Transcript of Oral History Tape 91 Transcribed by Rosemary Bauer 8/9/03

Fred Ritter Great Lakes Fishing

Ritter: Well, in 1900 my dad…the first fishing well, was, the biggest fishing was paw nets. They ran paw nets, they had the naphtha boats before the gasoline boats came in, see. Well before that there was the sailboats, but they fished gill nets, and then when they went to the paw nets they used to get the paw nets so full of fish they made four trips a day and sometimes in the herring in the spring they would never get the nets empties; that's how thick they were see. Then, I don't know how many pounds, but they'd work all day, they'd have to dress them and ship them to the…(indecipherable)… They would go out and load a load, come in and take care of them, then go out and get some more see.

Interviewer: Would it be herring?

Ritter: It would be herring in the spring you know, and then later on it would be the whitefish were that big. See they used to, they'd say they'd get the sturgeon maybe 100 to 150 pounds, well they'd just take them for their own and sell the meat to town people without any…(indecipherable). For salt and roe they'd get $5.00 a pound at that time. See five pounds of, well a pound of salt, a pound of roe, that's how they mixed it see, that was to keep them. They'd ship them to New York.

Interviewer: Was that considered high cost caviar?

Ritter: Yea, that's caviar, yea. But that is what they were making big money on. But, the herring when they were thick, when the white fish were thick as fleas, then from the steam tugs come in, well Booth and them had over one hundred footers…(indecipherable)…a lot of steam tugs. They were fishing out of here, but when the fishing fell off a little then they would move on up the lake see. Then they went to the coast later on. Like I say, the naphtha boats were like twenty-three to twenty-four footers, open boats see. They fished gill nets and paw nets.

Interviewer: Can you give us the dates on these different kinds of boats roughly.

Ritter: Well I would say the naphtha boat must have been from 1900 on up to maybe in the 1910, and then they'd come in with gasoline engines. Well you'd never see them. They didn't have spark plugs, they had what you call a make and break.

Interviewer: What is a make and break?

Ritter: A make and break plug is, well it works off of, like a, well they had them three cell dry cell batteries to give it a charge, then after they had it started they'd run into a magneto see. It is just like a distributor, the points, only that was inside of the cylinders, and then off of a cam this arm would run and keep hitting that, then it would make the break, see what they call a make and break. They had platinum points, and then after that well, you'd put a nail in and you'd go. See then later on the spark plugs come, and that was a high class engine, but we didn't have like the outboards, well

years ago, well that’s later on. When the outboards come in you’d crank them for five minutes to get a five minute ride see. Like now you take a pull and they go, they’ve got good magnetos. But them days, boy. I’d say the outboard must have come out in about 1920, the Johnson was the first one built…(indecipherable)… But from the make and break they come to the, well the kerosene gasoline, you’d start them on gas and you’d run them on kerosene, see.

Interviewer: Because it was cheaper?

Ritter: Cheaper, yea. But gas them days was what, eighteen cents see, kerosene was down to six cents. When we first got our first vehicle we paid six and a half cents for fuel oil, now it is forty-eight. Then from the make and break they went to the naphtha boats, they went to the gas boats, and from the gas boats they went to gasoline diesel. Then from that they went to like what we got is what they call a low pressure diesel.

Interviewer: You start them on gasoline and run them on diesel?

Ritter: Yea, run them on diesel. Now with our engine we started on air, but she’s what you call a low pressure diesel see. We can run her fourteen years without even putting a ring in her. When you get these full diesels they’re about 1500 pounds per square inch, as soon as you lose the pressure, you lose the cylinders see. But they run cheaper than what our big ones do. See we had the drift feed oiler and everything in ours. Like now in these full diesels they’ve got the splash pan and of course…(indecipherable)…oil. When we used to run outside we’d run through twelve barrels of oil a year, lubricating oil, a fifty-five gallon barrel. So that is the way they went, from open boats to steam boats, then from steam boats they went to gas and diesel both see. When the steam tugs, well, I got out of the steam tugs, when I was sixteen years old I quit school and went to work on a steam tug, but before that I used to go out for a ride on them all the time and work on them. When you work with a kid, you know, at sixteen I worked on tugs for two years. In the morning we would go down there, we’d get down there about 5:00 in the morning. You’d pull in, the engineer would be there, you’d pull her by hand back to the coal dock and you’d wheel on about eighteen wheelbarrows about 300 pounds to the wheelbarrow, and you would load her up, you’d load her bunkers up and then you’d load the deck up with coal see. And you’d run out there, then by the time you got to the nets it was two and a half, you’d go out twenty to thirty miles, well you’d burn up enough, then you’d put the flash bar oh maybe fifteen, twenty foot that would be about two inch pipe. Well always the young guys, you know, the flunkies, the younger guy, he would have to go down until you worked all of that coal down and you put the manhole plate on it, and that was it. You’d be just about to the nets and then you would have to start working. We would run seven men on the steam tugs, and they would pull, let see, one, two, three, four miles a minute.

Interviewer: That was at one time?

Ritter: One time, you’d run four mile a minute see.

Interviewer: How big of a propeller or wheel would you have?

Ritter: On a steam tug? Oh, I would imagine, oh, it ought to be sixty inches.

Interviewer: Sixty inches wide?

Ritter: It’s thirty-eight on the one I’ve got.

Interviewer: So it’s a five foot propeller?

Ritter: Five foot propeller with a four blade, and them engines used to turn over about 90 r.p.m.’s see. When you used to…(indecipherable)…when you hear them burn, boom, boom, boom, sounded like the sweetest…(indecipherable)… music.

Interviewer: That was a steam…(indecipherable).

Ritter: Steam engines, yes.

Interviewer: They are terrifically powerful…(indecipherable).

Ritter: Yea. And they used to burn a lot of coal, but coal was cheap. Like in 1926 there was an outfit out of here and the Imperial. I used to…(indecipherable)… at that time. They went out of here, well, they were just getting started, Fryer and Jensen, see. Well, they didn’t have too much money and they didn’t have too much coal, see. They got out, they come back through the ice and they run out of coal, so they set in the ice for two weeks. (indecipherable)…ha, ha, ha. So they set in there two weeks, and then there was a tug and a derek come out of Chicago and lifted them out. When they lifted them out of the ice they crushed the…(indecipherable)…so they lost that. They leased her out of South Chicago, the Imperial.

Interviewer: The men were saved?

Ritter: Oh yea, the men walked to shore. We had a young guy there like me that was about killed…(indecipherable)…he was about sixteen and the other two guys said, "We’re going to eat you, we ain’t got nothing to eat."

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: We’d drift from there. Off from Michigan City, they’d go as far as New Buffalo and sometimes be down off of Gary. That was the way the ice flowed, that’s the way they moved see.

Interviewer: So it was drifting with the ice?

Ritter: With the pack ice, yea, if they got caught in the ice they couldn’t get in and they’re out of coal, so they dropped the coal and stuff so their boiler didn’t break out of the burlap sack. Then the airplane which was coming, he dropped them some, yea, so that was …

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…the twenties…

Ritter: That was about 26th or 27th. Boy that was a big day. Well, now what else? The open boats we go from that to the steamboats and naphtha boats to what we got today, the diesel now. They used to say wooden boats and iron

men, now they got iron boats and wooden men see. That's what they say, but I don't know. We had our day.

Interviewer: Why would a man want to be a fisherman?

Ritter: It's in the blood. You get the fever. Well, why all these guys have to get started? You just get the fever like anything else. I've been in it all of my life and I had my good days and bad days and I prayed. I've had days when I prayed to get home too. We've had em…(indecipherable)… You know what a comer is just a little piece of white, you know. I've already been out there when you see it from horizon to horizon, that's when you pray you can make it home.

Interviewer: I seems Lake Michigan is a very treacherous body of water.

Ritter: They all are if you get caught in them. They can throw you down. Well that one, the ships went down all over in that lake, we heard folks that one year. Was it forty some they lost in all the Great Lakes? Yea, that is why they're going to catch em here, these sportsmen, one of these days too. We've been lucky. You get one of them black ones; I already been out there over a half hour out, we were out the…(indecipherable)…and we sat in back a perch net, a black one come and we waited til they hit you know. That's the first time in my life I'd ever been on a boat you couldn't steer. All you could do was hold her broadside and you'd try to bring her up in the wind and the water came right like this, climbed over the house just like a waterfall. It climbed right up the house and over.

Interviewer: Is that why those boats are completely enclosed.

Ritter: Yea. They shed the water, but years ago when you had wooden ones there's so many of them lost their house. Well the Armistice Day blow, think it was 1940, boy they were goin' down all over. There was about five fish tugs. See the wooden ones you'd lose, the house would shear off see. They get a little old and that sea would come and knock the house off. But then they lost tankers, they lost paper boats, and stone stack that comes in here, she was a center lower then she went aground at Dorra County, they were all over. There was a tanker out at Holly Gary that lost his rudder and pilot house, then out of South Haven there was a coast guard boat left South Haven because they lost two boats out of there. The guys started out and they couldn't turn around and go back in, so we talked to one of the coast guards after that, they didn't go back for two weeks after that and he says they rolled over three different times. You know they'd roll over like the sea scouts had done. When they rolled over two guys were chained to the wheel and to the outside and two in the engine room. They rolled over three times and they got at least short of Chicago and then they made it, but they didn't think they were going to make it. They couldn't go back, it was too rough. And then they…

Interviewer: They broached three times?

