

Officer Stephen Cook Teatown Reservation December 6, 1998 © 1998 by Marguerite Holloway

Tape One, Side One

OFFICER COOK: I'm Stephen Cook. I'm an officer with New York State Department of Environmental Conservation Police. I started in May of 1977.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Always in this area?

OFFICER COOK: I started here, and I've been here the whole time. I've had about 55 partners who have come through and left.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Why?

OFFICER COOK: Because they didn't want to stay here, it was too expensive, and they moved on. And I have one new person that's here now, and he'll probably move on too.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Because the housing around here is expensive?

OFFICER COOK: It's housing. And most people aren't from around here. I grew up in New Jersey and it was kind of similar, and I went to college near here. So I stayed right in the area.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So tell me how it began with the fisherman. You said Tucker Crawford started it, but...

OFFICER COOK: Actually Tucker -- Thomas Crawford, which is his name is, but everybody calls him Tucker -- he really didn't initially start it. About 1978, when I was out of the academy and working, I started to notice the commercial fishing down on the river, and I was told by older officers that there really wasn't anything we could do about it, other than check the tags on the nets, and for some possible illegal seining that would go on in the spring. There wasn't too much we could do because even though it had been banned in 1976 to sell striped bass, it was impossible to enforce.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And they had a sense that there was a lot going on illegally, but it was just --

OFFICER COOK: Well, I was told by some of the older officers that the fishermen made their living this way, but you couldn't enforce it because of the way the regulations were worded, and they weren't selling them. They could keep them for their own use, but they weren't selling the fish. So as I was here for a while, people would say, "You know, they're selling a lot of fish," and I would go down to the river and meet with the fishermen, and everybody is very friendly.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Who did you meet with?

OFFICER COOK: The first person I met was Henry Gourdine, and Officer Fred Polhemus, who had been on since the '40s, he introduced me to him and said he was a pretty good guy and he knew a lot about the river. And I would see a fish ice shed that was filled to the top with iced striped bass, and I felt that was a little odd, that fish they couldn't sell were all iced down. So that went on for a little while.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: That was in Henry's little place –

OFFICER COOK: Down there, yeah in Ossining, next to the Maui (?) Oil and Bus Company. It was more at Maui (?) Oil, there was maybe the beginning of the bus company back then. So when you're put in that position of law enforcement, people call you up and they say things are going on, and you investigate it. So I started to get some pretty good information that fish were being sold in Fulton Street Market. So it wasn't until I believe early 1979, it was the spring of 1979, some of my people I had developed as informants and things said that on certain days they would ship them down, iced down. And in fact it was so blatant that they would mark their names on the box because this is what they had done for years and years and years, and they would get so much a pound for the fish. What happened was the ban started in 1976, and no one was doing any enforcement on it, so they just continued to sell them. They knew it was illegal, but they figured nobody would ever do anything. So one day in the spring, I think it was in April, I got a call that a shipment of about -- it was about 300 pounds [0:05:00.2] -- were going down to the market. So we followed it down to the market with an undercover car, there were boxes of fish with "White" was on one, "Carey" was on another, and "Wilke" was on another. And we seized the fish and we called the -- in fact, I'm not 100 percent sure, but I'm pretty sure Tucker Crawford drove them in. And so he cooperated, and I believe they paid several hundred dollars, possibly \$1,000. I think it was a \$1,000 fine. And that was an administrative fine they paid right down there, and it kind of shocked everybody that somebody was going to do something. Well, the people in Albany were kind of skeptical that bass were really being sold, and people all the way down from fisheries would say, "Oh, what are you doing? There is nothing really going on." So after that arrest, people saw, I guess, that someone was going to enforce it. There had been a lot of articles and television programs that PCBs were contributory to cancer, and so on one hand, I had a lot of constituents that wanted it enforced, and on the other hand, the fishermen who had lost their income, they felt that they didn't pollute the water, and the fish were fine. The standard answer was, "I've eaten these fish for 40 years, and it's never hurt me." So this went on, and I tried to explain to them that marking your names on boxes was kind of blatant. So all of a sudden that enforcement action leaped into a huge illegal market. Now they hired drivers, drivers were getting so much a pound for the shipment. It was incredible, overnight it went from 25 cents a pound for delivery up to half the price of the shipment. So there was risk involved with shipping the fish.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And that was just because of that one action?

OFFICER COOK: Yeah.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: It suddenly made it blatantly illegal.

OFFICER COOK: It just shifted it, so people were -- there was a lot of discussion, "What are you doing?" I said, "Well, I'm doing what I'm mandated to do, and that's not allow the blatant sale of fish. If you want to use fish for yourself" -- and they sold it readily at the docks to their neighbors and things, because they did, it was a staple up in the Verplank area. So as it went on, we did some work in late spring in the river, and we started to see nets that were set for striped bass in the shallows, and these nets were going half a mile out from the shoreline to the middle of the Tappan Zee Bridge. A fellow named Hardy,

Dennis Hardy, he's passed away now, but he was an ex-policeman that got into fishing, and he had a half a mile of net full of stripers, and we couldn't seize them, it would have sank our boat. I mean, we took samples. So there was another case that we wrote up, and it was settled rather quickly in court, and the judge felt we were pretty lenient to want to settle it with him, and we just said you have to stop, you can't ship this fish.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Was that Hardy?

OFFICER COOK: That was Hardy. And that was the Rockland County side. The Rockland County side, the primary fishermen that I had contact with were Hardy, Gabrielson, a guy named Brestolli, and the DeGroht family. And we would go over and stop at the dock and talk to old Turk DeGroht, who, I don't know, he seemed like he was about 80 or 90 at the time, and his sons, and we would meet them, and they primarily were shad fishermen, and they would go out for the shad run, but there was no money really to speak of, once the run came in the price dropped, and striped bass was where the money was, and striped bass at certain points of the year were hitting \$5.50 a pound. Most of the time it was somewhere around \$2.00 a pound, but it was big money, [0:10:01.2] you could make \$1,000 to \$2,000 a day, and this was on each tide.

So as I became a little bit more comfortable in the county, and interacted with the fishermen on this side, or interacted with Henry -- and Henry at that time was in his late seventies, and he was one of the few -- it was about 1981 when pole nets, ring and pole nets, were used, almost all anchor line nets used out in the river, which were long stretches of anchor lines and nets tied to them. But the old striped bass nets -- and Henry was the master at this, he made the nets for everyone, he made the boats for everyone, he knew when the fish would be here, when to set the nets, when to check the nets. And he was a great guy to talk to because he was always kind of forthcoming with information. But I would check him with rowboats filled to the brim of striped bass and shad and sturgeon, and it would be thousands of pounds on a tide. And he would explain that we put the poles in the ground, and the rings, and they would float up and down. And after the arrests started -- the only reason you put pole nets up was not for shad, although some still tried to say that, but it was for striped bass. And we started to learn, I started to learn more about how the striped bass run would operate. We didn't realize there was a run in October as well as the spring. So certain nets would show up about the 8th of October, and then there would be pictures in books of people fishing in the Hudson, cutting the ice, and putting nets through the ice. I didn't understand why they were doing that, but what it turned out was that striped bass all migrated back into the river in the fall because they would die in the ocean because the temperature gets too cold and their blood freezes at a certain 30.5 degrees. So they migrate in to protect themselves, and they're concentrated in tremendous numbers.

