

Oral Memoirs

of

Bobby Martin

An Interview Conducted by

Daniel Motta

June 13, 2012

Museum of Seminole County History

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Interview Histories

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The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Museum of Seminole County History, Sanford, Florida.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Bobby Martin is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on June 13, 2012.

Abstract

Oral history of Bobby Martin, conducted by Daniel Motta on June 13, 2012. Martin was born in Tampa, Florida, in 1944, but spent much of his life as a commercial fisherman on Lake Jesup and Lake Monroe. In the interview, Martin discusses growing up in Longwood, serving in the military during the Vietnam War, the commercial fishing industry, the relationship between fishermen, fishing methods, catfish farming and the decline of the wild commercial fishing industry, leaving the fishing industry, and the dangers of fishing.

Bobby Martin

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Daniel Motta

June 13, 2012

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Motta This is Daniel Motta. It is June 13, 2012. I am at the Museum of Seminole County History, interviewing Bobby Martin. If we could just start – could you just tell me where you were born?

Martin Yes, sir. I was born in Tampa, Florida, Hillsborough County.

Motta And what year was that?

Martin 1944.

Motta So what brought you over to Central Florida?

Martin My dad's employment, basically.

Motta And, what was he in?

Martin Well, at that time, I believe he was working for the Imperial Oil Company. I believe he was. And I was about three, four years old when we moved up here from Tampa.

Motta And you said, a little earlier, that you fished with him. Did he have experience fishing in the fishing industry as well?

Martin Yeah, absolutely. Well, to get to that, we'll have to fast forward to 1960 or '61.

0:00:48

Growing up in Longwood

Motta Oh, okay. Well, we'll take it a little slower then. When you got here – could you describe your house. Your...

Martin Absolutely.

Motta Your – just your house, neighborhood. How it was then?

Martin Sure. We moved up here – I'll tell you this. My dad bought a house in Tampa when I was a baby. My mother told me this. They borrowed money from my grandmother. For \$600, they bought a house. They paid the house off. And from

that day forward, my dad never had a house mortgage. He was able to – to wheel and deal, and he never had a mortgage.

But the story is that we moved up here, and our first house was down by the Dog Track Road in Longwood, at the intersection of [Florida State Road] 17-92. It had a hand pump, for water, and it's what they call a "shotgun house." That means you can look in the front door and look right out the back door. That's how they were built then – bedrooms on one side. And then, from there, we moved on up into Longwood, rented a house. And in 1948--about 1950, I guess – my dad built a house physically himself. Built us a house and raised four kids in that house for 21 years. And then after that – wasn't long after that time period – I went to Vietnam, and while I was gone, Mom and Dad moved to another house, and then to another house. And, make a long story short, my dad has passed now, and my mother lives in assisted living here in Sanford at Renaissance Retirement [Center].

0:02:23

Serving in the Vietnam War

Motta So you, did you go to Vietnam right after high school, or...

Martin No, I was – no. I was – went to Vietnam in '67, and '68.

Motta Were you drafted, then?

Martin I was drafted. Yeah. And I obtained the rank of sergeant, did the best I could, and came home. And in the military I was a wheeled-vehicle mechanic. And, other than that, I was involved in the commercial fishing industry before I went to Vietnam, but not very much before. About – we went into the commercial fishing in about 1961. And I can tell you how that happened, if you want to hear it.

Motta Well, you said you were a mechanic in the..

Martin Military.

Motta Was that – have you always had an interest in that? Is that why you...

Martin Yeah. Mm-hm.

Motta All right. And, would you like to continue? Were you about to...

0:03:15

Commercial fishing industry

Martin Yeah, I was gonna tell you – did you want me to tell you how we started in the fishing industry, or did you want to go somewhere else?

Motta Well, what was the impact of the fishing industry like when you were younger, before you got into – before you went to Vietnam?

Martin Yeah. Okay. Exactly. Well, the way it happened was, I had never heard of a commercial fisherman on the river prior to 1961 or thereabouts. My dad had a gas station at the corner of Airport Boulevard, which at that time was Anora Road and 17-92. The building still stands today. We were in the gas station one day, and two men pulled in in an old car, and they looked bad. And the old car was a 1937 four-door DeSoto sedan – had no backseat. It was a huge. It was as big as a barn. It was a huge car. And they came in for gas, and my daddy walked out to that car and looked in the back of that car, and there were two garbage cans in the back, and they were full of catfish. Well, Clarence Coir and Cecil Dile were in that car, and they got to talking about those catfish. Well, our family’s always loved to fish, but we never did commercial fishing. And, when my dad found out that you could actually earn a living catching fish, it wasn’t very long before the gas station was history, and we obtained ourselves a little boat, and we began to commercial fish.

Motta So he sold the gas station to get a boat?

Martin That’s right. Right.

Motta All right. Well, so, that was when you were in your teens, or earlier than that?

Martin Early twenties. That was about 1961, ’62, I guess. Right along in there.

Motta So, when you came back from Vietnam, did you get back into that industry, or were you, like, looking for other jobs before then?

Martin Well, as a matter of fact, before I went to Vietnam – before I was drafted – I was involved in commercial fishing with my dad. He had his boat, and I had my boat. Now, these weren’t big boats like you see in the ocean. These were just river skiffs, basically, is what we fished out of.

Motta Do you remember about how long they were?

Martin Yep. They were around 14 to 16 feet, and some of them were flat-bottomed, and some of them were what they call a “skip jack.” A skip jack is just a small boat, usually with a big engine on it, and it has a very sharp bow, so that when you carry a load in it, it’ll break the waves on the rough lake, and it’s stable. The flat-bottomed boats were better for calm water. So we got our two boats, we went to commercial fishing. The kind of commercial fishing we did from 19 – approximately ’61, ’til the time I went in the service – we used a trot line. Do you know what a trot line is?

Motta No.

Martin Trot line is a very, very, very long piece of string, with a lot of hooks on it. You see that in the Deadliest...

Motta Oh, Deadliest...

Martin [The] *Perfect Storm*!

Motta Oh, okay.

Martin [The] *Perfect Storm*, they're catching big fish. But it's the same theory. It's a long line about...

Motta And you just drag it along the...

Martin No, they're put out.

Motta Oh.

Martin They're a quarter-mile long. And you go down the line on your little boat, and you knock the fish in the boat, bait the hook back, and go to the next hook, and so on, 'til you progress down the line.

Motta This was in Lake Monroe or Lake Jesup?

Martin At that time, that was Lake Jesup, only.

Motta Okay.

