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Terry Howard (TH): My name's Terry Howard, and today is Friday, October 26th, 2018. I am at 5351 NW Mims Court in Port St. Lucie, Florida, with Captain Rupert Brook—Brook—Harden, also known as Junior Harden. And, to begin with, Mr. Harden, please state your full name and your date and place of birth.

Rupert Brook Harden (RH): Okay. I was born in West Palm Beach on 4/20/33.

TH: And your full name?

RH: Is Rupert Brook Harden Jr.

TH: And what do most people know you by?

RH: Junior Harden.

TH: Okay. Mr. Harden, do I have your permission to use this interview for publication in books, articles, et cetera?

RH: Yes, sir.

TH: And do I have your permission to archive this interview at the University of South Florida Tampa Library Digital Archives?

RH: Yes, sir.

TH: Okay. And I've already got when and where you were born. Uh, give me a brief biography of yourself, including your first experiences boating, fishing, commercial and/or charter fishing. Just your first experiences on the water and where you grew up.

RH: Yeah. Well, I grew up in West Palm. And that was during, I remember, during the war in the '40s. Back then, our boats, we steered them all with ropes. We didn't—we just had car motors in the boats, and—

TH: Can you explain how you steered them with the boats?

RH: With the rope? We had a rudder—the rudder in the back with the arm sticking up and the rope went _____(??), and you'd pull it this way to go this way and pull this way to go the other way. That's how we steered boats back then.

TH: Now, when you say, "This way and that way," it doesn't—this is all—

RH: Left and right. Oh, left, right. Yeah. In other words, whenever you pull it, then they'll turn the wheel—you pull it, and you'll turn. You pull it—that's how—it went up to the bow and back down to the rudder.

TH: And through pulleys?

RH: Yeah, through a pulley.

TH: Okay.

RH: Yeah. And that's how we steered boats. And back then, fish was so—we could get out of Palm Beach Inlet, them old boats, and shut the motor off in front of the inlet, and drift to Jupiter. And when we got to Jupiter, the boats—everything we had on the boat was full of mutton snapper and grouper. And the tide was so strong, the little five-horse[power] Palmers that we had, they couldn't make it back. We had to go to the beach—to come down the beach—to get

back to the inlet.

TH: You'd go to the beach?

RH: Go back to shore so we could run, because the tide was too strong for them boats to make it.

TH: How far out was the—what you're talking about, the Gulf Stream tide?

RH: No. We—Palm Beach, it's only 60 feet of water off of Palm Beach. It's only, like, a mile offshore.

TH: Okay. Of water?

RH: Yeah, and then—but the tide was so strong, the old motors we had, you couldn't buck the tide. We had to come into the shore, go right down the shore so we could get back home. But the boats would be loaded. If you wanted—we couldn't hardly sell grouper. We just threw them away, until right at the end, then we would keep the groupers and throw them on the floor. But the snappers, we put in boxes. But the grouper were just the last—after the boxes were full of them, we filled the boat up with grouper. And we was using the old cotton line back then. They didn't have—

TH: You were using nets?

RH: No. Fishing line.

TH: Oh, fishing lines?

RH: Yeah, I was catching them. And see, net fishermen, we net fish in the winter. But we always hook-and-lined all summer, but for grouper, snapper, kingfish, stuff like that.

TH: So when you drifted, you had handlines?

RH: Mmm-hm. We'd just drop it down as fast as you could pull them until you wore out. Then you'd get all your boxes full. By the time I got up around Jupiter or Hope Sound, the boxes would be full, and we'd go into the beach and come back. And it just kept getting worse. It's hard to catch anything now because it's so many boats. Yeah.

TH: But this was—about what year would this be?

RH: That was in the '40s.

TH: Okay. And in the wintertime, did you use nets up there?

RH: Yeah, in the wintertime we used nets, gill nets, but—like, in '44, somewhere in there, the submarines were—German subs was so bad out here, we couldn't go out at night.¹ They would only let us go out—all the boats that was right at the inlet, at eight o' clock, and they would shoot a gun, and then we could all go fishing. But we had to be back before dark because of the German subs. And that's—back [in] them days, we had little towers about every four or five miles on the beach. And had horseback riders going up and down because so many—the German subs was letting off people, and they was coming ashore. Because every time they sunk one of them subs, it was full of restaurant stuff and groceries that they would—and they don't even know how they was getting them, you know. Like that, you know the *Republican*² buoy off of Jupiter, Hope Sound?

TH: Yes.

RH: Okay, that was a ship. That was a name of that ship that the German sub blowed up. And when that blowed up, we was—I was not fishing, daddy was. He said when they blowed that up, fish all the way to Palm Beach Inlet showered out of the water when they blowed it up. That's what a big explosion it was. Daddy and all of them went up there, and anybody that could free-dive in 60 feet of water—

TH: Free-dive?

RH: Yeah. In 60 feet—it's about 60 feet. Well, they would take a rope and go down. And the ship was full of five-gallon cans of lard and these big boxes of Sunshine cookies, shoes, all—thousands of cases of Vienna sausage. Well, they would go down and go and run ropes through and tie it and jerk it, and the guy up there would pull it up. They loaded damn boats off of that ship. Oh, my Lord.

TH: My goodness. Now, about what year was that?

¹ German submarines targeted tankers and freighters along the East Coast of the United States. The Germans sank 24 ships in Florida waters during World War II.

² In February 1942, a German submarine torpedoed the *Republic*, an empty tanker, off Hobe Sound in Martin County.

RH: That was during the war, so it would be like '45. Something like that.

TH: Now, you fished before the war. Do you recall fishing before the war?

RH: Well, let's see, before '44—

TH: Forty-one—forty-two is when the war began for the US.³ But before that, the German subs were sinking ships.

RH: Yeah, right. But I wasn't fishing then. Daddy was telling me about it, yeah. That's how—I was too young.

TH: Okay.

RH: But he'd fill up our garage full of all kinds of stuff. Blankets and Vienna sau—oh, what a mess—from that ship.

TH: Well, that was also during the Depression—at the end of the Depression.⁴

RH: Right, yeah. Yeah, I remember, we was at—whenever, during the Depression, we—on the street we lived in, there must've been 50 houses. Every house on that street, the Salvation Army's truck stopped and gave them food. Except for one. That was some guy that owned a grocery store. But every house, you know, it was kind of embarrassing. But when you'd see everybody else that did it, you know, they would all stand out on the road, waiting for that truck.

TH: The Salvation Army?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Now, what—do you remember what street it was or where you lived in?

RH: Forty-Third.

TH: Forty-Third? In?

RH: In West Palm Beach, yeah.

³ The United States entered World War II on December 7, 1941, after the attack on Pearl Harbor. The first planned offensive action by the US was in January 1942.

⁴ The Great Depression began in the US after the stock market crash of 1929 and continued until the beginning of World War II.

TH: Forty-Third Street. And how close were you to the inlet?

RH: Well, that was about 8 miles because that was at Riviera.

TH: Riviera Beach?

RH: Yeah, the inlet was down there. Now, first off, see, my parents, my daddy and them, they moved to the—here from [the] Bahamas. My daddy's Bahamian. And he moved over here when he was 18 and met my mother from Mississippi, and they got married. Well, my daddy—when they first came, they all went to Peanut Island. That belonged to the Bahamians. There was no bridge then. They would go back and forth on little boats and row across and get stuff from the grocery store and row back.

TH: They lived on Peanut Island?

RH: Not Peanut Island, Singer Island.

TH: Singer Island.

RH: Right. There was no bridge then. There was nothing over there but Bahamians. They more or less owned Singer Island. Well, then—but, like, where the inlet is now, that wasn't the inlet. The inlet was over here by Singer Island. That was the regular inlet, you know, of nature.

TH: A natural inlet?

RH: Yeah, natural. They would go in and out there, but it wasn't very deep. So they closed this off after they made Palm Beach Inlet. Yeah. Just like the same thing with Salerno Inlet. Do you know where the middle of the hole is? That's where the inlet was. Then later they dug an inlet over where they are, and they closed that one up. That's why, every time you have a hurricane, it wants to cut through right there.

TH: Interesting. Well, in Fort Pierce, the old inlet was where Pepper Park is today. And when they built the Fort Pierce Inlet in 1921, that one closed up naturally because it was only a foot deep in the mouth.

RH: Yeah.

TH: All right, I want to go back to—you're in Palm Beach, so in the—before the war, you fished at night, mostly?

RH: Yeah. Well, in the daytime, see, you only had cotton nets back then. And you had to circle them and pull them all the way down. That was before monofilament come out. Monofilament, you could run it out in front of them, and they'd run into it. But having—back in our days, we had to find them. We had no fathometer. We had no kind of electronics. We had to find the fish on our own and circle them. Well, then, after monofilament come out, it made it a whole lot better. So at nighttime, the water don't—we call it fire. You could see a school of fish ahead of you, a quarter of a mile, swimming, at night. We don't have that anymore. The water don't fire like that anymore. I don't know why. It just kept getting worse and worse.

The worst thing for fish is a propeller. And the more propellers you get, the less fish you're going to have. You could take—I could come up to a big school of fish, and that bunch of fish would be sitting there. If I didn't change the throttle, I could go right up and circle that bunch of fish up, and they wouldn't even know they was in the net. But as I go to it, if I touched the throttle, you could see them, whomp! That's how they go. Because they don't like that change of that propeller. That's the only way we could—we grouped a bunch of fish, we don't touch the throttle, we'd just go right on around it. But if we said, "Oh, look there!"

TH: Interesting.

RH: Yeah.

TH: Well, let's get the chronology of this. You started off fishing out of Palm Beach?

RH: Yes, sir.

TH: On some nights, you would set nets—gill nets—

RH: Yeah, gill nets.

TH: —and drift?

RH: No, we'd set them—circle them.

TH: You'd circle fish?

RH: You always had to circle them because the cotton nets wouldn't catch them. They wouldn't run into it.

TH: You wouldn't go out into the Gulf Stream?

RH: Oh, no. Just along the beach.

TH: Along the beach.

RH: Our nest was real shallow out there—after—we couldn't catch anything in 30 feet of water. It was from there in, yeah.

TH: That's where you did the net fishing?

RH: Uh-huh.

TH: And then for the hook and line fishing, were you drifted?

RH: Uh-huh. That's out in, right offshore, about a mile. You don't have to—the Gulf Stream is not very far off Palm Beach.

TH: So you go out there about a mile? And okay, explain the hand lines. What kind of—

RH: We had—it looked like—well, you know how a lead line is on a cast net now? Well, that's about the size of the line we used. Almost like a rope with a little piece of wire about that big, that's all.

TH: That big? You're holding your hands about three feet?

RH: Yeah, about three feet of wire. And then we would—

TH: Did you have a swivel—

RH: Yeah, we had—

TH: —to attach the rope to the wire?

RH: Uh-huh. And then, on that—and we used to use number 9 hooks. But when—and then _____(??) would have a lead on it. We made our own leads. We'd take some leads and pour them in the sand, you know, to make a lead. And then—

TH: You would just pour them in the sand?

RH: Yeah, you'd dig, like, a hole in the sand, and you pour the lead in it, and then you've got—like, you wet the sand. And it's like a—you pour the lead in, as soon as it hits it, boom, it's hard. And we had the wire sticking out of each end, you know.

TH: And you'd tie the—now, how big was the rope that you used? Or—

RH: It was like the—well, you know the line that we use, like, tying your outriggers and stuff like that? Real big stuff, because they bit anything. They didn't care back then, as long as you had a piece of bait on it.

TH: Like a quarter inch?

RH: Yeah, a little less than a quarter inch.

TH: Okay, and then you tied that to one end of the lead, where you had wires coming out of one end of the lead?

RH: No, we tied—we moved back up about two—about two fathoms from the hook, we'd put the lead. Then we'd come out with line, and then right on the end, we'd put the wire. Yeah. And that's the—the bonitos, back then, was millions of them. So you always had bonito bait. Yeah.

TH: Oh, you used bonito for bait?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Did they hit your lines? Did you catch a lot of bonito?

RH: Yeah. Anything you'd put out, it'd catch it. Bonitos was everywhere.

TH: I mean, how did you get out of the bonitos to get into the grouper or the—

RH: Well, down on the bottom, you had to troll for the bonitos. Yeah.

TH: Okay, okay. And how did you troll? You just—

RH: Just slow. Go, just like you do now. For the bonitos, the faster you went, if you could pull them, the better it is. You know how bonitos are.

TH: Yeah.

RH: They like it fast.

TH: So, you would use—to make sure we understand this—about less than a quarter inch, the line that you pulled. And you'd, I guess, coil it right at your feet in the boat.

RH: Yeah, just throw it down. Yeah.

TH: And then, at the end of the line, you had a swivel, and then another couple of fathoms with the lead on that.

RH: Right. See, in other words, like, it would go from here to the lead—right here. Then we'd go from here out a couple of fathoms, in a swivel.

TH: “Here” doesn't compute.

RH: Huh? Oh.

TH: Going from here—

RH: Okay. Well, let's say if it's 60 feet of water, well, usually I—we usually used, like, 20 fathoms, something like that, 25 fathoms of line. And we'll go down, and we'll tie one in one end of the lead. And then the other, cut it in two, the other end. Then we would go another two fathoms of line. And then, at the end of the line, we would put the wire.

TH: Okay. Attached to a swivel?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Okay.

RH: Yeah, it had to have a swivel because that rope, it just was—

TH: And you just used one hook per line?

RH: Yeah, yeah. You could—and just as fast as you could pull them, I'm telling you.

TH: That's amazing.

RH: I know. Yeah.

TH: So you said the snapper were your main target fish?

RH: Yeah, because they paid more for them, you know.

