



*Sid  
Patterson*

## **River Rat**

*of  
Alex Bay*

Glad in thermal longjohns while his brown canvas overalls and insulated leather mittens dry on the chair next to him, Sid reclines in his easy chair after a long day of ice fishing. Putting down his half-finished Western, he takes a chaw of tobacco and reminisces about his life and adventures on the St. Lawrence River. Much like the farmers of the North Country, who rely on their fields, and the loggers their woods, Sid, and many like him, have lived, worked, and played on the river all their lives, relying on it not only as a livelihood, but as a way of life. But unlike the farms and the woods, no one owns the river. Owned by all, it is this shared experience which gives to Sid's story the realization that long after all of us, the river will remain, inspiring others.

Taken from two taped interviews with Sid at his home in Alexandria Bay, this is quite literally his story, as close to his telling as possible. It is important to point out, however, that even with the care taken to accurately transcribe the conversation, to actually hear Sid tell it differs significantly from this written rendition. The story is complete by itself and requires little or no additions or explanations. So rather than reiterate what is already said, it seems more appropriate to give you Sid's remarks first hand.

We wish to warmly acknowledge the helpful suggestions and encouragement provided by Iva, Sid's wife, in the preparation and carrying out of this project.

— Peter Murphy



## GROWING UP ON THE RIVER

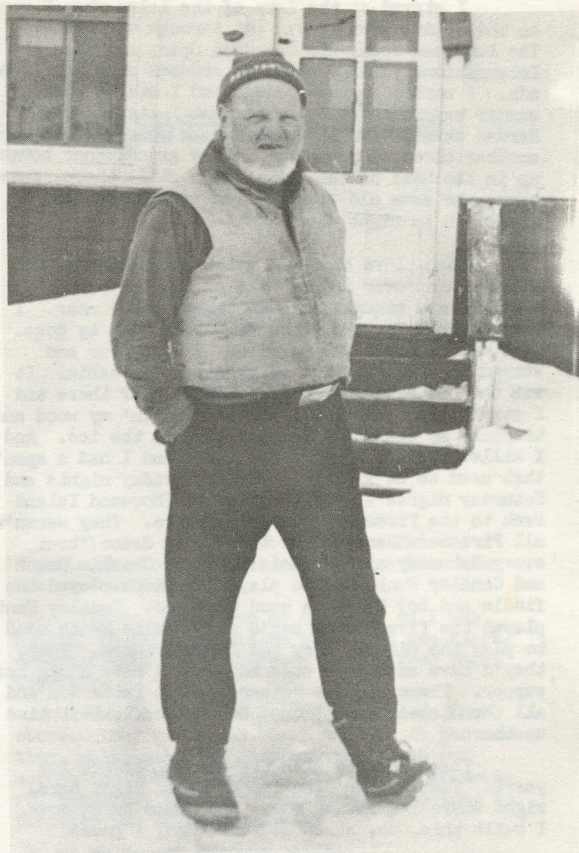
Well, I was born right down here, back of the Crazy Horse Saloon, right in that yellow house there. Hell, I had to swim before I could go to the old crick. My dad, well he was gonna lick me if he caught me and I couldn't swim. He would have "gad" me—you cut off a "gad", that's what he called it, a stick or a "gad." I had to prove it to him I could swim...(laughs)...I did. I learned in the old pond up there. The mineral springs—ain't like it used to be now. Years ago it was all gravel bottom in there but there wasn't only about 2½ to 3 feet of water and right in the summer time. That's where Charlie Davis was with me and he taught me how to get started on the swimming. Yup...and I kept dog paddlin' and kicking my feet till I got so's I could swim. I learned unbeknownst to my father. When he came down that day I had to show him I could swim. So I swam. There was no fooling about it.

I had lots of boats. Pick up any old boat whether a skiff or an old sharpie and if it leaked, I'd tar it up and get it so it didn't leak and had a great time. You'd buy one for two or three dollars from some other kid who'd got it somewhere. I don't know where he'd got it but he'd got it. And maybe you'd trade him something for it. They didn't want it so I'd take it, turn it bottom side up, tar it up, and I'd get in. It'd never leak a drop—go for years Yeah, them days I'd never thought about an outboard. Hell, if I'd had an outboard like some of these kids I'd probably prided it like a million dollars.