Martin There were other fishermen doing the same thing, but my dad and I, at that time, fished out of Lake Jesup. We put our boats in Tuskawilla Road – used to run right down to the lake. It was a dirt road. And there was a bunch of wino commercial fishermen that lived there in the woods. Now, in that camp where they lived, they had a wooden nail keg – a wooden barrel – buried in the ground, and the groundwater seeped in through the cracks. And they would drink that water, and I saw maggots in that water. And they would live in this old camp.

Well, at that time, we left our boats right there at the boat, along the bank, 'cause people didn't steal your stuff then. We'd just drive down there, get in our boats, and go fishing, and come back, and beach the boat, and go sell our fish down at the fish house. Right across the road from Lowe's, yeah, there was an establishment called Waits' – I don't know how you spell "Waits" – their last name was Waits – Fish House. And they were a commercial fish outlet – inlet, whatever, distributor. And we would sell our fish at that fish house.

Motta And where was this? What Lowe's? What location?

Martin Across the road from Lowe's in Sanford.

Motta Okay. So...

Martin Right where the Walmart is.

Motta Okay. So pretty much all the commercial fishing was done in the lake. It wasn't on the rivers usually?

Martin Well, see, at that time, we were fishing in the lake. There was commercial fishing in both lakes and the river, and all up in North Florida. It was all statewide. But I'm just referring to what my dad and I did.

0:08:05

Relationship between fishermen

Motta Okay. So how many fishermen usually were in the – well, commercial fishermen – in Lake Jesup?

Martin Okay. Well Lake Jesup – I'll say at any given time – people were running trot line. There might have been a dozen, I guess. But, see, when you're running trot lines that are a quarter of a mile long, you run three or four of them. It takes up quite a large area.

Motta It seems like there might be a risk of them getting tangled. Was that ever a possibility?

Martin Yeah. What would happen when one trot line – when one man would put his trot line unbeknownst to the other, across his, there was a common courtesy that when you ran your trot line, it would pick his up, and you would tie them together. And then when he saw that his line was on top of yours – so he would take his up, you see. Common courtesy.

Motta So there was like an unspoken code, pretty much?

Martin Yeah.

Motta All right.

Martin And sometimes it ended up in not so pleasant situations, but most of the time it worked pretty well.

Motta Well, were there any...

Martin Physical altercations?

Motta Or just any feuds or anything between...

Martin Yeah. There were always territorial wars on the lake. "I'm fishing this end of the lake." "Well, you don't own this lake. You don't have a deed to it." Back and forth, and so on, you know. "You go fish in that section," and "I was here first," and that kind of childish bickering went on constantly.

Motta Did it ever escalate above just shouting or...

Martin Mm-hm. Yeah. In some cases, it got physical. There were some boats sunk at different times. Hostility. But that was a rare occasion.

Motta You say boats sunk? How exactly did that...

Martin Well, there are stories. And, you know, I have to confess. I'm gonna relay a story or two to you that were stories that were relayed to me, and I don't know how much foundation there was to them.

Motta Okay.

Martin But I would – from that industry, I would say they're probably pretty well true. One of the stories is that one gentleman had his trot lines out – now, these lines, you leave them – at that time, you would leave them in the water, and you would take the fish off and re-bait the hook, and go on down the line. So the lines stayed in the water, at that time. And this gentleman had his line out, and when he went out to his line, there were some people – sports fishermen – fishing out there, and they had his trot line on up out of the water. Well, now, this gentleman had a skip jack with a great big stack of motor on the back of it, and he was probably running 100 horse[power] or better. Boat probably run 70 miles an hour. So he pulled up to them. He said, "What you all doing?" And they said, "We're taking some catfish off this trot line." He said, "Well, isn't that something?" Then he fired that motor up, and he made a big circle out there on the lake 'til he got her up running good and fast, and he cut that boat in half, and he put both of them in the water. So, that kind of stuff would go on, you know, occasionally. But I gotta tell you, my friend, that's a rare occasion. That didn't happen every day.

Motta Did all the commercial fishermen kind of stick together if there was some kind of...

Martin Confrontation?

Motta Water sports?

Martin Sports fishermen.

Motta Is that what you refer to them?

Martin Yeah. You had commercial fishermen, then you had your sports fishermen. That was always a conflict there.

Motta And you pretty much stuck together if there was any kind of...

Martin Yeah, but we didn't gang up on people.

Motta All right.

Martin We weren't that type.

Motta You weren't looking to...

Martin It was – looking at it from the sportsmen's objective[sic] is that they were right in their complaint that we had these lines all over the lake, and they're out there

drifting for speckled perch. Some people call them “crappie.” They’re drifting, deep, then their line’d get hung on it, and they’re [inaudible]. They’d wind it all in. Well, it’s a trot line. And they’d get their motors caught in them, so it was probably a nuisance. At the same time, we’d go out to our trot lines and find them cut in two, and they’re all tangled up, and the fish all make big balls out of the trot lines. So there was always some kind of a war going on out there, but it was usually verbal.

0:11:48

Typical day fishing

Motta So how long did you have the lines out at a time? Like, when you went out on the lake? How long was that?

Martin What we would do—we’d go out about daylight.

Motta Okay.

Martin We’d walk along the shoreline with a little net and we’d catch shrimp. There were brine shrimp that lived in the river, if you didn’t know that. They look like any other shrimp, but they’re just smaller. And we would bait our trot lines with them. So, we would put our lines out, bait them up, and we would actually—we’d get probably—maybe a couple weeks before we had to pull them back up and then re-hook them, you see. Put new hooks on the lines, ‘cause the hooks, after a while, they’ll deteriorate, rust, begin to break, get dull. So you had to put new hooks on your trot lines. So you would bring it in, put it in a big tub, bring it in, cut the old hooks off, put new hooks on, put it on a special rack that I’ll tell you about later, and we’d go put the line back out in the water.

Now, later on, this type of fishing—when I got back from Vietnam, I met a family that had come up here from Clewiston, and they were deep into commercial fishing all their lives. And they knew a technique that I did not know, and they would put the lines out at dusk, and pick the line up in the morning, and just knock the fish off of it. They would call it “boating the line.” They’d put the line in a tub, and they’d take the line home, and put it on this rack I’m telling you about, and repair any damage to it, jump it out at dusk, and the same process. They called that “jump lining.” Well, they taught me how to do that. This family kind of just took me in. They just liked me, I guess. And, so they taught me how to jump line. So from that point, my dad and I kind of separated in that he remained in Lake Jesup doing what we call “stay lining” or leaving them overboard, and I migrated up into the river and Lake Monroe, because now I started fishing at night. I started using different kind of equipment, different kind of light. My dad didn’t use lights. He’d fish in the daytime. I started using lights, and I started jumping the lines out in the evening, picking them up in the morning, and playing all day. I was single and running crazy.