I started to work a lot with the fisheries person, Bob Brandt, and he seemed to be very enthusiastic that we were actually working on these people and trying to stop the shipments, and he felt that for years the resource was exploited, and exploited very heavily, in the winter and spring, when the big run came in spring weather, they moved up and down, up to Newburgh, to spawn. There were not a lot of fishermen, they were the old style, mostly anchor nets, combination off their shad net, anchor lines, and

a few of these pole nets. I recall the only other pole net that I remember at the time was a Sam Columbo, and he fished strictly kind of as a sideline on the north end of Croton Bay.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So it was just Henry with the poles.

OFFICER COOK: And Sam.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And Sam.

OFFICER COOK: And he learned from Henry. The people off Croton Point, which was Greenspan, Cal, and Galbraith, they ran their operation off Croton Point, and they used anchor lines off where the water went out. The DeGrohts came across from Haverstraw and they fished in the bay, on the Ossining side, they used anchor lines. And there was another fellow, Lee Salazzo (?). Lee Salazzo (?) passed away, actually drowned in the river, when he was 78, he fell overboard one day. He lived his whole life on the river, and they found him down by --

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: He was by himself?

OFFICER COOK: Yeah. He was a tough, tough guy. I mean, tough where he could really weather the weather, and he would be out there, and a nice man, but he was involved too in this.

So I guess it was around 1981, I had a fellow who was a special game protector from, oh, gee, probably in the 1950s, his name was Nino Ferrara (?). And Nino worked in the National Guard, [0:15:03.8] but he loved to do fish and game work, and he was a special game protector.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: What does that mean?

OFFICER COOK: Special game protectors were civilians that had the authority to enforce what our fish and wildlife law comes under, which is Article 11 in the environmental conservation law. Well, these guys, there were several of them in Westchester, but Nino was really the only one left. And when I came on in 1977, we hooked up in 1978, and he always worked kind of for a conservation officer, so I was the one he was going to work for, and he was a volunteer, but he knew everybody, and he kind of was probably my best mentor as far as really showing me how to find information and do work. He knew everybody, he was the smoothest talker.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Is he still around?

OFFICER COOK: No. He passed away about 5 years ago, 6 years ago. And he would come to me and say, "They're really selling a lot of bass, 5,000 pounds went down tonight." And then we had a lot of controversy amongst the fishermen because now, because there was a potential violation where you could get arrested and fined, the shipping of the fish, the trucking of the fish, became big business. The fishermen were going to fish anyway, but they were afraid to take the fish down, so people appeared on the scene that were involved in shipping, and they could make big money for a run down to the city; in 4 hours they could make thousands of dollars.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Were the fishermen right that that's where you were going to concentrate your efforts, on getting them as they went down?

OFFICER COOK: What we had to do, the way the law was, was he could not just fine the fishermen with the fish, we had to show sale occurred. So it made it extremely difficult. So there was a rivalry between what it seemed like -- Tucker was a fisherman, and he would run the fish down.- The Capacotti (?) brothers were truckers, and they wanted to run the fish down. So there was like a rivalry occurred between the two. I would check Tucker out on the boat, he would show me how to take bass out of the nets, and he would tell jokes, if you know what I mean, tell you two or three jokes. And he was a sharp little guy, but he liked to do things to get away with. I mean, he just was thrilled with this. I learned a lot from him. In fact, I just let him talk and talk and talk, and our investigation was going pretty good, and I guess they were kind of encouraging me to not bother them. On a pretty passive level they were just saying, "The other guys never bothered us. Why are you bothering us? We didn't pollute the fish." But at the same time, I was getting a lot of calls that the fish were contaminated, the studies started to be accelerated that PCB levels were way above the limits, and people who had died from cancer, their relatives and people were very angry that these fish could possibly make it into the market.

Well, I believe it was early 1980 or early 1981, we put our information together, I think it was 1982 -- no, it was 1981. What occurred was we got a hold of receipts which showed 100,000 pounds of fish were being sold.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: From Fulton?

OFFICER COOK: From Fulton. We were able to get the receipts, and we were able to put together an undercover operation, and we got support from other people, other regions, and Albany, and Albany still was kind of worried that this was going on because they're saying nobody could sell the fish. Well, Nino was remarkable in getting information, and we figured out that Sunday nights were usually a shipment, and then about Tuesday or Wednesday was a big shipment. So we waited along Route 9 [0:20:02.0] for a few nights, and nothing happened and then one night a truck went down, and we followed it, and we had this wild kind of following all the way down in unmarked cars, and this old truck was jumping from parkways to the Thruway, it was just going full speed down to the market.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: It knew it was being followed by you guys.

OFFICER COOK: So we got down there and there was a bunch of officers, and the fish was unloaded. And it was unloaded, it hit the streets, people grabbed it, it was gone. And here is the guy, we got the guy, but we don't have the fish anymore. And so we documented everything, saw the boxes go away, and we said, "Oh, nuts, we missed this." We didn't think it was that big a shipment, but we were kind of upset. So we set up about Wednesday, I think it was 3 days later, and the truck went by again, it was about 2:30, 3:00 in the morning on Route 9, and this truck was loaded, it was dragging. So we went down, it was just before --oh, it was in the beginning of April, when the big run came for the striped bass. Well, we followed this down, and this was going to take 35, 40 minutes to unload, so there was no problem there, we had more people. And I remember I was dressed like an old longshoreman, I had kind of a scruffy beard and old beat-up clothes. And I went over to Tucker Crawford, and he was at this little like

an old tobacco store window, and that's where the envelopes would change hands, where the money went. And I walked up behind this guy, and I said, "Hey, good morning, Tucker," and he turned around, and he just on a dime said, "Cookie, this is for you," and he hands me an envelope about this thick full of money, and I said, "I don't think that's for me." And what it was, was the receipts for the Sunday night fish, and it was only 500-and-some pounds, or 300-and-some pounds, but they would drop off the fish and get paid the next time they came down. So it was all cash, and it was an envelope. And so I said, "What do you got in the truck?" He said, "What do you think?" And it was full of bass, it was 2,200 pounds of striped bass. He said, "What the hell are you doing? That's my biggest shipment of the year." They were getting big money then, close to \$4 a pound, so it was a lot of money. And when we brought him over to our office at the World Trade Center, then he was just talking away, and we were writing everything up, documenting all the cash and everything. And they paid a few thousand dollars fine, but they lost the fish. And we took the fish up to Croton Point, and it was buried at the landfill. It was weighed, it was 2,220 pounds of fish. And it was huge, and we knew it wasn't just one person, but what it was, was all the fishermen's fish for that night. They had a lot of fish.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Everyone on that side at that area?