Ritter: No, not broached, they rolled over. The sea just rolled them over. It took em like that. The seas were so big, that same blow, that Armistice Day blow out of Holland, there was the Chamber brothers. Well it was the canthus season open and they went out to eleven percent see. They said four gangs went out, one in, one out and one in, and they went in to Holland and they

couldn't see the piers, but that was their own port and they knew where they were goin. If you've never been to Holland it is like an arrow and the inside piers are just like an arrow head. Well they took a range and they went through the foam and they made it, but all around them boats were sinkin'.

Interviewer: We'll show you on this tape what your boat looks like on a particular slide. Your boats were designed then so it doesn't have a house which would be washed off. They are designed specifically for the severe conditions…

Ritter: Yea, they are built for that see. And one new one is built for ice see. You see how our bow is cut away, and you can see how she can climb up see. Years ago the style of the boat was straight sten and after years ago then they made a little forefoot, and then they got over on the radical bow like an ice bow where you can rise see. Before they used to use what you call buck the ice the breakers. They had so much power they'd just break it apart see, but now later on on these designs like we got they get up and ride on the ice and the weight of the boat breaks the ice. See they are all designed different.

Interviewer: How thick is your hull?

Ritter: Well, we got in our first cheek plate, what we call cheek plate we got 3/8 iron, then from about what we call a quarter, that's about a quarter, well not quite a quarter back then you go into a quarter inch plate see. But at the forward end we've got what you call eight inch centers and after that we go to eighty inch centers. See where you get the power you've got them about every eight inches apart there's ribs, see it is all reinforced, you're really …(indecipherable)… But still you'll buckle them a little.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Steel now, yea, there's no iron, but they used to make iron boats before steel. What they call iron, see now your steel is in that. They used to make them steel, iron and then they riveted see, but an iron boat was better than a steel, you didn't get the rust. Steel is a lot of corrosion. Our biggest fight is electrolysis. Electrolysis in a steel boat, they're harder to take care of than wood. Wood boats you take eight years is the life and you never worried about, but after that you patched and patched see. But now like this one is thirty-two years already we've had her. If it had been a wooden boat it would have been in the bone yard already, that's the difference, but they are harder to take care of. You got to paint them and scrape them and clean 'em every couple of years. That's as far as the boats go. Then, you want to know the nets?

Interviewer: Yes, what kind did your father tell you he used? What were they made out of and how far out did they go and what kind of fish…(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Well, see we started with linen in my days and in their days see. Here the first nets that I know they said he used to make all by hand see. They made the old nets in the wintertime while they didn't have nothing to do, they'd sit, but then, well they say the fish were so plentiful you didn't need as many as now see. But then Germany made a machine and a twine company. The machine had to make the mesh, the web. The first lines were made out of

cotton, the sidelines were cotton. Then in the winter you'd weave them together to make a net. You could have it professionally made or most of them made them their own the way they wanted them see. That's the way you hang them, that's the way they fished. See you just don't put a net on there like a curtain or else they won't work. They got to be a certain way in order to fish. When a gill net hits here they gotta be enough slack so another one could get in. If they're fishing to tight, then they bounced against here and bounced off. The paw nets, well all they were with the stakes. Well, they run well from thirty feet, some places they run out as high as ninety feet, and they'd splice the pole see. Well, with the paw nets you'd have a lot of stakes, and then you had to have a pile driver, you had to have a boat and you'd have to have a boat to carry the paw nets. And, they'd go out and drive their stakes, and then they'd drop their nets on in. It was good, but on this end of the lake it was bad, the weather was so bad, but in bays and stuff you were all right.

Interviewer: How would they know where to place those nets? Would they have to be in a channel or a run?

Ritter: Do you mean paw nets? They'd be in the open lake. That's why you know…

Interviewer: The fish must have been that plentiful that they would…

Ritter: No, you take a paw net, you put a lead on see. Well you can see the picture. They let a lead, oh you start at thirty feet. Well, maybe sometimes they run in a little closer. They don't like to go in at fifteen because the waves would tear them out right away, so they started at thirty feet and they run out to oh maybe forty feet, but they was all along, there's was what they call a lead. Then you put your pot, then they'd run…

Interviewer: There was no need for those people to get a long net to…

Ritter: I guess they're long like a net or a fence you know, but they would be in sections. Well maybe they'd run around fifty foot sections, there's be a post in it, well maybe thirty foot of the fifty would blow off. Then they'd put another post and they'd have a lead, then they'd have another one and another one until they got to the paw net which would be the lead in there, then they've have the heart, then they had the tunnel, then they had the lifting pot. See that was one, it might be a forty footer. Well then if you wanna you'd run another one outside of that maybe to 360 feet see. Well, then he'd have a lead in between and another pot see. And like some places they'd run a third one out, maybe like where the water was deep they'd run as high as ninety feet. Well, then they couldn't get any stakes that big, they'd splice them, then they'd drive them. See they had a…

Interviewer: They would drive a stake ninety feet in the water.

Ritter: Yea, well they'd jet mostly, you jet with a big pipe. Well years ago at first they had those steam jets see, and then later on when you got the gas engine, well he could jet a pipe down. See they drive them and then they let them set before they settle and put 'em on. Years ago, well before your time, these guys here would get there boats and put 'em on the beach. Well then, they'd go out and they'd tie to the guys stake. Well, when you start wiggling that stake around in the waves and the blow come, then the stakes

would pop out. Well, then they'd wonder why the guy would holler. They never wanted to be content to fish on the outside, they'd always think there's more in the pot like they do now. Where the fishermen are the fish are now. They fish in the pot, Balow showed me a cigar box full of hooks. You go with your hands pullin' the net, well you would cut your hands all up see, then they wondered why the man hollered at 'em. Oh, he's an old crab; what did they expect. Along side well there'd be just as many, where they lead there'd be the same as anything like along a pier, but no, somebody always had to get in the net see. Oh, a fella used to get madder than a hatter. Well I don't blame him.

Interviewer: What kind of fish do you catch in a paw net?

Ritter: Paw net? Well you catch anything that comes along the lead in it. They get perch, walleye, gar, sturgeon, white fish, herring.

Interviewer: Could you tell us what happened to the sturgeon and the walleye?

Ritter: There still there. A lot of them. The sturgeon in there are thicker than fleas now. When I was young there was a ban for twenty-five years, well they never took it off. Michigan took it off for a while yet on a certain size, but the sturgeon…I talked to a diver out here that was working on a…(indecipherable)…he was working on an intake you know. When they were cleaning the intake out he says they're down there bigger than pigs, they were with catfish. He says when you're workin' there they come at ya and they scare you, they're bigger than a man see. There's no paw nets used no more, so they're bigger, they get so big you can't touch them, they're bigger than the net.

Interviewer: Do sturgeon get ten to fifteen feet long like they do…

Ritter: They're longer than that, they get 100 to 150 pounds. They get ten to twenty feet, there are real big ones. But I have never seen them, that's what my dad said they used to catch them, but right now who could touch them. You can't touch them, all you could do is get them on a set line and they'd take the line and all see. There's no net that will hold them. You can't touch them either, that's illegal. That's a federal law now. The fish, like I say, there's more fish now than there ever were, but that ain't the way they say, the way they put it in the paper. Well, everything is poisoned now…(indecipherable)…

Interviewer: When did they stop using paw net?

Ritter: Paw nets, they stopped that about in the early 30's. See what it was then, the early 30's there was, well the mills used to dump their slag and everything, and you couldn't keep a paw net clean. See it would all get full of slime and stuff and wouldn't fish. Well, then they cost too much, so everybody stopped then and they went to gill nets, the cheaper…(indecipherable)… They couldn't afford 'em and there wasn't the fish there. (indecipherable)…it was about in the end, about in '30. Well maybe later, about '31.

Interviewer: (indecipherable)…

Ritter: Yea, but he was gill nettin’ and he didn’t paw net no more. He got rid of his scuttle and everything else, that was in the 30’s. But then it went from paw nets, then in ’36 the trap netter came in out of Lake Huron, and he done pretty good. He trapped out of here and he caught a lot of white fish. He lasted for two years, then he quit. He got sick, he got cancer, and that was the end of that.

Interviewer: He…(indecipherable)…trapped?

Ritter: Yea, they got trap nets.

Interviewer: Were they like paw nets then?

Ritter: No, they anchor them out instead of stake ‘em, they got a cover on them, see, a paw net is open on top see. There’s a picture there, they’re like a box and they set ‘em on the bottom. They are easy to set, you put an anchor out and get a couple of side anchors and you need a hard anchors, and you just anchor ‘em on see, but with paw nets you gotta drive stakes in. Then you can go in deeper water with these. You don’t have to worry about stakes.

Interviewer: (indecipherable)…

Ritter: A lot of money, costs me more than we can handle. See there, they got a big rig. Costs a lot of money to put up that trap net.

Interviewer: How much would it cost to fund these?

Ritter: Well, right now if you put one up I suppose about $10,000.