TH: And the grouper were bycatch?⁵

RH: Yeah. But in other words, if you wasn't careful, you'd fill the boat up with groupers. So they had to keep throwing them back. So—

TH: Did they still buy the grouper though?

RH: Well, not much. Like eight cents a pound, something like that.

TH: And how much for snapper?

RH: I think we got 10 or 12 cents for them. Yeah.

TH: My goodness. Okay, so you were just a child. You worked with your father, mostly?

RH: Yeah. Yeah.

TH: And when did you move to Fort Pierce?

RH: In '76.

TH: Oh. Well, so most of your fishing was done—your early fishing was in the Palm Beaches.

RH: Palm Beach, and then—and sometimes the fish would go by, so we would go to Miami. And during that time, you couldn't go out. You had to—during the war, we had to have a big thing over the boat with the letters about 12 inches big because the Coast Guard would run you down all the time if you didn't have that sign. When you went out in Miami Inlet, you had to have that thing, or the Coast Guard would come pull you over because of the Germans.

⁵ Bycatch is the portion of a commercial fishing catch that consists of marine animals caught unintentionally.

TH: You went out, and government cut in?

RH: Yeah, sometimes. But most of the time, we would come out and go through the Biscayne Bay Bridge, and go out at the cape.

TH: Well, how did you get your boats down there, to Miami?

RH: Just run them.

TH: Down the beach?

RH: Uh-huh.

TH: And where did you stay when you—I mean, your home was in—

RH: On the boats. On the little 25-foot boats.

TH: Can you describe the boats that you used?

RH: Yeah. Well, there was clinker-built boats. You know, they're built out of cedar, white cedar. And then they put ribs in them, you know, to make them round. We'd put oak for ribs. You'd heat it so it would bend, and then, when it got cold, it would stiff. And that would rivet it.

TH: Did you build your own boats?

RH: No. Some of them did. We didn't. I couldn't build. But that—they was clinker-built boats like what you see, you know, the lapped over—

TH: Lapstrake.

RH: And you didn't have to—it was funny about that. You know how you used to have to put caulk in, like a regular boat? You had to put caulking in—not that white cedar. When you put it in there, you couldn't have a motor in there; when you first put it in the boat, in water, it would sink. So you'd have to let it sit, but it would soak up pretty soon. After it soaked up, you'd just sit there, never leak a drop.

TH: It would swell.

RH: Swell.

TH: And then you'd put little Palmer engines? What were the most common engines?

RH: Well, back—whatever car motor—we didn't have many marines back then. Just whatever kind of car—Buick, stuff like that. Something.

TH: And just a regular—the transmission?

RH: Now, when they first started, it was five-horse Palmers they used to use. Yeah. Pat-pat-pat-pat. If I set a net sometimes, if the net hung up, it stopped the boat. Didn't have no power.

TH: My goodness. So—and then—so you'd net in the wintertime, and in the summertime, you would hook and line fish?

RH: Kingfish and hook and line. Yeah, snapper.

TH: That was the seasonal routine?

RH: Yeah, always. Yeah.

TH: Okay. Did you or your father ever rescue any of the fellows from the ships that were blown up by the German submarines?

RH: No, we never did. No, sir. No.

TH: They brought some into Fort Pierce, I know, later on.

RH: Yeah, yeah. You know the 12A buoy? That's where that comes from.

TH: What?

RH: The German subs. See, the 12 buoy, right, there was a—the submarine was following this freighter, okay? Well, then, the freighter knew he was, so he acted like he went into Fort Pierce, but he couldn't get in. So he anchored right outside the inlet for three days, hoping he was gone. So about two o'clock that morning, he went out. And when he got out—boom. It blowed him up. That's where that is. That's the ship.

TH: Where the 12A buoy is today?

RH: Yeah, that's that ship. Then another one was blown up just offshore, which was the 12 buoy, remember? But it's gone now. That was two ships that the submarines blew up.

TH: Okay.

RH: Now, let me tell you one thing, that *Republican* buoy, their jewfish was so big and so plentiful—oh, probably, four or five years after the ship was sunk, right?⁶

TH: Now, the *Republican* buoy was the one at Hobe Sound?

RH: That was one down at Palm Beach, just north of Jupiter Inlet.

TH: Okay.

RH: Okay. Well, the jewfish were so thick there, in the summer when we couldn't find anything to do, we would catch jewfish, right? Now, we would use—

TH: That's—today they're called goliath grouper.

RH: Oh, they are? Okay, well, we would use quarter-inch rope and a hook with a chain on it. And we'd catch mullet, big mullet, and hook the mullet on and throw it down. And we would have to tie the end of that rope because you couldn't stop it once he—if we put the bait out, like, if the ship was right here, we would anchor here and let it go just so far. And then they would come out and grab it, and try to run back in the ship. So you had to make sure your rope wouldn't go to the ship. You had it just right. And he would turn the—whoa—and you had to get out of the way because, man, that line was smoking, you hear me? [Makes sound.] Sometimes, it would even pull a piece of wood right out of the side of the boat. We had them so big, we had to tow them home. You couldn't get them in the boat.

TH: What did they weigh? Do you remember?

RH: I know some of them weighed 900—8-, 900 pounds. We could take a 400-pounder—you know your tiller arm that you steer with?

TH: Yes, sir.

RH: Well, we'd get—a boat would come over, and you'd get two or three men, two on one end, two on the other. And we would stick it through his gills and slide him in the boat like that. At 2-

⁶ Jewfish is another term for the Atlantic goliath grouper.

or 300 pounds, they could do that easy. But some of them were just too big. And they would cut them in chunks. That's how you sold them.

TH: The meat?

RH: The meat, yeah.

TH: And it was sold, like, it was good eating?

RH: Oh, yeah. Yeah.

TH: Like grouper?

RH: Yeah, like—

TH: They're from the grouper family.

RH: Same thing, yeah. But we—

TH: So, I want to hear this—be sure we get this correct. So the *Republican* [sic] wreck, that's a ship that sank, and there's a buoy there?

RH: Right. Well, it's not now. The ship must have deteriorated. I was down there a few years ago, I said, "Man, where's the buoy?" Because it was such a place—right here was the bar inshore the buoy, and all up in here, we used the buoy for a mark, for kingfish. But the buoy's gone now, so they call this the inshore bar, and then the other one is out here. Yeah.

TH: So this was off of—?

RH: Hobe Sound.

TH: Hobe Sound. Between Hobe Sound and Jupiter.

RH: You know where Jupiter long rocks are, on the beach? Them rocks was right off of that, yeah.

TH: Okay. And let's get back to the—you would have a rope, where was the chain?

RH: Right on the end.

TH: And then beyond the chain was, what, the hook?

RH: Yeah, just a big old shark hook. Big shark hook, yeah.

TH: And what was it attached to? The chain, I guess.

RH: Yeah. You know, we had to put that to the chain, yeah.

TH: And what attached the hook to the chain?

RH: Like you—when you got the hook, like this, where you'd go through the hook with the chain and put a bowl in it.

TH: Oh, okay. And you dropped a big mullet down there.

RH: Yeah.

TH: The biggest you could catch.

RH: Yeah, big old mullet.

TH: And when they—now, were you—did they—were you anchored?

RH: Oh, yeah.

TH: And then you dropped this line out of the stern of the boat?

RH: Yeah.

TH: And was it tied off to a cleat?

RH: Yeah, you'd tie the end off because you couldn't do—once he took off, you couldn't slow it down. And it'd be smoking, and if you ever got your leg in, you'd be done. We'd just—we'd coil it up just right and set it down. And then you'd be holding the line, you'd feel him, and then you'd get away from it.

TH: Oh, so you'd jerk with your hands to get it hooked?

RH: Yeah.

TH: And then you—my goodness. You don't have any pictures of any of that?

RH: No, sir, I don't.

TH: That is something else. Any other stories like that? Like other kinds of fishing that you did off Palm Beach and Jupiter?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Did you ever marlin—catch any marlin or—

RH: Yeah, but they'll kill me if I told you.

TH: I don't think so. I think—that was a long time ago.

RH: Yeah, well, back them days, we had a drift net. When I went offshore to Salerno one day, and there was a bar, you know. Like, I said, "Man!" So I run my drift down—net out that night, right?

TH: Mmm-hm.

RH: And I never once put one there before, so I let it sit four or five hours. And when I went back to that, I must've had a hundred marlin in that net. I said, "I ain't never doing this again." I tell everybody, "Don't tell nobody." I never caught so many marlin. I couldn't believe that. I said, "What in the world are they doing down here like that?" I didn't go back. Not down there.

TH: Now, and that was where?

RH: That was straight off Salerno Inlet.

TH: About—

RH: Yeah, there's a lump way offshore.

TH: About what year?

RH: Oh, that would've been in, I guess '77, I guess.

TH: Oh, that's late. So, you came to Fort Pierce in the '70s, and you got—you were always—

RH: I fished—we fished up here every year. That's why we moved up here. So let me tell you

about that. My uncle—see, back then, a boat from Salerno couldn't go to Palm Beach. And that was mostly all Swedes back in those days.

TH: In Palm Beach?

RH: No, in Salerno.

TH: Salerno.

RH: They were all Swedish. Well, then, you know the Petersons, and the Gunnersons, and all them?

TH: I don't know them, but go ahead.

RH: Okay. Yeah, but anyway, a Salerno boat couldn't go to Fort Pierce. Palm Beach boats couldn't go to Fort Pierce. Fort Pierce boats couldn't come down here and fish, either. Everybody kept their thing. But my uncle, one time, he caught fish off of Fort Pierce Inlet, right? He said, "I am not taking these things back. It's too far." So he went in. They said, "You better not go in there." [He] said, "I'm going." So he went in. And he threw the fish on—he asked a guy, "Would you buy them?" "Sure." So he threw them on the dock—

TH: Which fish house?

RH: At Hudgins. He threw them on the dock, right? They threw them back in the boat. He threw them on the dock. And he jumped on the dock, and they threw him back in the boat. So he left, but then—

TH: What year was this, approximately?

RH: Oh, boy. Probably—

TH: Time period?

RH: You see, I was just a kid, so that would be '33, '43. About '46, something like that. Yeah, they couldn't—oh, you couldn't go another place and fish. Now, who helped—do you know who started it where we could? Terrell Hayes and Edson Arnold. They wanted to come to Palm Beach because we'd kill them all the time in the winter. But they would—

TH: Kill the fish?

RH: Mackerel.

TH: Yeah.

RH: Yeah, mackerel and bluefish. So they finally got together, they said, Let's just go—you come here and we'll go there. So that's what started it. So Terrell Hayes and George—Edson Arnold.

TH: Well, Terrell Hayes and Edson Arnold also were in the co-op.

RH: Yeah.

TH: At the cape.

RH: Right.

TH: And they had some other fishermen from Palm Beach and from, I guess, up around Sebastian.

RH: Yeah. I don't know if they had any in Palm Beach. I don't know of anybody going to the cape when they was outside. Inside, they was. But not—when Palm Beach boats went, that was, like, in the '49. That's when they [went]. But these other guys was there. They went up there every year.

TH: That would be Terrell Hayes and Edson Arnold?

RH: Edson Arnold. And back them days, the shrimp boats were just little old boats. They'd drag any kind of little old thing and just fill the boats up with shrimp. It wasn't nothing for the shrimp to be as tall as a man and a fish house on the floor.

TH: You mean piles of shrimp as high as a man? That's up—where did they catch shrimp now? I heard at the cape.

RH: Right there at the cape, right along the beach. Anywhere. Anywhere, them little old boats—they would load them boats with shrimp.

TH: They would drag for them like a miniature—

RH: Yeah.

TH: Drag like the big shrimp boats today? These were smaller boats?

RH: And they would catch more shrimp than these big 80-footers will catch now.

TH: Offshore?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Wow. So—

RH: And kingfish, you probably ain't going to want to hear this, but kingfish—I was fishing up to the cape—let's see, I _____(??) Ray Allen. That was back in—Ray Allen was 16, and he's 60, so 50 years ago. About 50 years ago, I was looking for mackerel one day, you know.

TH: At Cape Canaveral?

RH: At the cape. And I'm riding around, riding around. I said, "Man"—

TH: At night?

RH: In the daytime.

TH: How do you look for mackerel?

RH: Just look and see the color of them, like you see a bed of mullet or anything swimming ahead of the boat. And I was looking. I said, "Man, look at that bunch of mackerel." I said, "Y'all get ready."

TH: You looked for birds?

RH: No, just look. Birds are a good sign that'll make you go look. But you just—wherever you feel like it's good area, you'd go there. Well, at the cape, they got little _____(??) of shallow coming out from the cape. I would run down one, then I'd go off and run down—that's where the fish liked to lay, in the slew. Well, I looked, and I said, "Man, look at that bunch of mackerel." I told them, I said, "Get ready." And I let go and I come out like that, and that big old _____(??) went right out and into the boat. And I said, "Oh, man, we got them." So we pull them down. I had—

TH: When you say, "Pull them down," explain—

RH: Squeeze them down. You know, you have to pull it all the way down, yeah.

TH: Like a seine?

RH: Yeah. But it's a gill net. You just—it's got—I've got rings in it, like, a ring every 50 yards. And when you set the net, the rope goes out with it, and then you just pull that rope, and it pulls the net in like this.

TH: Is that—are the rings at the bottom of the net, or—

RH: No, top—at the top. Yeah, and it just pulls them there together. By the time it gets in, it's like this.

TH: Oh, it's like that. Like, yeah—

RH: Like a flower.

TH: Okay. With petals sticking out?

RH: Yeah, like this. Uh-huh. And I looked down, and I said, "Whoa!" It was kingfish. It wasn't mackerel. On that 10 feet of water back then. That's—I said, "Look at this!" And so we had 12,000 kingfish there. I said, "Holy mackerel." Now, back then—

TH: About what year was that?