OFFICER COOK: Yeah. So now they're saying this thing cost like -- that's when some threats started, some bribes started. I was offered cars, I was offered a house, I was offered anything to move. And they were not happy because that was a lot money.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Who offered you those things? Did Tucker offer you the money at that time?

OFFICER COOK: Yeah. He several times offered me, but he was kind of very happy. Other people, I learned later, had lost fish and they were very unhappy. So that's when the truckers were able to take over. Now, the truckers were tougher guys, they had better connections, and they could play leapfrog with trucks and warehouses, and they would do that for a while. The two factions kind of played against each other. What happened right after that arrest, the *New York Times* went to Tucker, and he just went on and on, and there was a full page of his interview. I don't know if you saw that. And he just kind of really told everybody everything. Now Albany, our fisheries people went crazy because they realized this isn't \$1,000, this is \$100,000 worth of business in the spring. [0:25:00.1] We didn't know about the winter yet, what was going on in the winter, but we knew the spring run. So it kind of cooled off a little bit, they were very careful, they paid a lot of money to ship it. About a year when by, and we switched from following the fish to starting to work hard on the nets in the river.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Why did you make that switch?

OFFICER COOK: Because we knew they were going to be looking for us, and we knew now we would hit them on the fish. So they had a period which was -- there used to be a 48-hour escapement period where the nets had to come out, Thursday night, and they could go back 48 hours later, from 6:00 to 6:00 on like Saturday night or Sunday morning. What they did is they changed that a little bit to 36 hours from 48 hours, and a lot of the guys wouldn't take the nets out when the fish ran because they didn't want to lose the fish, or the weather could be really bad and they couldn't get out. And we never bothered them if the weather was bad. But a number of times we started to see half miles of nets, and a

new dimension kind of appeared -- they were there all the time, we just didn't know -- and that was the Croton Point people, the Bleakleys from up in Verplank, and there was the Careys, they all were involved the whole time, but most of the exposure was from Tucker. We started to see the Gabrielsons mostly doing shad, he always was very cooperative, Mr. Gabrielson.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: He didn't get into the bass at all?

OFFICER COOK: He never got in trouble for it. There was a lot of alleged things, and he was a big bass fisherman, but I didn't work Rockland County, I was busy working this side. I did run into Brestolli and caught him with several hundred pounds of fish, and he quickly settled up and paid a fine for that, and then he said, "That's it. I'm going to stop," and he never was much of a big player once he got caught. But the Bleakleys, they had a floating dock and floating house out there, and they operated out of -- there were two Bleakleys, there was Albert Bleakley, who was the rogue, he was the one who just wanted to argue and fight, and then there was Jimmy Bleakley, which was the one that was more kind of stealth and kind of behind the scenes. We got night vision equipment from the federal people and we started to watch them at night and see their operation move to Charlie White's. It always was at Charlie White's, but a lot of the landing of fish came at Charlie White's house and dock on the water. And they iced up the fish and shipped out. Charlie, again, terrific guy, go down there, sit with him. And there was a real dilemma, you know, because you liked these guys, these guys made their living, they didn't pollute the river, and to try to get them to understand that they could be contributing to adverse health conditions in people. So I tried to be fair with what I did, and they knew if they got caught, they would have to pay. And they didn't want the exposure. They got very upset at Tucker because he talked so much to the papers, and he was kind of banned there. The Capacottis (?) were busy for a couple of years, and told me many times that it was real good money to ship fish. They were going strong, everything was going pretty strong, and one spring, it probably was 1982, I had caught Tucker with some small sturgeon and some bass, and things that he shouldn't have had, I think he received about a dozen tickets through the years. He didn't care, he just says, "I'll pay whatever it is." He used to call me "Chief." And he would run up and pay, and he would flash rolls of money that were -- one day he had \$22,000 in cash on him, and he said, "I can buy a truck with a load of bass." He was a funny kind of guy. Well, one day [0:30:00.0] I had a court date with him, and it was just before Easter, and we got information that a big shipment was going to come in, so we figured the only time it was going to come in was when I was at court. So I called the court, told them, "Just tell him to wait there," and down at Ossining the Salazzos (?) was bringing in this huge shipment of bass, it was 1,100 pounds, and the Capacottis (?) were going to ship it. So I caught him, his boat was filled to the top with bass, and they were small bass, and he was using the small net, which there weren't any regulations at this time to limit what you could use, so you could catch small fish, but they needed fish, and the Capacottis (?), when we grabbed him and took the fish, I got a phone call, they said, "How much do you want for the fish? How much do you want? We need those fish." And I said, "I don't want anything, they're going up to be tested." The guys went ballistic. They said, "We have a huge shrimp deal going down for a trade, bass for shrimp for Easter, and I've got to have that shrimp. It's frozen shrimp, and you're going to screw up the whole thing." I said, "You don't understand. This is all illegal. You can't do this." And they were furious. So I think at that

point a real line was drawn, and people were carrying guns. Tucker started carrying a gun allegedly. I never saw his, I did see the other people's.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And whose did you see?

OFFICER COOK: I saw the Capacottis (?). Some were carrying two. And it was heating up because there was a lot of money involved, and politicians. We never got to the source of them, but people were starting to really worry that the supply of bass was slowing up. We were going along, and all of a sudden people must have been monitoring the articles or something, but the feds came into the market, and they busted the dealers, and they hit them real hard, for about a \$35,000 fine for trading in bass. And that really just put the, it just shut everything down, because they had a lot to lose. I can't remember if that was 1982 or 1983, but it was around then.

The feds started to do surveillance on the river up here, but I don't think it ever worked out. When they were here, the fish weren't here, or vice versa, the fish were here and they weren't there. But then we knew it was late 1982, going on to 1983, I believe, I could be one year off -- in fact, that's the file there -- that really changed everything. It was winter, it was January, and at Charlie White's guys were going out every day, the bass were real dense in the river, they were just packed. If you went over with a sonar, it would just look like one sheet of fish. And they were out fishing and --

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: How many guys at this place?

