

An Interview with
Eugene W. Braschler

in
Fairdealing, Missouri

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interviewed by C. Ray Brassieur
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PREFACE

Eugene W. Braschler was born December 11, 1924 in Pratt, Missouri, a small town in Ripley County. Braschler recalls his childhood discussing his family's interest in birds, fishing, boat building, and hunting. In August 1944, Braschler joined the Army's Officer Cadet School as a trainee. The school soon discharged Braschler due to a pre-existing knee injury. One-year of school at Auburn University followed his discharge. After Auburn, Braschler rejoined the military as a sergeant.

After being discharged from the military, Braschler enrolled in Management Biology at the University of Missouri-Columbia in 1945. During his time at the university he was mentored by Professor Rudolph Bennett, co-founder of the Missouri Conservation Committee, he also met his wife Pheobe, while attending school. Starting as a trapper for the conservation commission, Braschler left school and began an extensive and varied career in conservation and wildlife management. From 1945 to 1953 he worked at a research facility in Denver before moving to Wyoming where he would head up the government's coyote depopulation effort. In 1953 Braschler moved to Arizona to work on the Apache Indian Reservation as a Fishery Specialist. Between 1953 and 1984, Mr. Braschler continued to work on a variety of fishery related tasks in Texas, Washington D.C., Georgia, Kansas, Oklahoma and Minnesota. Braschler retired in 1984 and eventually returned to Missouri.

The interview was recorded on 3M type I (normal bias) audio cassettes, using a Sony TC-D5 Pro II stereo cassette recorder (set on automatic recording level) and an Audio-Technica AT825 stereo microphone attached to a tripod floor stand. Little interference compromises the recording, and the audio quality is good throughout.

The following transcript represents a faithful rendering of the entire oral history interview. Minor stylistic alterations -- none of factual consequence -- have been made as part of a general transcription policy. Any use of brackets [] indicates editorial insertions not found on the original audio recordings. Parentheses () are used to indicate laughter or a spoken aside evident from the speaker's intonation. Quotation marks [" "] indicate speech depicting dialogue, or words highlighted for the usual special purposes (such as indicating irony). Double dashes [--] and ellipses [. . .] are also used as a stylistic method in an attempt to capture nuances of dialogue or speech patterns. Words are *italicized* when emphasized in speech. Although substantial care has been taken to render this transcript as accurately as possible, any remaining errors are the responsibility of the editor, N. Renae Farris.

[Tape meter, 003. Begin side one, tape one of two. Begin interview.]

RB: Let's start with your name. Your full name is...?

EB: Eugene W. Braschler.¹

RB: And the "W" is...?

EB: The "W" is [an] initial only. It did stand for "Weaver" -- that was my father's name. Originally it did stand for Weaver, but unfortunately I had a cousin that was born just ahead of me that was born on my dad's birthday. Because of that, and because there were so many Braschlers in the county, the family lawyer said, "Well, let's make it an initial only." So it's Eugene W.

RB: But your dad's name, then, was Weaver?

EB: His name was Weaver, yes.

RB: Is that a middle name or a first name?

EB: That was a first name. I believe his name was Weaver Roy.² But he never... He always went by either Weaver or "Boone." Most people called him Boone, and the reasons become obvious after you got to know him.

RB: Why is that?

EB: He was an outdoorsman and a river man and a farmer, but also he was known for hunting and fishing, swimming and being on the river.

RB: So your dad was such an outdoorsman that they nicknamed him "Boone?"

¹ Mr. Braschler may also be heard on a.c. 41, 42, 43, 52, and 53 in C3966 Missouri Environment Oral History Collection.

² This is correct. For more information on the Braschler family, please refer to page 152 of History and Families - Ripley County, Missouri, Ripley County Historical Society. Turner Publishing Company, Paducah, KY.

EB: Yes, he told me one time some of the older boys -- he was blue-eyed -- some of the older boys called him “gander-eyed,” but they didn’t do that over once! So they decided that Boone was a better name.

RB: (laughs) Let’s see... When were you born, Mr. Braschler?

EB: December the 11th, 1924.

RB: 1924? Okay. Now, your dad then... Do you have an idea of when he was born?

EB: He was born in 1893. September the 3rd, 1893.

RB: Now, where was he born?

EB: He was born at the little burg of Pratt. That was one of the original settlements in southern Ripley County, about nine or ten miles from Doniphan and about a half a mile to a mile north of the Arkansas state line, and about a half a mile or less to the Current River.

RB: Let’s see now. [Was] your mother from around that part?

EB: Yes, my mother [Frohna Patterson Gibson Braschler] was a Patterson, and the Pattersons arrived in Ripley County in 1833, somewhat ahead of my father’s folks. The Current River was pretty rugged country at that time when they came, and most of the early settlers settled *off* the Current River on one of the tributaries. My mother’s folks settled on the little river called “Fourchee DeMas.”³

RB: Fourchee DeMas? How’s that spelled?

EB: There’s several spellings. I think it was D-E, possibly, and then capital M-A-S, I believe. But Fourchee was F-O-U-R-C-H-E-E, I believe. I know I ran into Fourchee in other

³ Sounds like “Foe-she Day-mahs.”

parts of the country, in Wyoming. Out there even, one place there is called “Belle Fourche.”⁴ But still the spelling was so similar, I said, “Well, that must have come from the same Frenchman.”

RB: French word. Fourche.⁵ And so that’s where she was born?

EB: Yes.

RB: And they met then in that same neck of the woods and settled down. And where were you born?

EB: I was born in the same little community, Pratt. They met there and of course they... It was unusual that they would have married because basically the Civil War had caused families to not be so cordial to each other, and between the Braschlers and the Pattersons that factor did exist. But nevertheless, they married and...

RB: And the reason being... The Pattersons, were they *Southern* sympathizers?

EB: The Pattersons *were* Southern, almost a hundred percent. There were a few of them [that] went the other way. And the Braschlers were as neutral as they could be, although there were some... My part of the Braschlers were neutral. There was one of my great-grandfather’s younger brothers that did fight on the side of the North.

RB: Now, that kind of a schism, if you will, is it kind of a difference between people here in this neighborhood -- where some had been Northern and some of their families had been Southern sympathizers -- did that fall out along ethnic grounds? I mean, in other words, was there an ethnic basis? When you think about families that would not marry together,

⁴ Sounds like “bell FYOOSH”

⁵ Translated, it means “pitchfork.”

sometimes you think that they belong to different ethnic groups. But that's not necessarily...

[Tape meter, 050]

EB: Not necessarily, [but] to some extent. Really, the migration pattern coming into Ripley County was through the Carolinas, Tennessee, Kentucky and over into Missouri. Those people were *two* ethnic groups, actually. A lot of them were English and a lot of them were Irish. Usually, the more northern group of that, that came from the northern part of Tennessee anyway, were Irish. The ones from some of the more established wealthier counties in southern Tennessee were English. And then there was a sprinkling of different people [that] came to the county. Before the Civil War, there were a few -- and *only* a few -- German people [that] came into the county. Of course, the Braschler name is Swiss, but most people wouldn't distinguish that it wasn't German. So when the war started in St. Louis then, you know the story there: that there was a lot of hatred -- and rightly so -- and the county just never really recovered from that sort of thing until long after the war.

RB: And many of the Braschlers went with the Union side then, apparently.

EB: There were some of them that did. Most of them... My great-grandfather was a preacher, and as such he didn't really take part in the war.

RB: Now, your great-grandfather was a [preacher.] Do you remember your grandfather?

EB: Oh, yes! My grandfather was a typical preacher's boy. I guess I can say that and get by with it. He was really out of place on a farm. He came into Ripley County and bought two sections and had an idea that he would raise registered sheep. He had farmed just a

little bit in Indiana, and he came to Ripley County and bought a lot of *real* good quality sheep and was going to make a living at that. Either the coyotes or the neighbors' dogs or something else put him out of business. So the older boys, who weren't more than twelve or so and younger... My grandmother and the older boys for some reason came down and bought into the Huntington silt loam area along Current River. And that's about all that saved them. It was some of the best farming soil in the state. My grandfather, I remember him quite well, and he had some talent. He was a good artist and he was somewhat eccentric though, when I came along, and I got along with him really well.

RB: He was an artist you say?

EB: We have some of his pencil drawings and charcoal drawings. He had a lot of talent. It was not... I don't really know if he... In looking back, his schooling, his training was in leatherworks, saddle making and that sort of thing. But he had talent in art and...

RB: What was his name, now?

EB: His name was David Ernest Braschler.

RB: And so by the time your dad came along, he was farming some pretty good land too, then? He had moved to the...

EB: He was living on it. My dad had [six brothers.] There were seven of the boys, and he was the youngest one. So the older ones had begun to farm and really make it pay off by the time my dad came along.

RB: So your dad grew up on the farm. But he was right against the Current River, you say, and so he was sort of drawn to the outdoors.

EB: Well, that was true. And really, as I've said, it was a great marriage. Even though the Braschlers came from the high mountains of Switzerland, they were still farmers. And the Current River seemed to be an ideal marriage of the river and the soil along it, so it was... There were many years... One time here while back I was telling somebody, I think I had... There were sixteen of the Braschler boy cousins, not counting the girls. And of course, living along the river and farming, some of the girls could swim and dive just about as well as the boys. But there were sixteen of the boys, so we pretty well populated the area south of Doniphan.

RB: (laughs) Boys. That spread the name, didn't it!?

EB: It did, it sure did.

[Tape meter, 100]

RB: So your dad became interested in boating and that kind of thing. Did he ever do much fishing along the river?

EB: My dad was a *legend* in fishing. My dad was a good athlete. In World War One -- he was just a good athlete in most sports, but in the Army he boxed a lot. So when he came back, he was known pretty well everywhere. It took him a while to get settled down. He went to... I guess in World War One they called them "remount school" and he took advantage of that. But he came back and basically lived on the farm, and we lived close to the river. I grew up where we ate fish for breakfast regularly, and we practically lived on the river when we weren't working.

RB: Now, a "remount school"... What was that? To get someone accustomed to life after the war?

EB: I think so. Really, in questioning him, it seemed to me similar to World War Two when boys could go to school in something that they thought they might do well in, and you had a lot of choices. I guess there were less after World War One, but I know in talking to him I found that he had studied some courses that they give in college. So it was a matter of readjustment, yeah.

RB: When you came along... Do you recall the house you were living in? Your dad's house at that time?

EB: Yes...

RB: What sort of place was it?