Motta So about how old were you when you and your dad split up the boat?

Martin That would have been about 1970, I guess. Something like that. We didn't part enemies. I just took on a different kind of fishing. And for 10 years – after I got back from Vietnam – for 10 years, I lived on various kinds of boats on the river. I actually lived on the river. And Archie Smith at Sanford Boat Works [& Marina] – finally I moved one of my boats into his marina. And after he talked to me for a while, he asked me if I would like to run his little store there on the weekends. And I said, "Sure!"

Motta It's like a bait shop, or...

Martin Well, what it was – no bait – it was what is called a "ship store." They'd sell screws and hardware and bilge pumps. Of course, they had their yachts in the marina. So, I went to work one weekend, and my next day off was a year later. I ended up working seven days a week! [*laughs*] But I still fished at night. Archie's a great guy. This guy – you know Archie?

Motta I'm trying to get an interview with him, actually.

Martin You've got to. You'd better have some time, though, 'cause he's got a lot to tell you. He's a wonderful man.

And anyway, I lived in the marina and worked at the marina for five years, but I was still commercial fishing and still living on my boat. But I bought and sold, back and forth, different boats to live on, always making a profit. And I lived on boats for 10 years, on the river, and that was a cool thing to do.

Motta Sounds kind of nice, actually.

Martin Yeah.

0:15:19 **Fishing methods**

Motta So the lines, that was pretty much – the trot lines, that was the way to catch fish? You didn't use – you only used the nets for the shrimp and...

Martin Okay. That's a good question. Now we're gonna get in the part where we're gonna talk about some poaching.

Motta Okay.

Martin With a trot line, basically, you can't poach, 'cause it's all legal. But now, when I moved up into the river, and I fell in with some friends up here. We began to do what they call "monkey fishing." And most people, they don't know what monkey fishing is. It's just – I don't guess it's a local name been given to it – but it's using electric generator. And these generators generally come in the old field phone or an old crank telephone. It's an armature with a series of bar magnets stacked over the armature, and when it spins, it generates an electrical current. Well, my daddy had one of those monkeys – we'd call it – in his old shop, when I

was a little boy. You running out of time? And I saw that thing laying in the shop for years. I didn't know what it was. Well then, when I fell in with these guys and I found out what a monkey was, I said, "I've got one of those." And I went home and I got that monkey and I fastened it to a board, and I hooked an electric motor to it. And brother, we went fishing.

Now when you turn that monkey on, if you turn it too fast, it doesn't work. If you turn it too slow, it doesn't work. There's a certain rhythmic impulse for that machine, which is relatively slow, the catfish can't stand. It doesn't affect any scale fish. It doesn't affect eels, gar, brim, stingrays – nothing but catfish. And so, we would go out at night with very powerful headlights. My light was a landing light off of an aircraft. It was about a half a million candlepower. And we would run that monkey, we'd put a wire over each side of the boat, and the fish would literally try to get out of the water. They'd come up to the top, and they're running around, and we've got long poles with nets on them. When that started, we'd dip them up and put them in the boat.

Motta So they'd be jumping out of the water?

Martin Yeah, they'd jump up on the banks. Some of them would jump in the boat. It was crazy. We'd be laughing. It was funny. But it was illegal. I gotta tell you, it was illegal. But we made a lot of money doing that. And, so, I'll say this – and I want this to go on the record – because that monkey machine, as we'd call it, will not work in any water at all times. There are several conditions that have to be favorable for its function. The water has to be low, basically a drought situation – wintertime low. Water has to be hot, disgusting, nasty. Usually it's green with algae. But what happens in that process – and a lot of commercial fishermen don't understand this the alkalinity in that water is magnified, because the water volume is reduced, thus condensing the amount of alkalinity in that water. Now the river's a battery. It's a conductor. You put the two wires over it, now you've got a current flowing, as well as radiating, and it drives the fish crazy. If it rains a lot and dilutes that water, or the water's high – still diluted – you lose that connection, and it doesn't work at all. So we knew that it would only work in the summertime. But that's why. It has to do with the alkalinity and acidity in the water.

Motta This sounds like a kind of complicated process. Is this something that most fishermen knew, or was it something like you guys just figured out after a while?

Martin I think we all knew it, but I don't think a lot of the commercial fishermen – and I was one. So I guess, I wasn't of the same mind as most commercial fishermen, I gotta tell you. I'm not better than them, I just came from a different spoke of the wheel. I would investigate things. I take things apart now. I have an inquisitive mind. So I delved into why this thing worked. They don't give a hoot. All they care is if it works or it don't[sic] work. But anyway, that's why I was able to share with you why it works, and why sometimes it doesn't.

Now, I don't wanna get long-winded, but I could tell you something else phenomenal about commercial fishing. There is a time of year that you will catch more fish on a trot line with no bait than you will with bait. And they call it "fishing empty hooks." And you ask a commercial fisherman, "Why is that?" "I don't know! Just this time of year. They bite empty hooks." Well, I did some investigating. When acidic water is acidic water, as opposed to pure water, it's a good conductor. It's also corrosive. When you drop a metallic object into corrosive water, on whatever scale, it will begin to deteriorate. It's called "electrolysis action." It rusts. It corrodes. When it does that, it puts out a minute electrical aura around that which is deteriorating. You understand that. Iron deteriorating in air, when it gets wet, is called "oxidation." Metal deteriorating in water, going through the same process, I guess it's oxidation. It's a mixing of a metal with oxygen. But it occurs under the water, and it generates a small electrical charge.

A catfish's whiskers are so ultra-sensitive, he doesn't even need eyes. And I've got a book on this – I've read this, so I'm not just spinning you a yarn. They are so ultra-sensitive, that in itself is why the monkey affects only catfish. And it won't affect any other kind of fish. Now the state uses a generator to bring up scale fish to do a count. They're using an AC [alternating current] voltage. Well, the monkey's putting out a DC [direct current] voltage. And they use 110 volts – a different kind of electricity to affect the scale fish.

But anyway, that's why a certain time of the year, you can catch more fish on a trot line on empty hooks than you can with bait, because the fish goes for that electrical aura. That's how catfish can find food. They can actually find food by that. Any living thing has a small – you have electricity in your body. Well, I don't care how small the organism is, it has an aura, and the catfish can find their food with that. So when they swim by that hook, and they go, "Oh, this is lunch," and they grab it. And there will be fish on almost every hook. But the water condition has to be right. When that water's diluted, all of a sudden that doesn't work.