Interviewer: Oh, how often do you have to go out and check these?

Ritter: What’s that?

Interviewer: How often do you have to go out and check these?

Ritter: Well, every day. Every day they go out and maintain ‘em. I would imagine if you put up a paw net now it would cost you a fortune. I don’t know what it cost then, but it was a lot of labor. You had to tar it before you put ‘em in, all of that had to be coated with that hot tar and covered and then in the summer you would bring ‘em in and wash ‘em and tar ‘em again before you take ‘em back out see. You had to cover ‘em all with coal tar so they wouldn’t…

Interviewer: Even the mesh was covered with coal tar?

Ritter: Oh yea, you’d take the whole net and put it right in see. They did gillin’ then, it was just a trap. Same as with a paw net , a trap net you had to tar all that in coal tar, hot coal tar.

Interviewer: To keep them from rotting?

Ritter: Yea, to keep ‘em from rotting, yea. See that was, all them days it was all cotton made.

Interviewer: Do they have to do that today with the nylon?

Ritter: Well, no, they won't have to with the nylon, no. See that's the difference between the nylon. Like we used to, when we fished, like we'd fish ten, twelve boxes. We had to bring them in, well, in the spring of the year it would be once a week, well in the summer you left about every two to third day you'd have to bring 'em in and leave them up drying, then you had to pack 'em all. And then in the summer, about every second week you had to boil 'em to kill the bacteria in 'em see. So, it was a lot of work, but now nylon you can put 'em on the string and you don't have to bring 'em in.

Interviewer: Was the linen…(indecipherable)…or the cotton?

Ritter: Yea, the linen is, yea. You had to boil 'em and kill the bacteria in 'em. See with nylon they took all of that away, see, they won't have to reel the line in. In fact, you can put 'em back out in the lake see.

Interviewer: I can't imagine anybody working harder than a fisherman. Would you say what a typical day would be like when you were working…

Ritter: When we really worked?

Interviewer: Yes.

Ritter: Well, from five in the morning til. I already got done at 2:00 in the morning and I wouldn't go home because it was easier to sleep on a cable down there than it was to go home. I got an hour or more sleep.

Interviewer: What kind of operations did you have to get done even before you took your boat out?

Ritter: Even in the morning? Well, if you had a short crew, you had the nets packed. Well, then you'd have to load up, gas up, put, summer you'd have to ice up, get ice and everything and then…When we had them long runs it was always 6:00 and you were pretty pulling away from the dock. Well, you had to be there at least 5:00 in the morning, then if you had a four hour run, well, you didn't get there for four hours and if you happened to hit the buoy right away you were all right, if you didn't, well you would lose time looking for the buoy see. And, then you pulled the nets, if there were a lot of fish, maybe there was another four hours gettin' that fish out. Then you had that four hours home, so you had twelve hours before you even got back. Them were the good old days. Til we went to the…(indecipherable)… I never seen my children. You'd leave in the morning and you'd come home and they'd be in bed, so you go in and look at 'em and that was about it. Well when it was season, when the fish run in the spring, they run in the fall, well, then you put in long hours. And, in the summer, well, you put in a twelve hour day, that was a normal day. That's why these young kids today are workin' hard, huh, they never were. They do more for pleasure than they do for work now. During the war…(indecipherable)… See two of my brothers were gone to the Merchant Marines, so there was just a skeleton crew, and boy, I never got home. Sometimes we'd be down there at midnight cleaning fish. Well like I say, I liked it. Well, when I was in school, well my brother went to car shop and I went to school in a grade school and we'd go out at 4:00 in the morning and lift before we went to school, and before you went to work, …(indecipherable)… And when I was in high school…(indecipherable)…but

football season, so I couldn't go because then I was out for football see. But the rest of the year we always laughed at school. I would get some of my buddies, that's when we fished. Uh, that was before I got out of school, we always fished the little boat, a twenty-three, twenty-four footer, and we always fished. My dad had a big boat, and he had it from maybe 1916 or '17 and got rid of that, then we always had a small boat, see.

Interviewer: How big is a big boat?

Ritter: Well, it is anywhere from thirty to forty feet. Steam tugs used to run around seventy, oh they run seventy-four feet or more. If you wanted seventy-five you had to have licensed men see. But he always stayed right under the limit see, and then they didn't have to have a licensed captain and engineers. (indecipherable)…he always…(indecipherable)…about seventy-four foot see. Down in the harbor there they just built the Dad and the Bob, well, just across from B&E there, he built two seventy-four footers, steam tugs.

Interviewer: He built the boats himself?

Ritter: Oh, yea, wooden boats. They were good tugs.

Interviewer: It seems to me that fishermen also maybe were like a farmer who had to know a lot about weather, about biology, about engines, about wood. He had to be a man who knew lots about everything. How did he learn this?

Ritter: Well, there always has to be one out of the family who could one thing, the other one could do the other. It just seemed that way. I don't know, fishermen all seem to be naturally a jack of all trades or else he ain't behaving in the business. You know what I mean, they lose out if he ain't a jack of all trades like me. In high school I took a machine shop, picked up welding, a little bit of electrician work. You really had to overhaul all your own engines, and when they had magnetos, boy you were workin'. The first we had with gas boats, that old thing I'd kick in the slats a lot of times to get it going. One time we went out there, I'll tell you the old story. Are you superstitious? Well, we were young, it was Friday the 13th and Pa says don't go set. I said, "Get off it Pa, you're an old fogy." You know how kids are, they don't believe there old man anyhow, he don't know nothin' see. You're always smarter than your father, I don't care who you are. So, we took thirteen boxes and we started on Friday the 13th and we went out and set. A three day blow come up, boy, oh boy. So, then goin' out to look for him we went through the ice, and we threw our steering bearing. Well, we were out there grabbing for the nets and our floor boards started to float, see. We had five mile of ice to come home.

Interviewer: Why did your floor boards start to float?

Ritter: We were leaking. She was leaking bad. So that guy Ortho, well Orphy…(indecipherable)…was with us and well in them days you had a pitcher pump, well there wasn't none of these electric jobs. Well we got pumpin', we got her pumped dry and to keep ahead with a pitcher pump we stuck rags in it and everything, and we just come idling home you know. And, we wiggled through the ice and lucky we didn't hit no ice. Heidi's the one who had us docked there. He pulled us out and we had an inch and a half shaft and we only had no bigger than your finger left see. But we had…

Interviewer: So your bearing had worn out…

Ritter: Oh, yea, she was on a pipe see. So, they all laughed at me, but no more Friday the 13th.

Interviewer: You didn't go out last Friday then?

Ritter: That's the start. See a fisherman and most of your marinas, any mariner will never start on a Friday. Even the ore boats, they will wait until one minute after midnight see. When you get out there and you hear that whaling and stuff, sometime you can just… We won't start a season on a Friday, no way. Like, you know, the first day in the season, well that was the first net, nobody will go out on a Friday, no. We superstitious some. But we would…(indecipherable)…like all young kids, you know.

Interviewer: When does the season start?

Ritter: As soon as we can get out. Like now, as soon as the ice leaves, we're older, we don't do it, but as soon as there is open water we used to at least seen a fish and we'd break our way out. The year that we had that thirty-two inches of ice you know, well we cut from Franklin Street Bridge all the way to the Coast Guards. We cut ice, we cut a channel and all the fisherman were there and we cut an eighteen inch channel. You seen that boat I showed you was…(indecipherable)…well he come down with a diesel tug and he was breaking, oh it was twenty-two inches by the bridge and then by the Coast Guards they let up to about twenty, and he would get up on that and he'd break down. So from then on out he broke the rest of the way out. See it was all, what you call(Side one of tape ends.)

(Side two of tape begins.)

Interviewer: After what happened you know about different kinds of snow to survive, you talked about blue ice and other kinds of ice. Now what kind of ice are there?

Ritter: Well, your hard ice, what we call blue ice, like a natural freeze see. Now you take like a snow ice, it meets with the snow and that's really tough. Well maybe you've seen in the paper where that Orville was stuck last week? Well, there was one that come down the lake and he couldn't get in to Bethlehem, so they had to get the ice breaker out of Milwaukee to break it. You see well even when Escanava come down they come from up north where they had this blue ice and hard ice, what we call hard ice that is a natural freeze see. Well you can get up on that and break it down, it's just as brittle as can be. But, when you get down here and you get that snow ice and that slush ice, well you get on it and you get in it, it's just like glue, it just grabs you, you don't go through it. Like in the spring of the year when you see all that ice out here, well that's the hardest ice there is to get through. But you take that blue ice, well, we can break twenty inches of blue ice. You get up on it and boom, she goes down easy and keep a goin'.

Interviewer: How much does your boat weigh?

Ritter: Well, she's thirty ton. See, the engine alone weighs ten thousand pounds.

Interviewer: How many horse power?

Ritter: Seventy horse.

Interviewer: And you said a thirty-eight inch propeller?