EB: It was just I guess what they call a bungalow. We actually when I came along... In the first of my memory, he and my mother had been able to purchase a couple of farms, and they were adjoining each other. We lived in a bungalow that my mother and dad had built themselves when they moved on *that* farm. And when I was about five or six years old -- possibly six -- that house burned. We didn't have electricity, and of course we did have gasoline pump-up lights. My dad wanted good light, so we had a little bit too much light and one of them exploded and burned the house down. So we moved back to what we called the old Pruitt place. The Pruitts had built an old house that we'd maintained within sight of the house where I was born. It was built on the old Kentucky style. It had a smokehouse -- not attached but you could get to it -- [and] had a large barn and crib and outbuildings. The house itself had a big fireplace and upstairs bedroom. It didn't have a regular dogtrot; it had a porch that was a modification of a dogtrot. It had a big overhanging... The roof overhung a lot of the porch there, and you could go back

between the smokehouse and the main house, and then there was another room on the end of *that*. I don't really know what it was there originally for.

RB: You're talking about the Pruitt place?

EB: It was the Pruitt place.

RB: Was it a log house?

EB: No. It had some logs; the back part had some logs, but mostly it was a frame house.

RB: And so a lot of your youth was spent in that house, then?

EB: Yes. We rebuilt the house that burned, and I suppose we got in it when I was probably... By the time I was seven or eight, by the time I was in the second at least or possibly the third, we were back in our new home. And it was a bungalow and a frame house much like the first one where we lived.

RB: Did he just buy the lumber?

EB: He had a sawmill and he sawed a lot of the lumber. We had a local neighbor that was a builder, a carpenter and an old friend. So I remember well when they built the house. I was around [and a] big enough kid then to take it all in and learn and make some suggestions.

[Tape meter, 150]

I know one thing: When we finished it off, we put right out in the front yard on either corner -- the far corner -- we put a sizable pole with a martin house on each pole. And as I remember, those martin houses had perhaps room for sixteen pairs of martins. They were rather big and rather well built. Of course, we really never had to clean them out

like I do my martin houses today. They were self-cleaning. The only thing we had to do, we had to keep a carton of .22 shorts handy and keep the English sparrows under control.

RB: So you were interested in birds at that time, when you were very young.

EB: Oh, yes.

RB: Was it your idea to have a martin house? Was your dad interested in them?

EB: Well, my dad wasn't hard to convince. He loved birds. *Any* wildlife that was around, he protected -- any *worthy* wildlife. Now, he didn't have much time for crows and some of the things like that.

RB: One thing I was going to ask you: You say your dad liked to fish. Did he have boats when you were very young? Do you remember the first boat that he had?

EB: I don't really remember the first boat he had, but I remember the first boat he built after I was big enough to know what it was all about. In fact, some of the very first memory I have was good pine lumber at that time stacked in the barn and that's what that was for. They called them "boat patterns." By the time I came along, it wasn't like you'd go and buy lumber to build a boat. You'd talk to a mill operator and tell him you wanted a boat pattern, and he'd look at a tree and say, "Well, that one will either make one boat pattern or two," and rarely any more than that. But they'd saw out a boat pattern.

One thing you might be interested in: I know my dad had a way that he'd preserve or he would prepare lumber for use in building a boat -- and even if he wanted to make hammer handles or ax handles or whatever -- if he was using ash or hickory or whatever, he would do it the same way. I asked him where he got the idea, simply because... Later when I was in the university, I mentioned to Professor Ralph Peck -- who was one of

Missouri's most unique professors, and not only a professor, but he had a lot of *practical* knowledge. But I asked him about this and he never heard of it. But what my dad would do: he would "water season" lumber. That meant... We had springs, and of course the Current River itself is always cold, and he would prepare boards, tack them together -- not like they do now, they use binders -- but back then they would tack them together with one-bys [1" x ___] and sink them in the water for six months to a year and then pull them out and let them air dry, and that was called "water seasoning." He would usually water season boat lumber. I asked him where that idea came from, and he sort of thought that it came from the early Cherokee Indians that may have brought it in here, because he had heard some of the old timers say that the Cherokees would use obsidian or some sharp chert or whatever to shape a bow or a handle or whatever they were making, they'd use that to shave it down, to shape it. And he thought that they had used that. But anyway, he liked the idea and we water seasoned a lot of lumber around our place.

RB: Yeah! Where do you think your dad learned his woodworking, particularly his boat building? Where did he learn it mostly from?

[Tape meter, 200]

EB: Well, I think boat building... I know he had talked to me about the changes and various measurements, and I think he was just like everybody else. I think it was a matter of either trial and error, or knowing what you had before and making some minor adjustment in that. I know one boat we had... He told me that early on, before they had powerboats -- and they did try some inboard power, but I mean a regular fishing boat before they had outboard motors -- they wanted a boat that would float straight with the

current. Of course, they used paddles. And the popular thing besides gigging was fly fishing, and to do that along the trees along the Current River, whoever was paddling the boat had to maneuver it in and out to some extent. They came up with the idea to back paddle, which simply meant that [it was] just reverse of paddling forward. You were paddling back. And the only thing about it that a person had to learn -- it was hard for the average one to learn -- was... The old-timers and my dad told me that the idea was to put the back of the boat where you wanted it and let the current pull it straight, and that would put the man in the front of the boat, then, where he was supposed to be.

So to get a boat that would float well they wanted relatively straight sides. That meant that the ribs or skeleton of the boat, the middle ones would be about the same width and the same angle. Then as motors came along, you needed a craft that would turn a little faster, [that would] not cause you problems with turning fast. So then is when they started using more rake and more flare and shorter ribs as you went to the front, and a tapering effect to the back. It was less than it was in the front. In other words, some of the boats that he built... I used to tell him you'd look at the bottom of them -- which that's what you'd be looking at when they finished them -- and they'd look more like the shape of a torpedo, which meant that the back tapered down more gently than the front. The front was pulled in rather abrupt, and that gave it a look of the bottom being wide about a third from the front and then gradually tapering down to the back.

RB: Did he ever build a boat that was completely pointed at the bow?

EB: No, I don't believe so. No, I don't think so. Generally, the boats that were in demand when I was a kid were about (I believe) twenty-four to twenty-six feet long, [and] rarely a

twenty-eight footer. But then as I got older, they started trying to make lighter boats. And for some reason people just decided they didn't need a boat that long, so they started going down to twenty foot and even to eighteen foot. Usually the longer the boat was, the more rake, more flare, the more you could pull it in the front and the back without causing a problem. If you went to a shorter boat, you usually didn't try to shape it quite so abruptly in the front and back. I think that's probably understandable. You know, they get... Some of the guys used to say, "Well, you don't turning like a washtub when you get in the water." And that's what they were referring to, I think.

[Tape meter, 250]

RB: Now, the plank itself, you're talking about... You mentioned two terms: "rake" and "flare." The flare being the outside plank of the boat, the angle that it is to the bottom of the boat?

EB: Well, the angle is... As you turn it up, that gives you lift, that raises it up. And as you pull it in, that...

RB: ...makes it flare more and more.

EB: Right, uh-huh. So actually they're closely related. The terms, I think, they probably came in with the builders. They're ship-builders terms, probably. But to me, I always said as you said: As you turn the board, to me, that was flare. And as you pull it in, that was rake. But I'm not absolutely positive that that's the way it should be. But those are the two things that really made the johnboat different from any other boat. Like you say, the ones that come in all the way... Now, certainly metal boats have been built that way later, and big boats were built that way -- seaworthy boats -- at the time. But on the river,

it was unique to see a boat get its lift from the rake and flare than actually sawing that lift along the board.

RB: Well, that's what I wanted to ask you, now... So that's one thing I wanted to ask you. Because that's one way to get plenty of flare and plenty of rake in the front is by *cutting* a board instead of letting a board run as it normally would, but cut a curve in it so when it comes together, it forms that kind of pattern. Did your dad ever cut any of that gunnel⁶ or that side of the boat?

EB: He never... In fact, I became interested in that [by] watching him, so naturally I questioned him a lot. Wherever we'd go, we'd look at boats. Believe it or not, up until even into the early 1930s, there were still a lot of those boats around that had been cut. And also instead of having a plank running the full bottom, they had several planks running across from one side to the other.

RB: They were crossed planked.

EB: Uh-huh. Those boats persisted, they were around. Some of them had ribs or skeletons -- builders here call them ribs -- some of those had ribs and some didn't. There were a few that the only brace they had were seats coming across. So there were various types of boats [that] existed for a long time.

[Tape meter, 300]

In looking back and asking questions, really what I choose to call a classic Current River johnboat -- I use the term "Current River" just simply because I didn't study them any further than that and I know what they used here -- but actually it was developed quite

⁶ Also known as a gunwale.

rapidly and wasn't used all that long if you get to thinking about it, because you know, as soon as World War Two came along and they started building so-called metal johnboats, the wooden ones disappeared along with the guys for the most part that were builders.

Of course, another thing had happened. Originally the... Make a division in the river, Doniphan would be fine... The upriver boys used short leaf pine timber mostly to built boats. Whereas down the river, there were a lot of cypress. I can remember there was a little place right at [the] state line (right below Current View) that was called the cypress bay or cypress bayou earlier. I can remember when the bay or the bayou just was lined with big cypress. You know, you could hardly throw the first limb. There was no problem getting cypress. But then just before World War Two, there was a demand for cypress as well as some of the other big timber along the river. There was not particularly a demand for cottonwood. There were cottonwood trees that were just like the cypress. They were *beautiful* specimens. By then, I was grown and my dad had quit the sawmill business, but my best friend, his dad *was* a sawmiller, and he was also a friend of my dad's. So I remember being in on the discussion; they were talking about sawing boat patterns from cottonwood. And I could show you the exact spot just above Pitman's Ferry right within the area where the... I was telling you about the Indian crossing and on is Island Ford. There were giant cottonwoods in that area. And that's when I really discovered where the old river crossing or the Glaze Creek crossing was. Because there was no reason for anybody to go down in there, it wasn't farm territory at that time. It hadn't been cleared, and there were a lot of giant cottonwoods. In order to get into there, the sawmiller had to make a place were tractors and trucks could get in.

Anyway, they sawed some cottonwood. That's when my dad started experimenting with cottonwood. We had had the idea of planing it down to three-quarters of an inch. Later I wished we'd have gone to a half of an inch, but we planed it down to three-quarters of an inch and built a boat, and...

RB: About what year was that, then?

[Tape meter, 350]

EB: That was probably in '37 or 38, somewhere in there. Close to '38, I suspect. I know I was interested, but I had to watch most of the time. Once in a while I could drive a nail or put in a screw, whatever they used was. But anyway, I remember that boat. I believe it was only about eighteen foot long and we could haul it around on the wagon. That was something that was completely unusual. In fact when Phoebe and I got married, we had it in a pond there. I have a picture somewhere of where we put it on the wagon and took it down to the river. And she and I, [and] my dad and mother -- four of us -- [used it.] So it was seaworthy for a pretty good crowd. Four of us used it.