In about 1937 I got my first outboard, a five-and-a-half horse Johnson, and I bought a Lyman boat for fifty dollars. I think it was about 14 or 16 feet. Boy, I get her planing off and you know—that 5½-horse—I thought I was, boy, really going. (laughs) Boy, I enjoyed it—was lots of fun when you had your own motor. Yeah, I bought the motor in Watertown. Didn't give over fifty dollars for it, I guess. The whole business cost me—I don't think it cost me a hundred dollars, boat and everything. I bought the boat from Earl Ward down here.

I never knew what an outboard was. I used to trap on the river here with an old skiff, or an old sharpie. When I was twelve-fourteen years old, I used to go on the river and trap. I used to go over to Lake of the Isles and stay at the log cabin. Then the next day I'd come back across the river into my grandmother's and my dad's down here—right there where Maxwell's wife lives now. Yeah, I've hunted the river, I've trapped the river for forty some years up through...well, Fisher's Landin' up through there...the Narrows. They call it the Narrows up through there.

We used to have a little "yawl putt," a single cylinder Barber engine. He had a clutch on it. A lot of them didn't have clutches, you know. If you wanted to back up you'd just shut her off, then just catch her up on the coil or something and she'd turn backwards. You could go backwards with her lots of times, you see. But he had a little clutch on her. She wouldn't go over seven miles an hour, though. Two of us set there—why you could reach right over the side and get a drink of water. We used to drink right out of the channel years ago.



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Oh, my grandfather and I couldn't wait til I got home Friday night to go to the Lake of the Isles with him. Boy that was a big treat. I'd come in from school, hurry home, get in the boat, get my fish-rod. Eddie, my grandfather, handled fishing tackle, mounted fish, and stuff.



I stayed at the Lake of the Isles when I worked on the bridge when it was put through up in there. The American Span, the Canadian Span, and then the International Bridge where it crosses over into Canada. I worked on that bridge and I stayed there all summer way up into the fall. But I stayed at the Harden shantie for three different years. That was another piece of property that my grandfather bought up in the head of the lake. It's still there, same camp, the same old shantie, and everything that I stayed in is right there yet.

Yeah, I've had some great times with my dad and my gramp over in the Lake of the Isles. I was born and brought up over there, pret' near. I stayed there for two years all alone with my dogs. That was before I was married. I went over and stayed in the log, well it wasn't a log cabin. It was the old Harden shantie. I went over there and I stayed right there all winter, cuttin' my wood and trappin' my traps and fishin' through the ice. And I killed foxes. I had a fox hound and I had a span'1 that used to be with me. Then on Friday nights and Saturday nights I used to go up to Thousand Island Park to the Firemen's dances up there. They weren't all Firemen's dances, but they had a dance 'bout every Saturday night. Edie Root and Charlie Heath and Cansley Hunt used to play—Edie Root played the fiddle and boy he was a good one, too. Cansley Hunt played the five string banjo and Charlie Heath used to play the piano. They had suppers there. Yeah, they'd have an oyster stew and they'd have a big ham supper. There was Joe Patterson, Orb Patterson and all the Slaters and oh, used to be the greatest time up there.

Then I played with the Shanty Shakers for years. That's when Glen Tricky lived right here, right where I'm living now. The house burnt down, I built this, oh, about 28 years ago, I guess.

My grandfather was quite a fiddle player and Dad, he played the banjo. I played the guitar. Yeah, I got all kinds of instruments. We played mostly hillbilly music, you know, square dances, old time tunes. Tunes that I'd heard and that other people—and that I'd heard on the radio. Yes, my dad was an awful guy to play, you know. Glenn Tricky and Chuck Cavanaugh, Harold Houghton and Willard Chase, Frankie DeLair was the caller and I played the guitar and sung with Chuck Cavanaugh. Used to play all over for three dollars a night. That was big money then. From nine to one. Three dollars apiece.