Ritter: Yea, it will churn up 400-500, is my top speed. But you see, that's a two cycle, and so I said I got a four cylinder, I got really actually an eight and she hits on every one. And the way she's built is equivalent to steam. I can run ahead full and I can take the quadrant and back that engine up direct back it, see, then I don't have to use my clutch. She's the closest thing to steam that you can get. I can go this way with it and I can go that way with it. I can give you one hundred percent, so when you get up on the high sea, sometimes you get hooked pretty well see. So then, you gotta reverse the engine, you back off one hundred percent in back. See like a clutch is about two and a half to one, you know your reverse gear. So you haven't got the power, so when you get up to your stuck point, well I already turned it over to four hundred and I had one pop and the next pop she stops. I've already done that too.

Interviewer: Explain that to me.

Ritter: You're running 400 going through the ice.

Interviewer: 400 rpm's?

Ritter: Rpm's, okay. The next pop she's no more.

Interviewer: You killed it?

Ritter: Yea, the engine just like that, and you've got a flywheel maybe, well I'd say the flywheel is about 300, 300-350.

Interviewer: Your propeller hit something and stopped?

Ritter: Just like that. If there's not another pop, boy, then you go look to see if you broke anything. Ice gets jammed in there and she couldn't go no more see. But when you turn her over a big flywheel stands that high and it's that wide and that thick and all cast iron, it weighs maybe 400, you know it stands about that high.

Interviewer: How big is the diameter of your shaft?

Ritter: My shaft is three inch.

Interviewer: Out of stainless steel?

Ritter: No, no, just plain cold rolled steel. Yea, when you work in the ice it is hard on machinery. It is harder coming back in than it is bucking out, I don't know why.

Interviewer: Whey do you go out when conditions are so severe like that, when you're taking a chance on equipment, taking a chance of getting stuck?

Ritter: You've got a job, you've got to go out and get some fish, you gotta go out and make some money, what's the difference? It's a job.

Interviewer: But you're not worried about…It seems to me that most people today would think that would be taking a chance.

Ritter: It is, but you get used to it. You take a chance walking across the street, it ain't no different. …(indecipherable)…it's just a way of life. Like now we're older, we don't do that no more. I don't know if we got a little more sense or something. Years ago, man, we'd go out of that harbor, if it was possible you'd go. Well now, we haven't got the harbor we used to have either see.

Interviewer: Tell us about that.

Ritter: Well, years ago we could go out of there well in almost anything see, but after Northern Indiana put that break wall across…see the sea broke on the beach and that would be all. It would break and that was the end of it. Now it hits that wall and goes back, and back, and back, and you have a backwash. See we used to have eighteen to twenty feet of water in the harbor, we didn't have the backwash that would build that sandbar there all the time see. They say erosion, no. You know what started the erosion on the west beach too don't you? The same thing I'm telling you about right now. When I was courtin' ma …(indecipherable)…See the beach, on the west beach there that's gone in about…(indecipherable)…we lost the whole sand hill, the whole hill there, and then we had about a block of beach and we used to go and beach part that's all gone. We drove out there last summer. We used to park there at the end of the lake, then we had a hill probably about twice…

Interviewer: You're saying that's due to the breakwater?

Ritter: …(indecipherable)…Yea, but they all say something else. I watched it, I seen it happen, I seen it work, but then I would say that.

Interviewer: Who are going to be the young fishermen? There is one younger fellow who is a fisherman now. Does it attract many younger men?

Ritter: Well that's where those thirty-five…Well, what did they say, there was forty-seven. Well let's say that's where the other forty-five come from.

Interviewer: I don't understand.

Ritter: Well there's forty-seven licenses, there's two full-time fishermen, so the other forty-five are all new. And there's a young fella next to us, Furness, he's going into it, he's got the bug. There's none doing it for livelihood, it takes too much money. You can't afford it now. I was talkin' to a guy last night and he was saying boy he's got 8500 in there and he don't know, he ain't got nothin', only one box of nets and a boat. It costs too much to go into it now. People who were in it can't get out.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: No. I wouldn't advise anybody to go into it, not the way it is now. Maybe some day, if they ever take the restrictions off it wouldn't be bad if

you like it, but it's not easy. It's not an easy life at all. It's rough, but you gotta like it.

Interviewer: Why'd you like it?

Ritter: It's a bug. Like anybody else. Some fellas like flying, some like fishing, some like to go fishing, it's just a way of life, that's all.

Interviewer: When you're talking about when you pick the boats up and you bring the nets in, the movie shows it automatic. It wasn't like that really.

Ritter: Oh, no. Years ago when they first started it was all what they call, you had to walk the deck you see. The first steam tugs, I tried to find a picture, it was just an open deck and they had a big roller on it, and then they'd go grab and walk across, and as he was going across another man would go and walk the deck, see. All by hand, you're walking across, see. When we started, well, when we were in school, we pulled by hand, we didn't have machinery then. You'd go out and pull five or six boxes and think nothin' of it.

Interviewer: How many feet of net are in a box?

Ritter: 1500 feet. You could go out there and pull all day, you get used to it. That's where you get a big …(indecipherable)… from see. And some days it was nice and quiet and it was easy, but if the wind was blowin', man you pulled. Most generally you tried to go down with the wind so it wouldn't be so hard.

Interviewer: Most people today aren't used to doing that hard of work. I think you'd say it's hard for you to find help these days.

Ritter: Well, right around here with help it isn't the work alone, a lot of them like it, but the factories pay so good. You see with the fluctuation of the market is, is the market, see. It's hard to get help because the factories pay too good for that. They get all the benefits and everything and why should they go fishing? All these guys that are on the sidelines, well, they like it, see. That's the reason they do it on the side, they have a job that keeps 'em goin' see. If you're new you can't go out when the weather's bad, you don't have the equipment and a boat to use. You have to have a lot of equipment to make a go. Your investment is so big.

Interviewer: How many fishermen were out when you father was alive.

Ritter: We had eighteen boats, and to a boat, like I say, there's a seven man crew, and you most generally had two or three shore hands, so there were ten men to a boat, see. That's about the way the equipment would have…(indecipherable)…The old time fishing, well, we always did it…(indecipherable)… I don't know, maybe beyond the summer, I never did go in the day. When you work for yourself you don't do that. There's a lot of them I've seen come and go, there all pretty well gone, so I'm …(indecipherable)… the old time now.

Interviewer: What did your boat cost you to build in the 30's and what would an equivalent boat cost today?

Ritter: About 50-60,000.

Interviewer: It cost you then to build it?

Ritter: Now. It cost use between seventeen and twenty then. It would probably be more than that now. That was what, about ten years ago they wanted fifty. It would be now, yea, after ten years…(indecipherable)…You take them there on regular trawlers there it is $250-300,000 for a pretty fair trawler on the coast see. None of it is cheap, your equipment isn't cheap either. Then you gotta know what you're doing.

Interviewer: What was the most dangerous thing about fishing then and has it changed any now?

Ritter: Oh, yea, you got your radio now and you've always got contact with somebody. Them days if you broke down, they'd wait until maybe 9:00-10:00 at night, then they'd come lookin' for you. If you were well to do, well they always figured maybe you were working eighteen, so they waited at least until 9:00-10:00 maybe. If you weren't in by then, then they started to get worried see, but before that you didn't. You didn't have a radio and none of that electronics, you know. We did have a depth finder or sounder. If you come in in a snowstorm and you either throw the lead over by hand. Now you turn it on and you see all the shallow shoal water your coming on. Electronics made it a lot safer. If you break down, you call the Coast Guard.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…all that electronics to some countries…

Ritter: Well, in 19…that was after the war. First we got a radio right after the war. The first one we got was RCA. You couldn't buy 'em right now with all the ship to shore. You couldn't buy one, well that was in about '47 the first radio we got, and we had to buy it out of Chicago. We had to get a man out of Chicago to work on it. The first one we bought was a Navy surplus out of Grand Haven. The only thing they told us was it was Navy surplus, but didn't say you had to have a Navy guy to come along and work on it. We bought that, that's when you had to tune the RF. You had three different adjustments to get a channel, see. It was good enough, you could call in, but the Coast Guard's weren't no better. Now later on you just flip a button, like now you know there's nothin' to it, see. But that was about in, I'd say, '47-48. Now like I say all of the electronics and everything, radar and everything, you've got the radar and…(indecipherable)… But before it was all by the seat of your pants, boy you sailed.

Interviewer: How would you navigate if you got lost, compass alone?

Ritter: Yea that's all you had to do. That's all we ever used at the time was compass, that would rescue you see. But when you're in a snowstorm, current, winds, fog. See when it is snowing it is most generally blowing. Fog ain't bad. If you get fog it ain't blowin' too hard, but when you're in a snowstorm, boy, you know it, you don't see nothin' and it keeps blowin'.

Interviewer: Strong currents might be …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Yea, there's four or five different currents. You leave the harbor, the first twenty minutes maybe it can be from the East, then from twenty

minutes to a half hour it might be just the opposite. When we go out what we call an hour, maybe that would be about 120 feet and it might be out of the Northeast, out of the Northwest, see. There's three different current. A lot of them don't know.

Interviewer: How many knots would these currents travel at?

Ritter: Well, it's hard to say, you know, August they travel, I would say, three, four, maybe five knots. See when we used to run the paw nets they'd stand on an angle like that, see. Like when it is sunny in the morning most generally you'd have a current coming from the East, see. And after you go across the meridian that current would almost switch, see.