RB: Was it still called a johnboat?

EB: Yes, uh-huh. In fact, that... As I said, the boat of choice and length of choice -- back in the heyday of the johnboats fishing up and down the river from Doniphan and back and forth -- they were mostly from twenty-four to twenty-six foot long. So it was unusual to bring an eighteen or twenty footer out, but nevertheless, it was still a johnboat.

RB: That's what I wondered, now, about the name of that thing. When they shortened up from those real long ones, they shortened up to about eighteen foot, and then maybe even shorter, some of them. But the name stuck with them.

[Tape meter, 373. End side one, tape one of two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin side two, tape one of two.]

RB: Okay, Gene, what we were talking about before the tape ended, was the name “johnboat,” and whether you had any idea where that might have come from.

EB: I don’t really know. Some of the Murrays say that one of their ancestors, John Murray, had built a boat and people named it the johnboat after he. To me, this is logical; now, I don’t really know. I did research it enough so I felt that it was actually spelled J-O-H-N rather than J-O-N.

RB: You think?

EB: I think that is correct: J-O-H-N boat. And it could be precisely what they say. I’ll tell you why I think that: Because in reading, [I discovered that] during the Civil War, they talked about “dugouts,” and it was hard to tell just when they were really, *really* dugouts and when they were something that they’d started to build with bottoms in them like we were talking [about] with the cut sides and the crosspieces in them. But I believe that’s what was originally in this country. And like I say, it persisted up into the ‘30s. [When] you hear the log rafters talk -- and I had one that was the real McCoy that I had a chance to talk to a lot when I was a kid, and his last name was Miller. His son still lives in Doniphan and he’s in his eighties (somewhere in there), but he was a real rafter. Apparently, when they wanted to get back up the river, they had plenty of lumber and [it] didn’t take them long to throw something together. Of course, a boat that would swell in water... I’d read where they actually... From the other end of the river, some of these outfitters would make boats and float down. And you could tell by the way they wrote

what they were doing more or less, what kind of boat they were building. And then other people said that these people that had floated rafts of logs down and going back, they said that they started throwing a canoe-like of boat together, which makes sense. You know, they wanted something that... When you go up the Current River, there were places that you were obliged to paddle; you had no other choice. There were other places where you could pull it along and there were places where there were back eddies, there were places where one person could pull and one could keep it pushed out, and you could make pretty good time up the river without expending all that energy. And like I say, there were other places where you *had* to paddle. So it makes sense that they'd want something that would glide through the water similar to a canoe. So using that thought and what little material that I have been able to read, I sort of believe that that was the beginning of the johnboat built the way we're talking [about,] with the three planks on the bottom and a full length plank on the side without having it cut and trimmed. I think that was the *beginning*, but they may have built something less than that.

RB: So you're saying that the beginning was linked to floating ties?

EB: I believe it was. And see, that would put it well before the turn of the century but after the Civil War, which I could *never* find anything written during the Civil War that would indicate that they had anything more than either dugouts or some reasonable facsimile thereof.

RB: Have you ever actually seen a dugout that was carved out of a single piece?

EB: Yes.

RB: That was in use around here?

EB: Well, I've seen them. The one I think of immediately... They had one in what they call "Keeners Cave" over close to Poplar Bluff; I'm not sure if it was out of Butler County.⁷

I was there as a kid. And it was partly submerged, but you could see the detail of it quite well. It was carved out of...

RB: Was it like a boat that was no longer in use?

EB: It was no longer in use, that's true. I've never seen one in use. The nearest I've come about that, I believe, was the Kansas City group (that you've probably heard of, a group of sportsmen that used to float the Current River) -- I *believe* that's where it was -- that they referred to seeing dugouts come out of the tributaries along the way. I've *read* that. So that's the nearest I've ever come to knowing that real dugouts were used. Of course even so, I have reason to believe in reading about them that some of the natives referred to some of the first boats that weren't dugouts, or something more than dugouts, as dugouts. They called them a variety of names. In fact, I mentioned earlier -- for want of better pronunciation -- they referred to them as "dinghies." And I think they spell that in three or so different ways. But I'm not sure they were true dinghies.

[Tape meter, 050]

RB: Have you ever heard the term "yawl" referred to a boat in this area? I mean, a regional...?

EB: I've heard the term, but not in this area, not by natives.

RB: Well, we've seen plenty of photos of actual dugouts, and seen some of the dugouts from

⁷ It is located slightly north the common line of Wayne and Butler Counties, approximately four miles west of U. S. Highway 67.

around the Bootheel area, especially lower in the Hornersville area downstate. So it's not hard to believe they were used here pretty frequently, probably at an earlier time, a little bit before you came along.

EB: Mm-hmm.

RB: One of the things you mentioned, especially with... Referring to the kind of material that the boat was built of, you mentioned that there was somewhat of a difference between the tradition on the lower Current [River] than the johnboat tradition on the upper Current [River.] What other features were somewhat...? Do you know of any other differences that were in the building styles? The materials could have been a little different?

EB: I don't really... The material's the main thing, and that was just a matter of availability from the mills and the sawyers. Now, the way a complete boat... I know some builders finished them differently, but the ones that... When the guides come down the river with them -- and I consider those the ultimate, because they had to be. They were the twenty-four and twenty-six footers. They were basically... They had the bottom, and the sides, and the seats, the ends, they had the ribs. Most of them, the ribs... *Many* of them, the ribs were drilled at least two places in the bottom so water could move from one compartment to the next. Most of them had one-by twos [1"x2"s,] I think, possibly one-by fours [1"x4"s,] but I think mostly one-by-twos [1"x2"s] that could use a nail on the bottom of the boat *on the rib* so that you had an area there that you could walk on and stay dry. But it was also an area that if you dropped anything under it or... It was a nuisance sometimes. But most of them had that, and most of them had one-by-two [1"x2"] rails over the sides.

Now, if there was any difference, it would have been in the way the ends were sawed. And of course, as motors [and] power boats came along, that could have varied quite a bit. But I notice, a lot of the builders upriver -- and this is... I just noticed *some* of them upriver, the sides were nailed right up to the ends. The ends were cut slant all the way. Most of them down the river, the ends... Even though if the sides were nailed all the way they still cut the ends, cut an angle off of them. I don't know why, I just noticed they did that a lot. Probably to keep it from splitting. I know when motors really started coming into use, then the people that wanted boats built were more concerned with the backend -- how high it was and everything -- and wanted that built for their motor. So possibly that could have been the difference, probably just the... [*Pauses, searching for a word*] What would that be, the transom?

RB: Transom.

EB: Transom, uh-huh. But I never really noticed that much difference. I think it was just availability of wood downriver. Not that they couldn't haul it, but if it was cypress [that was] available... I think cypress was what people wanted because of its durability and somewhat workability, although I'm sure that shortleaf pine was equally workable.

RB: Now, let me ask you then on the actual construction of a boat like that... You're saying that there were single plank sides (just one plank on each side) and they were usually a three-plank bottom. As you recall, in the steps of actual construction, would they tie the -- let me call it the head block, that would be the bow piece, whatever that short plank there in front [is called] -- would they tie that to the sides *first* or would they start building the frames, what you'd call the ribs? Do you recall what the first step...?

[Tape meter, 100]

EB: Mm-hmm. I can tell you how we done and how I done. In fact, I might tell you a little story. When I was in Auburn or actually in the Fisher School in Marion, Alabama -- and that's along the Cahaba River, and the Cahaba River, of course, is kind of a small version of the Current. Everybody was fishing, but there was no johnboats, of course. So I decided to build a johnboat, and like would happen to anybody after you've been away for a while, you forget. But I got some... I believe it was twenty foot cypress boards locally that were really nice and I cut my ribs. But before I did, I either phoned or wrote my dad -- I probably wrote him a letter -- and asked him for the measurements on the boat that we had, because I wanted a boat that would handle equally well to the paddle and to a motor (because I had a little motor). So he gave me pretty good information and I talked to one of my cousins -- who is incidentally still alive -- that gave me some information, and I wasn't quite satisfied with it.

So I built my first ribs, I think about four sets of them, and put them on sawhorses under my carport. And [I] started attaching the sides to them. In this case, I was using woodscrews. I thought brass woodscrews might be better than nails. So I got toward the front, [and] I wasn't quite happy with what I had. You know how ribs are made: you've got your bottom of your rib is just a one-by [1"x ____], and of course, up your sides then, they extend over it and overlap. So instead of nailing them... I wasn't happy with just what I had, so I took a wing nut and put in and didn't trim them and set them up there. And I looked, eyeballed it back and forth. Of course, this is one thing that my dad always said, that the early settlers, even gun makers, were good eyeballers, so he said you had to

eyeball things once in a while. Well, I took a look at it and was finally satisfied with it, and then I took those ribs and nailed them together permanently and trimmed them.

Because you know where the overlap is, you have to saw it to have it even or it'll... You know, you get some kind of a, part of it... When you move that (what we were talking about) to give you your flare, you have to trim it to where it'll have a smooth place to nail your bottom to. So I finally got them where I wanted, and then as I remember, I put my end in last. I just went right up the ribs on both sides and screwed them on there.

RB: How did you figure out how short to cut your bottom ribs as you were approaching the bow?

EB: That's what we were talking about, that's what we were talking about.

RB: As you were approaching the bow, you have to shorten up on your ribs.

EB: Yeah. You have to do your ribs first, or I did because... You see, if you go ahead and attach to your end, why, then if you've got to flare that out a little bit... So you've got to just take it a rib at a time. That's why I say I think most people that built boats didn't vary them very much from one to the other. If they felt that they needed to make it more maneuverable, then they would vary it *some*. But that's when I really got worried. But I went ahead and went with what I had, and I looked at it a lot before I put the final screws in it, but...

RB: So now, let's go back. I really want to understand this pretty good.

EB: Okay.

RB: Now, the ribs that were closer to the middle, or I'll say -- and from the back -- you have somewhat of a taper going to the transom, too, don't you?

EB: Right. It's a more gentle taper, *usually*.

RB: But the ones there in toward the center of the boat, they're going to be more or less the same, right?

EB: Mostly, uh-huh. I believe I varied them just a little bit because I'd taken... I'd asked my dad to give me the measurements off this boat that we had, and it... Like I say, when we finished it, looking at the bottom, it looked kind of like a torpedo. In a way, not... Of course it wasn't that sharp in the front of it.