We've caught thousands of pounds of fish on pink Camay soap. And you could always tell when the fish were biting on the pink Camay soap, because you'd go into the store, and all the soap displays were all crumbled, because the commercial fisherman would pick up the bar of soap and shove his thumbnail in it. If he could push his thumbnail in it, the bar of soap was a nice, fresh bar, and you could cut it up. If you couldn't push your thumbnail in it, he didn't want that one. So they'd destroy all the pink Camay. And they would only bite on pink Camay. So we've caught catfish in a commercial way on pink Camay soap.

Shrimp – local shrimp here in the river – there's brine or grass shrimp, snails. The bottoms of these lakes and the river are just literally covered with millions of snails. There's a certain way you get the snail out of his shell to put it on the hook. Watermelon produces large channel catfish. But not many of them, but the thing of it is, would you rather clean five great big fish, or two hundred little

bitty fish? So we would use watermelon sometimes. Watermelon. Cantaloupe was a good producer of large channel cats. I think that somehow the large channel cats, believe it or not, they must favor something sweet. I have a friend right now that's running trot line right now, today, he's baiting with corn, canned corn, and he's just cleaning house.

Motta [laughs] I would never imagine that would...

Martin Well, see. That's another reason I'm glad we're having this interview. And this stuff could – that's why I asked you on the phone, "Could this be a long interview?" This could go on – I could tell you stuff like this for days. And you don't have that kind of time, let alone that amount of stuff on that machine. So anyway. Therein lies that. And in Lake Monroe, we would do the trot line. Now if you want, I'll get into other methods we caught fish.

Motta Well, let me just ask you this quickly. The device – monkey? What'd you call it, the monkey?

Martin A monkey.

Motta Okay. You said that wasn't really legal, technically.

Martin Not legal at all! No way.

Motta Was there, at that time – what kind of presence did the fish and wildlife have? Like, were they patrolling the rivers and the lakes a lot?

Martin Yeah. Yeah.

Motta Like, did you have to watch out for them?

Martin Very much so. That's a good question, Daniel. Matter of fact, what we would do, occasionally – sometimes we just went monkey fishing, but occasionally, we would go down to, we would drive down to Mullet Lake Park, or we'd go down to [Lake] Harney, or we'd park right here across the river at 17-92. We'd go to that park at night. Well, it's closed. We'd drive around behind the park, and come up the back way, and come under the fence. And we'd go down to the boat ramp, make sure the game warden wasn't in. Now, if his truck was sitting there, we knew he was in the area. So if his truck wasn't there, now we drove down to Mullet Park and it wasn't there, we had a full, pretty fair shot that he wasn't in our area, and we'd go monkey fishing. So, but, the game warden...

Motta So it was kind of a risk, a little bit, or...

Martin I'm sorry?

Motta Was it kind of a risk, or...

Martin Absolutely. Every time we went monkey fishing, it was a risk. But the game warden and the average commercial fisherman didn't have a real good rapport. I happened to have had a good rapport with the game warden. I respected him. He was a good man. A lot of guys didn't. And he almost caught me doing some illegal things, but he never caught me. He never caught me, brother. *[laughs]*

But anyway, the game wardens were always – it was like the old movies – cowboys and Indians. The cowboys chase the Indians, or the Indians chase the cowboys. And it was that kind of a thing, you know. But he'd catch – occasionally catch somebody and write them up, and then there was always a dispute. If he caught somebody doing something illegal in Lake Monroe, when they went to court, the commercial fisherman would say, "Well, where did you catch me?" And he'd say, "I caught you in Lake Monroe." And he would say, "Well, where in Lake Monroe did you catch me?" Because the county line runs right through the middle of the lake. So, and a lot of times, it was thrown out of court. *[laughs]*

Motta So what were these other methods of fishing you were...

Martin Now there's a – fish traps, at that time, when I was doing that, were illegal. Now, I didn't get into the trapping much.

Motta What kind of traps were they?

Martin Good question. A trap was made, basically, with chicken wire. Now, picture in your mind a round tube made of chicken wire, approximately 18 inches to 2 feet in diameter, 3 feet high – maybe 4. Now pinch one end of that tube shut. So it's seamed at the bottom, now it's open at the top, in which there is an inverted funnel laid on its side on the bottom of the lake with food in it. Catfish would go in the funnel, and they're too stupid to find their way out. They turn around, now they're against – between the trap and the funnel, and they can't get out. And they just continue to fill up, fill up with catfish. And when the person – you would tie that to a long line, like a trot line – when you would run your trap string, as they called it, you'd pull the trap up, you unzip the bottom of it, drop your fish out, close it back up, threw some more bait in there, you threw her back overboard.

Motta And this was illegal, as well?

Martin At that time, it was. It isn't now. At that time, trapping was not legal.

Motta Is there a reason why – do you know why that became illegal? It doesn't seem very harmful.

Martin Well, I don't know the particulars as to why it would be illegal, unless it would be because of the amount of fish harvested. Other than that, I don't know why. I just know it was illegal, and if they would catch you, they would confiscate your traps, stomp them all down, and then put you in jail.

Motta Oh, really?

Martin Yeah.

Motta They'd jail you?

Martin If they caught you with the stuff, yeah. But a lot of people were doing it. But I never did the trap. I don't know why. I was always content to do the trot line. I was a trot liner. And then I got into monkey fishing. Now there's another method of fishing that we—oh, this was fun, brother. Out off the coast of Florida, they do a lot of shrimping. Behind those boats, they pull what's called a "shrimp trawl." Do you know what that is?

Motta No.

Martin Have you seen a shrimp boat?

Motta Yes.

Martin It's got the two things sticking up here. When they're out in the ocean, they're called "outriggers." They'll drop them down. And from those—back behind the boat are two long ropes tied to a very wide-mouth net, and it comes down to what they call a "sock." This is wide at the beginning. It comes down to a long tube. They drag that along the ocean bottom, and that's how they catch the shrimp that you put on your dinner table. We had a shrimp net—a trawl, as it was called. Well, we would pull the trawl on Lake Monroe, with 100 horse Mercury. Now, you couldn't pull it very fast, 'cause it was 35 feet wide and dragging the bottom. Had a cork line on top to hold the top up, and it had a lead line on the bottom to hold the bottom down. So it was bagged out, and you would drag that along the bottom of the lake, and you would catch your catfish that way. And that was easy pickings there. It'd take a long time, but see, you could get caught doing that, too. You had to always be on the lookout for the game warden out there in the lake. This was done at nighttime, with no lights.

Motta And you said you did participate in that kind of...

Martin I'm sorry?

Motta You did use that kind of a method sometimes?