Interviewer: How would you ever do dead reckoning if you have those currents?

Ritter: You had your landmarks, like you were running way outside you put buoys. You use what we call drift buoys, see. About fifteen miles you'd have a drift buoy…(indecipherable)…we'd go that way. If we made that way, then we'd steady up see. You have what you call a drift buoy out there.

Interviewer: Did you study navigation to learn…(indecipherable)… It's no wonder that the average fella doesn't go out this way. Without those years of experience you'd be a pretty …(indecipherable)…Well he has the electronics today.

Ritter: Yea, well now it is simple, you see the radar and there you go. With the radar screen on anything you can find it.

Interviewer: But that's another $5,000.

Ritter: Yea, but that's a lot of money now days, but…(indecipherable)… Them days if you had a boat, boy you had it touch.

Interviewer: Was there good money in fishing those days?

Ritter: Oh yea. I'll tell you, when we got outta school the college boys were standing on the corner selling pencils and …(indecipherable)…

Interviewer: When was that?

Ritter: That was in '34, in '33, in there see. So, I had a scholarship to go to Purdue off of football. All my brothers were goin' fishing, I went fishing. I don't ever regret it. Yea, I could of went to Purdue, but I didn't think it was worth it, see. It was from football, but I figured ah. And, I don't regret it. Now days, well look at all those college boys, they're all looking for jobs again. They all say, get that college degree and then you will work. I'd go out and be a bricklayer or welder, you make more money. Ain't no lie. No, you had to make your own work them days, see. I was just saying that the WPA and all that was just coming in, you know, and …(indecipherable)… was really gettin' the old …(indecipherable)… started to go downhill. That's when you had old folks. Well, there was three of us comin' out of school about the same time and there wasn't no work, so we were fishin' a little and then we started makin'…(indecipherable)… The Keeting boys we were saying that two of them got out of school, so they started the

same time. At one time there were around four or five young kids that teamed up and started fishin', and see they found a boat somehow to go out. There must have been about ten boats that come out of there in the 30's. Well, Ludwig had three, we had one, Keeting had one fishing, but that was in the 30's. But before that there used to be a lot of big ones.

Interviewer: Did the depression hit commercial fishermen then?

Ritter: Oh, that's the best time to go fishin', people gotta eat. Right now if we'd go into a depression, boy then it's good. Maybe the prices ain't good, but they'll let you fish so you can feed the people. During the depression we went out and traded them for chickens and butter and eggs. See you'd go out in the country and nobody had any money, so they'd barter, you got fish, they'd give me chickens. They ate whatever they had. They gotta eat, people gotta eat, that's what keeps us going. If you had a job you didn't make much money. Well when I worked on a steam tug you got fifteen dollars a week, that's from five in the morning til. If the old guys got a bonus they get a shot of whiskey, see. Well, we were too young for whiskey, so we didn't get no bonus.

Interviewer: How old were you when you started working on a steam tug, sixteen? Was it …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: No, I quit school, I like it, I quit school and went fishin' for two years, and I quit and went back to high school then because my mom and sister talked me into going back to school.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Well, most of them start like that. The old timers they started, well like I say, a lot of them that's all there was besides the dock, …(indecipherable)… or else you go to car shop or one of them. A lot of them from the hollow they all went, they only went six months on a tug see. It was all right, they liked, see. But they'd never stay in the fish business. If you don't like to work, you don't want to be a fisherman. It always was nice, but…(indecipherable)…I can't get around. Rheumatism ain't for the lake. My aunt was a nun and she had it just as bad as my dad did, and my dad had it and I inherited it see. Out of the five boys I'm the only one that got the rheumatism.

Interviewer: When did you change …(indecipherable)…nets?

Ritter: Well, right now most of them pull by hand, all those little fellas, they all still pull by hand see. Well, then as the machinery advanced, the steam tugs, the first ones they came at about, oh it must have been about 1910. There was difference advance and that, and the advance the machine that pulls, see they used to be steam lifters first. First they put a machine on that roller see to help 'em, then from that it went to the lifting machine that was up and down and it would come over, see.

Interviewer: Like the one in the movie?

Ritter: No, no. That is a horizontal one see. But they had like a vertical one that would pull them over and drop them and then as they would advance

then …(indecipherable)… At first it was steam, then at you got gas and you could hook them on there…(indecipherable)…see. But as it kept advancing, I imagine about 1900 the machines started coming that I know of see. And, there advancing til now, it's pretty well a standard.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…the little boats.

Ritter: For the little boats, yea, like in the summer we used to fish off them, then we had little boats we pulled by hand. Well the Dorothy was about a thirty foot and they pulled by hand and that's quite a bit of fish. You know it depended if you had enough money to buy all this or not. Otherwise, you went out and pulled by hand. I'd say maybe before 1900, I don't know for sure. As long as I've known they've always had machinery on the bigger tugs to pull, see. The ones that are on the steam tugs are run by steam. Right now they got hydraulic, they got air and everything to run the machines now. If you had the air lifter, the air machines, they'd run 'em, they'd compress and then they'd run that, but we always run ours off our big machine see. …(indecipherable)…but before that they were by hand. They made the nets by hand, and then they went from that, they could buy the web. They went from linen to cotton and from cotton they went to nylon, now all they got is what they call this here like elastic. It's really…fiberglass, not fiberglass. What is that fish line they call that? You know, that you can see, Monofilament. Yea, they got that for gill nets too. As far as advances, they went from wooden float to aluminum float, and now they got plastic. First they were wood, see they'd float see. Well then, see you float, if you leave them out for long they get the pressure and put the water in. See if you go out in the deep the pressure is so great, you'd come in and you'd have to change your floats. About every other time you'd have to take the wooden one off and put a dry one on see. Every winter well you put 'em in racks to dry them, then you had to linseed oil them every winter, see. You dried the floats and then you'd oil them. Then aluminum floats come on, well, and now they're getting the plastic in. That's the three steps of the float. Before that they tell me, I never seen it, but they used to cut cedar sticks out like a float, and they had a string in there and they'd swing there. Well, they would take them off and for lead, we used lead. See before that they used stone. At the bottom they'd tie a stone, on top they'd have, Art …(indecipherable)… was telling me they'd have a piece of cedar like a block. Well then they used to stand them up to dry every time and they'd have to put them on every time and they'd tie a stone on it, wherever a float was they'd tie the stone on. See that was before, well a long time. It was before my time. Now we have the lead sinker that stays right on, we have a float that stay on now. When they had the wooden ones they had to change a lot…(indecipherable)… you could feel if it was light or heavy see. Water logged, yea, but if you go out in the deep you got 50-60 fathom, well even at 50 fathom that's a lot of pressure, see.

Interviewer: Your nets would go down 300 feet?

Ritter: They'd go to the bottom no matter where you go. See that's what is wrong with everybody, they think they float. Up north they fish 100 fathoms off of Port Washington, except well they'd have aluminum floats. If they didn't have special aluminum floats it would smash them, see. They had to get what they call pressure floats. Them were special that you had to buy.

Interviewer: I think most people think of the perch being at the surface…

Ritter: It all depends, you see now, according to federal specifications 85% of your fish are from above the gill nets, see. See we get 'em if it's rough or if they're feeding. Everybody thinks you get 'em all the time, but you don't. If they ain't down feeding you don't get no fish. We've already gone out there from nearly nothing to, well, a good load, see. Everybody thinks you go and drag 'em and that's the big idea, but you know. Well, it's so easy and I said that's what gave us all the trouble were …(indecipherable)… What else do you want to know?

Interviewer: What would you do if the fish didn't go into the nets?

Ritter: Well, like if we were fishing chubs, well you'd have to be out at least about 120 feet out, that's where the chubs were running, see. Well, you'd lift, you'd get the fish all out of the net, and then on the way home after you got set, well you set a trap. If we were fishing trout out there, you'd have to set a …(indecipherable)…Of course, they're the only ones that we'd clean on shore because they'd have to be scaled, see. See at first it used to be all hand scaling, then you went to an electric scaler, then from the electric scaler you went to automatic scaler, they'd hook 'em on a drum and it would go round. Now we got one as fast as you can throw 'em in it will scale 'em. A man could walk through a thousand pounds in maybe, oh about half and hour, three quarters of an hour. We'd take 'em from there and we'd cut the heads off and run 'em through a filleting machine, the machine does the work. Years ago we done all that by hand, see. It's gone from hand to machinery now, but they don't give you that stuff either.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Well, all the chubs you're goin like that. When we used to get chubs you'd take a stroke, one you'd cut and one you'd drag, see. We used to run, well, four, five, six thousand pounds a day when the run was on and everyone you had to clean. Well that's when you worked til, well, eight, nine, ten o'clock at night cleaning them. Then you'd have to put 'em in boxes and ice 'em and get 'em down to the market.

Interviewer: Did you ever smoke your own fish?

Ritter: We do all the time, ya. But now they got a ban on chubs, so, they're pretty hard to get.

Interviewer: Why are they banning chubs?

Ritter: …(indecipherable)…I don't know.

Interviewer: How did you pack them before…(indecipherable)…

Ritter: What's that?

Interviewer: The fish when, you know, they were packed in ice.