[Tape meter, 150]

RB: So now, where was the greatest width? Was it right at what we'd call mid-ship? Right at the center point?

EB: It appeared that the greatest width was toward the fore. [I'd] maybe say the greatest width was from a third back to halfway back.

RB: Okay, so then you would have had a slightly larger boat in the front than you had in the back?

EB: Well, *toward* the front, but then it come in. And here's another thing to consider that I think... It *appeared* to be that way. And I'm not sure it wasn't that much at all, but when you bend the boards, [when] they've got where they bend, that's going to give you that appearance, you know, wherever you start bringing them in, and if you're looking from the bottom, especially.

RB: It depends on where that measurement is taken, of course.

EB: Mm-hmm.

RB: Now, the measurement of the rib that's sitting on the bottom, that piece that's sitting on the bottom that the bottom is nailed to, it may not change...

EB: But your angle then on your upright...

RB: But then the outside overall width is going to change depending on how much flare you have.

EB: Right. Your width along your top railing is going to change.

RB: Right, that's what would change.

EB: Yeah.

RB: Is that correct, that the bottom frame, the one that was on the bottom, did you start out with pretty well equal in the middle of the...?

EB: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm. In fact, we built boats that were absolutely the same for maybe... Six or eight ribs were precisely the same. And that boat gives you the appearance of... From the top anyway, it'll be straight like you'd expect, and in the back and in front and the bottom of it basically the same way. But this boat that I built was twenty feet. I don't remember exactly why, but I wanted to experiment with that width forward or the ?appearance? of the width forward. It was very little, but I did vary it a little bit, and then brought it on in pretty sharply as I came in.

RB: To kind of explain that kind of shape in another way: it was slightly fish-shaped? In other words, a fish would be brought in toward the front.

EB: Yes, mm-hmm, right. It'd give you that appearance looking down on it. Because I know people would come in and look at it, you know, and I had a lot of "sidewalk engineers," (what are they called?)

RB: _____+ (laughs)

EB: It had me a little worried to be honest with you, but I knew I wasn't varying it *much*. But anyway, I took it right on up to the front, and then I don't remember whether I had to have someone to help me or used "helpers," you know, to squeeze it in and do the end. But I was worried about being away from my dad and everything. That's the first one I'd built *completely* by myself, and I had been away a while too, you know. I remember bringing it in, the "taw" in, to do the front end, and then I felt a great relief because that back end was not... It was duck soup after that. But here's the thing that happened: I had them plane that down, even cypress as heavy as it was, I had them plane it down to three-quarter inch. So then when I got ready to put the bottom boards on... I don't remember how I determined it, but just like you do a deck or anything, I got a spacer and kept a space there, but at the same time I used some caulking in it. And I believe I used two kinds. I think I used fiber caulking and then put modern paste caulking on it.

RB: In other words you left a spacing between the planks?

EB: Mm-hmm, mm-hmm.

RB: How big of a space did you leave?

EB: I could be wrong, [but] I think it was more than a nickel though, it was maybe an eight-penny nail or a ten-penny nail, I'm not just sure.

RB: So it could have been an eighth of an inch?

EB: I could have been, uh-huh, uh-huh. I've left more than that in times past. In fact, some of the boats we built, depending on the lumber we were using, we had to put them in and let them soak and...

[Tape meter, 200]

RB: So you'd want to have a space in there because you were going to leave it in the water and the cypress would swell up.

EB: Right.

RB: So you'd leave that spacer in there.

EB: Right, mm-hmm. It was a pretty fair space because I was... Again, you know, I hadn't worked with cypress a lot and... But I caulked it.

RB: You closed that space up with like cotton fiber caulking?

EB: Well, hemp kind of material, uh-huh. I don't remember where I got it even, but it was that kind of material, rope. And then I also finished it with the modern caulking before I painted it. The payoff was that... And maybe it was just luck, but anyway after all that worry and work getting it ready, I put it on the wagon after the paint dried, and took it down to the river and she floated just as perfect as could be! And not a leak in it! That was the funny part. It did swell, and it did mash out some of that caulking, but the caulking I put in there kept it from leaking, and naturally it [would] swell, and I left it in the river. And I used it there on the Cahaba all the time I was there. And of course it was a popular boat. There was one fellow that I particularly liked. He was an old native that... You know, he wasn't like punk, but he was an old timer. So when I left there I gave it to him, and I thought he was going to faint when I told him it was his. I went back there some... It must have been... Let's see, that was... It was easily ten or twelve years later that I went back. And said, "Oh..." Well, he wrote me a letter and said, "We sure are enjoying that boat!" But I went back, and it was still seaworthy.

RB: When did you build it, now?

EB: That was in... [*Pauses, thinking*]

[Unknown woman suggesting years. Presumably Mrs. Phoebe Braschler.]

EB: 1957. It had to be 1968 or [196]9, then, when I finally got to go back there.

RB: How did you decide what the distance between your frames would be?

EB: The ribs?

RB: How many ribs you'd have, for instance?

EB: I believe that I used... I started out with somewhere between twenty-four and twenty-six inches and then allowed for my ends. Of course, your ends are set back a couple inches. I don't remember exactly. Your ends are set back a full inch, anyway, into your bottom and sides. And I just divided it then equally after I decided how much room...

RB: Okay, now, that's what I wanted to know, what kind of formula... Or if you remember or even if your dad had a certain kind of formula that he would use in, you know, figuring out how many... In other words, could you have produced a full set of ribs before you ever started mounting the side pieces?

EB: Oh, sure! Sure, they routinely done that. But the reason I didn't was because I realized I was... Two things: I was using figures that... And I was trying to correct a *little* bit; I was trying to change it just a little bit. And the other thing, I wasn't sure of myself after being away that long. You know, when you've got a papa to sort of tell you what to do, you don't worry about things like that.

[Tape meter, 250]

But I think they routinely done that, because like I say so many of those old boats were almost... You would look down them and the sides would be straight for ten or twelve feet and then rather abruptly they would move in. And those were the kind of boats they needed back then. It would stay with the current; they didn't move back and forth with eddies. They'd float straight, and that's what they wanted when they were float fishing without power. And then as they got more powerful motors... I've actually seen some folks put a powerful motor on one of those old boats and try to turn it in a hurry, and it looked like they were going to lose it! Certainly you could make a boat maneuver a lot better and turn a lot better. At the same time, you could hold it where you wanted it with a motor too. So that capability for the boat to float straight with the current and sides of the river was less important as they had [more powerful motors.]

RB: So you think your dad and a lot of the boat builders around would probably have generated the frames before they even started in the process. And then would they have built it after they had the frames built? But the frame -- I'll say the ribs -- they had the piece that goes on the bottom and then they had the side sections, would they build them in a piece like that? In other words, would they build a whole set of frames?

EB: I think they *could* build the whole set of frames, [and] probably did. And then they would, I *think*... The way we always done it is to put them together like I did. You'd put your middle ones together first, and as soon as you got a couple of them together, then you could set them on your sawhorses and go right on down and fit them in.

RB: Did you set them upside down or right side up?

EB: Upside down. You build it upside down and finish it with the bottom. Of course, the bottom boards had to bend to some extent, you know, to give you a moon shape.

RB: That's right, you have a rocker and you insert the rocker on the bottom.

EB: Uh-huh, right. And so it was good to start -- I don't know how important it was -- you didn't want to start the front, anyways. You either start at the middle and work back all the way and then to the front, or it's possible you could start at the back and go forward, but the front's where you had to have the most fitting. Back then it was all nails. I liked the idea of using screws. I don't know whether it's particularly good or not, because a lot of the time those screw heads will pop off and everything, but I liked the idea.

RB: Your dad used nails?

EB: Yes, uh-huh.

RB: What kind of nail did he use? Did he use a galvanized nail or did he use common nails?

EB: Well, as soon as he could get... I don't remember when we were able to get galvanized nails. As soon as we could get them... He was kind of... My dad sort of kept up with that sort of thing, and he would use... As soon as something come out that he thought was better, he'd use it. But I don't recall. It seems to me that he liked box nails a lot, you know, slim nails. And I'm not sure... I know that may be important, but I'm not sure how much importance *he* gave it, because I'm not sure what was available back then.

[Tape meter, 300]

I just don't remember him saying too much about nails. I know the first galvanized nails that came out; naturally we used them for about everything. But I don't even remember when they came out now.

RB: Did he paint his cypress boat?

EB: Yes. Years ago, we didn't have paint like we have now, and his favorite paint was... He'd get lead-based paint, and it seems to me like we had to get thinner and thin it [to] mix it. Back then, he liked at least to put on a coat of what he... "Battleship gray" was his favorite. Of course, that wasn't always what everybody else liked. Now, we did float out a few boats that were treated without paint. I'm not absolutely sure on one of those cottonwood boats, it seems like we... I think the boat we had when Phoebe and I got married, that *he* had, I don't believe it was painted. I think it was treated with something and I don't remember what it was, really. But I know back in the old days he liked good lead-based paint. We didn't have the varieties available that we had later on.

RB: Did he use any other trim color? If he was going to paint with battleship gray for instance, did he trim it out with any other color?

EB: What he'd like to do was the battleship gray on the outside, and he'd paint the inside white, which was pleasing.

RB: Did you find there were characteristic color patterns in different areas up and down the river? Did you ever notice that?

EB: I think there was a medium to dark green that most people used, and I think that's what they would ask for most of the time. It seemed to be the choice. I know many times I've seen... Oh, sometimes you'd see six or eight boats tied side-by-side and they'd all be the same color. I suppose it could be called a dark green, I think.

RB: Now, the actual use of the boat, you would float fish with it? Would you gig out of it?

EB: Oh, you bet! You bet! The gigging... My cousins and my dad and everybody, we'd build a -- we called it a deck. It was actually in the front, it was just like your seat behind. It was a full seat attached to the end and the sides, a crosspiece probably the length of the last rib.

[Tape meter, 350]

And always, the giggers... The front gigger would stand up either on that deck, or more often he would stand with his... They liked to stand with a foot on each railing side. Which is not an easy way to stand! (chuckles) But that's they way they would usually gig. Of course they would have their gig resting on the front end for balance, so it wasn't as bad as it might seem. But the gigging was really the big thing. Of course, we fished a lot. We usually kept a trotline out. [We were] eating fish [caught] on trotline, giggered for sport, and ate those too. The float fishing was for fun, usually. Sometimes when we'd go up the river before we had power, we would take the boat up the river to gig *down*. And it was a normal procedure because it was kind of bad to paddle back up after you'd fished all night, so we'd gig down a lot. But the fly fishing and the casting was the...