My grandfather owned the saloon over in the International Rift there for years. He had a saloon over there, where you go up into Lakes of Isles through the narrow of the lake. Then you hit Rick Giltz's Island there and then you turn right and go up where the International Bridge is goin' across the channel. That's International Rift, up through there. Yeah, that's before I was ever thought of. That was before Dad was ever married. I've seen pictures that Dad had down there of him and Babe Glad and Wayva Hunt and Fitz Hunt and there was Orin Lacky and Steve Norton—all their pictures on the steps over there. All of them to the saloon drinkin', having a good time. Old skiffs laying around. That's all they knew in them days was skiffs to row.

We used to get catfish and eels and we'd clean 'em and Dad had a smoke house down back there. Yeah, he used to smoke 'em and, oh boy, they were good. They was awful good. My grandfather done it before he did. And Gene Russell was an awful man for smokin' you know. Gene, he lived down the crick here on the little island down there...him and his brother. Yeah, he was an awful guy for spearin' eels and, course, they were bootleggin'. Bootlegging time they was bootleggers.

I was only 'bout fifteen then and I didn't get into it. My dad was into it, I guess, and my grandfather. I don't know. I couldn't really say they was, but I know there was a lot of stuff 'round the house all the time that I seen them drinking and everything. A lot of people used to come there so I figured they was buying it somewhere, see. Course, it wasn't none of my business. I had my chores to do, gettin' wood in for the night and for the furnace.



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Dad was a taxidermist and he mounted birds and fish and my grandfather ahead of him done the same thing. But my grandfather used to stuff fish with sawdust. He used to get sawdust, then he'd stuff 'em, then he'd leave 'em—leave the sawdust in 'em. Well, years to come, they'd wrinkle.

My dad found out a way to do it. He had a poison. He could skin 'em, put fish right into that poison, leave 'em for ten, fifteen years and they'd never spoil. Take 'em out and they'd be just as good when he took 'em out as when he put them in. They'd never spoil or nothin'. And then he'd stuff 'em with sawdust, get the shape—he had boards, of course—get the shape and then, he'd take all that

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sawdust out and he'd cut a hole in the back end of it and he'd put fiberglass in them. You could take a hammer and hit 'em, you know, and it wouldn't phase 'em.

My dad used to make a spring tonic. We all used to drink it, a great big cup full. It was made out of popal bark. I think he used to put juniper in it. Juniper is supposed to be poison but it never poisoned us. Then there was Prickly Pear he used to put in it and, I don't know, two or three different kinds of bark. He used to steep it all up and then he'd strain it and he'd have a great big dish pan full of it setting in the cellarway. Well, it was cool in the cellar. We had a big dipper hanging up, never thought about getting extra cups, you know, everybody drinking out of a certain cup. Everybody drank out of the same cup them days. It was good. We'd take a drink every time we'd go by there. It wasn't bitter or nothin—it was just a spring tonic. That's what would keep you from having colds. We had it every year.

I don't know—it's a lot of fun. I've had more fun since I was alive. Like Babe Glad used to say, "I've had 65 years worth o' fun." He says, "if I had 65 more, I'll never have that much fun again."

#### FOX HUNTING WITH DOGS

I'd live to come out in the spring—just like a seal. Then I'd come over and trap the river. I hunted foxes right in the winter time over there. I had a fox hound. He'd start a fox and sometimes a fox'd go way over into Canada onto Hill Island. Well, I called it LaRue Island, but it's Hill Island now. I'd step out of the cabin at night and it'd be a nice clear night and I'd hear him, "ow, ow, ow" and I could hear him running fox down there. All at once I'd step out and I wouldn't hear him. Well, pretty quick I'd hear him scratching on the door and whining and in he'd come. I never worried about him. He'd been in the river two or three times, and he always got out. He took a fox right by the front door of the camp once. I couldn't believe it. I'd gone on up to the head of the lake and he'd started the fox. I'd heard him go down that way. You see I used to carry a gun right in my pack with me—a shotgun in case a fox come out when I was trapping. My God, when I come back down I see these tracks and I looked and they went right in front of my door—as far as from me to you. Of course he'd been used to running through there when nobody lived here. That's when I first got over there, see. Yep, he run right in front of the door. He didn't do it again as soon as he found out somebody was there. He went down in below. I eventually killed him down on the point.