RH: Oh, boy. That was—would be in—well, 50 years ago. It'd be 50 years ago. What would that be?

TH: Well, 20, 30, 70—'60s or '70s. Seventies.

RH: Sixties, yeah.

TH: Mid-sixties or '70s. Were you living in Fort Pierce?

RH: No—yeah—no, I was living in Palm Beach then.

TH: So that was probably—you came up here in seventy—

RH: Seventy-six. So it was probably in the '60s, yeah.

TH: Okay.

RH: But the next day, I run—I went back out there. Man, I said, “Man, I can’t believe it.” I went out there [and] you should’ve seen that.

TH: So, you had how many pounds? You said—

RH: Twelve thousand. And look here, I looked, and I said, “Gee, look at that. Another bed of kingfish.” The next day, on that shallow water. You could almost stand up. I said, “Look at this.” So I let it go, and when I turned, when I went like this, my boat just kept going straight. I said—and my wheel, my steering wheel broke. But I probably would’ve caught 20,000 kingfish because that was a big bunch. And I’m talking about—the water, you could almost stand up in. The boats from the inlet catching kingfish, you could see them right over there, trolling, catching them. You didn’t have to go way offshore anywhere.

TH: The troll boats? Did they have a troll boat fleet then?

RH: Not like they do now, nothing like it. One or two boats, yeah. Or something. Yeah.

TH: This is the 1960s?

RH: Yeah.

TH: At the cape?

RH: Yeah, at the cape, but—

TH: So how long was your net?

RH: Then? Six hundred yards.

TH: Six hundred? That’s a long net.

RH: Yeah. Well, my drift nets was 3,000 yards. But that wasn't no good. I told them, I said, "We're going to have to stop this. It's costing too—causing too much trouble." And even when we went to meetings, I said, "Y'all are—you're causing too much," I said—I even got up, and I said, "I feel like we should give the kingfish to the king fishermen, and let's catch mackerel with nets." Well, naturally, four or five says, Why are you doing that? I said, "Because that is their living, and if we catch a lot of them, it cuts the price. They'll catch two or three hundred. We'll catch 10,000. Well, if they're only 50 cents a pound, we've done good. But if they're 50 cents a pound, they only got a few hundred." I said, "We need to stop catching kingfish with mackerel, with the net."

TH: This would probably be the 1970s.

RH: Yeah, that would be the '70s then.

TH: When the OFF [Organized Fishermen of Florida] and Concerned Fishermen of Florida's fishing—

RH: Yeah. Yeah, because I went to the meeting. I told them, I said, "We're going to try to." But we had some—you know how some people are. Just like that lady, we called her the "turtle lady." She started, she says, "Y'all are catching too many turtles. We're going to move you offshore three miles." I said, "Now, you know," I said—and one guy got up there, a sport guy, he said, "How many turtles do these fishermen catch?" She said, "We've got a record they caught five last year." He said, "They caught five turtles out of that whole fleet, and you're going to put them out of business for that?" So he says, "I have got a 50-foot yacht. I kill that many every day"—and she said—"You know, it's just, I run over them. I can't help it." And she said, "Well, we can't stop you, but we can stop them."

And I remember getting up there, and I told her, I says, "Lady, you are not after these turtles. You want to put us out, and I know you do." And I said to the—I said, "I want to tell you what the Bible said." This is what I said at the meeting, I said, "The Bible said, 'Be not deceived. God is not mocked. Whatsoever you sow, you're going to reap.'" And then they broke for lunch, right? Well, I was standing out in the hall, and all these commissioners come to me. They said, Sir. I said, "Yeah?" They say, We just want you to know it ain't us, okay?

TH: You scared her.

RH: But that's all she wanted. She was just mad. And she end up losing her job and everything, just like I said. She lost it. But that was another thing. But—

TH: That was a tough period. That was a period when the nets and the hand-liners were—

RH: Oh yeah, fighting. And that's the reason I said, "It's causing too much trouble. We can survive with mackerel. Let them have the kingfish." That's what I told them. Let me see. Oh, I wanted to say, about—what was up to—well, let's see, I talked about the submarines and the boat steering. And back in—there was no inlet, and rattle—I want to talk about the rattlesnakes at the cape. I have never—if you just wanted to walk over to the ocean, you could kill two rattlesnakes every day on the way.

TH: Now, walking from where to the ocean?

RH: Like, when you come in the inlet, the fish house was—

TH: That doesn't work. You have to describe it orally.

RH: Okay, when you come—the inlet—we come in the pass, they'd call it. It wasn't quite an inlet. We'd come in, and we'd go to the fish house. If you wanted to walk over the land to go to the beach, you could kill rattlesnakes on the way. And mosquitoes were so bad that we had screens in our boats. And you had to go in that cabin before dark, and if you had one little, tiny hole in that screen, you were ruined. Your screens would turn black. And I don't know how many—back in—that was when they said mosquitoes was killing cows up there. That's how bad the mosquitoes was. I never—

TH: Approximately what year would this be?

RH: That would've been in '49, yeah.

TH: Okay. I'm going to show you a picture. I've only been to the cape once, and we walked from the parking lot out over to the beach. And I don't know if you can see that picture. That was—we were coming back from the beach, and this huge rattlesnake was right there on the path. And that's my only, one time at the cape.

RH: Really?

TH: This is about—I think it was 2015 or '16. And it was huge. I took that picture on top—

RH: So they're still there?

TH: One is, anyway.

RH: I ain't never—I've never seen so much rattlesnakes, and then that—

TH: That's the first rattlesnake I'd ever seen in my life.

RH: Really?

TH: Out in the wild.

RH: Well, my daddy and I, we was going fishing this one day out the cape. We'd come out, I was going right down the shore, and out there—right when we got to the point, as we went around the point, there was a horseback rider coming from that way. Well, there was a deer standing in the edge of the water. Well, evidently, the horseback rider scared him, and me too. Well, instead of him running on the beach, he took off. Man, he was going hard as he could go, headed northeast for Bermuda. He—

TH: Oh, he took off into the water?

RH: Yeah, he was way off—I said—I told Daddy, I said, “He's going to drown, Daddy. We got to get him back to the beach. He's confused.” So I took a rope, the anchor rope, made a lasso, and I threw it over his antlers and pulled it down. And we got him in the stern. Well, we tried to pull him up in the boat. He drowned his own self. He held his head underwater till he drowned. And we pulled him up in the boat. But somebody told me, they said, “Well, if you had got him in the boat, he would've owned that boat. You'd've got off of it.” I didn't know that. I thought they was like a pet. I was about to go pull him on the boat and pet him. I didn't know they were dangerous.

TH: So the wildlife was pretty thick up at the cape? Cape Canaveral.

RH: Oh yeah. Yeah. But he was—and the Stellars, you remember the Stellars? You ever remember them? The Stellars from down [Port] Salerno?

TH: I've heard people—the Stellars?

RH: Yeah, well, we was riding—I had the deer laying in the back. And we was riding, and this—Francis Stellar come by. I told him, I says, “Come here. Let me show you what I got.” He looked at me, he said, “Where'd you get that?” I said, “I lassoed him.” And he grabbed a butcher knife and jumped in the boat. I said, “What are you doing?” He went back there, and he cut his—I said, “You—what? He's dead.” “No,” he says, “You've got to bleed him as soon as he dies. We're going to eat him.” I said, “What!?” I was feeling sorry for the deer, and all they wanted—they was going to eat that deer. And they took him and ate him.

TH: My goodness. And that was where the mud was. Now can you—you were telling me, before we turned the recorder on, about the mud, when you went up to the cape.

RH: Oh, yeah. When they first dug it, the whole thing was mud, no matter what. You know where they dug down in, to go through into the intracoastal? Well, they just pumped all that up as they dug. Well, the mud was so thick, it was about knee deep. We parked a boat, like, here, and that's where you go through.

TH: You parked the boat, and you had to walk to your car or truck?

RH: Yeah, about a half a mile. The road was out here about—and we had to carry a bucket of water with us to wash all the mud off so we could get in the car. There was nowhere to park anywhere. And right along that little canal, back there where they dug it, is where we had our nets. And there was eight foot of tide. Whenever the tide went down, if you had your boat to the ropes too tight, it would snap all the lines. Eight feet would go up and down. That's how much tide it was there. You had to be careful how you tied it.

TH: Interesting. I didn't—I never knew there were that big of tides in Florida.

RH: Yeah, I know it. But it did—later on, it didn't seem to be so bad anymore. I don't know why. But, well, I think after they—once it went through, it went up and down. But, see, the Cocoa [Beach] and all of them is lower than the sea level. And when they cut through, the ocean just filled it up, so they had to hurry up and close it. That's why you got the locks. You can let boats through, then they close it. They can't leave it open because, on high tide, they would flood Cocoa.

TH: Interesting. Very interesting. How has fishing changed during your lifetime on the water?

RH: Just—for one thing, it's so many, but see, we didn't have no kind of electronics. If you found a place, you had to look on the shore and mark yourself with things on land. Where, now, if they go and you catch a fish, you look at the meter, and it tells you where you're at. When you go home, you come back to that same place, and then somebody else will see you, so he gets a marking. It's just thousands of boats all the time, coming and going. And that's for snapper and grouper—I'm talking about.

But now, mackerel is—mackerel used to go to Miami by the billions. We always went down there and caught them [in] what they call as Hawk's Channel. Instead of going out around to go to Key West, we would go down Hawk's Channel. It was the—inside the reef. Well, the mackerel would get in there by the millions, okay. But then the airplanes started flying for us. He

said, “Come on, we’ve got them right down here.” All the boats would take off. Within five miles, he would have to say, “Slow down. You’re busting the fish up.” They could feel us coming. So we had to idle to the fish or they would spread out. You’d never catch them.

So—and now, there’s 50-footers running up and down that channel by the thousands, so no mackerel goes to Miami anymore. You will—the only way that you’ll catch a mackerel—sometimes they’ll go up in Biscayne Bay, way up in that little place. I hear they’re catching a few. But we’ve caught millions of mackerel in that channel, and they don’t go there anymore because of the boats all the time.

TH: Do you believe mackerel are still somewhere else?

RH: Yeah. Oh yeah.

TH: Or do you think that they caught all the big schools?

RH: Yeah. No, they just—they’re fine at their—for some reason or another, I mean, we can’t, we’re not catching them now because we don’t have no—we’re not catching them because they’re catching them with a pole or cast net now.

TH: You can’t catch them with nets in Florida waters anymore?

RH: No, yeah. But for some reason or another, the little mackerel ain’t coming. I mean, okay, they only come down here to spawn. That’s the only reason they come down.

TH: Come down to where?

RH: Spawn—to Florida.

TH: Where are they the rest of the year?

RH: Up in Carolinas and Virginia. And I’ve been, too. They’re scattered all over. Then they come down here to spawn. Well, when they come down, for some reason or another, every year, we’re not getting a big enough spawn. Years ago, you could set a bunch of mackerel, and when you’d close it, they would be black. They’d go right on through the net and keep right on going. They were so little. We don’t have them anymore. So they’re evidently—they’re going somewhere else to spawn, and it’s getting worse and worse. And that’s what I think—

TH: You mean there's fewer and fewer mackerel.

RH: But no, it can't be fewer, because they're having the babies by the millions. They just start—like, right now, with this red tide, I'm hoping they come this year because they're going to—they're going to go where their babies are not bothered when they have them, you know. And I don't know. That red tide scares me.

TH: Me too.

RH: That green stuff—that doesn't bother me. Not for that because that'll come and go, but the red tide bothers me.

TH: Have you seen red tide in your lifetime ever before on the beach like this?

RH: Uh-uh. No. Never. Now, at the west coast, they have it all the time, you know, off and off [sic]. They're thinking that it comes out of Tampa Bay. I talked to the _____(??) a couple of days ago over there, and they've got it over there bad too. They said that it seems like it always starts around Tampa Bay and goes with the tide, one way or another. And this mullet—oh, by the millions. It just kills the mullet.

TH: So it goes with the tide. Now, help me out here. The water in the Gulf of Mexico flows south around Florida, am I correct?

RH: Yeah, well, see, here's how it is in the gulf. In the gulf, you have—it's almost like an inlet. You've got six hours of tide going to the south—to the northwest. It'll stop and come back six hours going to the southeast. It's just like an inlet, more or less, it's not like the Gulf Stream. It's not like—in other words, if you get a north wind over here, you've got a south tide.

If you get a north wind over there, it don't change the tide. Because it's in a turn basin. You know how the gulf is. Your Gulf Stream stays out here. It don't go up in here. So whenever it—like, sometimes, we would set our nets, and we had to make sure—like, if—when we set a bunch of fish, we had to make sure our end is down-tide to keep the boat out of the net. Well, if it's—like, we've got three hours till it changes, then we have to put our net in the middle, which it's hard to explain that. But it's a—tide goes southeast and northwest in the gulf.

TH: Gulf of—did you fish much in the gulf?

RH: Yeah, we fished over there a lot. Yeah.

TH: You'd take your boats around or through the—

RH: No, I go through Saint—to the locks, come out at Fort Myers, over there.

TH: Okay. But what I was leading up to is the—through the Florida Straits, between Cuba and the south end of Florida, there's a tide. And that connects into the Gulf Stream.

RH: Yeah.

TH: So—waters from the Gulf of Mexico, am I correct?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Flow through the Straits of Florida, and then back up the east coast.

RH: Uh-huh. A lot of times, we have fish who will come around instead of going back. If the weather catches them just right, they'll come up this side of the coast.

TH: Okay, so the red tide could be coming from Tampa.

RH: Oh yeah. Yeah. It could get offshore and get in the tide. Oh yeah.

TH: And that's—a lot of people think that that oil spill a few years ago brought oil over to the east coast.

RH: Yeah.

TH: You've heard that? Or do you—?