OFFICER COOK: This was the Bleakleys, Carey (?), mostly the people up there, they were really hungry for money. Albert Bleakley was fishing, he was just around the corner. Tucker did a little bit of fishing, he right off from where he lived. But where Charlie White lived, next to the sheet metal barge plant there, they would go up to the power lines which crossed by the Bowline(?) plant, and they would fish because it was always open water there, it never really iced up too bad, and they brought in the fish. And so I went down one day, and the boat was coming in, and all of sudden the boat -- Carey's boat came in, and he had some bass, he had a small number of big bass, and Bleakley's come -- all of a sudden they did a U-turn and they took off. And I'm saying, "Why are they taking off?" Well, they went off, and they went up and they dumped about 200 pounds of baby sturgeon out of the boat, sturgeon at that time were 4 feet, you couldn't possess a sturgeon unless it was 4 feet or longer. However, we didn't know at the time, there were only juvenile sturgeon in the river.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: These were short-nose or Atlantic?

OFFICER COOK: These were both. Actually the fishermen said they were many times getting more short-nose than long-nose, and they didn't care if they were endangered, they really were indifferent, it was food. So we didn't understand what they did, but they came in and they had about 300 pounds of bass in the boat. Well, they had boxes of ice, I just wrote them tickets for fishing in the river, [0:35:00.5] intentionally fishing for striped bass, and they said, "We're not. We're fishing for tommycod, and we're fishing for 4-foot sturgeon." But they had just dumped sturgeon, which I didn't see, I found out later. So here I was, they were going to sue me, they were going to do this, they were going to do that. They were ticketed, I ticketed the Careys. And so I started to read the law, and read the law, and there was a

loophole, it said any fish caught in a gill net that is incidental to what you're fishing for you could keep. You could not barter, sell, or anyway trade in it, but for your own use. So there is 300 pounds. So I talked to a prosecutor and we started to look, and I said I know what they're doing is wrong -- and fishermen actually wrote that loophole into the law years ago, and they were fishing in the winter.

So what happened was Nino and a few other people suggested I go talk to Robert Boyle, and Robert Boyle was a writer, and kind of eccentric, high energy guy, but his first wife died from cancer, and he was adamant about fish not being sold. So I went up, and he was very almost theatrical. I went up, and I was new, I was fairly new in this work, I said, "I really would like to interview you, I need some help with your research." I said, "I have a case where people are selling fish in the city, and I know it's wrong, but there is this loophole." And so we sat down and I was talking to him about 30 minutes, and he said, "So what are they fishing for?" I said, "Sturgeon." He said, "Well, isn't sturgeon 4 feet?" and I said, "Yeah," and he said, "There isn't a 4-foot sturgeon in the Hudson River, they're all in the ocean. I said, "What do you mean?" And he says, "Well, the adults aren't in here now, they only come in, in the spring. The only ones that are here are the juveniles from when they're born to 5 years old, and then they migrate out into the ocean, they live out in the ocean 7 years, and then come back in to breed." I said, "Yeah, but I have to prove that. There couldn't be one sturgeon in the river?" He said, "No." So that led me -- and I was trained as a biologist -- to the research. Dovel did a lot of the sturgeon research, and we started to compile all this literature. Bob Brandt was very helpful in getting certain bass sizes, sturgeon sizes. And we put together a case, this started in January, the beginning of January, and we did not complete it until August. And what we did, we had the first trial, which was a long trial, it was in the Town of Cortlandt, and it was James Carey, and he was represented by two attorneys. And we went through, and the trial was about 4 hours long, and I think it lasted part of another day. And Mike Tone(?) was the attorney, he used to be a task force prosecutor from organized crime, and he worked for DEC now, and he just was a great prosecutor. And we were able to get through testimony, diagrams, and we were able to get a conviction, they found them guilty on all counts, fined them \$4,000. And this was remarkable.

So the Bleakley's trial was coming up next, and they immediately changed venue, they moved it to Yorktown, and they didn't want to go in where a judge had already found somebody guilty, so they claimed some kind of prejudice. And that went on until August, and we went through, and it was another long trial, it was like a day long. And the decision came down, and they were found guilty. They weren't fined that much, but they were found guilty, and all we needed was the "guilty." So we established something that never was established before, that people were targeting fish that were not in the river, so they could keep incidental catches of striped bass, and then they were selling. But at this point it was so sophisticated how they were shipping the fish, we didn't have enough manpower -- you know, there were trucks and shipments and changing and bringing them in. So we went to the legislature and proposed new regs, and we had the data which showed what was happening, and the marine fisheries foundation [0:40:00.6] or people were studying the decline of striped bass along the eastern coast, and they established that the Hudson was one of the last fish resources that had mature striped bass populations. The Chesapeake Bay was wiped out. It was a very young year class. But up in Massachusetts and the Hudson were the last two big fisheries. So we were able to adopt, the people up in Albany were able to adopt, through the legislature a closed season in the winter. So now it was illegal

to possess a net, it was illegal to possess striped bass in your boat and land them, sturgeons were raised from 4 feet to 5 feet, then a moratorium eventually came on them. And the striped bass seemed to really slow down, we didn't see any of the blatant fish like that. Occasionally we would get information that fish were being taken down. Then again, another raid was hit on the market where fish from the feds were caught and severe fines. And it really shifted. All of a sudden stripers started coming back, and if you see now, the river is just full of striped bass. We had in the late 1980s some groups -- and they may have been there the whole time -- they had some very crude netting apparatus, set lines with 300 hooks on a line that were baited, old wire netting, some gill netting that were used by people that had European backgrounds, Eastern European backgrounds, and they would come at night, they were strictly night fishermen, they would come in to catch fish, we would arrest them with the loads of fish or illegal devices. But the organized close-to-shore netting started to subside.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Were there really big fines that Carey and the Bleakleys had to pay after the trials?

OFFICER COOK: I believe Carey's was \$4,000, and he may have gotten some of it suspended. I think Bleakley's was much less, it was like \$1,000 or \$800. But we weren't really looking for the fine, we were looking for the conviction, and that's what shifted it, the whole attitude. Once the convictions were made and the word was out, actually sport fishermen became very eager to help us because there was a rivalry between the people, hook-and-line, and they were now selling the fish, sport fishermen were catching the fish. It always was the complaint of the sport fishermen that the commercial guys were getting the fish, now the commercial guys could not get the fish, and the sport fishermen had no limit, they could catch all the fish they wanted, they could possess all the fish they wanted. And what then happened was a limit of one fish per person came about. So that kind of put it in balance. We caught many fishermen catching over the limit there, and still do.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So that new regulation came into being because you caught some sport fishermen selling at Fulton's?

OFFICER COOK: Yes, yes, not at Fulton, but selling fish, they were shipping fish. And actually Sam Columbo (?) was a netter and a hook-and-line fishermen, and he was in the range of 80 pounds to as much as 300 pounds a day, and they were making a lot of money catching them that way in that April run. The late 1980s it started to subside because there was a balance starting to draw. To back up, though, when the Bleakley case came about things got really hot. I had really threats then, I had an attack on my vehicle, it was dismantled basically.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: With what?