[Tape meter, 372. End side two, tape one of two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin side one, tape two of two.]

EB: This one attempt at inboard that I actually saw -- you know, this is the one that I was telling you about that was thirty-some feet long -- it was quite a piece of timber, there. To *me* it was exciting just to look at it, anyway.

RB: Was it still in use when you saw it?

EB: No, it was used as a feed bunk when I saw it. And it lasted until... No telling how many years that thing lasted. Just sat there in the weather. It was made of cypress and, boy, it must have been some enormous cypress logs.

RB: And it was an inboard motor that had been in it.

EB: It'd been fitted; it was an inboard. I don't... The inboard may have been in there at the time; I'm not sure. I know it was an inboard; it seems like it may have been.

RB: Well, the kind they had down there were the ones that were contemporary with the Model Ts, and they were... Well, I'll say in the '20s.

EB: Mm-hmm, that probably [would] have been about [right.]

RB: And in '27 and all, they still had them, and they still had them into the '40s. They liked these single cylinder gasoline engines (is what they were.) Some of them had two cylinders, but they were all from two and a half horse to eight horsepower was the biggest they had.

EB: That was on Atchafalaya, there.⁸ And they were basically the same as these, then.⁹

RB: Yes, they were. It formed quite similar, and they were also called... Of course, in English they were called johnboats. In French, "chaland" was the word for that kind of a boat with square ends.

EB: You know, I know where a lot of the Louisiana people came from, the Cajuns and everything, but believe it or not, a lot of the same people who settled this country were not only *from* -- came across this migration route -- but a lot of them are relatives and

⁸ Located in Louisiana, it is North America's largest river swamp.

⁹ Apparently referring to a photograph.

kinfolks that went on down into the Louisiana area there. So they're not so far unrelated.

RB: Well, one of the fellows I talked to in Hornersville, he had personally gone down and been a commercial fisherman in the Atchafalaya Basin himself. And then he had moved back up _____+.

EB: Right.

RB: So I know there's been a lot of up and down the Mississippi Drainage. Especially there's been a lot of cross cultivation there and sharing, I'm sure, of ideas and that kind of thing. I'm certain of that.

Now, you were talking on the last tape before we stopped about bow hunting for fish and also for other animals, too. And you all did that here, when you were young?

EB: Yes, uh-huh. And it was just for sport. We farmed, and we had a lot of rabbits; we had a lot of swamp rabbits as well as cottontails. And usually we'd take a .22 short and shoot them through the head and use them for meat. But occasionally we'd have to have a little fun, so we would get together and my dad would make a bow from hickory for himself and my brother and I. We'd get out and bow hunt and of course -- I hate to admit this -- but you know a lot of my practice was bow as well as a gig. We also had a few rats around the barn and you know they were good target practice. So we'd get out and try our skill on rabbits once in a while. I'm not sure how *legal* it was, really, but I know the "bow and spiking" as they called it was an accepted sport. But we would hunt with a bow... Anything we could hunt with, because it was fun, you know.

RB: And you call it "bow and spiking" because of the tip on the...

EB: Right. Those were known as spikes originally -- in our community, anyway. Now, in looking at Ray Joe's collection...

EB: Ray Joe Hastings?

EB: Ray Joe Hastings, uh-huh. A lot of those were *bigger* than we used. We used a smaller version usually. Of course, they were a little harder to make. One thing that we used different, almost completely different... A lot of his collection as well as [that of] some of the boys that he knows -- they would make the beard by flattening the point and then cutting a beard and bringing it out. Well, actually, the way we'd make the beard, we would draw the end of it out and then turn it back and weld it to itself, and let the beard be the point that wasn't welded then, and then shaped the point. They were a little hard to make sometimes but still [for] some reason...

RB: When you're talking about "beard," now, is that the same as "barb"?

EB: Barb, uh-huh. They were tedious to make, but we had a lot of time, you know. I've made smaller things than that on the forge, so they weren't really that hard to make.

RB: Well, did you have a forge when you were growing up? Did your dad have a forge?

EB: Yes. I learned on my neighbors'. He had a bellows, an old-type bellows that you'd pump.

[Tape meter, 050]

And that's actually where I learned not only to shape metal but to weld it, too. And that was essential to making gigs and small spikes. I don't know why the spike... I know I have used just one prong. It'd depend on... Maybe the fishing was a little different.

Usually, our fishing wasn't for normal fish that you'd go and find with a light. We'd

usually use gigs for that. The time we would use bow and spiking was during a sucker run or something like that. We'd usually try to develop a way so you'd have more than just one shot. If you got a fish, you'd develop it so he wouldn't get away and then you'd get an arrow and another one maybe. I suppose that's why it was important to have good beards or barbs on them so they couldn't get loose.

RB: Because you'd have a string, is it, a line that you'd tie down?

EB: We've tried that. We tried it. I know one time we tried as many as half a dozen arrows on [or] around our belt, and of course you can imagine what happened. You might get a couple on and you may get a lot of tangle, too, you know. But we tried everything. That was a sport.

RB: So you talk about a sucker *run*. These suckers here would have certain seasons where they would make a run?

EB: Yes, uh-huh.

RB: And that means they would group together. Were they doing it to spawn, do you believe?

EB: Yes, uh-huh, they were doing it to spawn, and of course most of these streams, these tributaries to the Current River, a lot of them are... Even if they run year round, there'll still be a hole and then a swift place where it's shallow and that's where you'd usually get them, when they were going up over those fairly shallow areas where the water was fairly swift. But it was a lot of fun.

RB: You were mentioning earlier today, I recall, that the way you all made gigs here was different than how they made them upriver in the Current. What was the difference?

EB: Well that was the main difference, was the barb or beard. The locals call it beard here, but I supposed barb is the correct term, but...

RB: Well, no...

EB: But there were some other differences that I find in talking to these fellows. And apparently the boys at Doniphan have finally come around and started making them professionally. They took the pattern that the boys upriver used. *Downriver*, personally I favored, and I think most of my friends there that wanted the gigs made... I favored a three-prong because in gigging red horse and suckers and the kind of fish we usually gigged on the Current River, I found if I had a four-pronged gig and a gig that was flat... And I know a lot of people like to make them so they cut through the water, and even sharpen them off on the lower part of the shoulders. But to me that's a no-no, because nine times out of ten, I gig their head off, and the head would go floating one way and the rest of the body some other way, so I liked a three-prong that didn't cut so much when you gigged. So naturally we'd put a big barb on that, so that it would hold, if you had one prong or two or all three in him. The best way to do that, of course, is to pull your end of what's going to be the point of your gig, pull it out and flatten it and then bend it back and weld it to itself, and then that gives you just a nice barb that comes out and will hold a lot. And the way those barbs were turned, as far as I'm concerned... A lot of the folks would turn them in and turn the middle one opposing one of the end barbs and that would cut right through a fish. Usually, I would -- although it doesn't look as neat -- I would turn the barbs out so that they *wouldn't* cut so much and they'd hold more. Really, the truth of this is I learned to make gigs from a local neighbor that was a self-taught

blacksmith. My great-grandfather -- the one that was a Confederate captain -- he was a blacksmith and I had heard a lot of things, but I never did learn anything. I learned it from my neighbor, and then...

RB: What was his name?

EB: Daniel Patterson. Captain Daniel Patterson in the Civil War. But...

RB: Now, the neighbor, that you learned from?

[Tape meter, 100]

EB: Oh, the neighbor! The neighbor was George Pierce. Pierces were like the Prices in my home area. They were about as plentiful as the Braschlers, and his name is George Pierce. His dad and family had a colorful history along the river there too, so they knew about boats and everything. But anyway, I learned *basically* how to build a gig from him. And then there was a guy and his brother who came in to Ripley County, their names were Ryan. And they were the first that really taught me how to *temper* steel without just by guess. They taught me the color pattern as it come off and how to dip it into either oil or water. The only thing: after I went to school and learned this really scientifically, I still agreed with what *they* said. They always told me that when the straw color comes off, that's the time to dip it. And that gives you the toughest steel. And for the Current River, that was perfect. And it was perfect for tools like punches and chisels. If I dipped it when the darker blue color came off, it was usually too hard. So actually they taught me how to do that, and then they also taught me how to not be ashamed to use a file and really shape something up pretty. They taught me how to really build a gig that was pretty. I have one out here I intended to show you when we were out at the barn. I

have several that were sloppily made, and then I have it. And it's a beautifully built gig. I have one out here that they taught me on that I *like* [and] I've kept. The only thing: instead of the three-prong gig, it was made from a five-prong gig, and I cut the outer two prongs off and I didn't really smooth that as much as I should have. But they would use a file and really make them pretty and watch their original lines of the tines. If they'd turned them out to work on them, they'd make sure that they heated them in the same place and turned them back to where they had a straight appearance, you know. So I don't think I could duplicate what they taught me now, but I felt that I had some good teachers along the way on how to make the barbs, the beards, as well as shape the final product.

RB: When were you learning? Like when you were in your teens? Is that when you were learning that kind of thing?

EB: Early teens and through my teens, right, uh-huh.

RB: Some of those gigs, [it] seems like I noticed quite a bit of difference in the *weight* of them. Some are just *real heavy duty* it seemed like and some quite a bit lighter. Is that for different sort of fish, is it?

EB: I don't really think so. I think that people just maybe feel secure making a heavy gig. Personally, I like a light one and like I say the three-prong.

Really [there were] two different kinds of gigging in Current River when I was a kid, but I don't think it's the same anymore. Anymore, you gig in the summertime on the shoals. But back then we also gugged in the wintertime and in eighteen or possibly twenty foot of water. A heavy gig could be to [an] advantage under those conditions, but

I don't really think so. I've giggered with the light ones. And when you get in deep water, you have to hold against the current. So as long as you know the current and what you've got to hold against, the weight is... It's good to have a heavy gig in a way, and in a way it's better to have a lighter one. So I don't think that... I think that people just as I say felt more secure to build a heavy gig. And they got started using it, and I just don't agree with the heavy ones or the five [or] four prongs. But still, that's just the difference you know.

RB: And you can see a fish to gig in twenty feet of water?

EB: Well, when we giggered in the wintertime and the river's clear, you usually... Your giggering ended around ten o'clock in the morning. You'd want to get down early and gig. You'd want to have the sun up to where you could see well, of course, but strangely enough, all of the old wintertime giggers would tell you that by ten or ten-thirty the wind would come up enough to [create] the ripples [which] would come up and cause you problems. Of course, I didn't know anything about Polaroids then.¹⁰ They might have helped.