Ritter: Oh, yea, you'd have to ice them. It all depends on the season, in the Spring when it's cold you don't take ice with you, but otherwise you gotta carry ice all the time to keep 'em chilled.

Interviewer: Then what did you do, ship them out by the crate or…

Ritter: Well, we used to be at Motor Express and we've already shipped them by freight, not freight, Motor Express mostly. …(indecipherable)…Then we trucked a lot of them into Chicago. We used to have a truck going there two to three times a week.

Interviewer: You cut your own ice?

Ritter: We did for a while, when labor was cheap we cut our own ice, yea. Well, when labor got higher it was cheaper to buy the ice. Now you got ice machines now. You got that flake ice, see. We've had that for about twenty years now. See ice, first you used to buy a four hundred pound case for a buck, then it went to $1.25, $2.00, $3.00, then it went to about $5.00 a case see. It was cheaper to get a flaker machine. First you had to go get it, and if you didn't bring enough, you'd have to go back and get some more until you got all you needed. Like everybody is going to flakes now.

Interviewer: Did you ever ship them out salted in barrels?

Ritter: No that was the first, they used to salt. Well we used to catch herring and whitefish, see that was before my time, and everything was in barrels see, and they salted 'em. They either shipped 'em by boat or ox cart. That was the way in early times they salted 'em, so they'd keep, see. But later on what they'd do, see when the railroad come then they'd start to ice 'em, but before the railroad and stuff they had to salt a lot.

Interviewer: Did the dock have a retail outlet…?

Ritter: We always had one, yea.

Interviewer: Is that common for the commercial fisherman?

Ritter: No. Just a few of them would. Most of them fished commercial and they'd ship to the market. Chicago was a big one, Philadelphia, New York, they were all big markets. Detroit.

Interviewer: Were there ever fishermen around here who fished purposely to sell to Michigan City people.

Ritter: No, well, there was LaDink and us, and of late now Furness, see. …(indecipherable)…your surplus, what you don't handle, if you don't want to keep yourself, you'd ship to the market in Chicago or wherever you'd want to ship to.

Interviewer: Was there fishing industry in Chicago? Were there boats that went out of Chicago?

Ritter: Yea, there were boats that came out of there, yea. Chicago, well, they always had, South Chicago had around five or six at one time and Chicago had around ten, fifteen, and Waukegan must have had around thirty there for a while. Then if you go up the lake see a lot of the ports were all around ten, twenty boats.

Interviewer: What is that doing right now?

Ritter: Right now they got 'em down to three. The dumbest thing I ever seen them doing was have a lottery. A man would be in business all his life and he'd draw out of the hat if he was goin' to stay and do this or not. That was about the most stupid thing I've ever seen in my life. If you had a business, by just drawing out of there you were either in business or out of business.

Interviewer: There's only three coming out of Chicago now?

Ritter: That's all they got now. In Michigan they cut them down, like I say…

Interviewer: Was there any government or was there to compare the amount of government regulations in the 30's say with today, is there a lot more today?

Ritter: You'd get snowed under right now.

Interviewer: Does the government regulate them anyway today?

Ritter: Oh yea, we had regulations all the time, but, well, before the …(indecipherable)…came, well…

Interviewer: When the …(indecipherable)…come?

Ritter: About ten years ago, maybe a little better. After that everybody went wild. (Side two of tape ends)

(Side one of Tape 6 begins)

Ritter: What do you want to know? About making a living?

Interviewer: It seems like the whole nature of the fish business is changing rather rapidly. The day is gone when a man is lucky to do what you've done, that is, build your own boat, run your own engines, fix your own engines, teach yourself to navigate, run your own retail outlet, cut your own ice. This is unlikely to happen, am I right or wrong?

Ritter: Oh yea. All we got to do, I'll tell ya, is have a real good depression and we're going to be right back where we started in the 30's. They'll be out there pulling their nets and every Tom, Dick and Harry who has a boat he's going to get a net, see.

Interviewer: During the war you said that food stamps didn't apply to fish.

Ritter: No, see, the food stamps didn't apply to fish and when they'd run out of food stamps they were beggin' for fish, see. There was no food stamps on fish. And we had them, well during those days, boy you worked night and day. But like you say, there's never going to be. You're young, and now we went through it. I don't want to see ya's ever have what we had in the 30's, but you're goin' to.

Interviewer: What was it like?

Ritter: Well, it’s never going to be like it was in the 30’s, everybody was honest. You see, the old timers, the land that was vacant, they’d let you plow it up and have a garden. You could raise a garden on South Ohio where the houses were, all the neighborhood people, they had gardens there, they could raise gardens. Nobody stole anything. Nobody ever thought of it. Now you got a little truck garden off the side of the road and you turn your back when it’s ready to go, somebody’s got it. But in our days people were more dependent, they didn’t depend on the government and everything. Well, in ’30, what was it about ’32 when Roosevelt started? Around in ’31 or ’32, before that, you could hire a young fella, he’d come and work for you for, well then the wage scale was $2.50 to $3.00 a day. But as soon as the PWA started and they got this money, well you’d ask them to go to work, "Heck no, I’m PWA, I work two days a week and don’t have to work", see. From then on you couldn’t get any help and that’s the way it’s been. But, if we ever go back and the government can’t feed the people, then it’s going to be a great thing. And, right now, like I say, see all poison and stuff, I haven’t see anybody die from it. This is biologists, see. But then you’d be willing to eat the fish, see. You might see it, but I know I never will. But it’s always there, the lake is there, and it’s a productive lake if you only would harvest with a little sense. You know what I mean, just don’t let everything go to waste on a silly, silly thing which I think is silly. But I’m no biologist, I don’t know. I’ve ate enough of ‘em and I’m not dead yet. All the sportsmen are eating it, they’re not dead. See, but for you it’s gonna come.

Interviewer: Do they have any predictions of when the fish will be free of PCB.

Ritter: No they never do, but you see your own government every once in a while it flares up, this is cancer, don’t use it. About two months later they say, well it isn’t, we made a mistake, see. They still don’t have a standard that they can say really is harmful. That’s what they say, six, five to six percent, but they’ve never proven that it has effected anybody. I talked to some young biologist, they say we take these rats and work on them. And he said to me, if you take a rat and just take plain water and torment that rat the way they do, it’s bound to get cancer. But they’ll come along and say this is cancerous. Well, you can see by the paper everything, they had the cranberry, they had this, they had everything else right on down the line. They scare the people to death if you ask me.

Interviewer: When did these regulations, you know, the PCB ones come?

Ritter: It must be about four or five years, maybe six years ago.

Interviewer: What fish aren’t you allowed to take out anymore.

Ritter: You ain’t allowed to take any but perch.

Interviewer: Just perch.

Ritter: That’s all we can take. See they got everything restricted. They wanted permits, we were getting permits, well, we’ll just have to get permits. We were getting what they call a few tags to them. We had trout until last year, then they took them away from us, said it was poison, but still they let the sportsmen. If it’s poisonous for us, it should be poisonous for them wouldn’t it. So that’s the deal we have.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Well, we can catch coho, we can catch browns with our tag, see.

Interviewer: What do tags mean?

Ritter: Well, they issue so many tags and you gotta tag every fish you get, see. You put a tag on it, it's legal to sell.

Interviewer: How many fish per year are you…

Ritter: Well, it all depends on how many they give you, see. Like Illinois and Wisconsin, they have trout, Minnesota has trout too. We're buying them off the market. We have to buy and sell. Indiana has a trout tag, but the rest of them haven't. You can legally buy them off the market, so they still come out of Lake Michigan. I don't know how they're figuring that. I disagree with you on that there, it will never be.

Interviewer: No, I said it is unlikely. I just didn't see it happening very…So you are saying that if economic conditions change, the independent fisherman may come back.

Ritter: They're bound to. If I a sort of big company…It's too much of a risk. I don't think they'll ever take it, it's too fickle. See, they gotta consider you know, whether there's a lot of money in it, and it'll never be. I don't think it will ever be as big as us again, see, like our rigs. There'll always be fishermen, you can't stop that, but I don't think they'll ever go into these businesses again, because there's not enough pay. See we're coasting downhill right now. That's where they're going see. Ya, I'm getting old.

Interviewer: Unless there would be a good depression?

Ritter: Unless there was a good depression. Then I think that would be a good business. Like I say, people gotta eat. During the war they didn't, well I got a deferment on fishing, see, cause they needed it. But, that's the way it is. There's good …(indecipherable)…, still is a lot of …(indecipherable)… See, it's so you don't know what tomorrow will be. First you buck the weather, then you buck for whatever you're going to catch, and then you know, you don't always go out there. Sometimes you lose your nets, you set 'em today and you don't see 'em anymore, the weather takes 'em. It's a bigger gamble than horse racing.

Interviewer: Why would you lose the net if you have buoys on them?

Ritter: We get a good three day blow, and we might never see 'em again, see.

Interviewer: Even a couple of miles a net can get lost?

Ritter: Oh, we've already chased them, when we were outside we'd run 'em right straight off the harbor, we'd run them on the other side of Sawyer, and we seen maybe a piece, see.

Interviewer: Can you ever put a radio device on them to signal where that net is at?

