a lot of fishermen on the Hudson River.

INTERVIEWER: Huh. I never heard of that. That's great.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, yeah. Fulton Fish Market did that for years.

INTERVIEWER: So your father did that?

MR. BLEAKLEY: No. Our family were into it so long, they didn't take any subsidies, they would rather do it on their own. But there was a lot of large fishing fleets that fished out of here in the past that were subsidized by the market. Naturally everybody will say no, they weren't, but they were. Everybody in the fishing business knew they were.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember any names?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I think Ingolds was subsidized by the market years and years ago, not Ronnie and them, the guys down there, but I think their father and them, I think they were subsidized by the market. I think a gentleman that fished out of Hyde Park or up that area, Keb Feller (?), he had four or five or six boats way back. When I was just a very young boy, my father fished, they were subsidized by the market. However, they would take the subsidy for a couple of years until they built up their nets and everything else, and then they would fish alone because they had already paid for them.

INTERVIEWER: Did people look down on fishermen who were subsidized by the market?

So when they say one was better than the other, today one would be better than the other, it's all according to where the school hits. However, the reason drift netting always got the upper hand was because they were fishing twice as much net. You're fishing 2,000 feet versus 1,200. So drift netters always say, "We catch more fish than stake netters." Yeah, but you're also fishing twice as much net too, or almost. And I've fished both. We used to have drift nets going the same time we had stake nets going.

INTERVIEWER: Which did you like better?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I like the drifting better because it was I wouldn't say less work, but it was more fun. You could go out - - if you had to go out and haul a stake net, you went out at the end of the tide, when it's slowing down, and you worked your tail off until you hauled that net, and then you waited until the tide changed and then put it back on the poles for the next tide. However, a drift net, you put it in the water at the beginning of the tide, a couple of hours after the tide, you went about 2 1/2 hours, 2 hours before slack water. When they say they always fish the flood tide, what they mean is that when the flood tide comes 2-1/2 foot up the beach, you go up river, not down river, you go up river and throw the drift net because the center tide in the center of the river is still going down. Your beach tide is going up, that's the flood, but your center and center river are still going down. You want that net to travel downriver to wherever you want to stop, and they were pretty good at guessing where they were going to go. A lot of it was guesswork, sometimes the tide would run out on you, and you go too far, and you would get in trouble. They wanted that net to stop. As the tide changed, we all know shad moves with the flood tide, it doesn't move very much with the ebb tide. They wanted that net to stop at a certain spot, and the minute that flood tide would start to move north, so would the fish, and that's when you catch your most fish, and they call that a setback, the net starts to set back on a drift net. That's when you're going to catch your fish. On the head of the tide moving down river, that net could go as fast as it wants, catch very few fish, but the minute that tide changes, the tide raises enough on the beach to slack the tide down in the center, in that center tide, your mid-river tide starts to move north, that's when the fish move, and they move in a hurry, and that's when you catch your fish.

INTERVIEWER: How long do you leave it in?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, the setbacks, you leave it set back - - you watch it because once it sets back, you let it come back maybe, oh, for a good half hour, 45 minutes any longer than that, you have so much net in the water, and there are so many turns in the river, that if you don't start hauling, you won't have to worry about hauling, it will be hooked on the bottom, or tangled up on something, one thing or another, you know. But usually you like to get it - - if you can get half hour, 45 minutes out of a setback, and that doesn't sound like much, but you have to remember that the minute that net stops, the fish start moving, and as it sets back, you can only let it go just so far because you have so much in the water that you have to haul it or lose it.

INTERVIEWER: So you don't let it go a very long time before the setback.

MR. BLEAKLEY: No.

INTERVIEWER: You just get it in there before the tide changes.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, the ideal way would be to go out, I would say, a half hour before slack water and put the net in, and let it hit slack water and come back. But we couldn't do that. We used to fish what they call a Verplanck Reach, I fished Peekskill Reach, I fished the Race (?), I fished Amanatoa (?), I fished Hyde Park. You have to remember that here in this area you had 15, 20 nets, boats ready to go. The first man on the beach was the first man to throw, he was the first man on the river. However, they did some things that they shouldn't have done, what they call plug, and somebody (inaudible), and there would be big arguments over that.

INTERVIEWER: (Inaudible?)

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, yeah, there were some real heated arguments over it sometimes. There were some tricks you could do to offset somebody that did them things too, that didn't hurt nobody. I remember my father one time, his own cousins from across the river used to do it just to aggravate everybody, so he tied a ring on a big string and it had two buoys, and as I was rowing the boat, he would drop the ring and throw the buoys so it would splash on the water, and then he would throw the second buoy, and while he was throwing the second buoy he would pull in the first one and throw that out again. And they came out and threw their net right in front of him, and he laughed, he pulled in the buoys after they had a couple of shots of net in the water, which is 1,000 feet, because they're 500 feet a shot, and he rowed down and he said, "Now we're going to have fun because now I'm going to throw my net in front of you," and they couldn't stop because they already had 1,000 feet out, and he rowed down the river just so far, and he said, "Okay, son, turn the boat around now, we're going to start where we're supposed to be." That's the fun part of it.

INTERVIEWER: That's great.

MR. BLEAKLEY: But you had so many people in them days, that there would be people as close as you and I are right now with two boats, three boats, four boats tied together just floating down the river watching it, and sometimes everybody would bring their lunch, sometimes they wouldn't, sometimes they would sit on the beach. At night you spent a lot of time on the beach watching the lanterns, or you spent a lot of time just rowing back and forth across the net. In them days there wasn't much commercial traffic. Today you couldn't do it with the commercial traffic, you just couldn't do it because times have changed, you just couldn't drift. And like I say, some people up the river, I can't think of the guy's name, I'm trying to think of his name, he's way up in Roundout Creek area, he still drifts. I don't know what his name is. White. He may be a White.