OFFICER COOK: With bats. And it got to the point where we thought people were going to get hurt. And when they really wrecked my patrol car, that's when we called the troops in, [0:45:00.0] and everybody came in, and we were on the river every day, and they just saw they couldn't do any business with boats on the river.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: When was this? What year?

OFFICER COOK: That would have been 1982, 1983. That was probably 1982, the case, I believe, initiated in 1982. I think the vehicle was damaged in 1982. Yes, it was, because I got a new car in later 1982. And we put so much effort onto patrolling the river that they just couldn't –

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: How many people were out there?

OFFICER COOK: Well, we would have patrols of like two boats, three or four or five people a day taking turns, all were checking the sheds all the time. And they kind of asked for a truce, kind of not directly, but, you know, "We'll knock it off." A couple of new fishermen up here, Bonnes, Ken Bonnes, and some of his sons, they started. Some of the relatives of Tucker, a grandson, started. A guy named Frank -- see? That's what happens, you can't remember. He lives right at Steamboat (?) down there.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So the older guys sort of fell out.

OFFICER COOK: They still were fishing, they were still fishing for shad, they loved the river, the river is in their blood, they weren't going to give it up, it was like that was their life. And the older guys like Gorman (?), there was a guy named Gorman (?) who fished a lot, and these guys were just out there. There was a guy, he gave it up. Most of them gave it up. I mean, they knew they could get in big trouble, I think, and they saw the river was changing.

Officer Stephen Cook, Teatown Reservation December 6, 1998 © 1998 by Marguerite Holloway

Tape One, Side Two

OFFICER COOK: Part of why I think both the fish -- the fish thinned out because of over-fishing. When the fish started to come back, many of the people like Henry was getting up into like 90, the art of doing the nets, like Jimmy Carey was good at making nets, Gorman (?) was good, they started to die or get ill and just couldn't do it. And the kids, the grandsons and the kids, tried it, but it was hard work, it wasn't kind of what we got used to. And Tucker used to say to me, we would sit out in the boat, it would be a nice warm day, and he says, "Can't I get you interested in fishing? You would be good at this." And I would say, "Well, I don't think I would be able to do it while working." But it is, it's a fun thing, through the years I've probably pulled five miles of net that we seized, we hit boats that almost sank, hundreds of yards of sturgeon net, we've seized sturgeon over 8 feet long, 6 feet. You know, that's quite an experience to see the business end of a sturgeon pop up in your face. Today, I have very little trouble with the fishermen at the commercial level, but I have a tremendous influx of people from other countries that come up and fish along the river and cook the fish as they catch them, and take way over the limit of one fish, you find people with a dozen stripers, undersized stripers. So the whole scope of the thing has changed to where the impact, if you think about all the people that fish up and down the river, the tremendous impact from sport fishermen, where there is really just handfuls of the net fishermen.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: There have been a few shad fishermen that are still out doing it, say there are so many bass in the river and so few shad that it's not worth it even to do the shad fishing anymore.

OFFICER COOK: Right. Not only was I doing the enforcement, but I was attending the meetings the commercial fishermen, and I was actually in a way an [0:50:01.0] advocate I was the first one for them to be able to do this again. And there was a 5 parts per million amount on the striped bass. And everybody was really pushing and given kind of the hope that they had some 4.5 numbers and then all of a sudden the feds came in a lowered it to 0.2, 0.02 and it just kind of, they knew it was not going to go down to that. And it just, the publicity and getting older I think subsided. Of course, there's people that still catch fish and try to sell some fish. But it's not nearly as blatant and open as what it was. Those guys are gone, for the most part. Charlie White.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Tell me about him, I never met him.

OFFICER COOK: Charlie White was a big guy. He was like 300 pounds and he knew everything about nets and boats and fishing and a real likeable guy, you know. Easy, got excited a few times when I got down there. But I remember him sitting down there and he'd say, come on in. And I'd come in and sit down with him on his old back porch and when sturgeon came, he was known for sturgeon, he would catch six to a dozen big sturgeon, the old way, setting the -- not using electronic equipment like some of the people, he would be there showing me how they would screen the eggs through the mesh, and get them ready. Tucker knew how to do that. And we would go to the house. And they knew they were under arrest or they were going to get a ticket, and they would just say, "Come on in," and there usually was a jug of wine, a pile of cigarette butts, and they would always say, "Do you want a drink?" or something, and I said, "No thanks, I can't do that right now." And they were most of the time pretty pleasant. A few years back, not many, it was probably 3, 4 years back, Tucker had his whole refrigerator, everything was taken out, it was full of sturgeon roe, \$1,000 or more worth of sturgeon roe, all stacked up ready for shipment, and of course it was illegal, there were no tags on the sturgeon, so I had to seize it. But it really was a way of life that was wonderful. Charlie White, he was always to be found down at his boats and his dock. It's something that I just don't see like I used to.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Nobody out doing illegal sturgeon fishing?

OFFICER COOK: Oh, sure. Oh, sure, but it's not blatant. You wouldn't find a net. Tucker was great because he would tell you what you needed to know, how to find the things. He would say, "Cookie, you missed those nets," and I said, "What do you mean?" and he says, "They only come up at low tide. They're rigged." And he's telling me. So we got higher grade electronic equipment, we were able to find nets that were hidden. You start to see the way the fish go, it's like a lot of wildlife or fish, if you know where they go, their habits, you just go and you find the nets there.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So Tucker would teach you their habits?

OFFICER COOK: He didn't know he was teaching me, but I think he just -- when you would be talking to him, a lot of times he wasn't getting a ticket or he wasn't getting arrested, he was out there just doing it, and I would pull alongside, it would be 8:00 or 9:00 in the morning, and it would be a sunny morning, and I would just sit there and talk to him, and I would ask him questions. "What are you doing? Why are you doing it that way?" He would say, "You do this long enough and you'll get what they call a bass thumb," and then he would say, "See that thumb," and it would be all callused and just torn apart and

callused. And then he would say, "You've got to watch that gill, that will slice you open if you're not careful. And a lot of guys have got to gauge these fish. Where do you go, through the head or through the tail?" And then he would show you how to pull it. I didn't realize, but I gained a lot of that knowledge, so when I would have guys on, I would grab them and I would be saying, "Watch your thumb, you're going to get a bass thumb," and we would have a couple of the tools, and we would do it. And it was back-breaking work, I mean, it could take you a while to get used to it, but when you pull a quarter mile of net full of fish, I mean, your back is tired, especially if you don't do it right and get all tangled up in it. But we would have to seize the nets, seize the fish, and it was an all-day project. At the time, it just was what I was doing, [0:55:00.6] and I didn't think it was having the impact that it did, but it did have an impact. And it seemed hard, but it was a lot of fun, a lot of it. They gave me a little 14-foot aluminum rowboat with a little engine on it when I started, and we got so many arrests and so much fish, they bought a 17-foot Whaler with a big engine, and they said, "Go to it," and we paid that boat off in no time flat with all the fines and seizures of things, and we still use that boat.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: How much time do you spend out on the river now?