[Tape meter, 150]

But anyway, that's right. We'd gig in the morning in deep water. And I've actually giggered in Arkansas in deep water since I've been back here. But anymore, you know, it's different in the species and the fish you're allowed to gig. I even hate to admit the fish we giggered back in the early days.

RB: Why is that? What kind did you...?

¹⁰ Referring to polarized sunglasses which help fishermen to see when light is reflecting off water.

EB: Well, of course, we never giggered bass or anything like that. But I know when the natives, the walleye used come in and they would just cover the bottom of the stream in some of those holes, you know, in clear water. You know, I don't know whether they were considered a game fish. Certainly they should have been, but I know they were fair game at one time. Giggers giggered them. Of course, we'd gig flathead catfish and they were in deep water sometimes. And occasionally there'd be other species that you giggered. But there was a lot of deep water. You had to be prepared to gig in deep water when you gig in the daytime.

RB: Do you have buffalo fish and that kind of thing?

EB: Yeah, but buffalo was... Yeah, in fact we have giggered buffalo in deep water. Sometimes they will migrate into deep water. And we have [giggered them.]

RB: Did you ever see a trap used in the river?

EB: Mm-hmm.

RB: What sort of traps did they have? Was it wood slat traps?

EB: Wood slats [were] what you would see most often, because they're the kind that would be deserted most often. But there were people that [would] build hoop nests professionally. Like this one I've got hanging out in the garage, here. That's not a real good one; I just kept it to show. I had one that was built they way they were supposed to be built, it had wooden hoops. Some of these old guys, especially when you get on down in Arkansas where it was more commercialized, they were good at... They could make a hoop net and turn it out in a hurry. They would surprise you! Of course they had throats on them

and usually they'd anchor them upstream and have the mouth of it downstream and [they'd] bait that and...

RB: Now, was the wooden trap against the law? Is that legal?

EB: Well, it was illegal after I got up some size, but the reason I had mentioned that you see more wood traps -- Current River being as cold as it is, any old thing made of wood is likely to persist for some time. There were deep holes where the current didn't even take something like that out. I know there's a place down the river there, it's -- I always called it "Pipestone Bluff." It was right above the mouth of Hurricane Creek, some people call it "Cedar Bluff" and different names. But there was sort of a little cove in there that was very deep; it's still deep today. But this little cove [for] some reason, the current didn't hit it even when the river was up. And that old wooden trap, we'd see it every time we'd gig and come by there -- that is, when the river's clear, you know. It was there for years.

RB: Have you ever seen a wooden slat trap that was cylindrical, round?

EB: Not on Current River. I've seen them, but not on Current River.

RB: Not on the Current. Where have you seen them?

EB: I believe on the East coast is where I've seen those.

RB: I saw some down in the Bootheel.

EB: In the Bootheel, yeah?

RB: Uh-huh. (laughs)

EB: There could have been some here. You know, I just don't remember seeing any.

RB: One man was calling it a "log net." (laughing) He would call it that.

EB: Sounds typical. That sounds...

RB: (laughing) It was a slat, you know, slat trap. It was a cylinder with throats made of sharpened wood slats.

[Tape meter, 200]

EB: Right, mm-hmm, slats.

RB: As you were growing up, when did you decide you would go to college? Did you know all the time?

EB: No, I had a good friend that [was] a teacher. And really when I first started thinking about college, I was thinking about possibly law or something that required a little more study. I wasn't really that much of a student, but I knew I'd have to really work at it. So sometime along the way, before I got in the Army, I started meeting... Well, the Conservation Commission of Missouri was reorganized I think in the early 1930s. It was one of the early ones. And they started having people come out once in a while [that] I got acquainted with that would talk about restocking. And some of the programs made sense. In fact, I helped work on some of their early programs when I was just a teenager. And also I got involved to some extent in enforcement early on. And so I went ahead and went in the Army, and when I came out about the first guy I met that started talking to me was somebody from the Conservation Commission. I made up my mind *then* I was going to go to school and get involved in that type work, although my first plan was just to go... Back then, if you went two years in college you could be eligible for [the] enforcement part of [the] Missouri Conservation Commission. And *really*, that's what I had in mind, but I got up there and got acquainted then and decided to go on. I did work

for them a time or two during deer season and got a little experience there, but I decided I wanted to get into management biology. Even so, I didn't finish what I set out to once I decided. I never really finished college. I went to Auburn some and different schools after I started working for the government, but the demand then was for management in the field, and so you just couldn't pass up opportunities. So I got out really before I was finished.

RB: You were of an age... Let's see, or were you a little bit young for the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]?

EB: Yes, I was familiar with the CCCs. My brother was in the Cs, and he was in the supervisory part in the office here in Doniphan, so I'd go up and spend time with him. I knew a lot of the boys in the Cs and was familiar with it, but I wasn't quite old enough. It began to disband and we started getting ready for something else by the time that...

RB: That's right. You were still fairly young, there I guess, when World War Two broke out.

EB: Right.

RB: And then you decided to join? Volunteer?

EB: Yes and no. Most of my buddies volunteered [in] their senior year in high school, but I was... As I recall, when Pearl Harbor was hit, my brother came home, and he and I and one of my cousins [and a] neighbor's boy... Wait a minute, let me get that right. My birthday was December the 11th and his December the 4th, so we were celebrating our birthday ahead of time when the Japs hit Pearl Harbor.

[Tape meter, 250]

Well, he was ready to go to the Navy because, you know, we'd been in the war for some time, and so he was ready to join the Navy. And there was four of us. And one boy, the youngest one was just a year older than I. When the Japs hit Pearl Harbor... My dad had been agreeable but my mother wasn't after that, so I went back in and finished high school. Then when I finally went... It seems now looking back, I didn't think the war was nearly over, but I didn't go in until, I believe it was August 1944. Then I went in and was held back for cadre. The Army had problems in knowing just how many people they wanted trained for this and that; they'd change with the weather. So they told me then that they would hold me back for OCS [Officer Candidate School.] So then I failed the physical for it when the time came, so they gave me the option of being discharged. So I went out and went to school for a year and then I went back in again. I didn't stay long that time. The second time I went in, I had planned... You know, boys wanted to see the country, but the Army had other plans. They usually kept me in school. Then they offered me a pretty good deal. I was in the regular Army at that time, with an ?___? in front of my number, so when I got a sergeant [rank], that meant from now on. So I thought it was a pretty good deal and I was ready to make a career of it. My advisor at the University of Missouri -- I still have the letter, I wrote him a letter and told him, Dr. Rudolf Bennitt. I know you've heard of him; he was one of the great ones up there -- but, oh, he come apart. You know, *no way* that I should stay in the Army. So I changed my mind then, and took my discharge and went back to school. So I really... Although I was in the Army twice, I never really did anything. Like I say, I was always...

RB: But you achieved the rank of sergeant, then?

EB: Yes, uh-huh.

RB: But the first time, your physical, you couldn't get by that?

EB: Well, like I say, the Army didn't know what they wanted, it seems to me. They discharged me because of a... My physical problem was I'd had an accident with a horse that was a little too rough and I had a bad knee. I guess in football I got it damaged a little bit more, although I run track in the university. So you know, it wasn't that bad, but the Army was really strict then. In fact, I felt myself lucky. My best buddy that I grew up with in high school, he did leave high school and he got washed out of OCS the same way at Fort Jackson in South Carolina, I believe, and they put him in the infantry replacement and he didn't last long.

[Tape meter, 300]

So you know, it depends on... The good Lord just has it His way, and I didn't argue about it. But at the same time, I didn't want... What I'm saying is, for boys my age, there were a lot of them that had a lot more good military experience than I. I was kind of... I went to various schools that were not even tough to go through, just mostly administrative study and sort of thing. So I really didn't do anything, but at the same time, although I am not overly proud of it, I didn't gripe about it either.

RB: Did you know that when you know that when you... Let's see now, Professor Bennitt was it?

EB: Mm-hmm.

RB: Did he talk you into coming back to school?

EB: Oh, yeah! Yeah. In fact, it's kind of funny, back then I had it in my head that I might be a baseball pitcher, too. I played a little baseball. So I don't remember the sequence exactly, but he talked to me like a papa. But anyway, I went back to school and I was getting ready to play a little baseball and was on the track squad, too. And I got in an accident and got my shoulders both broken. So that's when I met Phoebe. And come to find out, he knew her, too. So that helped me a lot with him. He was... Everything was gun-ho! I don't know if you know the history of what happened to Dr. Bennitt or not, but he was really a... He had had a heart -- I think it was his heart -- had hit him even before I met him. He was a *brilliant* professor and a great one. He and E. Sydney Stephens were *really* the drive were really the drive that established the Missouri Conservation Commission as it is now. I read what Jim Keefe wrote and others, but I don't remember how much credit they gave Dr. Bennitt. But he deserves a lot! Because he and Syd Stephens were really the drive. And he was a brilliant prof. But anyway, he lived long enough, I think, to... I *think* he lived 'til after Phoebe and I were married. But he knew the situation and... You know, you never know whether or not I'd ever made it pitching baseball. That's a guess. So it turned out real good.

RB: So you had a _____. It was an automobile accident?

EB: No. It was this Max Peterson, who you probably know. He was always telling me about it, [he was a] chief [in the] Forest service. He and I were roommates. And I had a little dog.

[Tape meter, 350]

And you know, as students will do -- it was a retriever I believe -- and as students will do, they get out and walk. And back then, Columbia wasn't quite so congested as it is now. Back where there's buildings now, we used to go over there and take picnic lunches and everything else. But *this* time, we got out on that road southwest of Columbia -- McBaine Road, I think they used to call it -- and we were walking this dog trying to train her, and we crossed the road, and there was about a six or eight inch snow, I guess, that was sort of slushy. This truck driver, he was a local truck driver there, and he was pretty drunk up pretty good. And I guess I was too trusting -- even though I was out on the shoulder of the road, I wasn't on the highway -- but this dog, I was trying to keep it from running out and crossing the road. And I just reached over and petted it and giving it a little...

RB: Reassurance?

EB: Yeah. And the next thing I knew, I was in the hospital. I think the hub hit one shoulder and the head and the other shoulder. Broke both shoulders, so it was...

RB: *Gosh!* Did it actually roll over you? The truck?

EB: I don't know. They said...

[Tape meter, 376. End side one, tape two of two.]

[Tape meter, 001. Begin side two, tape two of two.]

EB: ...Hy Simmons. But you know, I was just working out mainly on the field there in front of where I lived, getting ready for the season to open.

RB: What was your event on the track squad?