INTERVIEWER: Tom Lake still drifts.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah, right. He's one name. But them guys, see they have the dual channel up there, they have the commercial channel and they drift on the other side, by the park there. So it makes it easier for them to do it. Down here you couldn't do it no more, there is just too much commercial traffic. Today it's hard to put a lot of net in the Hudson, especially here in the Haverstraw Bay Area because you have so much recreational traffic. And they blow their top, they get all upset because no one teaches them what to look for. They have all kinds of boating courses, they have all kinds of instruction on how to handle a boat, how to tie a boat up, proper maintenance of a boat, but no one says, "Hey, guys, watch out now, there is a commercial season out there, and if you see a line of jugs, or you see poles properly marked, this is what you've got to look for because there are commercial fishermen out there." They have no conception of what's going on out there, except what they've learned either in school or someone

teaching them how to run a boat, they don't know anything about commercial fishing. And there has never been anything put out to say, "Hey, guys, we know you're going out there for recreation, we want you to go out, we want you to have lots of fun, and we want you to enjoy yourself, but we want you to be safe." I've seen recreational boats tangled up in lines and tangled up in nets, and it's a very dangerous situation for those people to be in because they're used to going from the dock back to the dock, having a good day, and enjoying themselves.

However, when they get tangled up in one those heavy nets, or one of those heavy lines, somebody has got to go overboard and cut it loose, and that puts them at a disadvantage because they're dealing with something they don't know nothing about. And like I say, I've never seen anything around that said, "Hey, guys, this is what can happen on the Hudson River during this time of year or that time of year, that there is going to be commercial fishing out there, there are going to be different types of nets out there. So be careful, watch for this type of marking, or for a line of jugs, or for a line of stakes, and don't think you can go between them because they usually have rope between them." You know, there has never been - - no one has ever put anything like that out, you very rarely see anything, anything to bring attention to - - and you know the recreational people are going to be out there, whether it be pole fishing for bass, or pole fishing for this, or just taking a cruise. Some of our people, that we know in the area, one of them is a commercial fisherman today, almost hung himself in a boat going between two poles, it caught him by the neck, almost took him out of the boat, Ronnie Gorman. Almost took him out of the boat, almost killed him. And today he's a commercial fisherman and he knows, but he never forgot the day that the rope almost took him out of his own boat while he was going down. He was going down to do a little pole fishing for bass, he was going down the river and went between two poles in what they call a monkey line, so you can pull yourself from pole to pole, is hanging there, he never seen it coming. It's little things like that.

I enjoy fishing, I've done it all my life, but you sure don't want to go out there and get somebody hurt either. And I've had people come with me for years before I would let them fish on their own, because one mistake with an anchor net, one mistake with a heavy net like that, you would lose a person in a hurry.

INTERVIEWER: What kinds of mistakes?

MR. BLEAKLEY: It's little things that you don't even think of, it's putting the net overboard, you get tangled up and go over with it, especially a lot of guys haul anchor nets alone, a lot of guys used to haul stakes alone. Very dangerous, because you haul it over the bow, and if you slip and wind up in the net, you're gone.

INTERVIEWER: Has that ever happened to people?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, very rarely because most of the fishermen that do fish alone have been in the business a long time. Most of your newcomers that fish, that I know anyway - - Eddie Hatzmann, I remember when we broke him in, and we taught him how to fish the right way, he always had a second person with him.

INTERVIEWER: Initially he went out by himself.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah. Well, he went by himself, but he had a lot of guys showing him how to do this, showing him how to do that, and it took him a little time. Once he learned, he learned that the second man is very vital. It was different with me, I had all the boys that fished, we always had two, my cousin fished with me, he was a policeman in White Plains for 20 years, he fished with me, and when he retired he fished with me, and his boys fished. But there was a lot of little things that boaters don't think of when

they're messing with a net. A net in a boat - - like I told people for years and years, don't be afraid of the river, just give it the respect it's due, and a lot of people don't understand what I talk about when I say that. When you don't give it respect, it can hurt you, just as much as it can make you happy. I always told my boys that. I always made sure when they were fishing, either one way or the other - - I bought them the Sterns(?) Jackets, I bought them the stuff that you have to wear, because if you go over with boots and gear on, you haven't got a chance. So they all had them. I think there are still some up in the attic. They all had their Sterns (?) Jackets. I know my other son that lives in Cribbestown (?), he took his with him, he took all of his gear with him, but that's fine because he does a little fishing himself. But it's a lot of fun.

INTERVIEWER: So nothing ever really treacherous happened to you out there.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, I lost a cousin, and I lost a very good friend that went out one foggy morning, right off of Verplanck, to throw a drift net, very hazy, and an old boat come down and run right over the two of them. And after that it was hell for the family, I'll tell you that, because you had a - - big Johnny was about 15 when it happened, it was on Mother's Day, Gerald, the guy that was with him, Gerald McGuire (?), the guy that was with him, he was rowing the boat for him, Johnny was a good fisherman, he was a big, strong kid for his age, and they left the dock, the steamboat dock, in Verplanck, to throw the net, and they didn't get too far.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, god. So you just don't go out when it's- -

MR. BLEAKLEY: You've got to know what you're doing and when you're doing it. There was two guys that knew what they were doing. I mean, Johnny was only 15, but his father had a fishing business, I'm his cousin, we all fished, you know. It's just one of those things that do happen from time to time, and you hope to God it never happens. But it hit the family hard, it was a very tragic thing for the McGuire (?) Family, the Bleakley family, everybody.

There was a gentleman that come from New York at the time, he was with one of the newspapers, and he made a statement that I never forgot, he stood down there talking about it, doing his thing with the newspapers, and whatever, and he said, "You know, I've been to a lot of tragedies, I've been to fires, I've been to this, I've been to that," but he says, "For two people being killed on the river here," he says, "this type of tragedy, a fishing tragedy, I've never seen a community get so tight together to retrieve the two boys out of the water and get the job done as I've ever seen here," and he says, "I've seen people from Montrose, Ossining, Croton, Peekskill, Verplanck, Buchanan," he says, "and they don't leave the scene, they've been here from day one." And that was a pretty nice thing for him to say, and he says, "And I've been all over the world and seen a lot," and I said, well, fishermen do those things, and they do. They do. Whether it's here, Florida, California, they lose one of their own, they don't rest until it's over with. And that's something I can say about them, I've always enjoyed that.

INTERVIEWER: It's a tight community.