RH: Yeah, yeah. Because they found some fish in Jupiter [Inlet] that had oil in it, I think, one time. Yeah.

TH: Okay.

RH: That's what they said.

TH: All right. We've covered a lot of things. Where are you in your notes, there?

RH: Uh, let me just see.

TH: So you think, basically, fish have been targeted by more boats and more people?

RH: Yeah.

TH: It's just—there's just way more people than there were when you first started fishing.

RH: Especially anchor. I mean, like, the snapper and grouper stuff and kingfish.

TH: On the reefs?

RH: Yeah, reef. Yeah.

TH: The reefs have—

RH: The reefs, yeah.

TH:—been fished out pretty much.

RH: Now, I just want to tell you about—I had the—when I was at—you told me you want me to tell you about some things. Well, when I was at the cape, I had bought this Prowler. You know, Prowler, what it is. The boat? What's his name? Hale had one.

TH: Tommy McHale?

RH: Yeah, I think that was—yeah. He had—it was a Prowler. Well, I had one built in Miami.

TH: The *Zora*?

RH: His was *Zora* and mine was called the *Four G's*. Well, I had mine built, and I made it into a net boat. Well, it cost me quite a bit of money, and I was paying for it, and I was catching fish and paying a half. Whatever I caught, they would half of it—they took half.

TH: Who's they?

RH: Hudgins Fish Company. So I was at the cape this one night, right? And nobody went out but me. I went out and I caught—I had like 13,000 mackerel, and I come in. Well, then everybody went the next night and followed me, and that's where I went. So I went up there, and I made a set right off of Titusville. And I made a set—the only boat—and I pulled it down, and I said, “Man, this is—I'm putting too much fish on this boat. What in the world?”

And I said, “If I only I could give some of it away.” But I didn't want to leave my net, you know. I said, “So—well, maybe we'll make it. Let's try it.” Because the wind was out of the west, the southwest. And it was blowing about 25 out of southwest, but I was right along the beach. So I pulled—I got it on the boat, and I started home. Well, my son and my two nephews was fishing with me. And I told them, I said, “We are out of debt. This is it. We're finally out of debt.”

TH: If we can just get back to the dock.

RH: When I come around the pass, when I turn like that and I run into that 30-mile southwest wind from the cape, you're talking about rough—okay, well, now I had a dead sea coming out of the southeast.

TH: A “dead sea” being?

RH: You know, like the swells coming, breaking? But the main wind was out of here. Well, I had—

TH: Out of here being the?

RH: Gulf or the pass—the inlet. Because I come around the cape, you know, like this here. And now, naturally, I turned right ahead on. Well, I couldn't—if I went this way, this sea piled over me.

TH: If you went—

RH: And if I went that way, that one piled up. And my son and them was in the back with a five-gallon bucket, bailing. Pretty soon, I looked back there, and they were swimming. I mean, that boat, it went down. I sunk so fast, right? I had a Bimini top on my boat. Well, when I sunk, I got caught in the Bimini top with 20,000 pounds of fish on the boat, at least that much. Well, I went to the bottom. Well, my kid—my son and them, they just swimming out, you know. All right, well, then—

TH: Now, where was it that you sank? In the mouth of the—

RH: No, offshore, just when I come around the point.

TH: The point of the—

RH: Of the cape. I was eight miles from this way, and about three miles from this way.

TH: Eight miles from?

RH: From the beach, either way. I was eight miles from the inlet and three miles from the beach. Blowing 30 miles an hour out of the southwest, okay. But anyway, when I went down, I got caught. So I got out from underneath the Bimini, and I had boots, oilers all on, naturally. And I swam and swam, and then I started up. Well, when I came up, I come up under the net.

TH: Oh!

RH: The corks was over my head, and I was feeling everywhere. I knew that was it. I said, “Oh, my God.” So I tried one more time. I went down. It was nighttime. I went down, went down. I said, “I’ve got to have air,” and I started up. But when I came up, I breathed air and water at the same time. And I could hear my son, and them, “Daddy!” They were swimming everywhere looking for me. And when I came up, they—the corks above, in my nose, that’s how close I was from almost drowning. Okay, now, here we are, hanging on the net, right? Then the sharks come and start eating the net. Okay, we’re holding on the corks. You can feel the sharks eating underneath your feet, right?

TH: Now, this is in the dark?

RH: Yeah.

TH: And you're how far offshore?

RH: About three miles one way and eight miles the other way. And then— _____ (??) says, "Daddy! They're—sharks is eating the net! We've got to go." I said, "Where are we going? We can't swim three miles as rough as this is." And we didn't, because it was coming towards us. I said, "Lord, what in the world?" Well, under that 20,000 pounds of fish, I had an eight-foot Styrofoam box, right? I told my son, I said, "This is how things work now." I said, "Son, if we had something to hold onto, we'd make it. But if we don't, we're going to drown." That box came up, whoosh, right over there.

TH: Right over you? You're pointing. How far from you?

RH: About 100 yards. Whoosh. I said, "Hey, look!" So we all swam and climbed on the box and started kicking our feet trying to get the boat to go ashore.

TH: The box to go to shore?

RH: Yeah, to float on that box. Glenn Black just happened to be the last boat coming, and daylight was clearing then. And he'd seen an oil slick. He said, "I wonder what that is." So he— pretty soon, he's seen us. And it was so rough when he slowed down and threw her out of gear, we rolled in his boat with the wave. But now, let me just tell you how God works, okay. When my boat sank, I lost everything. I had—my wallet was in the boat. I took it out because I couldn't hardly sit on it. I hated it.

So I was sitting in the hatch, right? It was in the boat at the bottom. I'm sitting up here, I said, "Lord, why would you let this happen to me? I know I'm faithful. I pay you 10 percent of everything," you know, you—for church. You always ask God. Whenever something happens, you start telling him how good you are. But anyway, I look and I said, "Hey, my wallet." It was in the cork line. I said, "Where that—look." I grabbed my wallet. I said, "I can't believe it." I should've known right then that God was on my side. Anyway, I shoved it in my pocket and we went in with Glenn. We got in, and then the next day, we got—the insurance man comes, and he said, "I've got to see the boat."

Track 1 ends; track 2 begins.

RH: So I took him and that guy, Rolly(??), they call him, a salvage man. We went out there. The

insurance man says, "Where is it?" And I looked. You could just see the—I had one of the big antennas, before they came out with them little whips, one of the big ones. And about that much of it, every now and then you could see it—

TH: You say it's showing three inches?

RH: Yeah, about three or four inches when a wave would go by. I said, "It's right there." Well, this guy asked him, "Would you go down and see if the boat's any good?" This is the salvage man. He goes down. When he comes back up, "Help me up! Help me up! Quick! I've never seen that much sharks in my life." And we helped him in the boat, right? And the insurance man said, "Did you see the boat?" "Yeah." He said, "Man, that's a total wreck." He said, "That is no more good." Now, you know, ain't nothing wrong with it. It just wouldn't _____(??) right. He said, "If you don't believe me, here—go see." He said, "Are you crazy?" He said, "Would you buy it?" And he said, "I'll give you \$500 for it." He gave him \$500 for a \$50,000 boat. He brought it in, right? The shrimp boat come, and they raise it up. He took it in, flushed the motor out of it, and it was gone the next day, flying up and down the river.

TH: So did you get any insurance money for it?

RH: Yeah. I only had it insured for \$20,000. But I got that \$20,000, and a friend of mine—now, this is when they was catching—when the tide of Pinellas—

TH: Before you go any further, you're hanging on the corks.

RH: And sharks was eating it.

TH: And sharks were banging on your legs?

RH: On the net—eating the net.

TH: You could feel them?

RH: Yeah, under our feet. Yeah.

TH: And where—at what point did your wallet show up?

RH: When I was hanging onto the cork line.

TH: Did you—now, did you get your slicks off? Your slickers off, yet?

RH: No.

TH: You were still swimming with your boots and your slick—

RH: Yeah, everything. And I looked over, and I said, “Lord, why’d you do this to me?”

TH: But you already had your wallet in your pocket?

RH: No, it was—I hadn’t found my wallet yet. I was just saying, “Lord, why would you do this?” And when I looked and seen my wallet, that’s when I said, in my mind—now I can say—I should’ve thought God was in control. Where did that wallet come from? It was in the bottom. You know what I’m saying? It was—and I don’t know. But anyway, and that was all the money I had on me: \$400. I’ll never forget it. But when I got to the dock, a friend of mine had a boat, like the boat I got now, the *Eddie Boy*, 50-some feet long. He said, “Junior, I heard you lost your boat.” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “My boat is for sale.” I said, “Man, I can’t afford your boat.” His boat was a \$200,000 boat back then. He said, “Junior, I would like for you to have my boat. I love my boat, and I don’t want anybody to just have it.” I said, “I’d like to have it too, but I don’t have it.” He said, “What do you have?” And I told him. He said, “We’ll work it out.” I said, “Really?”

So, anyway, we could work that part out, and Pinellas Fish Company been wanting me to fish for them for years. He called me, and he said, “Junior, if you’ll lobster fish, I’ll pay for everything.” I said, “I’ve never done it before.” He said, “You can learn.” So he bought—he got me 2,000 crawfish traps, right? And I went down in the Keys and lobster fished that year. And then, when the mackerel started, I had a big boat. So I got everything nice. I charged everything—\$72,000 I went in [the] hole. Okay, now—

TH: And was this before you went to lobster fish?

RH: No, that was at—the lobster fishing and the boat? Yeah. He only charged me \$50,000 for the boat. But I started lobster fishing, and we was catching lobster in Pinellas. Said, “Junior, they’re catching a lot of mackerel. Go do that.” So I come up here. When I got up here, that guy, Buddy Daniels, he had already caught 225,000 pounds of mackerel. And it was only the—almost

December—in the middle of November. But I didn't have any mackerel. Okay, so I went out that Saturday when I got there, and I had 25,000. He had 23 [thousand]. So I was a little bit ahead of him, but he already had 200 [thousand].

So whenever I got through there, it was on a Saturday. Well, I don't fish Sunday, right? So he called me. I was in church. The guy comes to me, I happened to be in the office. He said, "A guy by the name of Buddy Daniels wants you." I said, "What?" So I went—I said, "What's wrong?" He said, "I've caught so much fish, I couldn't bring all of my net. Could I borrow your boat to go get the rest of my fish?" I said, "Well, I don't fish Sunday. I guess it won't hurt to pull you out of trouble." So I said, "Go ahead." So he went and got it. Well, he had 50,000 that day. And his 20—he already had 200 [thousand], and then 20 net. He had almost 300,000 to my 200—to my 23, 25 [thousand].

So just to tell you how things worked, when the season was over—I never fished Sunday at all—I had 960,000, and he had a million. So he only beat me [by] 40,000. But he was way ahead of me. And I don't fish Sundays. But what I wanted to say was, this is what happened. From me sinking—right—from me sinking and going through all of that trouble, this is what come out of it. I caught the fish—the money—I built a brand new red brick home. Nobody's ever been—I sat there and watched them build it. I built a red brick, brand new home, 3,300 square feet. I bought a Cadillac that no one ever drove, right off the floor. I bought a truck. And all of this came from sinking. Because I could have never caught those fish with that little boat. So that—that's just how God works. And if you're true to him, he works it right, yeah. So I just wanted to tell you a story of how—what God did for me, one time, when I got a hook in my arm. Can I tell it?

TH: Yeah.

RH: Okay. Well, I went fishing one day, like we always do—king fishing, and you know the double hooks? Where you hook one in with the other one.

TH: Oh, you kingfished for a while.

RH: In the summertime, yeah. I always kingfished.

TH: You hook-and-line kingfish?

RH: Uh-huh.

TH: Okay.

RH: Well, off of Fort Pierce, me and Billy—I always caught mine, you know, I always liked to go south of the buoy, down there where that old buoy was. Well, anyway, I was kingfishing and I caught a dolphin. You know how them crazy things are. And I pulled him in. Well, he shot up in the air. And you know them double hooks, right?

TH: You use double hooks and a strip of mullet.

RH: Mullet. Yeah, well, I had the—the dolphin was on the last hook. But when he went up in the air and come down, the other hook went in my arm. Right here.

TH: That's your—showing your forearm.

RH: Yeah, my forearm. And it went through and come out over here. Like that.

TH: Right through the meat of the forearm, all the way through, and came out.

RH: On the other side. Look. And that fish was going crazy. So I hugged him, like this. And he was shaking me. He wanted to go, and I couldn't—and nobody was on the boat but me. I said, "What in the world am I going to do?" And I looked at that hook, and I said—you know, you can't get that hook out. You ain't supposed to. I looked over there, and I went—and I done like that, and the hook fell out.

TH: Done like what?

RH: I just barely touched it, and the hook came out. And I let him go. He flew all over the boat with a hook in his mouth. But I still had that hook through my arm.

TH: So he got—you got the hooks separated?

RH: Yeah, when I flipped the hook, it come out. You know how you snap them in?

TH: How you—one goes through the eye of the other hook.

RH: Yeah. Yeah.

TH: And it came out of the eye?

RH: Yeah, when I flipped it, I said, “The only thing I could do here—I wonder if it would come out?” And when I done like that, it fell out. So I let him go. He was going crazy with the hook in his mouth. And my—the other hook was through my arm. Well, Billy Baird, he was right—I said, “Billy, I’ve got a hook in my arm. I think I might have to go in.” He said, “All right, I’ll follow you to make sure you’re okay.” I said, “Man, I’m getting dizzy.” Because it—

TH: It was bleeding.