They got runways just like deer that they stick to. That's their downfall. You take a deer and he'd get on a runway and he'll follow it. A fox is the same way. They get on a runway and they know where they're going, just like you and I. Now we wouldn't cut through that much snow out here to go to the sidewalk when there's a nice path right there. Well, that's what they do. They got them runways and they know every inch of them. Everything looks the same. If there's a black mark there that they don't know well I imagine they see it and they stop and investigate it to see what it is. Whether it's a man or an extra stump or what it is.

They've often said to me, "How is it a muskrat can go out underwater, feed, and come back and find his bankhole?" "Well," I says, "you know where your house and door is right in the middle of the night. Well, it's the same way—just instinct, that's all." They just go out and feed and when they get ready to come back they gotta know where it is, 'cause if they don't, they run out of air. They'd never get back in.

You get a rat and if he can stay in the water, he'll live, but you let a rat get out and he's traveling, and the cold air hits him, and he can't get in the water, he's dead before morning. Even with the fur on him and everything. People don't believe that, but it's the truth. Just like a duck. You take a duck and leave him out all winter—if you put him in in the spring, he'll sink. You take a tame duck that's out of the water all winter—if you put him in in the spring—his oil sacks are right above his tail there, you know—they'll get in the water right on the edge and they'll pick that and they'll put it all through their feathers. You've seen them doing it. Then they'll float all right. They got to have that oil in their feathers or they'll sink.

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It's a lot of fun to go out and hear the dog jump a rabbit or a fox. You hear him going out and hear him coming back, and you figure, gee, I got a chance to kill him. You see, well, it's just the sport of it. If you kill 'em, all right. But if a man likes to hunt and hear the dog run—I like to hear the dog run. It's a great sport to hear a dog coming right for you and you know you're in the right spot when a fox is coming or a rabbit. You're on a runway and you hear a dog coming right there...just a little ways..all at once you see the rabbit coming.

You can take a person and have thirty people walk right up through that road right there, and if you've got a dog and you let him loose, like a dog that's with me all the time, he'll pick my scent right out of the air and follow it right in amongst—right in Watertown if you'd stop all the traffic and everything. He'd pick your scent right out of the air right there and on things that you brush against, like pieces of grass or a telephone pole or anything. He'll smell it and he'll follow you and pick you up and find you. Your scent lingers in the air for so long. That's what I've read.

A fellow says, "How can a dog tell the front end of a fox track from which way to go, whether to go this way or go that way?" "Well," a fella says, "You ever smell of your heel?" And he says, "Yes." "Then smell under your toes and see which is the strongest." Well, there you are. Maybe there's something to it, I don't know. Them are things that I've read.



## COMMERCIAL FISHING FOR MINNOWS, BULLHEADS AND CARP

My brother and I go every fall and get our bait for fishing in the winter. We take and go off to Mud Crick and the cricks here. We got a 300 foot net we use. Sometimes you see 'em jumping. You go along and you hit on the boat and you'll see two or three flip. You take a chance and go out. If you see two or three flip, then you say there must be more bait than that there. Just like bullheads. You're fishing bullheads, you go along, see the bullheads jump, you stake down and you catch 'em just as fast as you can catch 'em. Until they start to move. Then you've got to move with them. Well, it's the same with the bait. In the summer time you bait them with bread or something. You go out and look and on the weeds you see bait feeding on your bread. You keep baiting them until you figure they keep coming in and coming in until you get 'em up on the beaches in June. You can see them, some as big as this house going right ahead of you—big schools of them, thousands, forty-fifty thousand of them.

We use a 350 foot net on the Lake generally. We used to have 450 or 500 foot on the river here, plus 200 foot ropes on each end, or on each side of it, to be able to get out far enough so you could get the bait in.