MR. BLEAKLEY: If you're in trouble and you're in the river, you can depend - - a lot of boats will go by you because they don't understand. I mean, we've towed people in that had minor problems, we've towed people in that had major problems, you know. I think it's because commercial fishermen are so - - what would you say? - - so experienced on the water, that they see things that are wrong that normal people don't see riding by.

INTERVIEWER: Like what?

MR. BLEAKLEY: If they see a boat listing too far, they know he's in trouble and they know there is something wrong there, or they see him floating and he's not doing well, or maybe they come up the river, and the tide is running flood, but he's not moving, but his bow is facing up the river, they figure, he's tangled up in a net, or he's tangled up into something. They know, they see these things, where a normal person would go by and never even notice it. It's one of those things where the experience on the water, you see things that are wrong that normal people don't see. And it's only true experience, it's like a mechanic looking at a car, you know, they see things that normal people wouldn't see.

INTERVIEWER: And there is no one else who knows the river in this way.

MR. BLEAKLEY: No, there are very few people that know the river, the Hudson River or any other river, I think, or water in general, than a commercial fisherman that fishes the water, because he knows how it reacts, he knows what it's going to do, he knows how to treat it. I could probably say - - my father used to take us down the Hudson River when we were very young, and at that time there wasn't very many shore lights when I was very young, there were very few shore lights, no condos, no nothing, and they used to take you down in the hole, what they call Lower Haverstraw Bay, turn you around twice and tell you to take you home. He would let you sit up, look, and then he would put you on a compass, he would make you take him home with the compass. And there were very few lights, there were a couple you could cheat by, you learned that quick on the river if you're a fisherman, you know what to look for. But he used to take us down and start us out on a hazy day or a foggy day, and tell you where you were, he would tell you you're - -

James H. Bleakley

Buchanan, New York
April 26, 1992

Tape One, Side Two

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever get really befuddled and totally lost or disoriented out there?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I think everybody has one time or another. If anybody says to you that they went out on the river and never got befuddled or lost, they're wrong, they're absolutely wrong. He's a lying fisherman.

INTERVIEWER: What an anomaly.

MR. BLEAKLEY: I think all of us have one time or another, drifting especially, when you're sliding along with the net, and somebody forgot to put the compass in the boat, or, "It's going to be clear as a bell," and then you get a little rain move in, and it gets foggy. There was an old saying in Verplanckj anyway, that you should always keep the bell tower over your left shoulder or right shoulder, and you always row to the east shore. Don't believe it, it don't work, because the sound bounces off the mountains and it sounds like it's coming from all over the place. It don't work. The old-timers had all kinds of gimmicks like that.

INTERVIEWER: That didn't work?

MR. BLEAKLEY: No. They would give you, "Do this or do that." The best way is a compass, believe me. However, they did have a trick that you could learn in a hurry that would help you. They would say,

stop the boat. Stop the motion of the boat. Put the oars in the water and stop the motion of the boat. Take a buoy or something that floats and drop it in the water alongside the boat, and watch which way it goes away from the boat. You know which way the tide is running, or at least you should, by that time, and you can tell which way your bow is facing, whether it's facing for one shore or the other, the east shore or the west shore, just by the direction of the float, the float would move away from the boat. That was about the best I've ever seen.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever have to use that?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah, a couple of times, a couple of times. Then they always told you that - - you had to remember, in them days, when you were drifting a lot, they had outboard motors, sometimes they ran and sometimes they didn't. I rowed home more than I think I came home by motor. And you didn't have to row that far, the river isn't that wide, you're only talking it's only a mile wide in most places, unless you were in Haverstraw Bay or someplace. But there were some things that they told you that really did work. As far as listening to noise, now I know when Cornell ran the river, towing barges down, they ran by sound. It was explained to me, I think the guy's name was Mickey Russo (?), he ran a tug for Cornell for years and years, he come from Poughkeepsie, that when they would come down the river with the old towboats, they had compasses on them, but they would run more by sound to know how far offshore they were, and whereabouts they were on the river. And a lot of people thought, "Geez, why are they blowing the horn so much?" That was to take the echoes in different areas of the Hudson River, to get the echoes, and they ran by sound. And they were good. I don't think anybody could do it today.

INTERVIEWER: That's amazing.

MR. BLEAKLEY: And they actually ran by sound. I didn't believe it when I heard it either, but they did, they ran by sound. My father, he worked on a maritime fleet for years and years, and he got pretty well indepth on running by sound and being able to read a sextant and using compasses, whether they be oil or alcohol, and I guess that helped us out a lot because he knew the theory behind all of this. So it was easier for him to teach us than it was for some people because he was involved on the river all his life, and like I say, he worked for the maritime fleet over here, when they had the maritime fleet in Tompkins Cove. He worked there for years. He used to go back and forth to work by boat. He went during summer, if there wasn't too much ice. Only the real cold months of the year when the river was froze up that he would drive to work.

INTERVIEWER: How long did your family fish both the stake nets and the drift nets?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, geez. Don't ask me when they started, I wasn't around. But up until the mid-'50s they fished both ways, mid-'50s to late-'50s, they fished both ways.

INTERVIEWER: And how many people did they have working with them?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, there was usually - - oh, there was three or four boats fishing drift nets and three or four boats fishing stake nets at the time, that I remember.

INTERVIEWER: And then where did the idea, when everyone sort of started changing on the river from the stake to the anchor, where did the idea come from?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I don't know where the idea came from. I know my father always fished buoy nets, which is a type of anchor net for perch in the cold weather. And they also fished what they call a tee for perch - - you've heard that word before - - and they used to build their own. And that's a matter of

whoever built it, everybody had their own design, everybody's was better than the other guy's, it was fun to listen to sometimes.

INTERVIEWER: Like what kinds of things?