RH: Yeah. So anyway, I made it in, and he took me to the emergency room. This is how God works. Here I am, sitting in the emergency room, a hook all the way through my arm, a number-nine hook. It was stuck in my arm. I’m sitting there. This lady in the next bed, she was crying. I said, “Honey, what’s wrong?” She says, “My husband’s got cancer, and he’s dying.” I said, “Oh, my goodness. Honey, is he ready to meet the Lord if he dies?” She said, “He won’t talk to anybody about the Lord, and he won’t let anybody talk to him about the Lord.” I said, “Holy mackerel.”

So I’m sitting there on the side of the bed. I said, “I’ve got to do something.” I told the Lord, “Now I know why I’m here.” So I slid off the bed, and I went over there. And I said, “Hey, man.” And he said, “Oh, man!” He’d seen the hook, “What!?” I said, “Yeah, it’s bad. How are you?” He said, “Not too good.” And I talked to him. I said, “You—is everything okay? Would you like to pray?” “No, I don’t do that.” I said, “But the Lord loves you. He wants you to be with him if you’re”—and he just said—he just listened. He said, “Wait a minute.” And I said, “Yeah?” He said, “You’re sitting here with a hook all the way through your arm, and you’re over here worrying about me?” I told him, I said, “Well, let me tell you something. This hook is in my arm for you.” He said, “You think God would love me that much?” And I said—and he started crying. I said, “Got him.”

So I told him, I said, “Let’s me and you pray.” Right? Okay, well, his wife was there and his daughter. When I started praying for him, they started—so he got saved, she got saved, and the daughter. And when he died, they kept coming to church, serving the Lord. So I know—and no, that ain’t all. Let me tell you something. Now, right after it done me—uh, what’s that McManus guy? The little guy? Not Mike.

TH: Brant? Brant McManus.

RH: Brant. He got one in his arm. Same thing, same place. About two weeks after that. Well, just the other day, I seen him. I said, “Hey, bud. How are you doing? How’s your arm?” He pulled

that up, and man, it was all bulged out. Man, that looked terrible. I said, “Holy mackerel.” He said, “Well, you had the same thing.” I said, “I know, and the doctor told me”—because he had to pull the muscle out when he—he said, “You’re not going to be able to use your arm for a long time. But I went fishing the next day. I got up the next morning. I said, “My arm don’t hurt.” I went fishing and had a couple of hundred kingfish. But anyway, he said, “Ain’t your arm the same way?” I said, “Look here. It went in here somewhere, I don’t know, and come out over here.”

TH: There. A little spot. That’s about it.

RH: And his is big, I said, “Holy”—

TH: When did you see him? Recently?

RH: Yeah. Yeah, he said, “Yeah, mine looks terrible.” But I’m just saying—

TH: About what year did that happen?

RH: That was probably about seven years ago. Yeah.

TH: You were kingfishing—that’s right you were kingfishing back then. I remember it.

RH: Yeah, yeah.

TH: I fished next to you a few times.

RH: Yeah, a lot of times. I always liked that—remember that old buoy or something floating south of the 12? I always went down there and I caught them around that buoy sometime. Yeah.

TH: Huh.

RH: Yeah. Billy, he got that from coming down there with me all the time.

TH: Billy Baird’s a good fisherman. I interviewed him, I think, last—two weeks ago.

RH: Did you?

TH: Yes, sir.

RH: I remember one time, too, I was in my boat the other day—I was coming home, right? And I had a load of fish. And the airplane, he was happy that I had them, because he gets 10 percent. So on the way home—[audio interruption]—is that all right? So on the way home, he wanted to scare me, right? I loaded down with my boat, hoping I'm going to make it in—

TH: And we're going back to mackerel fishing with the airplanes.

RH: Yeah, mackerel.

TH: This would probably be before 1992 or '94 when they would bar the nets.⁷

RH: Oh yeah. Oh yeah. Yeah, that would be in '70—

TH: Probably late '80s or early '80s?

RH: No, no. That was—with my little boat, that was probably '77. But pretty soon, I heard [makes sound]. He wanted to scare me, right? He'd come down like that, come from the back, [makes sound] and it went like that. And my antenna shot ahead of the boat. He hit my antenna. That's how close he'd come. I call him, I said, "Lord, are you all right?" "Yeah, I scared you, didn't I?" I said, "Lord, is you—are you playing okay?" He said, "Yeah, what's wrong?" I said, "You hit my antenna." "What?" He went and landed. And when he did, on the tail, you could see where it flapped over. That could've killed, he could've wrecked—slick as a—he said, "I will never do that again." I said, "I hope so."

TH: Explain the—the spotter planes used to spot schools of king mackerel later on or—but first, mackerel.

RH: Yeah. Mackerel is all we ever did, till later on, they started playing with the kingfish, yeah.

TH: Okay, fascinating. Okay, fishing methods. We've kind of covered most of the fishing methods, your time in the water, how have things changed. You've talked about that. Large fish corporations: I don't think that's been a factor. Major weather occurrences you've experienced. Water, storms, lightning, high wind, seas, waterspouts? Now, your sinking was pretty, pretty

⁷ In November 1994, Florida voters approved a constitutional amendment that outlawed commercial entanglement nets of more than 500 square feet in state waters. The ban was aimed to limit netting, most notably gill nets, and took effect on July 1, 1995.

harrowing story, right there. Any of those other things? Lightning or high winds that stand out in your mind? Waterspouts?

RH: Yeah, I always got a lot of waterspouts.

TH: You ever been hit by one?

RH: Yeah. That same boat I'm telling you about.

TH: The one that you sank?

RH: Yeah. We was off of Palm Beach one time, off of Hobe Sound, fishing—kingfishing. And I looked, and I said, “Man, look at that waterspout.” So we pulled up our lines. Well, it was coming from the northwest, and I was going south. So I kept giving it—and that boat run over 30 miles an hour. And I'd give her speed, give her speed. And it kept coming and coming and coming. I said, “Holy mackerel.” And when it got just about to me, I said, “I'm not going to outrun it.” So I turned, but when I turned, it got about half of my boat. It was like a wall. You could touch it. This started spinning, I said, “Whoa.” And when it hit the side of me, it took all the top of my boat off—everything.

TH: Your canopy?

RH: Yeah, it'd go [makes sound]. It was gone. If I'd had kept going, it'd flip my boat. I thought I could outrun it, you know. It looked like it was just coming like that, you know.

TH: It was coming from the northwest?

RH: Coming from the northwest, and I was headed south, and I thought I was going to outrun it and let it go over my stern. But it kept coming and coming, and I was doing over 30 miles an hour. I said, “I'm not going to make it.” So I turned like that, and when it turned, it went across my stern. It took everything. Yeah.

TH: Now, that's—I've never heard of such a thing. Tommy McHale got caught in one.

RH: Did he?

TH: And it tore him up pretty bad. George had one hit him—well, he thinks it was that—while he was anchored one night.

RH: Oh, yeah. You know, I was snapper fishing one day in the *Ray Allen* off of the Key, probably about 25 miles offshore. And it got to blowing and blowing. I said, “Man.” So I was right there, and this other guy had just bought a boat. And it was his first trip, and he was about three miles south of me, anchored.

TH: Now, snapper fishing, you anchor at night? Or you anchor—

RH: Yeah, yeah. So I was anchored there, and I kept talking to him back and forth. My radio was up top in the pilot house. And I said, “You okay?” “Yeah.” I said, “Man, if I could get my anchor up, I think I’d head in.” He said, “Well, I can’t get up on my bow at all.” I said, “Me either.” I don’t know—

TH: Because the wind was—

RH: Wind blowing, and rough, way offshore. And I said, “Man, I don’t think I can get my anchor now.” So we just laid there in the wind. Every now [and then], I’d call him. I said, “You okay?” “Yeah.” I _____ (??) blowing; I said, “Lord, that must be blowing 50 miles an hour.” I thought the anchor rope was going to break. I had to go up and wrap it with clothes so it wouldn’t burn it in two. So anyway, the next morning, I looked back there, and the guy was gone. I said, “Well, I would’ve told him if I was leaving.” But seemed to me like he would’ve told me.

About two weeks went by, and I was sitting in the fish house when this guy walks up. He said, “How are you doing?” I said, “Hey, I ain’t seen you since we went fishing together.” He said, “You didn’t hear, did you?” I said, “About what?” He said, that night, he had just bought the boat. Well, it worked and everything, and they must’ve had it all puttied up. It worked till the planks come loose. And the plank came off, and he sunk. His boat’s still out there on the anchor.

And him and his son just floated right off the thing with the kingfish box. They crawled up in the kingfish box. Now here I am, right up there and I didn’t know it. I’m mad because he left me. So I said, “How did you get in?” He said, “It was something. The first day, a ship, I just knew he was going to pick me up. He’d come so close that we’d push the ship off with our hand and nobody’s seeing me.” So he drifted another four days, and finally, a ship picked him up and took him into New York from the cape.

TH: My goodness. What year was this?

RH: That was in the *Ray Allen*, so like 50 years ago, whatever year that would be. We was offshore. I said, “Oh my Lord.”

TH: They were four days—they had no food? Just—

RH: No, nothing.

TH: They were just lucky to get into their fish box.

RH: Yeah, that was completely—yeah, they was doggone. They said when they—he was sitting—he was laying in the bed, and he said, “What was that noise?” And when he done like that, he said water was up to his knees. So him and his son went flying out of the cabin, and down she went. And he’d just bought it. That was his first trip.

TH: I just—I try and imagine, in your fish box in a storm at night.

RH: Yeah. He was just—I mean, naturally, it’d roll over and over and over. But you’d still hold on, you know. You know, it’s just Styrofoam, but that’s the best—everybody talking about, We need a life raft. You can’t beat your kingfish box, because that’s Styrofoam.

TH: You just don’t want any fish in there with you. Huh. Now, that’s quite a story. Okay. Big fish, big catches?

RH: Yeah, I had—

TH: Sounds to me like you’ve had quite a few.

RH: I have. I’ve caught—back in the old days, we could catch sharks. And they was—we was selling the fins and selling the bait. The meat, they would buy them in restaurants and all [over] the world. I just wanted to say, it was—one night, we were running my shark line out, right off of Sebastian, just north of Sebastian Inlet. Well, we went inside and anchored up, I mean, tied up and walked uptown and got something to eat and kill a little time. I came back, and I went out and start picking the line up—

TH: This is in Sebastian?

RH: In Sebastian. And the line was down in, maybe, a mile from the beach. Well, when I went to pick it up, it was a ball. I said, "What in the world?" All these hooks was together.

TH: Now, wait, explain a shark line first.

RH: Okay. Shark line is a little—what is it, 3/16ths line? And then I got a hook. I had five other hooks on it. And the hooks was only about six feet of monofilament with a hook on the end— with a snap.

TH: It snapped onto the main line.

RH: And I just snapped and let it go, yeah.

TH: And it sat on the bottom?

RH: Uh-huh.

TH: Okay.

RH: So anyway, I would keep pulling. I said, "Man, what in the world have we got here?" And we kept—I said, "Pull it easy. You're going to break the line." Well, my roller is 11 feet high—you know, that I pull my net on, right? Well, when I pulled that thing up, I said, "Holy mackerel." It was a tiger shark. I thought it was a great white, at first. But it was—a great white and a tiger looks almost the same, except for the spots, because they've got the fin on the tail, too. You know, it's not round, it's got a bone on the tail.

TH: The tiger shark?

RH: Tiger and the white. But we pulled him up to the boat, I said, "Lord have mercy. What are we going to do with him?" So finally, I had this hook. I hooked it in his jaw and put it—the roller—the rope on the roller, and I turned it on. I pulled him all the way up to that roller, right?

TH: Eleven feet high?

RH: Right. And at least five feet of him was still in the water. I said, "Holy mackerel." So what I did was I tied a rope around this part and cut—

TH: About his tail?

RH: Yeah, and cut him in two. I put that in there, and then I hooked the rope up again to pull the other half in, right? Okay, well, the half with the fin in it, my son sat on the shark. You know, like a cow? And his feet didn't touch the floor. He spread his own legs around him, like that. That's how big that shark was. Inside the shark—

TH: Now, wait a minute. You pulled him up. There were four or five feet left—

RH: Yeah.

TH: —hanging over the stern?

RH: Right. Right. And we cut it in two, pulled that half in, and then throw this rope up there and pull that half in. So now we've got him in the boat, right?

TH: In two pieces?

RH: Two pieces. Well, the big part—he said, “Look at this.” He sat on the back of it. He said, “Look here, I've got me a cow.” And he was sitting on it. That's how big he was, big around. We cut him open, and what do you think he had in him? He had a shoe, all kinds of bones, and a deer's head. The whole antler inside his stomach because they wouldn't dissolve, I guess, you know, in his stomach. But that's how big his mouth was.

So I got him all set, and I come to the fish house, and I went in there, and I told the guy, I said, “Look what I've got.” “Oh man,” he said, “you could sell that to Sea World.” Right? I said, “Yeah, we'll I don't know nothing about it.” He said, “I'll call them.” So I called them and put it in the cooler, right? I said, “Let me know if they ever come.” They said they wanted it. Okay, well, whenever I come—went down there—I went home; I was at Cocoa [Beach]. I took it back to Cocoa. So when I went home to come back, I said, “Did Sea World”—“Yeah.” I said, “Did they leave you any money?” “No, was they supposed to?” I said, “I thought they was going to pay you something.” But anyway, if you go to Sea World and you see a big tiger shark, that's mine.

TH: Is it there today?

RH: I don't know. I don't know. But it was—the biggest jaws I've ever seen in my life. But it had a whole antler, deer head in it and a man's shoe. I hope it didn't eat the man.

TH: My goodness. Amazing. Strange occurrences. You've kind of talked about that with that waterspout.

RH: Waterspout.

TH: Odd lights, empty boats?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Rogue waves or rescues? Tragedies, collisions, other calamities? You've pretty much covered a lot, I mean—

RH: Yeah, I could probably—later on, I could probably think of something.

TH: When I leave, you'll think of some more.