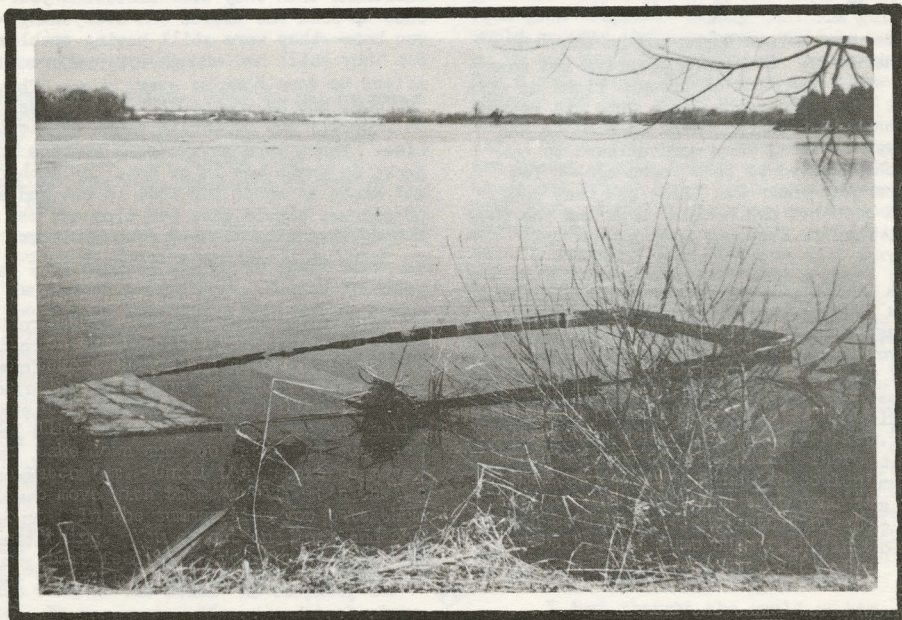
You've got to wait until November to catch 'em. You can't get them in October—hell, they'll die 'n rub their noses all to pieces. Soon as they slime up in the fall, about the first week or two weeks in November, you catch them. You can put them in a bucket and sink them all winter. You don't have to worry about 'em—they're all right. You don't have to feed them or anything—they'll get stuff out of the water. We keep 'em in a big tank. You can have them down cellar or you can have them most anywhere, as long as you got fresh water going onto them, you're all right.

You couldn't keep these bait in the summer time only so long. You put them in a tank and if you didn't sell them out in a day or so you'd have to heave out a bunch of them and go and put fresh ones in. We used to fish for bait every morning until we got our pond. We had a big pond down here back of the Crazy Horse, where I was born. We had a hundred by fifty pond and we'd fill that with bait. Then we'd haul some out and when we got a big load of fresh ones, we'd throw them in. We kept alternating them like that. We kept taking out a bunch and put more back in. There was a lot of times in the summer that we couldn't get the bait when it was tough, and that pond saved us, too. Then, when we'd horse right into a big mess of them and we had bait, we'd dump them right in there. You're bound to lose some. They get a fungus on 'em if you keep 'em too long. They have white noses. All they do is work around the tank—work, work, work. They've got a kind of chemical that they put in there that saves them for a day or two.

They buy them by the pound, you know. These fellas that buy them like up to the bait store on the state road and over to D.J.'s. They'll put in six inches of water in a pail—they have the pail marked inside with a little ring on it. They weigh that water. Well, all right, the water weighs ten pounds. They dump in their bait and it weighs thirty pounds. Well, all right, you've got twenty pounds worth of bait there. Well, that's the way they sell 'em nowadays.

Booty Joyner and them will go up and they'll get a plastic bag. They'll get five or ten pounds of bait, put them in there and then they'll shoot a little oxygen in at 'em and tie the bag up. They'll live there for five, six, seven hours. They're swimming around in there. Just put a little oxygen in them and away they go. I've seen them in the summer

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time. They bring them down there—golden shiners, they are. They buy them so much a pound up to, well, I always called it Ellis Lake's, but it's the Thousand Islands Bait Store now. Down here they sell them for eight or ten dollars a hundred, or like a dollar and a half or two dollars a dozen. It's according to the size of them, see. They still sell them here, but up to these baitshops they buy them by the pound.

Fishworms is where they made the money, this Ellis Lake and them. Thousands upon thousands of worms. They shipped them all over. He raised them and he bought some from Canada. He'd go over to Canada and he had people picking them up for him with lights on their heads. With a light on your head you can pick with both hands. What they'd do is, they'd strap a can on this log and a can of sawdust on this leg and that's the way they went. They'd put their fingers in the one and then they'd put the worms in the other. That's the way they'd pick. When they'd get through picking, they could hardly stand up. But he'd hire people so much an hour or so much a night to pick worms on these golf links. Why, they'd be going up through and pick up quarts upon quarts of them. Then he'd sell them 25 and 50 to a box. I just sold the minnies. I didn't want much to do with the worms. But there was money in it—damn good money.