MR. BLEAKLEY: The anchor nets I think are around for a good, good many years. I think the main uses of an anchor net was for sturgeon fishing. They were fishing in the deeper parts of the river, and they fished them for sturgeon because an anchor net can be drawed down underneath the ice, they could fish them whether there was ice on the river or there wasn't ice on the river, and they were made for fishing in deep water because the way you regulate that is that the more weight you put on the bottom, the deeper it will go, and the longer it will stay down there. And we all know sturgeon is a bottom dweller, and they wanted to hold that net down as long as they could. They also knew that an anchor net, the way it's fished, which they used glass jugs years ago, they use plastic now because it's more available and it's safer, but an anchor net only fishes a certain amount of the tide. Everybody thinks it fishes the whole tide, it doesn't. I know there are a lot of people out there that will dispute that with me, but I've had a lot of experience with them.

When the tide is running full, an anchor net is not fishing, believe it or not. An anchor net, the line is on the bottom, the anchor net comes up with the floats on the top. When that tide is running strong, that anchor net will actually almost lay out flat, away from the anchors. When the tide starts to slack up, it will come up, almost in the upright position. That's when it's fishing its best, when it's first going down on the first of the tide, and on the end of the tide when it starts to come back up, that's when it's doing its best fishing. Now, there are ways of regulating that by putting more jugs on the top to make the top stay up more, and more weight on the bottom. Everybody makes the mistake of the fishing an anchor net by putting a lot of jugs on top, but they forget you also have to put the weight on the bottom, you've got to stretch it like a string to make it fish right. And like I say, in the full of the tide very little of that net is fishing. Probably the top couple of feet are fishing in the strength of the tide, that's all. It fishes better as the tide slacks up and as the tide slacks off. And that's how an anchor net is used.

There are other ways you can fish, what they call a buoy net, that's regulated top to bottom because you have weights on both ends to hold the ends down, you have a line that comes up to support the top of it, and then you have two great big buoys that force the top to stay up, to force the net to stay like a stop net. But I think anchor nets have been around probably as long as anything. It's probably just a different type of fishing, they used it for a different type of fish, they used it for sturgeon. And then in later years there has been so much trouble over the stakes and some accidents, and just probably the time has changed where fishermen have died off, their families have gotten away from it, and the few that are left, it's easier for them to handle an anchor net than it is a - - they use an anchor net for everything now, for shad, for bass, for sturgeon, for everything. So it kind of did away with the stake fishing, but it does the same thing, maybe not quite as efficient, but it does it with a little less work.

INTERVIEWER: Did it change the community of fishermen at all, because, as you described, everyone would sort of sit on the side and watch the stakes and the lights?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I think it's just a matter of a lot of the families getting away from the fishing because I don't think it changed much any, the fishing has always been more or less traditional in the Hudson River in the way it's done, whether it be in the lower side of it, they do it a little different down below than they do it in our area, they do it a little different above here than we did it in our area. They used to seine shad in the Hudson River when I was very young. You don't see any seines for shad. As a matter of fact, seining is outlawed altogether in the Hudson River except for baitfish. You don't see any of that no more.

INTERVIEWER: What are some of the differences between the way they would fish below and higher up?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, down in the lower bay and, say, from the Tappan Zee Bridge on down, I know that Gabrielson fishes poles, but his are set up almost like anchor nets, he'll fish a pole here, a pole there, but it's generally almost an anchor net. However, Ingolds and some other people that fish down there, they were strictly pole fishermen, they had a regular barge and they would set all their poles and everything. They would fish strictly poles, they didn't get involved in anything else. For bass, for shad, for everything, they fished the same way. As you came north, you seen a lot of drifting, you seen a lot of poles, you seen anchor nets, because up here most of the fishermen in the lower Hudson, and I would say from Haverstraw on down, they fished either for one thing or another. You had a lot of fishermen in the Croton-Ossining area that would fish strictly for bass, they would fish the bass season, after that they could care less about the rest of it. You had other fishermen that fished mainly for shad. You had a few of them, my family, fished for both, they fished for everything.

But I think the difference between them down there and us up here, not that we're any different in the way we did things, it's just that they put the priority on shad or bass. So when they were done with their shad poles, they took them out, took them in, and they were done for the season. However, some of those fishermen used to travel. I know Ingold's father, Ronnie's father, I think had fishermen that came all the way up from the Carolinas that would follow the shad, they had professional fishermen that would follow the shad, and when the shad ran out, they were done, they went back home, that was the end of their season. Their season started maybe - - I know some of them come from down around Carolina, they may have come from Florida. Who knows? But they were professional fishermen that followed the shad run from one place to another, and they would generally hire on with one fisherman or the other. We didn't do that up here. Most of the people out on nets, they had people working for them and everything else, but they generally did it as a family thing, they fished up there. That would be one of the differences. Even the methods they used weren't too much difference, unless you get outside, where they fished the pound nets, that's a whole different ballgame. But as far as the way they handled a stake net or a drift net, they were generally all the same. It's pretty close anyway. Some people hauled it different, they would haul over the bow or over the stern, everybody had their own trick, "This is my way. This is the best way to do it." Everybody I think that I ever fished with had their own way of doing things, and that was always the best, bar none. However, they all worked for whoever was doing it. To each their own.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember Ron Ingold's father?

MR. BLEAKLEY: I remember the family. My father used to take us down the river once in a while in a launch, and Mr. Ingold himself - - I was a very young boy, if I do remember him, it was in passing, probably more by talk than anything. I know my father knew him well, my uncles knew him well. There was a couple of other fellows down there that fished too, off of the top of my head I can't remember who they are. I know my father and Henry Gourdine knew each other for years and years and Henry, old Henry, he fished all over the world, he's quite a man. He should write a book. He should have written a book a long time ago.

INTERVIEWER: Yes, he should.

MR. BLEAKLEY: He really got around. And you have to remember that people up in this area, they all know each other, they're all related. The DeGroats are related to me, they're all cousins.

INTERVIEWER: How are the DeGroats related to you?

MR. BLEAKLEY: It's on my father's side, yeah, my father's side. The Bleakleys and DeGroats are all intermarried. It's a mess if you try to figure it out. However, I have trouble trying to figure it out sometimes. But we're all cousins one way or the other. One time my aunt sat down and she was telling me how this one was related. I guess we did a courtship by rowboat in them days, across the river, which is cute. Because this one was married to that one, that one is married to this one, this one is a Rose, that one is a DeGroat, and that was the way my aunt explained to me, she said they did their courtship.

INTERVIEWER: That's great.