Martin Yeah. Yep. Pulled a trawl in Lake Monroe, right down the channel, catch all kinds of catfish. But once again, that was illegal. Very illegal.

Motta You keep saying "catfish." Is that pretty much all—the catfish—that was pretty much the prize fish you...

Martin Yeah. Now, catfish was a legal fish. Now, once you caught that catfish, and took it to market, nobody cared. I mean, it was just a fish on the market. So if you

trapped it, if you monkeyed it up, if you dug it with a trawl, or however, once you took it to market, it was fair game. How you got the fish was a different story. Now, there were a lot of brim captured with trawl, traps, and sold on black market. The brim, you didn't have to clean them. You ice them down, and they run them across the state line or wherever they went, and you could sell brim.

Motta But they weren't legal to sell or to catch?

Martin Not at all. That's right. No game fish. Commercial fishermen were not allowed to have a game fish in his boat.

Motta So what were the fish that were – aside from catfish – I mean, did you even bother with any other fish, or where there's like – was it like smaller...

Martin Oh, no. We just focused on catfish. And if you really got desperate and wanted to make some money on black market, you would catch brim and speckle perch, which is crappie. And I didn't get into that much. I stayed – basically, catfish.

Motta Okay.

Martin And, did a lot of things illegally to catch the catfish. It was a lot of fun, made a lot of money. But, you understand, commercial fishing industry, it's either feast or famine. You're making a lot of money in a very short period of time. But when you're not doing it, and that money's gone, you've got to do it again to produce that kind of money, or you just gotta get by the best way you can. So if your trot line's only producing a small amount of money, basically whatever that figure might be, and the monkey – or the trawl, the traps – are producing a lot, and you're not doing that fashion, that method anymore, now you've gotta revert back to your trot line, which takes hours and hours to run. A lot of effort, you see. Then you're gonna gravitate towards the easy pickings. Now the trot lines, they were on average about a quarter of a mile long – about 1,300 feet long each. And we would run anywhere from two to four, five of those a day.

Motta Okay. Were there any other methods of catching a fish that you haven't gone over?

Martin Yeah, one more. It's called a "hoop net." It's a long net, much like the trawl in the – what I called the "sock" or the "tube area." It has no large, wide mouth, like a trawl. It just has a round mouth with a funnel. This is all made out of string. It's netting. Has multiple hoops in it. Looks like a big caterpillar laying on the bottom. Like a big sausage. And one end of it is tied off. Pinched shut. The other end is wide open with the funnel, and the catfish will go in that. Just like a large trap, only instead of being made of chicken wire, it's – I don't know – four, five feet wide and it has fiberglass round hoops that are attached as ribs every couple of feet.

Motta And this was being pulled?

Martin No. That's just anchored in the river, like a trap, and the fish would just go in it. And you'd go out there and pick it up and drag the fish out of it. That's illegal. I don't know that hoop nets are illegal now. That might not be.

0:32:51 **Catfish farming and the decline of the wild commercial fishing industry**

Martin You see, what has happened, Daniel, is the farm-raised catfish. You're familiar with that?

Motta Mm-hm.

Martin Farm-raised catfishing industry has accelerated to the effect that it has shut down the wild commercial fishermen. Because people prefer restaurants, big dealers are buying up farm-raised catfish. However, I will say this: farm-raised catfish on the plate are distinctively different than those that came out of the wild. The flesh is relatively flabby and tasteless. And the reason for that, Daniel, is that the farm-raised catfish lays on the bottom of that pond where he's raised, and he is fed. He doesn't have to move. He just eats, goes back, and lays on the bottom. The wild catfish has to work for his food, and his muscle tone is good, the flesh is firm, and he has a better taste when you want to eat some catfish.

Motta So catfish quality has pretty much declined over the years, as a result of restaurants preferring raised fish?

Martin Yeah. If you buy catfish filet at a restaurant, you'll find it's – it's edible. It's good. It is. I'm not mocking them. I'm just telling you that a wild catfish is better on the plate than a farm-raised catfish. It really is. So if you go to a restaurant that has wild catfish – which I think Black Hammock Fish Camp on the bottom end of Jesup there has – they're a lot better, and that's the reason why. It's not that I'm down on the farm-raised fish. It's just a matter of fact.

0:34:26 **Fishing territory**

Motta Well. You mentioned going to Lake Harney, right? What was like, the – like your territory? Like how far did you go out on the lakes and the rivers?

Martin My territory was basically Lake Jesup and the [St. Johns] River connecting Lake Jesup and Lake Monroe, and Lake Monroe. That was my territory that I fished. Well, other people did too, but just personally, that's just the area that I fished. A local area. No commercial fisherman fishes the entire length of 128 miles of St. John River, so we all – you live in this town, you fish this section, and that guy lives in that town, he fishes that section, 'cause it's not practical to do that. But I just fished Lake Jesup and the river between Jesup and Monroe, and mostly Lake Monroe.

Motta So never outside of Lake Monroe, like north on the river? No?

Martin No. 'Bout the I[nterstate Highway]-4 bridge, from there north up. I been up there, but not in a commercial fashion.

0:35:30 **Leaving the fishing industry and pollution**

Motta Okay. And, I'm curious, so what were the year – when did you stop commercial fishing? What year?

Martin It's a gray area, Daniel, because an industry like that – to where you see all the beautiful sunsets and the sunrises, and you're out there in nature at night, it's so inviting to the typical guy. You get out of it, and you're back in it. And you're back out of it, and you're back in it. You meander. Nobody just quits commercial fishing one day, 'cause it gets in your blood, so to speak. It becomes in your fiber. But I'll say that I finally relinquished all commercial fishing, on a commercial basis, probably about 1971, something like that.

Motta Oh, okay. So did you notice any – it might have been a little early in '71, but did you notice any effective – like pollution, with more people moving to Central Florida? Was there any, like, effect on the water and the fish?

Martin Yeah. Now, the answer to that, basically, is no, as far as the fish are concerned. But I, of course, through the years, been on a river as many years as I have, there's a lot more pollution – people camping on the riverbank and leaving old grills and beer cans and bottles up in the woods. It's disgusting, the way people actually treat the river. Now, although I was a commercial fisherman, don't exclude me to the fact that where you think I don't have good sense, because I like to think that I do, and I'm an advocate for the river. And it offends me greatly when the river's abused. I see the erosion of the boat wake. Now, nobody can help that. Boat wakes will erode the bank and the trees fall. That – okay. That's okay. But the debris that people leave behind when they go out. They have a good time on the river, and they leave their trash on the riverbank. I've got a real, real problem with that. There's just no call for that. But anyway, to answer your question, as far as the fish are concerned, haven't seen anything negative reflect from the fish at all.