RH: But I was just thinking about that man, that poor man. I said, "Man, it seemed like he would've told me." But he said he drifted. They picked him up on the fourth day and he was— took him into New York.

TH: I wonder if he had insurance.

RH: I don't know.

TH: Probably not. Not too many commercial boats are insured.

RH: No. Uh-uh.

TH: Drug, alcohol, people smuggling?

RH: Let me tell you about the drugs. Everybody knew me in the Keys. They knew who I was because, I mean, if anybody—in the fishing fleet, if anybody gets sick, they say, Junior, so-and-so is about to die. And I'll go and have prayer with them, try to get them to serve the Lord before they die. The Lord has helped me in so many ways, in that way. And I just had a good name,

which is—you know how it is. So what I did was—when I went to go fishing, right? Many times, they'd come up to me—the marine patrol, or Customs, they'd come right up to me like that. And I'd look at them, he said, "Oh, Junior, I didn't know it was you. Have a good day and go." Never checked me. Next time I did, another guy come up, "Hey, Junior!" Never checked me. And he'd go right over and check this boat, that boat, that boat.

So this guy come to me—I won't be saying names—he says, "I'd like to rent your boat tonight. I'll give you \$100,000." That was when \$100,000 was a lot of money. I said, "What? For what?" "All I want to do is ride in your boat. Can I ride your boat?" I said, "You've got a load of marijuana you were going to pick up?" He said, "Well, I don't want to tell you that." I said, "Yeah. Now, do you have confidence in me?" "Yeah, I believe you're about the best Christian man I know." I said, "Would you have confidence in me if I gave you my boat?" He said, "See you later." The next day, he comes to me. "You lost 100,000. It worked. We got in without getting caught." I said, "Okay." But about two months after that, he was in jail.

TH: Other stories along those lines? You ever see any floating bales?

RH: Let me tell you something. I have fished my whole life and have never seen a bale floating. I tell you what I did one day. I was coming in one day, and my son was sitting up on the bow. And he said, "Daddy, look at that." I said, "Yeah, it's probably garbage." "No, I think that's a bale." [I] said, "Well, I don't want it." He said, "Just go look." So I went over there and sit there and looked and you could see—I said, "See, that's garbage. What was you thinking of when you seen that?" He says, "How you was going to get to the dock." I said, "You were going to throw me overboard?"

TH: I think I saw one, one time.

RH: You did? Yeah.

TH: One bale. And it was a whole—you know how the fleets used to fish, and it'd be a bunch of boats as far as you can see?

RH: Yeah.

TH: And this was on the opposite side of the fleet. I just—I thought I saw it. It looked exactly like, you know, something floating. But I went by it, and it was gone. I never—anyway, that was my one time.

RH: Yeah, that's something. As much as I've been out, I've never seen them. Now, I've seen

boats loaded. I went down to the fish house one day, and I says—and I won't mention any names, just in case. So one guy came to me, "Junior, what are you doing?" I said, "I'm going fishing." It's about one o'clock in the morning. He said, "Get in your boat and go fishing." I said, "I am." He said, "No. I mean now." I said, "What in the world?"

So we went down and climbed in the boat. As I went out, there was two boats over there, along the side, loaded all the way up to the roller, the whole two of them. And they had a semi over the steeves. And that one had boats in there already, and rolling—and if anybody come up and—you know, if you want to make some money, this is what they told me, all you've got to do is get over and get in line and help them load it. Because they're not going to run you off.

TH: Oh, my goodness. Humorous, funny stories. Those are kind of humorous, actually. Those are wild days with the bales of marijuana. Any other humorous or funny stories you can think of? You'll think of them after I leave, I'm sure.

RH: Oh, I'm sure. Yeah, well, you know, you too would think of different things, yeah.

TH: And anything else you wish to share about your life as a fishing captain in Florida?

RH: Yeah, well, let me tell you about this one thing about this one time I went fishing on the way home to Palm Beach. On the way fishing, I seen this guy laying on a surfboard, asleep.

TH: Out in the ocean?

RH: Yeah. He was just laying on the board. I said, "Man, he's a long ways offshore."

TH: How far out were you?

RH: He was probably a mile because—and I said, "Man, I wonder if he knows that he's drifted." The wind was out of the west. Well, I went on fishing. And I came back. When I got to that spot, I looked all over for him. I said, "Man, I guess he woke up and went in." Then I looked offshore and I seen a little knot, and I said—and I went way—about another three miles. There he was, still asleep, way out there. And I went out there, and I said, "Hey!" He said, "Yeah." I said, "You know where you're at?" Well, down there, he couldn't see shore, because it wasn't high enough. He said, "Where am I?" I said, "You're offshore." "Which way is—which way is beach?" I said, "Come on, get in the boat." I put him on the boat and took him to shore.

TH: And when was this? Here in Fort Pierce?

RH: No, at Palm Beach.

TH: Palm Beach.

RH: Yeah.

TH: My goodness. It's a wonder he didn't float all the way to Fort Pierce.

RH: Yeah, he'd have been gone. Once he got off of that tide, he'd have been gone. But he had been all right, as long as he didn't run out of arms.

TH: Well, before you get into—while you're talking about that, I've had a lot of people ask me, and I said, you know, I just shook my head—people don't realize how big the ocean is. I mean, it's huge. About those two boys that came out the Jupiter Inlet and got lost:⁸ Do you have any theories on what happened or—

RH: The only thing I can say with something like that was they was inexperienced to rough weather. And I say they was probably running too fast, and they skipped a wave, hit the side, it threw them out of the boat, and they couldn't get back to the boat because it was so rough. That's what I think happened, because they was just kids. And you know how if it gets rough, "Speed her up, let's go in." Well, if that wind really was rough enough, which they said it was a bad storm, I think, like, you know when you go, sometimes you hit, you do like this, and then you try to straighten up, and you hit again instead of slowing down. A lot of people don't slow down; they leave it. Well, when they do, they skip. And then, I think it shot them right out of the back of the boat, and the boat flipped away from them, and they couldn't get back to it. That's what I think happened.

TH: It's anybody's guess, but that's interesting.

RH: Yeah, now, another thing, as he's throwing these cast nets—I've always told these guys, "Do not"—you know how you make a loop in a rope and stick it on your arm? I said, "Do not do that. Make a rope that you can always pull your hand out. Don't—none of them ropes that tighten." Well, this guy, him and his wife was in Jupiter Inlet throwing the cast net. Well, he threw it, and when he did, it got hung, right? Okay, well, he couldn't pull it, and his wife was running the motor. And he kept trying to get his hand off, and he couldn't get his hand off because of, you know, how they'd tied this.

⁸ On July 24th, 2015, two Florida teenagers disappeared in the Atlantic waters of Jupiter Inlet. Austin Stephanos and Perry Cohen boarded a 19-foot 1978 SeaCraft. They were last seen buying gas at a gas station before setting out for a fishing trip. Later that day, a severe thunderstorm occurred in the area, and the two were never heard from again.

And he says, “Come ahead, come ahead, speed her up, speed her up.” But it was in reverse. She speeded it up and shot him right off the bow. Well, naturally, the tide was so strong, naturally, it just pulled him to the bottom, and he drowned right there with that rope on his hand. That’s why I tell all my boys, never, ever do that. And that same guy, Brant McManus, I told him, I said—he said, “You’ve got to know what you’re doing.” I said, “Really?” He says, “Yeah. When I throw the net, I’m right here. I’ll throw the net, and I’ll throw her out of gear, and everything.” I said, “Okay.” About a month after that, we was down in Salerno Inlet, right? Everybody was throwing, throwing, throwing. Pretty soon I looked over, and [makes sound] and he was in the water, and the boat was gone.

TH: Who? Brant?

RH: Yeah. I said, “What happened, Brant? You lost something. What happened?” He said, “You see me here today? In all of my life, you will never see me throwing a cast net on the ocean again.” He quit. I said, “What happened?” He said, “I didn’t know it could happen that quick.” I said, “I told you.” When he threw the net, it got hung, and he couldn’t reach the throttle. And he was gone.

TH: I’m going to interview Brant. I’m going to ask him about that when I interview him.

RH: Ask him, yeah.

TH: All right, well this is the final question. Your life on the water—anything you want to share about life as a fishing captain in Florida? And if you could generalize about your life as a fishing captain.

RH: Uh, I don’t know. I’ve just tried to be a good captain. I don’t know.

TH: Have you enjoyed it?

RH: Oh, I’ve enjoyed every bit of it. It was rough, but all that joy, I would never—I wouldn’t trade it for nothing in the world, no.

TH: Why?

RH: It was just something about it. It was your own. You was your own man. Everything was up to you. You either made it or you didn’t. And I knew I had the Lord on my side. That was one of the main things. But sometimes, we would eat good. It would be chicken today and bones

tomorrow. But I've really enjoyed my life fishing. Oh, my goodness.

And let me tell you this one story of what happened to me in the Bahamas. This is kind of dumb. But I took my boat to the Bahamas, right? And—because to crawfish, I had the ship out. I had a ship in Palm Beach carrying my traps over and put them out there on the coquina banks over there. And then I took my boat, the *Eddie Boy*, and went across. Well, on the way in, over there, I knew I had to go to customs, right? To be able to get my—to get things straightened out. On the way in, right, I got—my top teeth's false. This is kind of stupid, but listen. I said, "I've got to brush my teeth before I go in there and talk to all them people." So I took my teeth out—do you know Donald Stellar?

TH: No, sir.

RH: Okay, well, anyway, I said, "Donald, steer for me for a minute." So he was steering, and I was brushing my teeth at the door. And I looked, I said, "I better get away from this door."

TH: The door?

RH: Of the pilot house. I was afraid, if I lost my teeth, they'd go in the water. So I moved over. And I was brushing them, and I said, "I better"—and when I done look [makes sound], it slipped out of my hand. It hit the floor—hit the floor and 2,000 feet of water. My teeth were gone. I said, "What? I ain't believing this." Okay, I said, "Now, I've got to go ahead and talk to the people." And everything is [makes sound]. You couldn't talk. And I said—I felt so bad, I called my wife, I said, "Honey, I lost my teeth." "You lost your what?" Naturally, that was funny. And I've been going back and forth over there. I know how long it takes to get an airplane. Well, I said, "Find out if they can make teeth someplace in one day. I heard they do." She said, "I'll find out." I said, "And I'm going to try to get a plane as quick as I can."

Well, I had to rent a taxi to carry me to the airport. When I got to the airport, just as I got there, they said, "Where would you"—I said, "I want to go to Palm Beach." "Oh, well catch that plane right there." It was leaving. He said, "Hold up!" And they gave me a ticket; I run out there and got on the plane. I said, "Man." When I got—excuse me—when I got there, it went into Fort Lauderdale. My wife and my kids was there to pick me up—excuse me. And when they picked me up, I said, "Where is there a place?" She said, "Melbourne." I said, "Really?" "Yeah." We went to Melbourne, right?

TH: From Fort Lauderdale?

RH: From Fort Lauderdale. Listen.

TH: It's a long drive.

RH: Hey. I went in there, and he took a print of my teeth, right? Okay. I said, "Let's go get something to eat." But naturally, it would be soup. I can't eat. So I went in this restaurant, and I sit down, and I was sitting there eating. And, oh boy. This boy's name. I can't—Shaq? Anyway, when I get—when I sit there, I says—something told me, it said, You need to call Shaq. I said, No. And I don't mean the other boy. I said, Why? To myself. Then I thought—I said, No. He just moved to the West Coast. He's fishing over there. So I just let it go. Then something said, You need to call Shaq.

TH: Something said? Nobody said it?

RH: No, in my mind. So I looked, and there was a phone booth. Back then, you had to have a phone booth. So I went over to the phone booth, and I said, "I'll just see if he's still in town." And I looked. Boom. I said, "Oh, there it is right there." So I called. I called, and I said, "Hey this is Junior." And his wife, she says, "Junior!" And [she] started crying and hollering. I said, "Wait a minute, honey, what's wrong?" She says, "Come quick, please." She says, "Shaq is going to shoot us. He's got a gun." I said, "What? Where do you live?" And she told me. She said, "Where are you?" And I said what street I was on. She said, "We live on the same street, just come west." The same street with—

TH: In Melbourne?

RH: Yeah. So I jumped up and headed down the road. And I've come to her street, and I turned when I went down, and I knocked on the door. I could hear him, "Don't you open that door." But she runs to come open the door. When I walked inside, he looked at me. He says, "What are you doing here?" I said, "What's wrong, man?" I said, "What are you doing?" He says, "Nobody loves me. They know I've got cancer, and they don't care. I'm dying, and they're going to die too." And he's holding that pistol. I said, "You mean, you're going to kill your—because you think nobody loves you?"

I told him, I said, "Let me tell you, son," then I told him the story. I said, "That wasn't coincidence. None of this." I said, "The Lord loves you enough to send me here today to spare your life and your family." He said, "Do you think he really loves me that much? Why would he make you suffer because of it?" I said, "Because that's how much he loves you." But then I seen his lip start trembling, right? And so I got on my knees. And I prayed for him and his kids and all. They just start crying. But now, you say, "Man, that's stupid." I don't care. That's what happened. I've never—I said, "Do you mean"—and the teeth that they made for me, right? That was back, Lord, 40-some years ago. And the guy told me, when he made my teeth, he said, "They'll only last three years to the most." That was 40 years ago, and I still got them.

TH: They look pretty good.

RH: Same ones. Forty years. And I've dropped them on the floor. I've dropped them everywhere. But they said it'd only last three. But I just wanted to say that, how God works in my life.

TH: So your teeth bounced out of the cabin, out the door, and over the side?

RH: Two thousand feet of water. A guy told me the other day, he caught a fish over in—over there in the Bahamas, and he had a teeth mark in him. I said, "Yeah, right."