MR. BLEAKLEY: But I guess that was the way you do it, you didn't have bridges, maybe, I don't know.

INTERVIEWER: Did you ever go to Henry with specific problems or help that you needed in fishing?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Like what kinds of things?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Through the years we've sat down and talked different ones. When we were hauling seines, when it was legal, Henry was probably one of the finer seine men on the Hudson River, or anyplace maybe, as far as I'm concerned. He knew how to use it, when to use it, and why you should use it. And I was a young guy and watched him make that big haul of bass that time they all talk about, that 10,000 pounds, and he Ian't lying one fish. He ain't lying one fish. He may have had more, that's all he publicized.

INTERVIEWER: So you remember that.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Describe what it was like.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, it's an experience. I've seen big seines come in, in the south, different type seines, but in the Hudson River here I've seen shad seines come in up above and have a lot of fish in them. Do you know what I mean? But we were always used to fishing one way or another, a few bass here, we caught a lot of bass, but to see so many fish in the cod of a seine so big - - and his seine was big - - all at one time, the massive amount, it was kind of like, "Gee, I wish that was me." You feel a little envious, but you feel, "Geez, this guy knows what he's doing. If I want to use a seine, I'm going to talk to him," because he knew how it went.

But he also knew a lot about fish itself, he knew when the fish move, he knew why they move, and he didn't have no special gear to do it, no testing devices like we can now. You can sit down and figure the salinity of the water, and you can tell when the fish are going to move, you can tell when the bass are going to move, when they're going to spawn, you can tell all that now. We know all that stuff. In them days you didn't have that, you had to look and watch, and see what was happening around, and Henry could do that. Henry was unique in them days to know when, what fish was going to move, when they were going to move, and when they were going to be there. I always said he had x-ray eyes, he could tell when the fish were in that bay down there. He knew one of them by their first name, he had to.

But Henry knew when things were going to move because he was so experienced, and he fished in so many different places, I think his experience taught him. I mean, he fished down in the Gulf, he fished all over the place. He knew what the game was all about, a lot better than a lot of people thought he did, you know.

INTERVIEWER: People didn't think that he did?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I think that a lot of people didn't understand Henry. Henry is a man of few words. If you ask Henry a specific question, he'll answer for you, but if you want to chat about the time of day, he'll chat about the time of day. If you ask him his opinion, he'll give it to you; if you don't ask him, he won't give it to you. He doesn't talk too much. And I know his partner - - I can't think of his name now, he was with him for years and years, it really hurt Henry when he lost him, they were very close. I'm sure that someone has given you a magazine or you've seen one of the Hudson River magazines with him in it and all that.

INTERVIEWER: Uh-huh.

MR. BLEAKLEY: There are a couple of them out there. The picture of the sturgeon that we had that time, that's in National Geographic, I also have that.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, really?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah.

INTERVIEWER: Now, is this the one that Charlie wrestled? Tell me about that.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, that wasn't - - there was a lot of - - they make it sound like we had a wrestling match with two tigers, but it was only a fish. This is some of them. The gentle=man came here, and at the time I was involved in something else, the gentleman came here and wanted to do a story with me on sturgeon, and my partner, Charlie, was fishing pretty steady at the time, so I sent him down to see Charles.

INTERVIEWER: Oh, my god. So tell me about the wrestling.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, he was out alone, he was hauling, and he got one about 265. And he didn't know whether he wanted to put him in the boat or out of the boat. Well, that's a big fish to put in the boat. So he decided, "Well, I'll tie him to the side." Well, Charlie weighed as much as the fish, only the fish had the water to play with, and Charlie didn't. So he went around and around with the sturgeon until he finally got a rope on it and got it tied where you could handle it. And he finally got it in, and a few weeks later I had a big one. Well, you could call it a fish story, call it what you want, God be good to Charles, he made the biggest joke out of it I ever seen. I had two big ones up here in this reach, and I tied the first one very quietly. As long as you don't disturb a big sturgeon, it will lay quiet. So I fished the net off the first one, and I tied it by the tail, and I said, "Well, the rest of the net I can take off of him later." I want to reach out and I want to get that one out there, because I want both of them.

Well, I leaned over the boat quite a ways to reach out to grab ahold of it. When I did I put my elbows on the one on the inside, when I did he reared up and gave me a slap, knocked me in the bottom of the boat, bloodied my nose, scratched my face. And the other one is gone. Well, I got one of them. I got the one that got me, because I already had him tied. So when I come back to the dock, Charlie said to me, "What happened to you?" So I proceeded to tell him like I'm telling you, and he made a big joke out of it, "Well," he said, "I might have had a wrestling match with somebody my size, but he didn't knock me down and he didn't bloody me up like he did you." He said, "So I think I did better than you did." And that was the story about the wrestling match, because I had one and so did he, only I got cut up a little bit from mine, I got a bloody nose and a black eye out of it. And I said, "Well, someday we'll have to go out and catch one together."

Because we did fish there, we caught a lot of fish, a lot of sturgeon together. And I said, "We'll have to catch one together that weighs as much as both of us, and then we'll see who is the wrestler and who ain't." But it was quite funny because I got a black eye and a bloody nose out of it, and he thought he did better than me because he didn't get hurt. But he wrestled that fish for a long time until he got it tied down. He had net wrapped around. He brought everything in. He brought the net. He was so mad, he had the fish tied, he had the net wrapped around it, he brought it in, he brought everything with him. I asked him if he was trying to gift wrap it or catch it because he had so much net wrapped around it when he brought it in. I asked him if he was trying to gift wrap it or catch it. But you have your fun times out there, even though you're wrestling a big fish or something, it does - - you have to sit down after it's all over and laugh. So you say to yourself, "What the hell am I doing here?"