Motta Did you know any other fisher – like, I don't know how – how far out you got, but did you know any fishermen from Lake – I read Lake Apopka, for instance, there was a pretty – it was pretty – with the pesticides used from the surrounding farmlands, it got pretty bad for a while there. Was there not really much of that around here?

Martin No, not here. It was bad in Lake Apopka. It really was. No, haven't seen that here. Personally, I can't say that I have.

Motta Okay.

Martin The water quality comes and goes with the seasons. In the summertime, before the rainy season, water's low. Not all that inviting sometimes. It gets a lot of algae. And algae's a natural process.

But now I'll tell you this: away from the commercial fishing, and just looking at the river itself, most of the time that I was commercial fishing, the hyacinths were a nuisance. Because the hyacinths would move, and the hyacinth produces a new plant, I think, every 72 hours. So they're prolific beyond compare, I guess, but there would be literal acres—a half-acre of hyacinths floating in the water. And you try to run a trot line up off the bottom, you pick that trot line up, and there's this a half a[sic] acre of hyacinths you can't even get through. It's impassable. That's a problem. So they were a problem. Hyacinths were a problem to small boat navigation. They were a problem to the commercial fishermen. However, when the state began to spray the hyacinths, they would die and settle to the bottom. Now you try to run a trot line in that. When you pick it up off the bottom, all those hyacinths that were floating on top are now rotting on the bottom, and they're all over your trot line. There's another problem. And they turn to silt, and it just gets worse and worse. But I've got to say in defense of the hyacinths, I think water quality was better, because their, the way they feed, as they float to the water—have you ever seen the root of a hyacinth?

Motta It's pretty long, right?

Martin Yeah, and it was like a feather. It was like a feather duster. It hangs in the water. And as it moves along, it collects nutrients out of the water, and thus it cleans the water. So, they have sprayed so many hyacinths—the state has—that I feel like that the water quality is not what it could be with the hyacinths. In other words, I don't have a problem with them spraying the hyacinths, but I think they've overdone it. They've virtually almost wiped them out.

Motta Yeah. You don't really see them that much anymore, do you?

Martin No. No. You don't. And the habitat—the shrimp and a lot of small fish would live up under the hyacinths in the roots, and the game fish were up there all the time. You could find a hole in the hyacinths, and fish through that hole, and catch all kinds of fish. Well, there are no hyacinths. It's good to look at, nice pretty water, but it's not as good as it could be. And that hyacinth is not a natural plant for Florida, you know. It came here, I think, from the Orient.

0:40:31 **Dangers of fishing**

Motta You mentioned earlier some altercations with other fishermen. Aside from the human aspect, were there any major, like, dangers with—I'd imagine there's some kinds of dangers with commercial fishing? Natural dangers or just, like, the boat. Like, what did you have to look out for, pretty much?

Martin Yeah. Okay. I'm glad you brought that up. One of the most agonizing injuries a commercial fisherman can get is to get horned by a catfish. A catfish has three

horns – or spikes, fins – two out the side of each side of the head, and one up on the dorsal fin in the back. Now these fins are – they’re designed in a way that they’re serrated. They go in slick, but coming out is a different story, because it has, like, teeth on the backside of it, all in one direction, allowing it smooth penetration, but a very painful extraction. And to get stuck by one and bleed a little bit, it hurts a little bit and that’s it. But if you get one jammed in all the way in halfway through your hand, and you gotta pull that thing out, that’s a bad deal, brother. So anyway, that’s a bad deal.

And I’ll tell you something a lot of people don’t know about catfish. One of the things that creates the intense pain when one is stuck by a catfish is the slime on the fish. And the way I found that out is, I had a cut on my hand one day when I picked up a catfish, and it just stung beyond belief, and I realized that that had something to do with it. I don’t think the catfish injects you with anything. I can’t say yes or no. I don’t think so.

Motta Maybe like the bacteria or something?

Martin Yeah. And infection is rampant. You need to get attention for a deep puncture wound from a catfish. But catfish will hurt you. A stingray will hurt you. I didn’t mess around with the alligators. I’m not of the mindset that I like to kill things. I kill the catfish to survive, but I’m not a hunter.

Motta Well, yeah, you were on Lake Jesup a lot. Was the alligator population pretty big then, too?

Martin Tremendous.

Motta Did they pretty much just leave you alone?

Martin Yeah. An alligator’s a misunderstood animal. He’s docile in his realm. He’s shy. He’ll stay away from you. Sometimes he’s kind of curious, but he won’t come up to you. He’ll stay off some distance and watch you, and that’s about it.

Motta Even – you started in the early morning, right? They’re pretty active then. They still just kind of ignored you?

Martin Yeah. You’d see them out there, see their heads up out on the lake, and they’re just trying to catch a garfish or a turtle or something, you know. They’re not the aggressive animal the media has made them out to be. You corner an alligator, he’s gonna try to hurt you.

Motta Mess with its nest or something?

Martin Yeah. That’s right. But if you leave the gator alone, he wants to get away from you. He don’t wanna be around a human being. On the other hand, people that feed the gators, they’re asking for trouble. That’s a different scenario. But in the wild, an alligator – he’s not gonna come charging up and jump in your boat, and

all that stuff, whatever you might have heard. They're docile. I should say – I can't say "docile." They're hostile when they are challenged. But other than that, they don't.

Motta So, you worked for your father. Was there more crew than you and your father, I'm assuming?

Martin Just my dad and I.

Motta Oh, really?

Martin Yeah. And he had his little boat, and I had mine, and he ran his trot lines, and I ran my trot lines, and I lived with my dad.

Motta So even when you went off into Lake Monroe, it was just you?

Martin Well, about that time's when I started living on the boat, and so I had left on a different path.

Motta Okay. But you didn't have, like, deck hands or anything?

Martin No. No, 'cause the boats were too small. It's only big enough for one boat, 'cause you put a lot of fish and that commercial fishing equipment in the boat, and you – there is no room for anybody else. 'Cause you've got a trot line what you call "wrapped," and long hooks, and buoys, and all this fishing equipment. Lights and batteries and all kinds of stuff in the boat. So the boat's only 14 feet long, there's not a whole lot of room in there. So you gotta walk over all your stuff to get from one end of the boat to the other. And the trot line, by the way, is run from the bow. You sit right up in the bow, if you didn't know that, to run the trot line, and the boat just kind of follows along as you go down that trot line.

Motta Okay. So, since it was just you in the boat, did you have to kind of – I guess you knew what you were doing – but did you have to take care that you didn't hurt yourself, or fall out or something? I mean, there's nobody watching your back, pretty much?