OFFICER COOK: Oh, not as much. We used to have a high of about 10 officers and now we have 3, and I'm covering part of Putnam County, and kind of cover the whole Westchester. There was a time when an officer had his area and he really managed it, and those days are pretty much gone.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: You're all over the place.

OFFICER COOK: I'm all over, yeah. I was in another area this morning with the decoy, and the other day I was up in Putnam, and I was in Connecticut the other day working on the line.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Does it make it harder to develop sort of like -- you don't need them so much anymore because of the fishing dying down -- but the informants that you had.

OFFICER COOK: I still have informants. We can't get to all the complaints, you try to do the best you can. What I do miss are the older specials, those guys were great, even though they weren't trained in really what's legal, they were a breed that could make things happen because they were training themselves for 30 years. People came to this area, anywhere in the state, when you're an officer, and they stayed in the area. And we don't have that, we have people that are really transient, they're here 2 years and they leave. And you need to develop -- I found for me it was true -- to develop a rapport with the people, and if the people thought you were fair, thought they could trust you, it worked. If you weren't fair to people, you wouldn't get anything.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Who would tell you -- not by name, of course -- but what kind of people would tell you that a shipment was going to go down? A neighbor or someone who was actually involved in the operation?

OFFICER COOK: Well, when there was a lot of money in the shipping, one faction would try to eliminate the other faction. So you would get a call that one group was going to ship, and if you could get them, then nobody would want to ship their fish with them, so the other guy would get them. So that went for

a while. And then when the feds got involved with it, a lot of people that were connected with trucking got out of it because they saw they were going to go to jail, and they left.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Did you have informants at all at Fulton Fish Market?

OFFICER COOK: Through New York City. There were definitely people down there that were working with the New York City officers, and they would tell me about a few times that something is getting ready, and I would start -- and it was good, it was an exciting time from 1980 to about 1985, there was a lot of work. Once it made the national papers, then the feds came up here and they tried to do some work.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Tucker described to you chasing him over crates at the Fulton Fish Market, like he was leaping and running. Did that happen?

OFFICER COOK: I don't have any recollection of that.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Spending one night in a jail?

OFFICER COOK: No.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: No?

OFFICER COOK: No. What happened is I walked up behind him, and just his eyes opened up wide, and I put my hand on his shoulder, and I said, "How are you doing?" and he was upset. But actually I handcuffed him and put him in the car, I said, "You're going to ride with me," and we had another guy drive his truck over to the World Trade Center. The jumping over crates, I don't know if he could jump over crates. He was a comedy, he would get all the higher-ups all upset, he would tell them jokes and call them names, and purposely try to aggravate them. But he's a tough little guy, and he's got a lot of pride, and I always found that he would speak his mind pretty much. But I always heard he talk much worse about me behind my back than when I was --

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: He's always spoken very warmly of you.

OFFICER COOK: Yeah. When he got ill, he had some different ailments, his son, who I would run into from time to time, and his grandson, they would say, [1:00:00.6] "Go down and see Tucker. He would really like to see you." So once in a while I would stop down and say hello to him, and this and that. I really felt by the late 1980s that something had been broken down there, and they really missed that, that that whole kind of chasing around gave them a sense of importance, and that's gone, that's just not there. And there isn't the dialogue anymore, if you catch somebody, they're just processed and everything is seized. But I think that was one of my more valuable training, internships, that experience out on the river. We found a lot of other violations, you know, environmental quality, oil spills, and habitat destruction, and we dealt with those, but that was pretty much cut and dry, it didn't have the personality that you had with people who made their living off the river.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Did you ever have to chase Tucker out of the river? And did one of his boats get caught by a tug captain or by another boat?

OFFICER COOK: They may have. I may not have been aware. I had chases. When the winter work and we had a problem with the car being vandalized, and the tickets issued, and the trial, it got pretty heated, and they would go out at night. And I recall one night they brought down our big boat, it was a big 30-footer, and we had the whaler, and we went out, and it was 2 degrees in February, and it was windy. And we had to wear all this special equipment. Your eyeballs would freeze. It was so cold that we couldn't chase people, so of course a boat came out at 2:00 in the morning, and we grabbed some fish, and we started to chase them, and on the radar we started to lose them because there were squalls of snow going on, and I knew the river fairly well, and I was chasing them across some flats. They knew the river better, and they went into some areas where with the tide it was just too dangerous. What they were trying to do was suck me into an area and disable me. And so I had no choice but to let them get away. But I think that also proves something, that we were willing to go out at 2:00 in the morning and do some enforcement. And then that type of work stopped. I had a number of chases on the river, but when we got the whaler with the 115 horsepower, they couldn't get away. It was interesting, Bleakley, Albert Bleakley, made a souped-up boat, he had one with a huge engine on it, and it was either he was going to argue, fight, or run. And I saw some of the fights, I never got in a fight because I was able to talk with him and gain his composure, although we did arrest him a few times. And then he just got older and grew out of that. He did these old V8 engines in these boats that could really move, and they would run them down and drop them off, and you just couldn't catch -- we would flip back and forth from trucks to working on the river, and try to hit it where you could make a connection.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So does it feel sort of bittersweet in some ways?

OFFICER COOK: No.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: No?

OFFICER COOK: No. I think it was a great time, it was a great time in my --again, I was 27, 28 years old, and you're just real gung-ho, and you're kind of caught up in it. I look back, not only couldn't I do anything, I probably wouldn't. I think looking back, I would have tried to articulate and really get across how important it was try to get some more support because it always seemed like it was hard to win people over, although it was a slow process of getting the biologists, getting the federal people, the newspaper people. The newspapers loved it. I mean, it was just a great interest story. And I learned a lot. I think that case in 1982 really forced me to dig because there was no certainty that we were going to win, and if we lost, we could have been sued pretty severely, and that was one we put a lot up on the table, but it proved better, the river is full of fish again. [1:05:00.5]

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Do you think they'll ever open the commercial bass fishery again?

OFFICER COOK: I don't know. It's possible they could do something limited. It's a moratorium with a number of certain people. If the levels are safe. That river really produces fish. What I'm finding with other wildlife and fish that over the last 20 years technology has outpaced everything in the equipment

that's available now. For instance, deer and fish, they don't have a chance because the -- quote -- like surveillance type of equipment is just tremendous now. So you have to really be stewards at the same time to prevent it.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Than when it was much more of a traditional fishery.