In the spring we started on bullheads. Yeah, we've commercial fished bullheads. We've caught tons of bullheads, my brother and I. With a commercial net we'd go up on the Lake and get them. You couldn't fish 'em here in the river—not with nets. We've hauled tons of them. We'd sell them to stores and people would come along and buy them right to the house. It's a tough racket, though. Boy, I'm telling you, you're in the water all the time and you're wet and getting horned. Then when you get into minnie fishing you fall in the river in the spring or in the cricks, and it's cold water. That's why I've got those wrist bands I wear all the time on my arms. I've worn them for 16 months and I ain't had a touch of it in the last 10 months.



The nets are the same, and the seasons are just a little bit different than when we started. You can't seine in the St. Lawrence River or Lake Ontario until the 10th of June. Years ago you could start right in in the spring and seine anyplace you wanted to. But there's certain places in the cricks, above the bridges now you can seine. A seine is what you call a minnow net. You can buy Common Sense seines that are just a factory-made outfit. They're no good—just a woven thing. These that we got used to be tied—like a gill net only they have a smaller

mesh and everything with the purpose for bait. Well, these Common Sense nets come apart and everything. I used to set my own nets up right here in the kitchen. All the time I was building nets—building them for other people and for myself—and putting the corks and leads on them. A double clothes hitch is used, so when you pull your lines they pull against each other and keep tightening instead of loosening.

I've set night lines for bullheads. You get a dollar license. I don't think you can catch any sturgeon either. I think they closed the season on them. Lots of them down where the Indians are near Massena. Up here I don't think they can get up through for some reason. They don't catch them like they used to. Ernie Mance is the last one I heard of catching any. He caught three one year and two another.

The Canadians fish commercially for catfish and eels and anykind of fish they can catch, I guess. They sell them to Smart over there in Kingston. He's got a fishery over there. You can buy them live weight or you can clean them and sell them that way. You make more money when you clean them, but what they do is they get a big fish car and they put them right in and keep them alive. They get maybe half a ton and they start cleaning. Or else they take them right out, put them in a big tank and take them right up to Smart's and sell them live weight. They make good money, those fellows. Eels and catfish—it's a lot of handling and a lot of monkeying and working. Can you imagine eels, how slippery they are to get them out. Well, they got landing nets that they use.

He ships them to New York and Toronto. We took him up two or three loads of carp and got eight cents a pound for them. That was just to cut the heads off and take the innards out of them. They had to weigh nine pounds before he'd take any of them. Some of them weighted 50-60 pounds. We used to ice them, put the ice on them, then take them across the bridge and it would cost us about six dollars, seven dollars for duty to take them across. Stop at the broker and he'd make us out a paper. We'd go down here to the coal company and weigh our truck. They knew what our truck weighed and then they'd go from there. Then they'd give us a slip and when we got across the bridge we'd give them the slip so they knew how much fish we had on from our truck weight. Then we'd pay so much duty and go right on across.

That was twenty years ago, at least twenty or twenty-one years ago. They used to pack them in boxes over there. While they was weighing them, they'd throw them right in, ice 'em, crate 'em right up. They was going just as fast as we was taking them in and selling 'em.

I never took bullheads over there, no. We sold our bullheads right here. Cost us fifteen dollars for a license for the seine and fifteen cents a foot. We had a seine about 350 feet, 300 feet, I guess it was. I know a minnie seine costs a little more than it did then. It cost you ten cents a foot for the first fifty foot and then twenty-five cents a foot. We used to buy them cotton and then we'd treat them with cupenol and hang them up. But nylon—if you can get a nylon seine it'll last you forever. The only thing that'll bother nylon is sun. You've got to keep it out of the sun, that's all.



They got so they didn't want the Lake Ontario carp. I don't know what the difference is. What they do is sell them to the people in Toronto and in New York City. They ship them. Well, they get more, they may pay us eight cents but they get...oh, I don't know. But they claim that the carp in Lake Ontario was different than the ones in the St. Lawrence River. No difference and I know it. The water's the same. You take the water right out of Lake Ontario and bring it down here in the middle of the river and put it in, and it's the same water. I can't figure why they—but that was a big whim or something that they had. I don't know what it was, but we quit—we quit monkeying with it.