Pause in recording.

TH: We're talking about AJ Brown.

RH: AJ Brown, yeah. I was right beside him. Well, sometime, he'd come down, I say, "Hey, AJ. You going fishing tomorrow?" "Yeah." He said, "Are you?" I said, "No, it's Sunday." He said, "Oh, I forgot." I said, "AJ, won't you come and go to church with me sometime?" "Yeah, you know, I've thought about that." I said, "Well, will you?" "Well, no, not this time." And he said, "But I'm going to tell you one thing. If I ever really want to change and do anything, you'll be the first one that I'll"—I said, "Okay." Well, then, you remember when they went diving, and his best friend drowned catching crawfish?

TH: Yeah.

RH: He was sitting at the dock that day, crying in the boat. And I said, "AJ, that could've been you, man." I said, "Just as slick as that. You've got to make sure you're right." He said, "Let me tell you something. When I'm ready, I will call you." I said, "Okay, AJ. Okay." Right after that, you remember he was up there, and he fell overboard? And only one boat found him, you remember?

TH: Off the cape.

RH: Off the cape. So he comes in. I said, "AJ, somebody's talking to you, boy." I said, "Now"—he said, "Junior, listen. Didn't I tell you, if I want to, you will be the first one?" I said, "Okay, AJ." Well, about two or three months after that, the guy at the fish house said, "Junior, AJ said

he wants you to call him.” I said, “Oh, man. Wonder what this is all about?” So I called him. He said, “Would you mind stopping by?” I said, “Sure. Where do you live?” And he told me, and I went to his house. He said, “I don’t know if you’ve heard, but I’m dying.” I said, “No, AJ.” He said, “And I would like to make things right.” I said, “Oh, man.” I told him, I said, “You know, when you have a friend, all you want to do is give that friend good gifts. The gift—me hearing you asking God to forgive you is the best gift you could ever give to me.” And he asked God to forgive him—is it off, or—

TH: It’s on.

RH: But he asked God to forgive him. And he cried and cried. And that’s why, at the funeral, I done this, talked about it in his funeral. But that was something. He says, “I will call.” He was a good little fisherman.

Pause in recording.

TH: Okay, I’m still with Captain Junior Harden. And he’s going to tell us about his experience during the Mariel boatlift.⁹

RH: Okay, well, I came in from fishing one day. And when I—as I was coming in, I seen all these boats flying out, down in the Keys, at Marathon Fish Company. And when I went in, I said, “What in the world is going on?” I said—they called him the Peanut President. What was his name?

TH: Jimmy Carter.¹⁰

RH: Yeah. He said, “Yeah, you can go bring your in-laws back.” Well, everybody—they was running down trying to hire people. Well, when I got there, this car pulled up with a bunch of Cubans in it. And they come up to me, and they say, Would you carry me to Mariel Harbor, to Cuba, and pick up my grandkids and my grandparents? I said, “I can’t go over there.” He said, “Yeah. They said we could do it.” So I said, “Well, hold on.” He said, “I’ll give you 16—all we could come up with is \$16,000.” And I said, “Just to go to Mariel Harbor?” He said, “Yeah.” Well, most of everybody was getting 30- and 40,000, but that’s all they could come up with. I said, “Well, let me find out if it’s legal.”

So I went up to Customs, and he says, “Yeah, you can go.” I said, “Well, now, one more place.”

⁹ The Mariel boatlift was a mass emigration of Cubans from Mariel Harbor to the US. The Mariel boatlift was a result of the Castro regime’s announcement that all Cubans wishing to emigrate to the US would be free to board boats at the port of Mariel, west of Havana.

¹⁰ James Earl Carter Jr. was the 39th president of the United States (1977-1981). Carter was raised on a farm where his family grew, packaged, and sold peanuts. During his presidency, Carter also lifted a series of restrictions on US travel to Cuba.

So I went to the Coast Guard, they said, Yeah, it's okay. I said, "Oh." So I went down, I told them, I said, "Okay, how long are we going to be going?" He said, "We're just going to go, and then get on the boat, and come back." I said, "Okay." So he said, "Here's the money." He gave me \$16,000. Well, I give it—went to the fish house and give it to the owner there at Pinellas Fish Company. I said, "Put this in the safe for me." We went out and got a few groceries, nothing much. I thought we was coming right back. So we went up there and went into Mariel Harbor. A band of boats—

TH: About how far a trip was it?

RH: Ninety miles. About a 90-mile trip, then we went in. As we went in, well, there was a gunboat there. And you went in and handed them the names, and then they'd tell you to go over there and dock. Well, there was no dock. We just went over and anchored. Well, it must've been 500 boats in there after we finally got in, and it was just a little place. Every day, every day, I said, "What good—we'll run pretty soon." And at night time, we was like we was in a concentration camp. Up on the hill, there were search lights. And they would flash across the boats all night, you know, thinking we was going to get out or that some of the people would get on our boat. So we did that for nine days. People was buying and selling food. There were shrimp boats and no ice, no—but it got bad, now. And—

TH: What did you have to—you ran out of food?

RH: Yeah, because we only went in for a couple of days, and it was nine days. So a bunch of us, we'd get together, and we'd try to fix a little meal and share it. Well, then people started coming by—uh, I think a can of beans was, like, \$30. And man, they was going bananas. I said—well, this one night, this man, he broke loose from somewhere because he came, and this woman was sitting on the side of the boat—I mean, in the stern—this guy pulled himself up over the side. It was a Cuban, broke loose from the prison. The prison was just over the hill. Well, they just looked at him, right? Well, the woman hollered, "Look!" Well, the guy standing on the hill up there with the rifle, he runs down, jumps from boat to boat—because you're just like that. Went down and had—

TH: Because, you mean, the boats were tied together? More together?

RH: Yeah. Yeah, there wasn't nowhere to dock tie. So he jumped and went in there. When I went to help him in the boat, he just stuck the bayonet right through him, right there. And the woman died with a heart attack that was sitting on the stern. So two people died right there.

TH: The woman was not with you?

RH: No, she was in this other boat. Yeah. She screamed, and that's why the man on the hill come running down there. And that guy was trying to get in the boat, so he killed him—from one of

the prisoners.

TH: Was that your boat?

RH: I was in my boat when I was there, but they didn't die on my boat. It was next to two boats over. So anyway, the ninth day—okay, my son, he was with me. But Rodney, he brought Lester's boat over, the *Miss Jodie*.

TH: Rodney Black?

RH: No, my nephew. No, Rodney Harden.

TH: Okay.

RH: He brought the little *Jodie* over there. Okay, well, he was—and I heard—he was down further than me, a little bit further. But he said, "Uncle Junior, I'm going." I said, "If you go, they're going to—the only way you can go if it's not your time, is you've got to carry a load of prisoners." He said, "I don't care. I've got to go." So they said they was cleaning the prison out. Well, he—I said, "Well, all right." So he went over there to the side where you go to load up.

And what he told me, he said, "You ought to see it over here." He said, "For the people that was waiting to leave, kids and everybody waiting, they had a block of ice sitting on the sand. And that—only drink they could have is they'd lick that block of ice. That's all." The kids had to lick the ice for water. I said, "Rodney, what are you going to do?" He said, "Uncle Junior, I'm getting out of here." Because that same day, [Fidel] Castro came by in a helicopter and was hollering, "You Yankee pig-dogs! You Yankee pig-dogs!" That scared us to death.

So he went over to load up. I said, "Rodney, you're going to leave?" I mean, I told Ray, I said, "Ray, are you going to leave your daddy in Cuba?" He says, "Daddy, I've got to go." I said, "No, you don't have to." I said, "Okay, go." So they went over to load up, right? Well, I'm sitting here, and this man—these people in my boat, they said, "Captain." He says, "Maybe we'd better get out of here. It don't sound good." So I said—I started up and was headed over. At first, the day before that, let me tell you what happened. A storm—about 90-mile-an-hour winds, they said—came down. And the only—if I hadn't had my son there, I'd've sunk. But anyway, he knew just what to do. I backed down real hard. He threw the anchor in the boat, and I took off. And it blowed so hard, I kept the boat in gear, inside the harbor. I—whenever the storm went by, there was shrimp boats laying on its side, and people everywhere. Man, what a storm.

But anyway, where I'm at now, where I said—they said, Take us home. If we gave them the ticket, maybe our kids will come with somebody else. I said, "Okay." So I headed out for the inlet, and I see these boats in line. And there were—the guys with the machine guns turned the guys around. The next boat comes up and, "Ah!" And they'd hold the gun, and they turned around. He says, "Go ahead up there." I said, "No. Nobody's going. They're not going to let us out." He said, "Just go up there." So I got up there close to them. And the guy climbed up on the bow, the Cuban. And they argued back and forth, back and forth, and he was throwing the machine gun like that. I said, "He's going to shoot us, man." He said, "Throw her in gear." I said, "Throw her in gear?" So I pushed it in gear, and I was just idling. And he was idling alongside me, right? And the inlet was right there.

TH: The Cuban coast guard?

RH: Yeah, the Cuban boat, the run boat—gun boat. It was, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah." Pretty soon, he says, "Will this boat run?" I said, "Not that fast." He says, "Put her in gear, and give it to her." I said—and they was, "Yeah, yeah, yeah." Screaming back and forth. I said, "Lord help us." So I pushed it on, and I took off. And when I took off, I was headed almost to the inlet. When I pulled out of the inlet, I looked back, and that guy just turned around. I said, "What did you say to him?" He said, "You don't need to know." I said, "Holy mackerel." So I got out, right? And I'm leaving. I call Ray Allen. He was in there loading up with prisoners. I said, "What are you doing?" He said, "We'll soon be loaded. We must have 40 or 50 people on here already." They was all underneath the bilge, everywhere.

TH: The prisoners? All prisoners?

RH: Yeah.

TH: Did they let any of the kids and family go?

RH: No. For every one you brought, you had to bring a prisoner.

TH: For every family or—

RH: Yeah. Yeah, so he had—they said they had people underneath the—under the floor, the deck, everywhere, boat people. I said, "Okay, I'm going." He said, "Going where?" I said, "I'm out. I'm going." "You're going to leave your son in Cuba?" I said, "You left me." They were so loaded with people, I don't know how many boats turned over when they seen Florida. When they seen—knew they was out. When they seen it, they'd all run to one side, and the boats would turn over. They had—one boat had 200 people drowning. And they wouldn't let the people from

America go save them because it was Cuban waters. They drowned right there. Boy, that was a bad experience.

Well, anyway, about six months—oh, they had told me, they said, Are you going to keep our money? I said, “Now, you told me whether or not, I could have the money. You remember?” “Yes, sir.” I said, “I’ll tell you what. The money’s in the safe. I’ll wait for two weeks. If they don’t come, I’ll give you half of it back. The money’s in the safe.” They said, “That’s fair enough.” So about three weeks, I got this phone call, “Captain Harden, Captain Harden.” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “Keep the money.” I said, “What’s wrong?” He said, “All of my people have come back.” I said, “Oh, that’s good, man.” So every year on that date, they send me an invitation for the family reunion.

TH: Where’s the family reunion?

RH: In Cuba—in Miami. Every year on that same date, I was invited to the family reunion.

TH: Have you gone?

RH: No.

TH: That’s pretty nice.

RH: Yeah.

Track 2 ends; track 3 begins.

RH: When I was in the Bahamas crawfishing on coquina banks, right? Well, I was pulling traps, you know. I would pull about 500 traps a day. Well, it was getting dark. And I says, “Man,” I told Edwin, one of my crews that pulled the traps, I said, “we’ll pull one more line and go in.” He said, “Okay, Cap, which one?” I said, “Well, pull either, uh, 16 or 17.” Well, 16 was first. I had to run about 20, 30 minutes to get to it.

TH: There’s a string of—

RH: Yeah, I had 500 crawfish buoys—I mean, 100 in a line.

TH: On a string?

RH: Yeah, probably five or six miles long. Well, I said, “We’ll pull 16. It’s first.” He said, “Okay, Cap.” Then I kept saying, something says, No, you need to pull the 17 line. And then I

said to myself, I said, “I think we’re going to pull 17.” “Okay.” Well, I got there, and I could see 16. I said, “No, grab 16.” So we starting pulling. And we pull trap, trap, trap. Well, sometimes, when you run your lines out like that, if you’re not careful, you’ll see the other line.

TH: You mean, if you try to run them parallel?

RH: Yeah, yeah. So I had—16 was like this. And 17 was over here, like this. But somehow or another, I must’ve got out of whack, because I got close enough to see 16, and then I straightened back out again when I set them out. Well, when I was doing 16 line, I seen the 17 line. I said—and this wasn’t doing a lot of good, so I’m going to get the other half of 17. He said, “What are you doing?” I said, “Well, I’m going to switch over to 17.” “All right, it’s getting dark, remember.” I said, “I know.” So we started pulling 17, okay.

TH: From the middle of the line?

RH: Yeah. So I started pulling, right? When I got to the last buoy, I looked, I said, “What is that?” And holding on to number 17 buoy was a 14-foot boat with six people in it. The little tiny motor it has [is] about that big; you could see it was burnt up.

TH: About that big? You’re holding your hands about three feet apart.

RH: Yeah, it was just a little old tiny motor. Like one horse [or] something. I don’t know.

TH: Was it outboard?

RH: No, inboard. And that had done burned up, you could tell. And I said, “Holy mackerel.” And they were holding onto the buoy with the marking “17” on it, right? And I said, “Holy”—I said, “Edwin, look at that.” He said, “Wow.” And they kept [makes sound]. I said, “Man, I don’t know what to do, Edwin. It’s only me and you, and it’s five of them. They could take this boat.” So, I had a shotgun in the boat. I go down and got the shotgun and laid it up there.