Ritter: Well, they do some of them, but that takes money too. The only ones that does that I think is the government when they have marker buoys out. See with the radar, you put a radar shield on them and then you can pick 'em up with radar. A lot of the boats in Canada and stuff, they've all gone to radar cause it's so much easier, see. Now, like you take Canada, they take care of their people, they're all fishermen and they all make a lot of money.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Well, we've had a lot of 'em. We come through the harbor there, we were out on a Northeaster. Well that was on the Arbutus. We had her, well she was, maybe you've seen a picture, she had a house aft like the one we had. We were covered up on both ends, see, and that old wave…When you get in a wave it pulls you down and just shakes you like a dog shakes a rat, and boy you …(indecipherable)…We got about even with the west pier and then she let loose. I was steering at the time. I got inside the harbor and boy my knees were just kind of weak. Boy, oh boy. We've been out there with the Arbutus too, about thirty-five miles and the wind, well she was like I say, a breaker you see, you look from horizon to horizon and when you get on a Southwest wind and out there thirty-five miles, the waves…You see on a North wind you see 'em coming in nice and big, see, but when they're Southwest they're straight up and down just like that wall. Well, when they're coming at you, well my brother was steering, the man we had working for us, Davey Hage, he stood by the window and I sat by the engine for three and half hours. You didn't have time to ring three bells, when the one is coming at you, they come in threes. In a series of threes they'll hit you and you ring one bell and you shut the engine right down, then you let 'em hit ya, and after the three are gone you ring another bell, then we'd start going again, see.

Interviewer: Why would you shut the engine down?

Ritter: If you'd go into them, she'd tear you apart. If you hit that wall, if you run into a wall, a sea of water coming at you, coming, if you hit that, that's what tears the houses off. See most of the time, with boaters today, even with the cruisers, they get out there, they get caught in a storm, they get excited and they will drive the devil out of the boat. Well, what they're doing is there tearing her apart. See, well they all want to get in, see. But if you get a boat, a boat can ride almost anything, if you let her take her time. If you slow her down and just take it easy. So we'd go when it was sea, and then you'd see those comers, from one end to the other it was just a big foam coming at you. My brother, Bobby, would give me one bell, I would shut her down and we'd just idle, see. You got to keep enough for steering, so then when she'd hit ya, then you'd start going again, see. But we started, we left out there, it must have been oh 1:00, and we ended up and stayed parked. We had to hold right into the wind. Well then our neighbor, Egelski, he was out there and he had the Thompson. Well, first off before you start you trim your boat, see. You take your weight and you distribute it so she's buoyant, you know so she ain't all one way, like if you had all your weight in the bow, then she'd dive. See you had to trim your boat. Well then we trimmed it up and we started home, well he was still hangin on, and we got in, well it was about 8:00 that night, well about 7:30, 8:00 and his dad come down and he said, "What do you think of Louie?" I said, "Andy, you want to know the truth", and he said yea. I said, "I wouldn't give you a nickel." And that's

just the way I felt too. I was glad to get in and when I got in I had …(indecipherable)… So he come in, oh it must have been 9:00, maybe 10:00 that night. He had five ribs broke. With those wooden boat you'd iron off from the ice. The iron was bent in and five ribs were broke, well then you had what they called a Dutchman or patches you'd have already. Then you drove them in and held 'em in, he kept ahead of the water. He come in on a wing and a prayer I'll tell ya. I didn't think he'd make it myself. When we come in I, boy she was blowin.

Interviewer: You said you wouldn't give a nickel for his chances of getting in?

Ritter: Right. I wouldn't have given a nickel for his chances of coming in. That's the way she was whippin when we come out of there boy. We left there at 1:00 and we didn't get in until about a quarter to eight that night.

Interviewer: Were there thirty-five mile an hour winds?

Ritter: No, thirty-five miles we had to go. She was blowin 50-60 miles, whatever it was I don't know. She was blowin.

Interviewer: Is the most dangerous wind the Southwestern?

Ritter: No, well if you're out that far it's bad riding, but a boat today we'd think nothing of a wind like that, we'd just let em go. We used to set nets, we'd be setting of the back, we'd take blue water right over the back, see. You'd get into them with these steel boats you just let 'em go, see. You could drive, but we drove her, we broke the compass and we jumped off once. See you jump off and then you get in. We broke the compass on her and everything, that's when we were young.

Interviewer: You were getting …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Well, you drive into it so hard you'd jump off when we broke the compass on her, but she was new and we were young. See but then like the wooden ones you had to favor them see. But the worst in here is well, anywhere out of the North, you get a big sea, you can't. You see, with our harbor you gotta come in, you gotta come around. See you gotta make a bend that leaves your side open to a broach see. She can roll over. See like at thirty feet, that's when the Martha went down. I imagine that's what happened to her, but I don't know, see nobody …(indecipherable)…

Interviewer: What do you think happened?

Ritter: Well, I think she flipped too myself. Well she was a wooden boat and then they were fishing late in the winter and they put up on her, she was an open deck in the back. Like where we got a house, well years ago they used to have a back and they had an open deck. See, they didn't have it closed. Well, you put up sideboards on her to keep the wind from blowin, see. She took a sea in there and knocked the door in, she'd split her in two. That's what my theory is, because we picked up one half on one side of the pier and the other half on the other, see. But see they got the engines back out of her, she was split right in two, see. But four men was drownded, that was '33. Just a week before that my brother, Bob, my dad made him quit, see. They took

his place down. Pa said it was getting too late, it was the day after Christmas. It was getting too late in the year, they were running three hours see. They were running thirty miles out into the lake at Christmastime. He said it was too late, too far, and he said you quit, so he quit. A guy, he took his place and he got drownded. For a young fella, they were all about maybe a year or so older than I am.

Interviewer: Your dad, did he have any problems like that? He'd never been swamped had he?

Ritter: Oh, yea, two or three times. With an open boat though. I already had my shoes in my hand about four or five times, yea. One time we went out, it was on a Friday, we went out by the …(indecipherable)…and a black fog come up and the engine wouldn't start, then we knocked the bottom out of the boat, but we were in close, see. Right in close to the beach, see.

Interviewer: You knocked the bottom out on the shore?

Ritter: We hit the bottom, yea. Yea, we've had our times.

Interviewer: …(indecipherable)…

Ritter: Oh, yea, we were out in the deep, see we used to years ago put a buoy on our roof see. Well, my brother, Bob, put the buoy on his roof and then when he come back he come down and he missed his hole and he slid right down into the lake. Well, he had a habit of wearing these three-quarter hip boots, you know. I never would, I'd always wear kick-off boots, I do still yet, see. They kick off. Well my younger brother, Chuck, and I was there, well we went to the back deck looking for him and it seemed like five minutes and we couldn't see him, we couldn't see him, and pretty soon he come up and we grabbed him. He was down there taking his boots off see. Oh I'll tell you I never was so scared in my life. It seemed like five minutes, maybe it wasn't that long, but it seemed like it. Boy, Chuck sat down, and I sat down, and I broke out into a sweat, you know. Man, that was the last buoy that ever went on the roof. We used to put them on and put the line up there, now we take them in the house and just yell before then. We never go on the roof for the buoys anymore. He come down and zing right on into the water. He was on my side, it's a good thing he come on my side, on the lifter side. See I was lifting and he swims right on in. If you're running the back you don't see nobody moving. Jacobi was out of there, his son went on the back deck and he fell over and they were just a fishing and stuff and they didn't notice that he didn't come back in you know, and they lost him. He was about, oh maybe twenty years old at the time. They went back and looked around, but they couldn't find him.

Interviewer: I have a very simple question, how do you ever keep warm out there in the wintertime? It is just inconceivable to me. That's the main question.

Ritter: We had a stove, that keeps you good and warm and then we used hot water. See, on our stove we had three oyster buckets or gallon cans heating water, see. We'd wear canvas gloves and we'd dunk em in the water, see. Well, then they're warm see. Then after a little while your hands get used to it see. Like ma said, my hands are always warm. I could touch you in the middle of winter and my hands is always warm. I don't know, they don't bother me. I

tell ya, I wear these thermal pants, since my legs are bad, otherwise we always had boots on with woolen socks. It ain't cold as long as you haven't got a draft, but if you get a little crack there and the wind blows through, boy, then you're cold. See, it's all closed up but one door, there's no draft. If the wind is right, I get uncomfortable, yea, because I'm the man who does the lifting, see. If she's coming on to the lifter's side, then it's pretty cold, it blows right in on ya, see. Then, we used to have like a, we put a curtain across, so you can slide the door so there's only a little bit that you can feel, that you do and that's all. Fortunately, it ain't too bad.

Interviewer: If you learn anything from the old timers that people wouldn't think of today, I would imagine you know thousands of little tricks, a few things…

Ritter: I'll tell you the truth, that's how you learn, from the old folks, you learn how they do it, and then pass em down more or less, see.

Interviewer: That's the kind of thing we would like to get on tape, these little things that are otherwise being lost.

Ritter: See, they ain't going to be lost, they're going to learn it sometime or another.

Interviewer: They would have to relearn it?

Ritter: That's it. You gotta pick it up yourself more or less, see, but like we did, we worked with the old timers, you know how to do it, but everybody has their own style more or less I would say. You do one thing this way, like when we make nets, see, we sew them on. We do all our own net making and all our…

Interviewer: You still make your own nets?