#### THE OIL SLICK AND OPENING THE RIVER YEAR ROUND

This oil slick killed a lot of rats. We found rats down the river there—eight or ten in a bunch—laying along the shore. Ducks and everything, Blue Cranes—that oil slick killed them, you know. Killed a lot of 'em. It didn't kill all of them, but it killed a lot of 'em. It knocks them down. Down the river, towards Goose Bay and down through there, I think they picked up as high as twelve rats along there that they found just going along. There was two or three that they tried to take care of and some Blue Cranes. Conservation was around trying to save them and get the oil off them. Now whether they saved a lot of them or not, I don't know, but the muskrats—when that oil got on them they were done...and ducks, too. Up the river—up towards Clayton there—the slick didn't reach. Of course it worked down this way. Most of it was on this side of the river and didn't get over on the other side, the Canadian side, very much.

I know I went in Goose Bay the next spring after the oil slick and there were hundreds upon hundreds of sunfish and perch and northern pike that were climbing right up on the shore—right there by the head of Kring's Point. They were piled up a foot deep right up on the shore, stinking awful. I'd never seen it before so I figured it was the oil slick that helped do it to the fish in Goose Bay. It was something that done it because I'd never seen that many fish dead. The only thing I've seen that's died quite a lot is suckers over the last few years. I used to eat suckers all the time, and I'd eat them yet, but I've seen a lot of suckers dead in the last two or three years in the river. Now why, I don't know, but they're a bottom fish. They feed off of the bottom, the same as sturgeon and carp.

Yup, well as soon as the snow went down and they started washing up on the beaches and things in the spring, there was an awful lot of it. It wasn't good I'll tell you. Some of the docks are still marked up with it and the land that they didn't clean up.

I'd like to see them open the river all year round. Why, comes out three foot of ice and they claim that they can put warm water into that river. From what I've read about it, they're going to have stations up through here and they claim they can put warm water in that river and keep it open. I'd like to see 'em. Why, we won't be able to live here. The taxes will go up. What do they want to keep the river open for? It's bad enough to have them boats going up through in the summer time, let alone in the winter. There's no more good trapping in the spring, you can't fish good in the summer. No...no, there's enough monkeying in the summer time without getting

#### Full Circle

As in the last child-carrying days  
When sight rejects exterior life  
Glazed with thin film that changes all  
To holy or too complicated ritual,  
So one waits in life's own pregnancy,  
Its dragging close,  
With all fruit scattered,  
In acceptance of an end.

Death as near knowledge  
Makes art or soundless chaos  
Of All separate things -  
An unfamiliar movie  
Concocted by a lunatic or priest  
Seen from the lobby through swinging doors  
Interrupted, interminable and luminous -  
A metaphor with neither half revealed.

- Gloria Grasmuck

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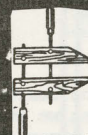
Combination of baffled door damper, sliding smoke shelf and 5 pattern draft afford infinite control and complete combustion.

24 gauge galvanized steel plenum.

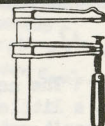
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boats going up through here in the winter time. I like to fish in the winter and things like that. If they start monkeying with that kind of stuff....no, they've monkeyed with the river enough now; they've got it pretty near spoiled.

I knew the minute that seaway went through, you see. Of course, you don't have to put this in your writing, but the minute that seaway went through, I knew it spoilt the St. Lawrence River. These lake boats and things, they were doing dandy. Oil spills—never heard none of that when we were kids. You could go right out in the river and dip right down and take a nice cold drink. You go out and look at it now. Just take some and put it right in a glass and hold it up and look at it. Let it settle overnight and then look at it. You'll see a whole lot of settlin' in the bottom of it.

I'm not the only one that knows the river is spoilt, and it's getting worse all the time. We never used to see these weeds that are in the river like the way they are now. Big as this house in some places—just solid weeds. One year, Lake of the Isles looked just like a great big beach up there. Just as far as you could see up in the head of the lake there was nothing but a beach. Never used to be like that. There's something that's just doing it, I don't know. Something there in the water. I don't know what it is, but they claim it's a lot of stuff—detergents and all that—but there must be something. You never heard of any oil slick years ago.