INTERVIEWER: How many years did you fish with him?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Oh, geez, well, in and out. Like I say, we went to school together, and we started fishing in school, when we were in high school. I fished before that with my family and everything, and I fished after that with my family also, I fished with my boys and my cousins, and my cousin and his boys. But me and Charles always wound up doing something together. I don't think there was two seasons or three seasons out of our lifetime that we didn't get involved in some type of project, "Well, we should go here and try this, or go here and try that." There was always something that he had in the back of his head, and we would get talking about it, and we would go try it. At one point we were doing some - - just before they closed up the bass fishing, we used to follow them from the day they entered the Hudson until they went past Saugerties. I had a big boat, we had a big rowboat. We've since built another one, the other boat is down the river now. We had a boat in them days, a great big flat bottom, and we would take my launch and leave here, I would take my vacation, we fished them until they moved out of here, and then I would take my vacation and we would follow them up river until they spawned.

INTERVIEWER: That's great.

MR. BLEAKLEY: We would bring them back, pack them up, and sell them to market. We actually followed them. There were a lot of holes there were fish in a lot of people don't know about that we found. But it's funny, the way they travel, but they have stopovers.

INTERVIEWER: Like where do they stop? At certain set distances?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, a lot of people don't know - - they know the fish went up the river, they fish for them, they don't know why, why they move at certain times. Well, nowadays you know the salinity of the water dictates to a bass when it's going to move, and Mother Nature dictates the rest, when they're going to spawn. The temperature of the water has more to do with it than anything. They will come so far up until the conditions are right, and then they'll move to another place. However, they fooled us one year. We followed them, and there was fish, we had nets, we had some nets set down here, we had some nets in Garrison, we had some nets just north of the Newburgh-Beacon Bridge, we had some just above Rondout Creek, on both sides of the river, some below that, Rogers Point, some up on the Esopus Flats. And we didn't do very well at all. And coming down the river, we hauled the nets we had in Newburgh, and we came down the river, and I was coming by Con Edison over here, and the chart recorder almost lit up, it almost burnt the paper off of it.

And I said to Charles, I said, "I think we just ran over something we've been looking for." He said, "What's that?" I said, "I think we just found all the fish in the river." He says, "What are you talking about?" So I made a big circle across the river, and I came back down through them again. He said to me, "Could it be true?" Well, we rowed up and down for 20 minutes over there with the boat, about half an

hour, maybe an hour, I don't know what it was, and that chart recorder burnt a hole in every possible angle you could see. I think every bass in the Hudson River was laying in the warm water off of Con Edison, every bass in the Hudson River, because there were very few up the river, there were hardly any down the river. I mean, and we had nets set where they should be, and we didn't do nothing. But from the Georgia-Pacific dock to almost Peekskill Lighthouse, the charter recorder almost burnt the paper up. The river was lousy with them up there. And he said to me, "It's got to be bass, it couldn't be anything else this time of year that condensed." And we chased the sturgeon up the river and down the river the same way. One year they were talking about doing away with the sturgeon, which I think is a waste of time.

INTERVIEWER: Doing away with the sturgeon fishing?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Their priorities are not in the right place because they don't know enough about them right now to make a decision like that. They want to do away with the sturgeon fishery, and I think that's totally wrong because there are certain times of year - - they're going I think by catch, and you can't go by catch. I've seen one year where we didn't catch hardly a sturgeon in the river here, and everybody thought, "What happened to them? No sturgeon came this year." So again, me and Charles said, "Well, they've got to be someplace. Why don't we go look for them?" So we got on the big boat of mine and we crisscrossed this river from - - we started upriver first, we went as far as Newburgh, and we picked up a few here, an odd one there, and then we started from here and went south. Well, we got down into deep water below the Tappan Zee Bridge, between the Tappan Zee and the George Washington, and we found more sturgeon than I ever seen on a chart recorder in my life. We even thought about going down and drifting for them.

So we came back and we decided we're going to find out why. And we had known that Bill Novel had done a paper for Boyce Thompson on the sturgeon in the Hudson River, and if anybody is an authority on sturgeon in the Hudson River, Bill Novel definitely is. He's probably one of the finest biologists around, if you want to know the Hudson River, because he knows it inside and out. And we did a lot of work with him, Charlie fished with him for quite a while. And we asked him why that should happen. Well, he gave us an explanation 4 miles long because he doesn't explain things very easily, he wants to give you the technical terms of it, and you have to know Bill to appreciate him, he's a fine gentleman and knows what he's talking about, but he don't want to give you the wrong information. I said, "Geez, put it in English." He said to me, "Well, you must have had a lot of rain." I said we did, and we had a very heavy spring rain, and he said that's why they won't come up the Hudson River. He said the water is too fresh, the salinity in the water is not right. He says where they are is in a hard bottom, and I said, "Yes, it is, it is a hard bottom, very hard bottom." He says, "They'll spawn right there because a sturgeon rubs its belly to spawn." It will actually rub its belly on the hard bottom, that's how they spawn. And I didn't know that until he told me. They actually rub themselves to spawn, they actually squeeze the spawn out of them, the caviar.

INTERVIEWER: So you can go up and down the Hudson and find the different spawning areas, and they will correspond with these very hard bottoms?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Yeah. They use the hard bottom to spawn. So if a person was really to follow them as close, you would probably find out that it's in deep water and it's a hard bottom they spawn in. But we found them in the real deep water, and the reason they didn't come up the river was because the salinity of the water was not right, so they stayed where it was right. So when they say, "Geez, well, you didn't catch many this year, there hasn't been many caught this year," there may be a very good reason why the fishermen didn't catch very many. If conditions are wrong along the coast - - if you was to have a good heavy rainfall, they might not even come into the Hudson River at all, they may spawn in the lower harbor. Who knows? Because the salinity of the water is right for them. And a lot of people don't

understand that. I went around and around with DEC for years. I go to all the meetings, I don't miss none of them.

INTERVIEWER: With any success?

MR. BLEAKLEY: We know through experience that there is 99 percent politics and 1 percent truth in it all. We also know that Ogden Reed (?) - - I stood alongside him when he said he was going to close the Hudson River to commercial fishing for bass, he did that, at Pete Smith's Boat Club in Verplanck, when the first notice came out, he stood there and said he was going to close it. And the reason he closed it was pressure from outside groups, special interest groups. To this day, and I asked the question more than once: Has there ever been a case put on record in the New York State Health Department that a person has been made sick from a fish out of the Hudson River? And their answer was no. I asked them: How many cases - - because we know the PCB problem all originated in Japan - - and I asked them how many cases they based their findings on, and they couldn't give me an answer.