EB: I run the... I think it was... It wasn't the quarter mile relays. I believe back then they run the eighth mile relays. It could have been a quarter mile. I was in the relays. And I went out and worked out for the... What? I don't remember; the dash, hundred yard, or whatever it was.

RB: Sprint?

EB: A sprint, uh-huh. But I learned there were people that were faster. But it was fun; I enjoyed it. Like the Army, I got a lot of credit even when I didn't participate. Like my roommate... I roomed with the football players and all of them. I knew all of them and worked out with them. But I decided after all that happened I had to concentrate on one thing, and pretty soon then I concentrated on marriage.

RB: (laughs) So you got married there in Columbia, did you?

EB: Mm-hmm.

RB: Where did you live in Columbia when you were there? Do you recall?

EB: Yes. .My first home was on Hitt Street. That was right down from where the library [was located.] Well, you know where Hitt Street is.

RB: I probably parked my car close to where it was.

EB: Between Hitt Street and Rothwell. Is Rothwell Gym there? I guess it's still there, isn't it?¹¹

RB: I think there is a gym down there

EB: And then...

¹¹ Near the southwest corner of Hitt and Rollins.

RB: McKee. No, I was thinking of McKee Gym. I'm not sure which one you're talking about there. [*Suddenly remembering*] Oh, yeah! Right, uh-huh, there is another old... There's two old gyms there. One was the women's gym and one...¹²

EB: Then later, when I went back... There's an old house around in front, over by the dairy area there, in front of the Sanborn Field, I roomed there.¹³ That's when a big lot of the football players were there. Old Chester 'Fritz' was captain of the football team then, when I went back.

RB: It was a big house then?

EB: Uh-huh, yeah.

RB: Was it like a dorm?

EB: It was a dorm, uh-huh. Then when Phoebe and I got married, I moved back up on... Oh, I don't remember the name of the street, back up in the northeast part of town.

RB: So you were there in Columbia right after the war. It would have been in '46 [or] '47 or right in there?

EB: '45, I believe. In fact, I was tempted to kid Dorothy, when I went there, there was seven girls to every boy. Of course the Stephens College girls, we'd date them. We'd even pick out the ones we wanted before we went in, usually.

(both laughing)

EB: It was terrible!

But it was work, too. I worked. I held down a lot of jobs when I was in college

¹² McKee was the women's gym, located on the east side of Hitt Street, between Rollins and University Avenue.

¹³ Sanborn Field is located on the southeast corner of College and Bouchelle Avenues.

even though I was under [the] G.I. Bill. I wanted to get experience. So I worked around Boone County there quite a lot on various things. I don't know what [job I] started [in.] I had a job... I think maybe Ralph Peck gave me the idea, but another guy and I worked around on various hedgerow cleanings and different things, you know, conservation related jobs. I got acquainted pretty well over the county when I was there. I think the world of Boone County.

RB: But the campus sure has changed a lot, I guess, since you were there.

EB: Oh, you bet it has! In fact, that whole area down... The poultry husbandry area used to be out in the boondocks, out where the highway comes across, the old... What's the name of that creek there? Anyway, where it goes around to the football stadium. That was all cow pasture back when I first went there. We'd all walk out there and picnic.

RB: The campus was more like town streets and stuff. In other words, you had businesses within the campus? Lowery Mall was not there, was it? Where the library is, wasn't there a road that ran through there somewhere?

EB: Mm-hmm, there was an opening in the...

RB: They had some clubs in there too, didn't they?

EB: Yeah. And of course, they had The Shack around there.¹⁴ I was trying to think of the... The uptown... The best restaurant there was right around the corner from me. I can't think of the name of it, [but] it was pretty good, there in front of Jesse Hall. We would eat there on Sunday, usually.

[tape meter, 050]

You wouldn't believe... You know, fifty cents for a meal wasn't unheard of. Through the week [at] some of those other restaurants [a meal was] thirty-five cents. And of course, I know you've heard of The Shack. It was right on down the way there.

RB: What kind of place was it, though?

EB: You mean you never heard of The Shack?

RB: I heard of it, but I...

EB: I think it was a four... What's the low percent beer? Six percent, or whatever? But that's where the guys went to unwind. And it was always in the forefront.

RB: Was it only the guys? Or the girls would go in there?

EB: Yeah, the girls too.

RB: (laughs)

EB: Of course, I come from a place like Ripley County, I didn't... You know, that was new to me to see the gals out and letting their hair down once in a while. But we had some times. We had a few clashes between the vets and the regular students... Oh, the initiation and everything... Of course, the vets, they were...

RB: The Greek students?

EB: Yes, we had a little of that, too. I know one. One old guy that become a... I haven't looked him up, but I've heard a lot about him. His name is ?Shinamen?...Carl ?Shinamen? Several of the people I knew become administrators in the University. Elmer Keil was another one that... In fact, I saw his picture just recently. Of course,

¹⁴ On the southeast corner of Maryland and Conley Avenues, now the site of the university's Reynolds Alumni Center.

Elmer was always a gentleman. If I'm not mistaken, Elmer was a... He may have been even a colonel; he was an Army officer, so he was reserved when he came out. Helen, his wife, died of cancer here some time ago. She was a real good friend of mine. But I believe it was Carl... I know he got up pretty high in the School of Agriculture. I don't remember just what it was.

But you were talking about the Greeks, I know one time we had a battle between a couple houses there. Of course, what it started over, he was a boxer. He'd boxed in the Army -- and I believe he was an officer, I believe he was a lieutenant at least, maybe a captain -- but he was pretty sophisticated, a pretty good boxer. A couple of those guys jumped he and his buddies, and of course he just laid them low in a hurry, and that got a gang coming up the street. We had a big old guy from Swampeast down here.¹⁵ In fact, there were several boys from Swampeast that I was buddied with, and they were a little rougher than I. But one of them was big John Langdon. He was on the football squad and I don't know why he didn't make All-American, he was big enough and tough enough, but I guess he just didn't have up here. But anyway, bless his heart, he was nice and I liked him. But the boys saw the fraternity house marching up the street there. It seems like it was at Defoe Hall or something over there. We had some buddies over there, so we were going to make a flanked attack on them. We had it all planned, but they were strong coming up the street so we decided we'd better get Big John out of bed. I'll never forget this: you'd think this wouldn't think this would happen to a guy in college, but somebody woke up Big John and told him the Greeks were marching up

¹⁵ A joking reference to the southeast Missouri Bootheel region.

there. He come bouncing down those stairs -- it was a three story building and you could stairs shake. I know he came by me. We were real good friends, but it just tickled the fire out of me! He said, "Just let me get to those sons of Ethiopians!" (laughs)

RB: (laughing) Ethiopians?!

EB: (laughing) I thought I'd die!

RB: But they were really Greeks!

EB: Real Greeks!

(both laughing)

EB: I shouldn't tell that about a college buddy, but... But we had some good ones!

RB: And did they actually have a clash there? Who prevailed in the situation?

EB: No, they... I don't even think the police came. I think they backed down when Big John come down, and we had some pretty rough cookies there and we made our flank attack, they... I don't think there were any... There were a few guys that went together, but you know how that goes. When it's guys that don't know how to fight, a lot of times, the college guys, they look like they're doing damage and [they] scuffle around a little bit, but I don't think there was any damage done. [Didn't] amount to anything.

RB: But the point was that there had been some... Some of you guys had already been to war or been to the Army.

EB: That's true, but in all fairness, I think there were some boys that had not really... They had a chip on their shoulder. That's about the best way to describe it. I'm not saying there weren't some that... They weren't ready for anymore foolishness; there were some like that [who] had really been through it. But there were a few that... I belonged to

some of the veterans' organizations. But I know one time I did participate in one of those deals, where they set up a paddle line because of a cigarette butt situation. Of course, I didn't smoke and I don't like the litter! So I was really on the side of the paddle line. But nevertheless, I was a veteran [and] had to go with them. This is back in the annals; you'll see this back in the paper somewhere where we took their paddles and burned them. I think I saw a picture of it not too long ago -- burned them right on the campus and that made the big time.

[Tape meter, 100]

RB: How did that go down, now? If you were a veteran, you had to go through this paddle line?

EB: Well, the veterans were... They should have known better. As I remember it, you know... We had to police after ourselves in the Army, but some of them after they got out of the Army I guess they decided they didn't want to be told. And I believe [that] is what it started over, to the best of my memory, was cigarette butts.

RB: What did they [do], just flick their cigarette butts down?

EB: Yeah, and they were going to form a paddle line and run them through it, and it didn't work out. That's the nearest real clash that I remember, and I don't remember...

RB: Who was the ones that was actually going to man the paddles?

EB: Well, it was mostly boys that were not veterans, you know, that belonged to the fraternities that had a policing disposition or whatever.

(both laughing)

EB: Really, I was on their side, but I wasn't either.

RB: So there was that kind of conflict. It's not surprising that after such an event like World War Two that... You know, I do remember after the Vietnam War, there's some of those boys that came back there, they were crazy if you had to work with them. Some of them had all kinds of, different kinds of attitudes.

EB: Some of them really were for real, but a lot of them... They'd take advantage of a situation, and that's what bothered me. That's what bothered me there. One old boy I knew personally in our house there, in our place, he raised so much commotion. He couldn't sleep, he was... All that jazz, you know. So I just had to find out, and I got to asking somebody who knew him, and they said, "Well, he washed out of paratroopers in Florida!" (laughing) And they said, "He couldn't take it!" And here he was... You know, it's unfortunate.

RB: He was shell shocked...

EB: Well...

RB: (chuckles) But he never...

EB: (laughing) He never went. He shouldn't have been! I had an old sergeant that I liked pretty well. When I first went into the Army, as late as it was even, there were still a lot of the remnants of the peacetime army, which I think it's not unfair to say that some of them were not the very best specimens. I had several that I knew personally, like a captain that got broken down into a buck sergeant, and a lieutenant broken down to corporal. Well, that tells you the story, you know. Then when you get into war, you start getting your very best and the thing goes that way. I was actually acquainted with some of them as late as it was when I got in the Army and everything. But that was the... I

don't know, it... This one old sergeant was talking with me one day. I'd buddy with them early on. In fact I had my hair cut G.I. when I went in the Army, and when they took all of them to the barbershop to get their hair cut, there was an old boy, Dale Easter, that pushes these Missouri foxtrot horses up at Lebanon. You may know him, may have heard of him. He and I were kind of buddies, and we both had our haircut good, so they said, "You might as well come out and go with us down to the service club, the cadre there." So I got acquainted with them in a hurry and would hear them talk. This one old sergeant, I thought he hit the nail on the head. This one kid was hard to handle, and he said, "You know, you're an all American screw-up, and the trouble is if we let you go into combat, you'll cause more trouble and cause more good people to get killed." And that's unfortunate, [but] that's the way it happens sometimes. At the same time, there's a lot of good men that get wrecked by war, and there's no doubt about it. It's just that I would [have] liked to have some kind of way... Back when there were a lot of them, I would have liked to had some kind of way knowing who was for real and who was the fake, you know.