OFFICER COOK: Oh, yeah. It was wonderful. It was a wonderful culture. Henry, we talk, I remember several conversations with Henry, and he would try to reason me with that I shouldn't do this, and I'm making a lot of trouble. And I asked him one time, I said, "Why are you so upset? You're always accusing me of things that aren't true." And it went back to when he was younger, he got busted by a game warden for taking some herring, and the guy in Henry's mind did something illegal, he just took his herring, and it seemed to slant his view all the time. And I don't think he ever resolved that, that here was somebody just working to do what the law said.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Did you ever catch him with anything or arrest him?

OFFICER COOK: I took fish from him. In fact, one day I came out and he had about 1,500 pounds of bass, and a few hundred pounds of shad. And I pulled up, and I said, "What are you doing, Henry?" He said, "Oh, I'm just checking my shad." And I said, "This is a lot of bass there." I said, "What are you going to do with them?" He says, "I don't know. Maybe eat them." He says, "Why? Do you want them?" And he says, "I don't feel like I should throw them over" because they were dead. And that was before they had that incidental thing. Henry really never had much of a problem. I may have taken some fish away from him, I may have written one ticket to him, but I don't believe so. I know one time I watched him, they loaded about 1,000 pounds of fish, and I couldn't see where they were loading them into.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Who?

OFFICER COOK: Henry, at Henry Gourdine's. And this was early, this was like 1979.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Who was he working with?

OFFICER COOK: He was working with a tall, skinny fellow, a black man, that he was like a brother-in-law or something. He passed away. And I didn't realize it, but it probably was one of the truckers that was doing the shipping, and they had a rack-body truck, and it was a pickup truck. And I was focused on the pickup truck, so I followed that, and it went to different diners, dropping and selling fish, but I missed the other one. You know, you only have one set of eyes, and you can only go with one truck. And the big load of fish went out one way, and the other one went out the other way, and we got the smaller one. But people were shocked because we would follow them to the restaurants and things, and everybody said they're not selling them, but everybody was buying them.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Where were you hiding that you saw --

OFFICER COOK: Oh, we would hide in the parking lot or behind the building, and you would be wearing plain clothes and using binoculars and spotting scopes. Something, I just said "spotting scopes," the commercial fishermen kind of subsided, and the sports fishermen came in, and then over the last 5 or 6

years, the Moonies, the religious order, came in and put a big fleet of commercial boats up here, and they use their membership that had to go out on their boats and fish, but they couldn't keep the fish. And we would interview them, and they said, "We have to go out and fish, and we pay to go out and fish, but we leave the fish here," and then they were taking the fish and allegedly exploiting it in some way. So we made a number of arrests with -- well, half a mile away with spotting scopes watching the people fish and checking them, and they were allowed one fish per person, so they would fill these boats up and they would have 20 fish because there were 20 people. And then the people would leave and they would take the fish. So we seized hundreds of pounds down in North Croton Bay. [1:10:01.5] And they were very great. Now we're on the water -- years ago you were on the water and you had no communication, then we went to radios on the water. Now when you check fishermen they give you their cell phones, you're in touch with everyone. And we seized the Unification Church fish and nets. And they're all over New York, on Montauk, and up in Massachusetts. They own, I think, one big -- it's one of the large fishery companies. And they were generating so much upset from the other fishermen that everyone was calling about them.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And where were they selling it?

OFFICER COOK: Allegedly they were using it through their church, and they were also using it in a restaurant they owned. But that never was substantiated. But we were able to seize the fish. And they were very efficient, they would pay their fines immediately, you never had to go look for them, they would always write a check right away. We had people from other countries visiting that had to go out and fish. It's interesting, because it did evolve, the whole river changed. A huge Vietnamese and Cambodian group that fishes along the river now, and blacks that fish along the shore, they like catfish primarily, to catch catfish.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: That is the same limit as the bass?

OFFICER COOK: No, that's unlimited.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Because that's a ban also, right?

OFFICER COOK: It's a ban as far as selling, but it's not a ban -- if people want to take and eat them themselves and contaminate themselves, apparently there is just an advisory for that. Where there is a ban is short sturgeon, short bass, any game fish that you might catch, like large-mouth bass or pickerel. Let's see, catfish --

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Eel.

OFFICER COOK: Eel is the thing, eel is a ban. They can possess a 6-inch eel. It has to be at least 6 inches and up to 14 inches, they can possess that, but a small one they can't and a large one they can't. And the eels they possess can only be used for bait. There are elvers, or the small eels that come up, glass eels they call them, and there is a huge market in those in Japan, and they sell those for up to \$500 a pound. And they come up the Hudson in the spring, in April, and what happened, Japan's economy collapsed, so

the market collapsed for them, so we didn't get any action on it. But they've started to find them and get some arrests in Connecticut and around. So the river is changing.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: You haven't heard of any more bass busts recently?

OFFICER COOK: No, I haven't. I've been so busy with hunting work and environmental work. But after -- it's my mother's birthday, the 8th of October -- Tucker said you can always count between the 8th and the 10th, the bass are in, and that's when we get our fall bass, and he showed me where they put their nets. Tucker also used some of the poles, he was one, but they quickly abandoned that when we started targeting the fish.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Did you think it made sense to ban the sturgeon, the Atlantic sturgeon fishery?

OFFICER COOK: It makes sense to me from an enforcement program because of what happened. When they were catching three, half a dozen, even a dozen fish, it was kind of almost romantic, the type of fishery, with Charlie White, and Tucker, pictures of him with a big sturgeon in his boat. But the technology came in and people up above, in the Newburgh area, came down, and they caught 125 in a season, no fish could make it through, they could zero in on a fish and then surround it with nets. And the fisheries recognized that there weren't going to be any getting through, and so from that point of view it made sense. Do they still catch sturgeon? Probably. Are they more careful about it? Yes. They used to tie them to the docks by the tail, and you would go and you would see a line and you pull it up, and there would be this big fish tied up.[1:15:00.5] And they would smoke it. And apparently it was an tremendous industry in the 1800s, the sturgeon, Albany beef they used to call it.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Right. And apparently they set caviar on the fires.

OFFICER COOK: Yeah.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: They considered it (inaudible). [1:15:19.0]

OFFICER COOK: Yeah. Just going down through Verplank they're planning all kinds of restoration, fixing the places up. It's changed, it's not the way it was. Albert Bleakley's thing is gone, and many of the old kind of quaint artifact type things are gone.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Somebody, I can't remember who it was, said that sometimes they would stamp the crates down at Fulton, and say "Delaware," or put another state's name on it?

OFFICER COOK: Oh, sure.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Did you ever (crosstalk) that?