Ritter: Yea, we are doing that this winter, patching and well, yea, you have to do that. If we were making string nets now ya buy the web, you sew em, you seam em on there. Well that too, we used to sew the needles by hand, now we got machines for that too. You know what a bobbin and a needle is. You put on the twine, and you go through, you pick up whatever mesh you see, you get fingers like old ladies. See, now they don't work so good. We used to string around 1600, sometimes 2000 feet a day.

Interviewer: How many men would it take to do that?

Ritter: Two. Two men, you team up, one on one side and one on the other, see. But now I get on a…

Interviewer: Is that a six foot spline?

Ritter: No, it all depends on the depth of your net, see. See most of them are around three, four, five, we don't go much more than six feet anyway. You have a sideline you seam on each side. I got …(indecipherable)…it's an old one that shows how you seam on it. It's an old one I took myself …(indecipherable)…but it shows the fishing net. In the wintertime you do that. A lot of them years ago they used to have what they call a short crew,

see. They keep the nets all patched up. Like if you went out in the deep well you didn't get tore up so bad, then you won't have a whole that big in any of the nets, see, they'd all be patched up tight, what we call tight, see. When you fish on the beach you can't do that. The fish actually just blow out and you get a lot of dirt. The beach isn't that clean like that, there's everything but money on the bottom. I've never seen a dollar or any money in it. Logs, we get logs, whole trees you get up sometimes. When you get a tree, you tangle on this end or that end, boy you're working to get it off of there, see. Sometimes you can't handle em and you cut off and you go to the other end and start the other way, but then if you hit a tree in between, then you got a mess, see. Oh, yea, that lake is…

Interviewer: What kind of anchors do you carry?

Ritter: Well, we used to use chain, now we use what we call pick axes. They are like a double, they pick this way and that way, see, then we hook em down. They weigh around maybe 30, 40, 50 pounds. One on each end.

Interviewer: How long a line generally.

Ritter: It all depends on how…

Interviewer: How long do you carry though?

Ritter: On the deck? Well, wherever we're at. We need more chain on like the sound where we are at, but we see the recorder and we keep it so it's pretty well straight up and down. See, when we used to go out there fifty, sixty fathoms, well that was a lot of line. See otherwise you have to add maybe around ten fathoms, five fathoms for current, see. But like in here now sixty feet is about the deepest, seventy feet is the deepest we can go.

Interviewer: Is that against the regulations?

Ritter: Yea, it's regulations. See we get over the state line and we can't do nothing. And, equipment, it takes a lot to keep that, keep it up, keep it up and everything else.

Interviewer: Why do you keep referring to all the boats as she?

Ritter: Well, they class all boats as she, there temperamental, they're a woman I guess. I never did know, I never did look into it, you look into it. All boats are she.

Interviewer: The lake's a she? She's rough. She's blowing hard today.

Ritter: Well, something with a lot of temperament, that's what they always claimed, see. Now women are, …(indecipherable)… and three days later, you know.

Interviewer: You told me before, but…(indecipherable)…the way you used to eat on the boat.

Ritter: Oh, used to cook on donuts, yea. See when we had our first tug, the first fish that came up, well the punks, or the young guys, would have to go clean em and then we used to take the first trout and split em down the back, you know, and we'd take the cavity, and well we'd have Franco American Spaghetti, and then all the onions and black pepper, then you'd fill the cavity up and you'd put it in paper see. Then you'd stick it in a bucket and wet it and lay it on top of what you call a donut, the top of the boiler. You always had a donut in the pilot house, you could slip it down there and cover it up with oh, raincoats and stuff and then after you got done lifting, well then you take it and lay it on the pilot bench, you know, and then, boy everybody would dig in, you know. Well, I'd come out of school at Easter vacation, I used to work before I quit school, you know. We'd go out and work on a tug, well I would be one of the five boys that always got sick, so I'd go in and eat it, boy I'd go out and heave. Them old guys used to get mad at me you know, and I'd tell them, well, I taste it going down and I taste it coming up. Oh, they used to get so mad at me when I …(indecipherable)…time. Boy, you get a nice trout today, and boy, there's nothin' like it though.

Interviewer: How many hours did it take?

Ritter: Well, they took around three to four hours, as long as it would take you to lift you know, and boy, a slow fire, and it would have spaghetti and black pepper and onions.

Interviewer: Do you still cook on the donuts?

Ritter: There ain't no steam boats no more. That was on steam, but ma makes it once and a while in the oven, but they still don't taste like the donuts, not quite. But if you didn't get any trout, you fixed the chubs and you done the same thing, then you put em in there, so we always had something to eat. When I come out of school I would be sick, well I'd carry my bucket. There was one guy, Otto Hanke, see, well after two days he didn't bring nothing see, cause I was sick every day and you had to keep working.

Interviewer: You worked when you were seasick?

Ritter: Oh, you're darn right that you would. You didn't get paid for the ride.

Interviewer: If you have ever been seasick your only hope is that you might die. I can't imagine working when you're seasick.

Ritter: You had to keep working boy, I'll tell ya.

Interviewer: How long did it take you to get over being seasick?

Ritter: About a week, well no, about four days.

Interview: So each season you get seasick?

Ritter: Well, I do yet. If it's these big oily ones, you know, I get an upset stomach. The roughness don't bother me anymore, but them oily ones, …(indecipherable)… Well anyhow, it was four days and then I got over it. Well, he didn't bring no lunch, so he come down one day to eat my lunch, so I

said, I ain't sick, you ain't gonna get nothing. Boy he was mad. We used to have a lot of times, boy those guys.

Interviewer: So each season you had to go through a period of seasickness?

Ritter: Ya, that's right, you break em in, see. But now, right now we've been off the lake now, oh what, a couple of weeks, since the first of the year, maybe before that, yea, before Christmas. See now in the Spring of the year we'll go out there and we will roll around. The first couple of trips we'll fall down like a bunch of drunks, you know, till you get your sea legs, but I don't get sick. Even during the season if we get those long lazy ones, I get upset, always did. But, I used to go with my dad when I was about that high, I'd get sick and they laid me on the back deck, and then I'd lay there, but I'd go the next day. I never knew enough to stay home I guess. Like I was caddying for ten years, well on Monday when the caddies would go golfing I'd go out and go in my sea tug. I'd rather go fishing than I would go play golf. In them days they had little …(indecipherable)…

Interviewer: How long have you been off? You said you've been off since before Christmas?

Ritter: Well, we haven't been on the lake. Oh, about three weeks, maybe four. See years ago, well we don't buck it, but we used to try to fish all winter. We used to get out where we could fish, see. I could use …(indecipherable)…nets in the deep, well that weather don't bother them too much, see. But if you got to stay in shallow water, you can't, the ice, you see there's what they call anchor ice. A lot of people don't know that. If you got nets on the bottom, there like tear drops, they are. They will form around, you take a quarter inch line it will get that big, it will raise it right out…

Interviewer: It will get eight inches big?

Ritter: Yea, it will raise rocks off the bottom. See what they call anchor ice. You take a net along the bottom and anchor ice will get on it and that whole net will come up see, and then they come up and the ice will take it away. But if you get in certain water, certain times what they call anchor ice.

Interviewer: When you've lost your net there's nothing you can do.

Ritter: Yea, there's nothing you can do about it see. That's how you lose a lot of them, see.

Interviewer: How many thousands of dollars in nets have you lost?

Ritter: We call that paying taxes. Every year either by weather, somehow or the other you lose. Well, we don't fish like we used to. On an average we fish lose about ten boxes a year.

Interviewer: It seems like your temperament, you couldn't get upset about all the difficulties. A fisherman has to take a lot in stride.

Ritter: That’s right. And that’s why you wonder why you worry all the time. See, you got so, preparedness, see, we never take one of anything, even when you buy new, you always buy two of everything see. But that just, I’ve been all my life living that way. You always got something…(indecipherable)…, you never figured on one see, because you always might need the other one, see. That’s only that you might need, see. The boat is loaded down with extras.

Interviewer: Like what, what would be some of your…?

Ritter: Well, like an extra anchor, extra buoy line, extra everything. You name it, it is always two, because you might need it. Yea, you get stuck like in the fall of the year when it starts to ice, we carry extra food on her in case we get…(indecipherable)…or you can’t get in. See a lot of times you get froze out and you can’t come home. We’ve never been that way, but we’ve been close to being stuck. We always try to make it home. See where years ago, they used to, well they’d push low, they used to go through more ice then. The tugs had power then, see. They could go, well some of them would shove a hole in the side, …(indecipherable)…he poked a hole in the side of one. The Bob Ludwig had a couple of tugs stuck out between the lighthouses there. Didn’t want to get caught in the ice you know. You can get so far and you can’t move. You see it’s a bad harbor. I’ve been out and when you get a Southwest wind that pushes on that ice, oh, it’s tough, and it gets like glue, you know. You get so far, and boy, it’s hard to get through. Then when you got to push on it, if you get it pushing against your wheel, if she stops your wheel, she plugs you see, so you can’t let her stop, you got to keep that wheel free. (End of side one.)