Martin Well, that's right. You're out there by yourself a lot. Yeah, you know – and that is good. You didn't want an explosion or fire in your boat, which I never heard of that happening, but you wouldn't want that out there by yourself.

But I think the main thing you had to watch out for was – every commercial fisherman had a knife. It was a tool, and you could get cut, which I had done. You could get a pretty bad cut. Or, at times, when you're baiting a trot line, when you grab this hook to bait it, you let go out this side of the boat, as you're going down the line. You follow me? So you grab this hook, you bait, you let it go, and you grab this hook. Now, now you're spread eagle. When you come together the length of the next pull, when you let that hook go, it's a crucial moment, because if the wind is blowing – and this has happened to me and my dad – you pull that

hand back, and that hook will bury itself right there in the palm of your hand, 'cause it's flopping in the wind, and you pull your hand back—it's got you. So then you cut that little—it's called a "brailing." You have a trot line, you have a little string hanging down with a hook on it. You would cut that little string off, leave the hook embedded in your hand, finish your work, and come home and go to the doctor and have him cut it out. But what I would do, I'd just get a pair of pliers, jerk it out, and it'd pull out a hunk of meat. I wasn't gonna go to the doctor. I'm not big and bad. I was cheap. *[laughs]* I wasn't going to the doctor. Uh-uh. But we'd pull it out.

Motta Oh, man. *[laughs]* Well, do you have any other stories you'd like to share, or I mean...

Martin A lot. A lot, but I can't take up your whole day, brother.

Motta We've got a little time left.

Martin All right. One time when I was married, I came home from the lake and I had exactly that scenario.

0:46:46 **RECORDING CUTS OFF**

0:46:46 **Fishing injuries**

Motta All right, sorry about that. You were about to start a story?

Martin Yeah. That's fine. We were talking about injuries or potential injuries. And, only because you asked me, I'll tell you this story. But I came home that one day, and I had a hook buried in the palm of my hand. That little—what they call a "brailing"—that little piece of string on it. And as I said, at that time I was married. Well, outside we had a clothesline, and a T-fashion pole at each end. So, I knew she wasn't gonna pull that out of my hand. So, I took a concrete block and I tied a string to it, and I set it right up on the top of the center of that T on that clothesline, and right beside the clothesline was my truck. So I laid my hand on the truck, and I tied a loop around that hook, and I held the shank down on this side, where it would pull that hook out reverse, and I called her out in the yard. And I said, "Push that concrete block off the clothesline." And she looked at that scenario and saw that line coming down to my hand, and saw that hook, and she wouldn't do it. And I insisted, so she finally tipped that concrete block off, and it went over the side of that clothesline pole. And when that line tightened up, brother, that hook come out of that hand and it pulled a hunk of meat about the size of an English pea. It put a hole in the middle of my hand. *[laughs]*

Motta It seems you would have a lot of scars from this industry.

Martin But you know, there's probably so many scars, they just all run together. Now, I'll tell you—you wanna hear this scar? That scar runs from that middle finger down around here, and comes around here, and it goes right through here. Well,

my friend had a skip jack – fiberglass skip jack. That’s a boat I told you about earlier. And it was brand new. It didn’t have the bow cap on it. Boat comes to a point at the bow, and you have a little cap that goes on it right there. It’s a decorative cap over the bow. It’s usually aluminum or something like that. Well, now you’ve got this boat with bare fiberglass bow sticking out like this, and it’s sharp. I was right there in front of the Sanford Boat Works, and my friend was running the boat, and because he just got it, he wanted me to stand on the bank and watch the boat run by, to watch how she was running in the water. So he ran by a couple of times, and then he wanted me to run it, so he could stand on the bank and watch it run. So I ran the boat, and when I came back, he wanted to do it one more time, so he ran the boat, and the wind was blowing that day, and I was standing right at the water’s edge. Water was low. There was a bluff bank about four feet high right to my rear. So the bank came at one level, dropped 90 degrees down to a very short four-foot beach to the water. You follow me?

Motta Yeah.

Martin So now I’m standing on this little beach in front of this big bluff bank behind me. My friend makes a circle and comes back with this boat with a[sic] 80-horse Mercury on it, and he slows it down. He’s just gonna let it come right down to the beach there. Well, he came in a little bit hot. So I reached out to get a hold of the bow of the boat to slow it down as it come in, and it just shoved that hand right into that bank, and it almost took those two fingers off. And that’s what those scars are right there. It just about amputated that half of my hand, when that boat pinched my hand between the bow and that dry muck bank back there. [laughs]

Motta It seems like you had a lot of injuries with your hands. Didn’t that, like, prevent you from doing basic boating...

Martin Sure. Yeah. It’d cripple you up for a while. It sure would, boy.

Motta Did you ever have to, like, stop fishing for a while?

Martin Yeah. I was skinning fish one time. The way we’d clean the fish, you would take the fish, you’d cut him right behind the head here on both sides. And you would have a reverse hook on a ramp. So you got a little ramp with a reverse hook on it. You would hook that fish on that hook, take a pair of skinners, and pull that hide off the catfish and throw him in the stack, and then you would take his head off and gut him and he goes into the last process, you see.

Well, I was skinning fish one night at the Sanford Boat Works. I had a little hook set up out there, and right under my hand right here is what we called a “red cat.” Now, a red cat is what they call – some people call them “brown bullheads,” “spotted catfish” – and they have red meat. The meat’s red, but it’s good. And that red cat was right there, and I was skinning that fish. Well, the skinner slipped off the hide, and my hand went right down the back of that fish, and that fin was sticking up I just told you about. And it went almost through

my hand. When I got that taken care of – and like usual not going to a doctor – I rubbed some stuff on it, bandaged it up, and I was crippled up where I couldn't hardly use that hand. Well, in about three days, it got all swelled up. My fingers got real tight like they were gonna split open. And it got red, boy. I mean, it was hot. And finally, I went to the doctor, and the doctor got all over my case. He said, "Twenty-four more hours, we'd have taken that hand off." He said, "You've got blood poisoning in that hand." He was not nice to me. He seemed like he was offended. They pumped me full of antibiotics, and got that taken care of.