OFFICER COOK: No, because we had to do it more hands-on. We would have to see the fish come in, go down to the market. When the 1982 case became successful, and we won, all that went out, we didn't have to do that. If we found the fishermen with the fish, we could arrest them, and that made it -- oh, it was night and day. So anytime you wanted to get them, you could get them, whereas before it was a 3-

day -- there were times we didn't sleep for two full days, we were just going and going. Of course, they didn't pay us around the clock, we were on kind of a salary then. Now they have to pay you, they're not going to do that, you know, to go for 36 hours or something, they're not going to pay that.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Have you seen Bill Dovel in a while?

OFFICER COOK: No, not for a long, long time. And Bob Boyle. I haven't seen in a while. I don't even know if he's still alive.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: I saw him a couple of years ago, but I haven't spoken to him since.

OFFICER COOK: A lot of changes occurred. In the 1980s, we were much more fish and wildlife oriented, and we became much more environmental, pollution, trucks, truck equipment, medical waste, oil spill, much more geared that way, and construction demolition was the hot item from about 1984 on, and dumps. That's where we headed, the big money was in that kind of fine.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Are any of the family that was doing the trucking, are they still around?

OFFICER COOK: Oh, yeah. They've worked for the town or in unions, and they always say, "Oh, yeah, that was good times back then. It was good money back then."

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: That was out of Verplank?

OFFICER COOK: Montrose.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Montrose.

OFFICER COOK: Interesting people. A couple of times it got a little tense.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: With your car that –

OFFICER COOK: Well, it got tense actually at night a few times, and arrests a few times.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: What do you mean "tense"? What would happen?

OFFICER COOK: When it looked like there were going to be fights and altercations and things. But I was able to raise the bench, as they say, and communicate in a way that made sense, that they didn't want assault charges.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Anyone ever fired at you?

OFFICER COOK: No there, not with fishing, but with other things.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Where?

OFFICER COOK: With duck hunting and hunting and things like that. But that's a different type of work.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: Where was your car that they were able to –

OFFICER COOK: Right in front of my house.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: So you heard it being –

OFFICER COOK: Oh, yeah. I said, "That sounds like glass." And it's the proverbial kicking the hornets' nest, because they probably hadn't thought it through well because the next day it was like the whole Verplank was swarming with police.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: You didn't see who it was?

OFFICER COOK: No, but I know who it was. We'll leave that as a mystery. (Laughter.)

OFFICER COOK: Yeah. An \$80 windshield at the time cost them a lot because really everybody dug their heels in, the attorneys, and we fortunately convinced the -- it was a jury trial. In fact, I think one was actually -- they started with a jury, and they changed, [1:20:03.2] they felt there was too much sentiment against them, contaminated fish. They went with the judge in one of the trials.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: What was Carey like in court?

OFFICER COOK: Oh, Carey, he was just a real nice guy, and he would get angry at me, he would get so angry he couldn't talk, he would turn bright red. And he had white hair, and this bright red -- and he would curse. You know, it was just too much for him, this whole thing, and taking his fish, and giving him a ticket, and, "I never had a ticket in my life." I felt bad it was him because he was one of the nicer guys. You know, they weren't really bad people, they didn't want to lie about what they were doing, but they had done it their whole life, and I think it was painful for them to go through that. And they were sure some businessman was going to pay all the fines, that was what allegedly was told, that this was all covered.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And it wasn't.

OFFICER COOK: No. In fact, I talked to an attorney with Bleakley, and he said he never got paid.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: But it never went higher up than the fishermen, it never went into the truckers and bigger business.

OFFICER COOK: I think there were some tickets there. I was looking through it, and some of the truckers had tickets. There were some people in black suits with briefcases involved, and some important people, which we never really got into. There were a lot of alleged things that went deep into business.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: And it wasn't pursued.

OFFICER COOK: Didn't need to on the level we had to prove. It was the feds, they did that on that other level, and they made some big connections and closed some people down. But we did establish that there were several hundred thousand dollars worth of fish moving every winter through the market, and that was back then was something considerable.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: I remember when I first met Tucker too, he took a huge, big wad of bills out of his pocket.

OFFICER COOK: He's very proud of that.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY: He said, "This is what you get if you don't go to college." I was in college at the time. It was towards the end of it actually.

OFFICER COOK: Tucker was unique, where you knew he was like a little --almost like a leprechaun, he was up to all kinds of mischief, but you still liked him, there was a level you liked him at. After a while he would tell you, he would say, "You know, I've got to support a daughter that's all messed up, and I've got a son or a grandson that has no father, and I've got to pay for all this," and you could see that he had -- he was a barber, and he said, "I got into bass because I had to make money to make it okay for my family." And I could admire that part, and there was kind of a denial when you said, "What would you feel about babies getting sick from mothers eating this fish?" That happens. There was just a denial, "There is nothing wrong with this fish. That's all made up." So I said, "I hope you can prove that because I would be the first to support you in selling the fish again." Oh, they had a thing where they finally -- it was shown that they weren't responsible and did lose income from the loss of the fishery, so the government people said, "Okay. How much did you lose?" "Oh, we lost \$80,000 a year. We lost all this." So each year they're required to fill out a report, and the report was just for records, but they thought it was going to the IRS, so they put 500 pounds of bass, they would make up ridiculously small numbers. So they pulled all those sheets and said you're not making a living on this, this is nothing, this is just little amounts of fish. So they didn't want to pay taxes, they wanted the money, they never wanted to pay taxes, and then they felt bad because they lost it. But you've got to do it one way or the other. I remember that at the meetings, they were saying, "We've lost our income. We've lost." They had all the records right there. "Well, you only had 1,500 pounds." That's, what, \$2,000, \$3,000? So parts of it were sad, but parts of it were exciting.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY Do you think that the river has lost the people who are really connected to it? And do you think that that bodes badly for the future of the river?

OFFICER COOK: No. I think that those people had their period of time on the river, and a whole new kind of people are coming up. I think the river is utilized tremendously now. I see more people now on the river. And they just speak different languages, and they come from different countries, but they have that same connection to the river. It's hard to find parking places along the tracks in some places. There was a group 20 years ago of I would say Italian, Irish, black, that just the weekend was where you went, to the river and fished, and that's just changed, it's more a melting pot now.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY But people still do have that strong connection?

OFFICER COOK: Oh, yeah. Tremendous numbers of Koreans and different Asians, Cambodians. The violations are probably more blatant. There is a whole disregard for size limits, it's just whatever you catch, you eat now, whereas before there would be some semblance of size limits and quantities.

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY But they're mostly supporting themselves so much.

OFFICER COOK: Oh, no, I don't see that. I'm sure people are selling fish, but it's not -- they had first a fishery that allowed them to sell it, then it was closed, and they continued to do it until somebody said you can't. People will do what they can do until they can't. That's why they put police on the highways. Does that cover it?

MARGUERITE HOLLOWAY Yeah. Thank you very much. I'm glad the sun is shining.

OFFICER COOK: Oh, is it now? (Conclusion of interview.)