I don't care—you can put anything you want to in your write-up—about the seaway or anything because I'm not the only one that talks that way. It doesn't make any difference. It's just the idea that I knew the minute they put that seaway in that the St. Lawrence River was all done. It's getting worse all the time. every year getting worse.

Now these boats here last fall—they had them up so they could work under them. Now the ice is right up to them. They can't even get under the keels to work on them. Some of the wheels are right in the water and they thought they was up high enough. But the water's kept rising on the ice, and that snow ice is built right up. They can't do nothing about it down there to that seaway. Not now they can't. That ice is up there and there ain't no letting it down. They claim that they can do it in the fall. But there's more water coming in from Lake Superior and Lake Ontario and on through that's going out to the flues down there. Yeah, I heard that the other day. A fella was telling me how much was going out and how much was coming in and there's a lot more coming in up here than there is going out. There ain't nothing they can do about it now. The fall's the time to do it when it first starts freezing. Where these tour boats are in these old boathouses, they didn't get them up high enough.

Years ago the ice was different than it is now. I walked right across by Seven Isles with a pike pole. Walked right across. It was solid. Walked right across the channel out here. Well, you can this year, but you can't out by Seven Isles. There's open spots. But I don't know—there's something different about the waters, the river nowadays. Whether it's the detergent in it or, you know, so much stuff dumping in it or something. It doesn't freeze like it used to. I don't really know. You can drive a car right across [the ice] by Deer Island because the current slows down there and it's wider. But up here where they used to walk across, it's open water in a lot of places. I walked across right by St. Lawrence Park there with my uncle, Allan Russell. Test right across. I'd walk right along behind him and he'd take me right across with a pike pole. Let me off at St. Lawrence Park and he'd go right on back across.



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I don't think he could do that now. They're going across in snowmobiles and everything, but there's a lot of places, down by the lighthouse here, where there's a swift current that boils right up. Well, it's bound to be wearing that ice. I don't care if it's a foot, it's gonna wear it. There's a lot of places that are treacherous. You've got to watch where you're going.

These weeds affect everything, ducks and everything else. Places where ducks used to get by the hundreds and fish, there used to be lots of fish. At the head of the lake and such they can't get up in the thick weeds. You can't even run through them with a boat. They [the ducks] have got to stay somewhere else.

"You never heard of any oil slick years ago."

They claim the fishing ain't as good as it used to be. I can go out and catch just as many fish if I want to and the fishing guides catch lots of bass, lots of northern pike, and there's lots of muskellunge on the river. I catch my share of them all the time, but some of these people want to catch four or five a day. Well, they got it now so's I think you can catch one fish per person this year a day—used to be two. I don't go out to catch ten, twelve fish a day. If I can catch one or two fish a day when I'm tip-uppin', I'm satisfied. That gives Iva and I and our family plenty to eat. Some people want to go out and slaughter them, you know. Well, I can't see that—slaughtering them.

They changed the length in the back lakes like Butterfield and Black Lake and those places to 22 inches. Used to be 18—well, they changed it to 22. Well, that's good over in them back lakes. But over in Canada you keep the first five or six fish you catch. You catch six bass, you're supposed to keep the first one from that long up to that long, because a lot of the bass are hooked deep. Well, you catch a bass and it's supposed to be 10 inches over here. If he's hooked deep and you throw him away, first thing you know he's floating and he's dead. The minute he starts bleeding, he's dead—that bass is dead. You get northern perch bleeding in the gills, and muskellunge, they're hard to keep alive.

In Albany there they just think, or whoever makes up these laws, they think...well...26 inches... We're working on it. I got Lowell Fitzsimmons working for me. He's trying to find out from the Conservation what can be done about it. He's got quite a pull, Lowell has, around. You know if there's anything us fellas want, we try and go to him. He can't always do it, but he tries. So he's trying to find out what they can do about it. He won't be able to do nothing about it, but he's gonna find out what the Conservation can do about it and the big shots. See if they can't drop it down a couple of inches next year. Can't do nothing this year because the law's been made, but maybe when it comes up to voting next year on the fish laws and hunting and trapping and all that, they can get it changed.



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