And I had outriggers, I had the big outriggers like a shrimp boat because it’s always so rough over there. Man, that boat was doing like that. Well, they [makes sound]. And I could see the lady, and four men, right? And it was just back and forth. Well, when it went down, one jumped and grabbed on the outrigger and started climbing in the boat. I didn’t know whether to shoot him or what. And Edwin says, “What are we going to do?” So, naturally, I’m talking to the Lord all the time. I said, “Lord, help us.” So he climbed up to the boat [makes sound]. And I said—and he couldn’t speak.

TH: You're showing me—you're holding your hand at your mouth and your stomach. And he was holding his hand in his mouth?

RH: Yeah, he'd want something to drink or eat, anything. So I said, "Okay." And I pulled him on the boat, and I gave him a drink. And he was drinking. And the others was in the boat, was slapping back and forth. I said, "Edwin, we might as well get them on in here." So we pull them up to the boat, and they all climbed on the boat, right? And I went to shove the boat, "No, no, no!" I said, "Huh?" They said, [makes sound]. Well, the little girl, about this tall, was laying in the bilge.

TH: You're showing about a three-feet-tall little girl?

RH: Yeah, she was about, I don't know, four or five years old, laying in the bilge. She had been drinking the bilge water, and dying right there. That girl, with one more day, she'd have been dead, right there. And we couldn't—pulled her up in the boat, and got her up in the boat. And I had a big freezer then. I had ice cream and all kinds. And I gave her some ice cream and water. And then the cook, he went down below and started cooking.

TH: Their cook? They had a cook with them?

RH: No, my cook. Yeah, he went down to make them something to eat. They hadn't ate. And I told them, I said, "How long? How long?" Either five or six—five or six. Something like that. I couldn't understand them, and they couldn't, but we talked. We got them something to eat and everything, and I done like that, and he says, "Miama?" I said, "No, Bahama." "No, Miama." I said, "I ain't going to Miami. I'm from Bahamas." Oh, and they hung their heads down. I said, "Ed, we might as well take them in. We can't work anymore."

So we come on in. I traveled half the night to get back to the Bahamas. Well, naturally, before I got there, I called customs. And I said, "I've got five people on the—four men, a lady, and a baby, a little girl. I'm bringing them in." "We'll meet you at the dock." So when I got to the dock, man, they were mean to them. They snatched them over—I said "Hey, wait a minute. They're on my boat. Don't do that to them. They haven't done nothing." And he looked at me. And I didn't know what he was going to say. But I said, "That's no way to treat them, like that." So they got them in. Well, the next day, I went down to my place where I was staying. The next day, I got in the car, and I was riding down the road—there's only one road on that whole island—and I was coming down—

TH: What island was it?

RH: Huh?

TH: What island?

RH: Long Island. Long Island, Bahamas. That's about 200 miles south—north—southeast of Nassau. That's where all my people was born. My daddy's people. They was from England. Well, anyway, the next morning, I'm driving down the road, headed down. I wanted to find out what happened to them. Well, as I was going, I see these bunch of people standing on the side of the road. I said—so I slowed way down, and I said, "Oh, that's the guys we brought in." And they seen it was me, and they run right in front of the car. I stopped, and they got on their knees, hands and knees—like this. I said, "No, you don't."

TH: They—like this? Like they're bowing down to you?

RH: Yeah. And I said, "No, God saved you, buddy." That's why he kept saying "17." But that looked so funny. Them holding that 17 buoy. One more day, they'd have been dead. Their mouths was just—I don't know—and where they was, if they'd have let go of that buoy, they had no anchor, no rope, no nothing. They was just plain drifting.

TH: Were they from—Cubans?

RH: Cubans.

TH: And what did they do? What ended—how did they end up—I mean, finally, how do they live in—do they live in Nassau, or did they send them back to Cuba?

RH: No, they sent them to Miami. And then they probably either done one thing or another there. But it was on CNN. It was on—whenever they said that a Bahamian vessel brought in six Cubans, and that was me.

TH: This was about what year?

RH: That was, uh, let's see. I had the boat in '77, '80—probably '85, I guess.

TH: Nineteen eighty-five.

Pause in recording

RH: When I was in Hampton, Virginia, they—the Fass Brothers Fish Company came down, and asked, could we come up there and catch bluefish for them? They was going to catch them and clean them, and send them to Siberia if we could catch them, they said. But all their fishermen has tried, and they can't catch them. So me and Henry Crane and Ronnie Howell and Jeff Altman, we took four boats and went to Virginia. We made nets and all. When we went up there, it was the funniest thing. And we had an airplane.

TH: Now, wait. You made gill nets?

RH: Yeah.

TH: And you went to Chesapeake Bay?

RH: Yeah. Hampton, Virginia, is right there at the bridge that goes over to Norfolk, Virginia.

TH: Okay.

RH: So we fished at that fish company, big—Fass Brothers—big company. Well, when we got there, we went out of the airplane—stopped to—“Y'all let me know.” So we called in, we said, We're coming out. Okay, they went up there, and they said, See that bunch? I said, “Man, that's a big bunch of bluefish.” That you could see. And he said, “Okay, I'm going to put you around them.” Okay, well, Jeff was first.

TH: Jeff who?

RH: Altman.

TH: Altman.

RH: So the airplane says, “Let her go.” And he circled them up and waited, waited, nothing. That bunch of fish came up right over there, out of the net.

TH: They came up in a different place?

RH: In a different place.

TH: How deep was the water?

RH: Forty feet. And I—so I said, “Man, what in the world?” So then the other guy, he said, “Try me.” So he went up to a bunch of fish. He said, “I’m going to set real fast.” He went [makes sound] and waited, waited—

TH: He’s making a circle. He’s setting a circle?

RH: Making a circle around them. And they came up right over there.

TH: They came up in another area on the net?

RH: In another area. So the pilot, he said, “I told you. You can’t catch them.” I said, “Well, I don’t know. Now”—

TH: How deep were the nets?

RH: Oh, probably 50 feet. Yeah.

TH: So plenty deep enough to go to the bottom.

RH: Oh, yeah. Yeah. It was on the bottom. So I said—so the only two boats that hadn’t set was me and Ronnie. Well, everybody’d go, We might as well go on back to Florida because they cannot be caught. I said, “Now, wait a minute. The Bible said that we have dominion over everything. We can figure a way to catch these fish.” So I told Ronnie, I said, “Ronnie, come here. Get on my boat.” He got on my boat. I said, “I’m going to show you something. I’ll draw out the fish. Now here is what I want you to do. I want you to come from the north. And I’m going to come from the south. When we get to that bunch of fish, drop your net. You let go, and I’ll let go, and then we’ll go this way, like this.”

TH: Now, “This way, like this,” we’ll go opposite directions?

RH: Well, as we passed each other, we dropped our ends, right?

TH: Yeah.

RH: He was going this way, and I went on around here, and he went on around—

TH: You went the opposite directions and made a circle?

RH: Right, right. So we lapped, and I said, “Now, when we pass each other like this, when you get over to here, and I get over to there, you pass”—

TH: When they get over to the other end of the circle?

RH: Yeah. I said, “You pass me and run out there real quick and tie the net together. And I’ll tie it together here.” He said, “We’ll try it.” So we [makes sound], like that. And right around there, a bunch of fish. And we sit there holding on to the net. They blowed that net right out of water—42,000 the first set.

TH: Forty-two-thousand pounds?

RH: Of bluefish. Hey, they were so fast, they just outrun you as you’re going, said, “Why don’t we double this way?” They didn’t know which way to go, because one boat was going here and one was coming there. And the net was already out here, so they didn’t know which way to go.

TH: So you doubled the circle?

RH: No, just the ends.

TH: Okay.

RH: Yeah. See, you don’t throw the net until we—just as we get to each other. He threwed this when I throwed mine, and then we’d come on around, and then one guy grabbed and hold it, and then the other guy kept going. He’d run over here really quick and grabbed that one and held it closed.

TH: So you had two nets instead of one net.

RH: Yeah, one on my boat, and one on his.

TH: And you made a circle with the two nets.

RH: Yeah, see here. Okay, here's—

TH: Oh, I understand. I'm trying to say it so that it—

RH: Oh, I see. Okay. There's like—if the fish was right there—

TH: There's no pictures.

RH: And he went this way, and then he'd come from this way, and he went this way. So he'd come over here and tie this together, and I'd tie that one together, and then boom, 42,000. And we started catching so many, right? Till the news people—they had the media, they call it, they had—the place was all fenced in. They was out there—

TH: The fish house?

RH: Yeah, the fish house was fenced in, all the property. And the people would come down and they would let them in, so they was outside the fence videoing everything. And it was on TV. Now, it wasn't long, the governor got into it, of Virginia, right? They said, You've got to go back to Palm Beach—I mean, to Fort Pierce. I said, “You mean”—“Yeah,” he said. “We'll go to court.” We went to court. Man, people was hanging out of windows—

TH: Why did you have to go to court?

RH: Because they were saying that we couldn't fish in their waters because we was Florida and they was Virginia. So we went to court, and you're talking about people, now, sports, oh, they were everywhere.

TH: So where did you go to court? At what—

RH: In Hampton, Virginia. And while we was there, right, okay, well, all these people, we go in—we went in there, and the judge says, “What's up?” Well, this guy, he stands up, he says, “These men are catching—they're putting all these people out of business.” He said, “What people?” He said, “These charter boats. See, they catch them but they throw them away because they couldn't sell them. They're no good. Only if you fix them like they did and send them out of the country.” But the sport guys on the head boats, they'd go, and they'd pay money just to catch them. They unhook them and throw them over, and they're floating everywhere. So why not eat them?

So anyway, we went to court, and the judge says, “What’s up?” They said, They can’t fish in our waters because they’re not—they don’t live here. And, man, the judge, he said, “Now, let me see now.” Now, he was good. He said, “You’re trying to tell me that a United States vessel can’t fish in Virginia waters? I’m going to tell you one thing.” He looked right at the marine patrol. He said, “You leave them alone, and I better not hear that you’re harassing them one bit.” Boy, and that was something. So we went to catching them. All right, now—oh, they wanted to kill us. We was paid to leave the fish house.

But anyway, we fished for a while, and they’d tell—so the governor, he said, “Just to find out that you’re not catching them all, I’ve got to prove it.” So the governor went on one boat, and I took one of the aides, the governor’s aides, and all of them had a guy on the boat. We got out there, and here’s that big bed of fish, like this. We went up, and one guy took one piece, another guy took a piece, and like that, and millions just kept on going. And he told them, he said, “They’re not bothering these fish. There’s billions and billions of them.” And they said we paid them off. You know how that is. So—

TH: They accused you of paying off—

RH: Yeah, they said we paid the governor to say that. But anyway, later on, right? We was getting ready to go home. I call the governor, I said, “Sir, this is Mr. Harden.” “Oh, yeah. How are you?” We talked a little bit, and I said, “I just want to let you know that I think we’re going on back because they’re getting scarce all the time.” It was later and, you know, the water started cooling up, and they were disappearing. He said, “Would you do me a favor?” I said, “Yes, sir.” He said, “Would you let it be known that I run you out?” I said, “Sure. I don’t care.” You talk about a write-up: “I have had enough of this.”

TH: This is what the governor said—

RH: Yeah.

TH: —in the paper?

RH: On the paper. He said, “I have had enough of this. They are going back.” Now, on the way home, every time we would stop for fuel in Virginia, they would come out shooting us birds, and “Get out of my”—I just thought I’d tell you about that.

Pause in recording

TH: We have one last story here with Captain Junior Harden. He's going to tell me about this picture he found in a restaurant, of his father, in Miami, unloading a catch of mackerel.

RH: Mackerel. Yeah.

TH: Where did you find the picture?

RH: I was in a restaurant right there on Flagler. The Miami River goes right under Flagler Bridge. Well, right at the foot of the Flagler Bridge is East Coast Fisheries. It's been there probably 50 years. And my daddy—and I went fishing with him that night—it was my daddy, Rupert Harden, and the guy fishing with him was Randolph Fox.

TH: Your dad—your father was Rupert Harden.

RH: Yeah.

TH: That's why you're Junior.

RH: Yeah.

TH: And the fellow fishing with him was—

RH: Was called Randolph Scott.¹¹ And we had 5,000 pounds of mackerel on the boat. The boat was so loaded, the mackerel tail was sticking in the water. That's how loaded it was. It was hanging off the edge—

TH: Of the boat?

RH: —of the boat. And we had—it was right there in Miami River—now, back then, we had to gut every fish. When you got through picking them out, you had to gut every one of them. But I was there, and I asked the guy that owned the restaurant, I said, “Man, that's my daddy!” He said, “Well, you can have it!”

TH: Oh, you were in a restaurant years later?

¹¹ “Scott” appears to be an error, as Harden is still discussing the aforementioned Randolph Fox.

RH: Yeah, a long time ago. Yeah.

TH: And you saw this picture?

RH: Yeah, and I said, “Hey, look at that. That’s my dad.” He says, “Well, you can have it, son, if you want it.” So I took it and blowed it up.

TH: And that’s the picture we have.

RH: And that’s them little old cotton nets. And we caught them in—what I was telling you about—in Hawk’s Channel, where they don’t go anymore because of so many traffic.

TH: And you were, at the time this picture was taken, where were you?

RH: I was probably out back running around somewhere. I was only 10 years old.

TH: Okay.

RH: That was Christmas vacation. That’s why I was there.

TH: Christmas vacation?

RH: Yeah, and school was out.

TH: What year?

RH: In, say, 10—’43.

TH: Nineteen forty-three.

RH: Yeah.

TH: And that’s your father on the left or the right?

RH: Yeah, on the left, right here, and that's the other boy, there.

TH: Okay. That's Mr. Fox and Mr. Harden.

RH: Uh-huh. Yeah.

TH: Thank you.

End of interview.