Well, the reason I asked that question is because there was a piece on television around that time about the PCBs, when it first came out, and it was made public that GE was dumping in the river, that they were basing their case on two pregnant women in Japan that they suspected got cancer from PBBs. To this day they haven't proven that PCBs has ever made anybody sick, in the fish or out of the fish. They said it can cause cancer in laboratory animals. Well, I asked another question, that if you draw the line in the Hudson River, it used to be the George Washington Bridge. Now, anybody with any intelligence knows that a fish swims with the tide. If that fish swims, the George Washington Bridge, I'll say, for argument's sake, is 200 feet wide, if he swims 200 feet up the river, he's contaminated with PCBs and cannot be used. If he turns around in the ebb tide and goes south of that bridge, he's fine. That's an insult to anybody's intelligence in this world. Nobody can be that dumb. Now I understand that they're drawing the line at the Tappan Zee Bridge. That's not quite as wide as the George Washington Bridge. So you don't have to swim so far to get poisoned or unpoisoned.

And we went through this for years and years with the DEC. They've came down, you never talk to the same people twice, they've came down to meet with us, with the organization on striped bass, and this is where you get to the point where you get so disgusted with the people that are working spending good hard- earned tax dollars of the peoples, and are not doing their job. They're playing more politics than anything. They came down and talked to us a dozen times on every fish on the Hudson River, and 5 minutes on striped bass. And they do it time and time and time again. They know there is nothing wrong with the striped bass, we know there is nothing wrong. We know, just as well as they know , that there is $30 million of Superfund money they want and can't get, and from what I understand, they're never going to get it because the federal government has hired someone to do a study and found out that in the lower bay the PCB level in the fish are so minute it's hard to find. So there goes the Superfund money because the government ain't going to give it to them in this day and age, with the economy the way it is.

INTERVIEWER: What about the lobby of the recreational fishermen?

MR. BLEAKLEY: See, let me tell you. I'm going to say the state does it, and it's very unfair, it's very unfair to both sides. The state will have a meeting with the lobbyists and certain representatives from the recreational side of fishing. And they'll give them misinformation, they'll deny this from one side of the country to the other. They'll misinform them just enough so it makes them angry at commercial fishermen. And then they'll do the same thing with commercial fishermen.

INTERVIEWER: Give me an example of something they'll say that's misinformation.

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, I think a few years back we had a discussion at a meeting. Gabrielson could probably enlighten you better than me because he remembers it very well. They went out to Long Island and told the pole fishermen and some interest group what the commercial fishermen had said. Well, they took out of context and arranged the wording the way they wanted it. The next thing, there was a big argument between commercial fishermen and pole fishermen, or recreation, I should say. I've never had a problem. Recreational fishermen want to go fishing, fine, let them go. We want to go fishing, fine, let us go. We all know when push comes to shove that recreational fishermen have more money and more political clout than commercial fishermen because there are more of them. Okay? We also know that pole fishermen take more fish per pound than commercial fishermen, and that's a federal study that's been done for years and years and years. On average commercial fishermen take 6 million pounds a year, on average pole fishermen take 8 million pounds a year, and that's a fact because you can find that through the federal studies that they do.

There is no question about that, pole fishermen take more fish than commercial fishermen. And it's hard to believe, but they want you to believe that the commercial fishermen are ruining the stocks, and destroying the stocks by overfishing. And I don't think that either one of them - - I think it should be regulated, I always said it should, at every meeting we ever had, there should be a lower size limit, and there should be an upper size limit. And the state is not equipped to make that decision because they don't know what's out there. They would do good to sit down with the fishermen and not use the information that they've got against the fisherman, whether it be recreational or commercial, they would do good to sit down with both parties and set something up so it's pliable to everybody.

When they did this PCB study, there was an outfit, Lawler, Madusky, and Scully (?), from Green Hill (?) and Nyack. They had a gentleman that was very well known in the field of science, and he set up this program to test the fish for PCBs. When they were working here at the Texas Instruments' old property here in Verplanck, the state picked up the fish down there, that's where we would drop them off for a study. I was involved in a study. First of all, the guy told me, that worked on the project, he said, "Jimmy, you can't bring me the fish that way. It can't be tested that way. You have to take that fish out of the water, it has to be handled in such a manner, and then it has to go straight to the laboratory." They were taking these fish, putting them in plastic bags. He says that's a no-no, that's an absolute no-no. They said, "No, we account for all of that." He says there is no way you can account for that, he said that fish is useless. First, it's froze in a wooden box with wax and everything in the box, and then you're taking it out of the box, throwing it in a plastic bag, and shipping it out west to a laboratory. That's an absolute no-no. He said you cannot test fish like that. There is a procedure set up for it, and the state never used that procedure, they used their own.

And they never had it done inhouse, in New York State, their testing, they had it done out in the west, I think it was out in Wisconsin or Illinois or someplace. They never did any PCB testing inhouse in New York State. Why not? We've got the finest laboratories in the world in New York State. That's one question I had asked them: Why not do it inhouse? Columbia University is one of the finest around, they never used them, maybe because the information from Columbia might get to us easier than it could from Illinois or someplace. Okay? The other question I asked was: If striped bass got contaminated from the water in the Hudson River, and that they were so bad that they had to close down the fishing, what were they doing to prevent the human population in New York State from drinking water above Poughkeepsie? Had they done any testing on humans? Had they done any testing at all? I was given - - and this was with the FDA and State Department of Health sitting there - - "Oh, we're looking into that." I said, "You mean to tell me that you're looking into this, when you've already determined" - -that's another son of mine, that's Glen - - "You're looking into this, the fish are supposed to be so contaminated in the river you d on't want anybody using it because the water is so contaminated with PCBs that you want to dredge, and you haven't checked one person, one glass of water yet." Now, we all know that you can filter dirt out of water, but you can't filter chemicals out of water, and that's why they didn't want to get into it. And the

only reason I know so much about it, I'm in the water business, I've been a foreman in the water district for 25 years.