And I'll tell you another time, a stingray – I had a stingray on a hook, and I was trying to take him off, 'cause I didn't want to hurt him, and that was not a smart thing to do. So, I rolled my hand under his back and turned him belly up, thinking he couldn't get me with that tail. It'd be hanging out here in the air. And I'm over here trying to take that hook out of his mouth, and he run that spike right in that knuckle right there, and buried it in that knuckle, and gave me a good shot of his poison. Well, I was bleeding pretty good[sic], and I got rid of that scenario. Cut the string and threw him over. And about that time, I had a girlfriend. She was out there with me. And she said, "You better go 'n' have that taken care of." And I'm like, "No. It's all right. I'm okay." Well, we kept fishing, and after a while, my wrist got to hurting, and then my elbow got to hurting, and I started rocking. You know, I didn't want her to see it. She said, "You're hurting. We'd better go right now." So by the time we got to the boat ramp, I couldn't hardly get the boat up on the boat trailer, 'cause now it's hurting up here under my shoulder. And we went right straight down, right to my house, and parked the boat, got in her car, and took me to the hospital. They gave me an IV of Benadryl, morphine, and some other stuff, because of the infectious poison that the stingray had. So that's another thing a commercial fisherman doesn't want to do is a stingray.

0:53:11

Stingrays and eels in Lake Jesup and Lake Monroe

Motta And there's – I didn't know there were freshwater stingrays in. This was in the lake?

Martin Yeah. Lake Jesup, Lake Monroe are just thick with stingrays.

Motta Oh. I never knew that.

Martin Yeah. If you fish with worms or a protein-type bait – worms, shrimp, snail, meat of anything – throw that on the bottom, you've got a good chance of catching a stingray. Now, I know you're running out of time, but I'll tell you how the stingrays got here, because a lot of people don't know, and I'm a reader. I read. I try – I'm not very educated, but I try to educate myself. And I read a book by Bill Belleville, and he wrote this book on nothing but the St. John's River and the history thereof.

Motta Do you remember the title of it?

Martin Yeah, *River of Lakes*[*: A Journey on Florida's St. Johns River*]. And the St. John's River originates over there just west of Melbourne. And at one time, the St. John's River used to run directly into the Atlantic Ocean in an easterly fashion. The whole east coast of Florida literally rose up – this is probably millions of years ago, but they've done studies and they know this – thus forming the St. John's River basin. And the river had to go somewhere, so it meandered, and it found its way out at Jacksonville. Now, when it did that, it encapsulated a lot of salt water. It was a saltwater marsh. Well, those stingrays were there. There were stingrays, there were mullet, and there were seahorses, and there were all kind of saltwater animals living in this saltwater marsh that eventually turned into the St. John's River. So these stingrays that are here, most people think they come up from Jacksonville. They didn't come up from anywhere. They've always been here. So that's how the stingrays, the American eel, small seahorses – a few, not many – -mullet, stripers, croakers, are saltwater fish. There have been sightings of tarpon in Lake Harney.

Motta Man, and a lot of these, they stay in – pretty low to the, like the lake bed? So they're pretty much out of sight a lot, right? Like the stingrays and the eels.

Martin Yeah, they're bottom-dwellers.

Motta Yeah. So, a lot of people wouldn't know that they're there.

Martin That's right. I mean, a stingray can swim clear to the surface. There are stingrays in the ocean, where they jump clear of the water. But these stingrays, if you're not looking for them, you basically don't know they're there. But you don't want to step on one of them, brother, 'cause he'll put that spike in your ankle. And these aren't large stingrays, like in the ocean. They're only about – a big one might be a foot to 14 inches wide – would be a big one.

Motta [*laughs*] Learned something new.

Martin They're a nuisance on a trot liner, 'cause if you don't float that trot line up off the bottom, where they'll swim under it. If you put that bait on the bottom, my gosh, you'll have a whole string, trot.

Motta Do they ever get caught in the traps, or like eels ever get in those traps?

Martin That's a good question. There are actually – some of the commercial fishermen, which I never did, they have what they call "eel pots." They have designed traps to actually catch the eels here, and they send them to England. They eat a lot of eels in England. They do some kind of jelly with our eels or something crazy. I don't know. But he's called the American eel. He's harmless. And a big one would be probably two and a half feet, I guess. But they actually – it seems like they have actually shut down the eeling in Lake Monroe, for some reason. Probably population's down. I don't know what it is, but for a long time, the commercial fisherman was putting out eel pots, or eel traps, and trapping the American eel as well.

0:56:41

Favorite aspect of fishing

Motta Wow. Well, to—let me just ask you one last question, then. Kind of on a personal note. Do you have any—well, could you just tell me—it seems like you have a lot of experience on the lakes and the water. Personally, what was your favorite aspect of it? Like nature aspect or just your personal opinion. I would love to know.

Martin Yeah. I'm glad you asked me that, because I have an answer. This is gonna be different than probably any commercial fisherman that you interview. Only because it's different, not because my opinion is better. I'm a humble guy. I'm not in this for the heroes.

But, many a night, when I would get through running my trot line, baiting it, sometimes I'd put the trot line out, and then bait it out there and go home. Well sometimes, it might be a full moon or thereabouts—beautiful out there—when I got through working out there. I'd take my boat and I'd go all up in the nooks and crannies with my big light, and watch the wildlife. And I could tell you some alligator stories. An alligator attacked my boat one night, but it was my fault. I provoked him. But it's too long. I'll tell you later. But anyway, I would appreciate nature.

I saw a rabbit one night, on the bank in a place called Woodruff Creek. And the rabbit was on the riverbank eating a piece of grass—just one long piece of grass. He was just sitting there. And you know, a rabbit can eat a piece of grass and never move his hands. He'll just kind of ingest the whole thing. He was doing that, and the grass was getting shorter and shorter, but the unique thing about this particular rabbit was when I shined the light on him—I wish I had had a camera, photography, the ability to take a picture—there was a halo of mosquitoes around this rabbit that were illuminated by the light. He didn't pay them any mind at all. They can't get to his fur, you see. So he was just—they didn't matter. But the mosquitoes sensed that he was there, but they couldn't get to him. So the rabbit was eating his grass in the nighttime, and this big giant halo of mosquitoes—not blind mosquitoes, these were bloodsuckers—trying to get to this rabbit. And I just—that picture in my mind will never go away.

Motta Stuck with you?

Martin He just was having dinner. *[laughs]*

0:58:51

Closing remarks

Motta Oh, well thank you for talking with us, coming in. Definitely taped a lot of this, so again, thank you for coming in and talking.

Martin Well, you know, it's been a pleasure. But the downside is—I just regret the history that is gonna be missed, because we only had an allotted time to do this. And I'll still try to put some things together on paper, and you can drop by and

give them to Ms. Kim [Nelson] up there or something. I wanna draw you some illustrations as to how the trot lines were made.

Motta Oh, that would be great.

Martin Now I've thought about donating that monkey to you guys. I guess I mentioned that earlier. Are you interested in having that machine?

Motta Oh, yeah.

Martin It's about that long.

End of Interview