RB: Mm-hmm. You say there was quite a demand after a while for field people in conservation. Were your first jobs in the field, were they enforcement jobs?

[Tape meter, 150]

EB: No, not really, of any permanence. My first jobs were kind of... Trapping, that was my first job. Even in my trapping job... *Soon* after I got to trapping, they assigned me to work with... We had a research lab in Denver, and they assigned me to work with a research biologist out there. So you know, I'd collect any kind of data that they needed.

And then something you *might* be interested in, and [it's] something that interests me as far as the coyote control program, we had two things that were interesting to me. Coming out the war, we developed two methods -- and stop me if you're not interested in this -- but one of them was called a "coyote getter." Basically it was a triggering mechanism for a .38 shell and that was loaded with cyanide. And you buried it in the ground in such a way or stuck it in the ground in such a way that the loaded cyanide [shell] was ready to go off in whatever's mouth that pulled it. And you used shoddy sheep wool and paraffin, and you made a little cap on that. It looked like a bone sticking out of the ground. And the old coyotes would come and pull those. We had to use them judiciously of course; you didn't want to kill everybody's sheepdogs. We had ways of doing that. We'd load them up with the cayenne pepper and try to break the sheepdogs, but still you had to be real careful with them. Those had to be supervised really close. And I got into that soon after I got into Wyoming.

So then from that I graduated into the most exciting one in a way, but the most deadly one. We captured a formula from the Germans we called "Ten-Eighty" [Sodium monofluoroacetate] Are you familiar with that?

RB: I think I've heard of something like that.

EB: It's deadly poison, but it's more poison to different species than others. It's poison to humans of course, and it's more deadly to the canine tribe than anything else. But we were still researching that as well as using it when I was there. I was in charge of that program. For canines, it's so deadly that... We usually used wild horses for bait, but I

could spray it on a horse's hoof and [if] a coyote [would] come by and lick it, he was a dead coyote! It was really...

RB: You mean you used dead wild horses?

EB: Right, we'd kill wild horses and drag them out in the remote areas and set up bait stations. And it was very deadly on coyotes.

RB: Boy, things really have changed quite a bit, haven't they?

EB: Oh, you bet! You bet!

RB: The methods, uh-huh.

EB: We were researching it as fast as we could, you know, on cattle and different species. But I knew it was deadly. It was designed for humans to begin with, so you had to really be careful with that.

RB: Isn't one form of that is what they used in Japan in that subway poisoning that they had lately? Something like that? It seems like it was a relative of that stuff. Yeah, so things have changed an awful lot in the conservation field since then.

EB: Oh, yeah! Another way we destroyed coyotes was from the air. You wouldn't believe some of that! I didn't when we first started doing it.

[Tape meter, 200]

But we used small planes, really, and a shotgun, believe it or not. You'd just come down so low on those old coyotes [when they would] come out above the struts or under the wing, and you'd do damage. So we hunted coyotes from the air, and there were a few accidents down in on that. But it was... The attitude, like you say, has changed. Of course, even *then* the wolf had already been destroyed out there so the cattlemen were

not... They didn't look with very much kindness toward controlling the coyote for the sheep men because their problem was gone. So there was... It took a little bit of preparation and getting acquainted and talking to the ranchers. That was one of the things that was interesting.

RB: When did you move back?

EB: *[thoughtful pause]* Let's see, I moved down to Arizona... No, in Wyoming I changed from the wildlife end of it to fisheries, and went to Saratoga, Wyoming. Let's see, I guess in about '53 or so, something like that. From then on I was with fisheries. I went from there down into Arizona on the Apache Indian reservation, where we had a trout program going there. I didn't stay anywhere very long, it didn't seem like. It seemed like I was moving all the time. I stayed there probably... Oh, maybe a year or so, and then I went to Texas and got back into the warm water. That's when they were looking for ways to produce catfish. And I went down and got in the catfish business. So then from there they decided...

RB: Whereabouts in Texas were you?

EB: Uvalde. That's southwest Texas. And from there then I went back to Auburn. I hardly got landed there 'til they wanted me to come to a special school in [Washington,] D.C. So I went up there and was there for a year, and then came back and finished it (Auburn.) Then I went back to my old region out in Oklahoma and got back in the catfish business again. From there I went up and started a new hatchery in western Kansas. I started working with not only catfish but started working with walleye there a lot. Started a stocking program in western Kansas [of] walleye. And that eventually got me back up

into Minneapolis and the area up in there. There mainly we were working with lake trout trying to reestablish them in the Great Lakes. [In] Michigan, one of the fellows there -- I don't remember his name now -- but he wanted to try the Coho salmon, so we got busy. And you've heard or you've read about it. It was a great success, so that didn't hurt my stock, so they moved me then to work on the striped bass down in Atlanta. Of course, I was working... In Atlanta I covered from [the] Carolinas -- well, from Virginia, originally -- over to Texas, including Louisiana and Arkansas. That's where I spent most of my time then.

[Tape meter, 250]

And there's where I really got back into a little bit of everything, but I was still basically a fisheries man when I retired.

RB: And so you weren't able to come back home until you retired.

EB: No, I'd come through here sometimes and stop by on official business and see them. And sometimes I'd come through Columbia. I was at Columbia more than I was anywhere else. I'd fly up to Columbia every once in a while. In fact, one time they even let Phoebe come with me. One thing that brought me to Columbia was their fish research lab there. Do you know where that is?

RB: Let's see...

EB: It's on the south campus or south university property there.

RB: Oh, right.

EB: See, when I was in Minneapolis I was engineer liaison up there for... The [U.S. Fish and Wildlife] Service was set up where you had a good bunch of engineers but you had to

have somebody that knew something about facilities. And I got into that early. We built that research lab there, and so then when I got down to Atlanta occasionally they'd want to talk to somebody about some of the operation of some of it. So I'd run back up there once in a while, and that got me back in *near* home country once in a while.

RB: So you've been here since 19...?

EB: '87. I retired in 1984, I believe, and I stayed down there until '87 when I came back here.

RB: You decided to come back home after all.

(both laugh)

EB: Yeah! I loved it down there but... We had a place down in Morgan County, [Georgia.] That was about fifty miles southeast of Atlanta, and you would have loved it! It was the last stronghold of the Indians down there and a nice place. Nice place to hunt and everything. And I really tried hard to find a good place to live down there somewhere. We tried hard. Phoebe and I looked all around. So we finally decided that we were going to have to sell where we were at because the town had built around us and the property had come up to where we couldn't afford *not* to sell it, you know.

So we came up here. Like I think she mentioned to you, we came awfully close to buying a place out of Ashland there, and we probably would have but they didn't... The situation was that I was trying to buy about six lots and I was going to sell the house that [was on] one of the lots and then have me a little room and build a new house. The house was there had a good orchard established, and I was just hem-hawing around to whether we could get by with keeping the orchard and selling the house and everything. So I didn't want to bid again, and so we came down here and this house was available.

And I decided to take it. That's how close we come with being residents of Boone County.

[Tape meter, 300]

RB: But now, history, though. All this background you have of kind of outdoors, wildlife, fish and that kind of thing. But have you been interested in history all along?

EB: Oh, you bet. And that was something I started to mention to you while ago. I don't know how interested you are, but I really fell in the middle of it in Wyoming. See, Wyoming's not that far from the history that we study about. Including the Tisdale Ranch and the Three T and the Beck Ranch and the... Oh, there's another one that I was telling somebody about the other day that they were still... Actually, I got in there and I would stay. Because of my job I would usually stay... I had the choice: I'd either sleep in a tent or else go to the nearest bunkhouse or ranch. So I got acquainted with the ranchers. And as luck would have it... I was always interested in history, and I'd get out there and I'd see things that I didn't know existed, like up in the Bighorns. There were still places up there -- when I went out there anyway -- where you'd see the teepee rings, where you read about the Indians that encamped up there and went back and forth, you could see! It was still there. Acres of them, you know. So many things like that, that you come to ignore. And then I got out... This Johnson County War, I was familiar with it, you know, to some extent. So lo and behold I started staying at the Three T Ranch, where old man Mark Tisdale was still alive back then. Of course, I talked to him. I found out his wife was from Missouri. In fact, she'd been back to visit relatives in Missouri when she got killed on a country road there on the ranch, you know, in a car

wreck. So I started really asking about the Johnson County War and all the various things that happened in there. The more I talked the more it seemed it wasn't really that remote!

So I *really* loved the history there, and then another place where most Missourians don't even like to think about history was in western Kansas at Hays. See, I was right out at Hays there. In fact I went to church in Hays. And that's where it all happened, in that area. About the time I was there, old... What's his name? I thought of it just a minute ago. The actor from Minnesota that -- Mr. Dillon.¹⁶ He was going through all that. And most of that was based on history, which made it interesting even to watch the show along when you were actually learning something about the history of the country. So the history was always there.

[Tape meter, 350]

RB: It was a draw to you.

EB: Yeah. I enjoyed the history everywhere I was ever at. Alabama, and D.C., and naturally Texas, because I knew a little bit about the area down there.

RB: Well, they've got a kind of interesting place around here. It's good to have a little bit of time to devote to it, I suspect. Do you spend a lot time with it pretty well, or...?

EB: Well...

RB: Part-time?

EB: Too much, really. (laughs) The history here is... I think I mentioned to you earlier that

¹⁶ Referring to James Arness, who played an Old West sheriff named Matt Dillon in the long running TV series, *Gunsmoke*.

the details of it is what I'm really interested in. And that's because of being on the river and of course, I like to spend a lot of time on the river even now. And if you're there you can see how it *really* happened and *where* it happened. You know, history, they'll move you from Pocahontas to Jefferson City or somewhere in a hurry, and you miss a lot of details.

RB: That's right, the daily events.

EB: Mm-hmm.

RB: What's your role now with the museum? Are you the director?

EB: No. We have a board that is not functioning anymore. I'm the president of the ?DNAP? board, which is really...¹⁷

[Tape meter, 381. End side two, tape two of two. End of interview.]

¹⁷ Unfortunately, no more of the interview was recorded, so the meaning of DNAP is unknown at the time of transcription. However, DNAP does stand for "Division of Natural Areas and Preserves" in other parts of the country. Perhaps he was involved in something along that line, or possibly he was referring to a defunct Doniphan museum.