INTERVIEWER: Have you tested any?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Have I tested any? No. I haven't even gone near the water. The test that you would have to do for that is so lengthy and so sophisticated, that we haven't got the equipment to do it. It would have to be sent out to a real professional lab, you know. But I think the dredging project is a waste of time and money. They claim that they were afraid of the 100-year floods. Well, a few years back they had more rain in the Hudson Valley that they ever experienced in their lifetime, and it didn't do any damage, and it didn't turn up the bottom, and it didn't raise one PCB out of the mud. So that should end that argument. People don't want something that's potentially dangerous in their backyard, so that encapsulate business on somebody's farm is totally out of the question, and I don't blame them people up there for being mad, I wouldn't want it in my backyard either. However, the Hudson River is unique where most rivers are not. The Hudson River cleans itself, it's got a natural limestone bottom.

I'm not sure of the time, the exact time, it takes, but when IT did the study, I think it was every 72 days - - and I stand to be corrected - - that the Hudson River completely changes its water. So you're not dealing with the same body of water every day, it changes its water over a certain period of time with the influx from the lakes coming down and the small rivers running into it. It actually changes its water and filters its own water. So how could they say it's trapped - - they started saying it's trapped in the water itself, and then they had to get away from that, not it's trapped in the sediments. Now it's all in the sediments. Yeah, you take core samples, you'll find it, but when is it going to come out? If you dredge, you may cause more problems than you ever believe could happen. Then it wouldn't be no longer a commercial fishing river, or a recreational fishing river, or any other kind of river. And the minute you take a chance on letting that happen, now you've got all your power plants and all your discharges going into the river, don't have to be controlled as tightly because it's a trash river. Do you know what I mean? The restrictions that they have on them now, the tight restrictions, would have to be relaxed because now the fish out of it or nothing can be used for human consumption, so now you have to relax the laws on dumping in the Hudson River, which would be a tragedy from now until doomsday. It should never be allowed to happen.

INTERVIEWER: Do you remember when the river was really polluted?

MR. BLEAKLEY: I really can't remember the river being so polluted as they always claimed it was. I remember raw sewage running in the Hudson River from a number of communities along the Hudson River. I think sewage treatment came a long way. However, I think sewage treatment has to go a lot further, for the simple reason that now where you had raw sewage that would run off and eventually wind up in the ocean because it would go with the ebb tide eventually, now the chemicals that are used to treat sewage has to be monitored very closely, and see what damage that's done, because that could probably do more damage than the raw sewage could, which everybody knows.

I asked the question one time of all our experts, if they were testing animals, or testing this, and testing the fish for PCBs, how much it would take to make a person sick. Well, they didn't have the exact figures, they couldn't give them to me. "In concentrated form," they used that word quite often, "in concentrated form" it's been known to cause cancer in laboratory animals. I asked them, "What do you treat your drinking water with?" He said, "Why? What do you mean?" I said, "What do you treat your drinking water with? Do you use chlorine?" In concentrated form, chlorine, it will not cause cancer, it will not even make you sick, it will kill you, dead. I said, "And you're using that in drinking water." So what's the difference between that and PCB? You use it in controlled form? Right? Yeah. "Well, how much does it take to make a person sick with PCB?" And I've never gotten an answer. If you can control chlorine, one

of the most dangerous chemicals we have, and we treat drinking water with it to kill bacteria, why don't you have the answers to how much PCBs it will take? Or is this just a mercury scare? Or is this just a political stunt to grab $30 million and help a guy sell copies of a book that he wrote? A hell of a guy - - Bob Boyle. Can you shut that off for a minute?

(Break in tape.)

INTERVIEWER: Well, it's very interesting.

MR. BLEAKLEY: I think he's still tangled up with them, I'm not sure. I haven't spoken to him in an awful long time. John, I see once in a while. I used to fish out of where John lives, not the same house, but just up the block a little bit, in Manitoba, where him and his mother own a home. I haven't seen John in quite a while either.

INTERVIEWER: And the PCB issue, I mean, because of the ban, brought all the fishermen together in a different way than they had been before?

MR. BLEAKLEY: Well, yeah. The ban, the PCB ban, was - - well, we all know it's more politics than anything, but it brought the fishermen together to say, "Hey, look, we'll help you out to decide," because in the beginning they were undecided whether they wanted to close it totally, this, that, and the other thing. And we went out and did all the studies, we caught all the fish they needed for the studies, only to find out they used it against us. And I don't think they all did it intentionally, I think a lot of it was the people that were doing the actual studies, picking up the fish, and delivering the fish, and all that, I think the politicians were the ones that should be blamed. I think the people on the eighth floor up there need a good talking to. Do you know what I mean? The people that were involved with us, they were doing their job. They were doing what they were told to do, let's face it, whether it be Ogden Reed or whoever might have been there at the time. However, I still think it's wrong. I think the river could be a good commercial river, set up properly, I don't think there is anything wrong with the fish. However, I think it should be monitored and everything so that it's done right. However, there are a lot of things in the Hudson that you can't allow to happen. Commercial fishing is commercial fishing, as long as it's done in a traditional manner in the Hudson River, and it will always be there for everybody else. If you let the automatic rigs into the Hudson River, forget about it. We know this is the only river on the coast that has the stock of bass, that everybody always brags that 95 percent of the bass spawn in the Chesapeake Bay.

However, there was a guy that done a study for Con Edison up here, I can't think of his name, but he worked for some outfit, that did a study, that disputed that fact. He felt that 85 percent f the spawn come out of the Hudson River because it was so healthy a stock that more fish were spawned out up here than they were in the Chesapeake, that they migrated to the Chesapeake, but the Chesapeake did have its own spawn. Well, they fired him, he was gone as quick as the wind. I never did see the paper he did, I always wanted a copy and never got it. As far as the shad goes, I think shad haven't been overfished, I don't think there is anything wrong with them, I think they run in cycles, they're on a down cycle now.

INTERVIEWER: I've heard the theory posed that because the bass population is up, they're eating the young, the shad fry, and that's going to cause a decline, that since the bass have finally peaked, they're having an impact on the shad population.

MR. BLEAKLEY: I don't know. You could look at that two ways. The two fish come in almost together. Okay? The bass come early in the season, you have a spring run of bass, very early.