**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS**
**ORAL HISTORY PROJECT**
**NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA — SPRING 2010**


*Karen Bell was born and raised in the fishing village of Cortez and comes from a long line of fisherfolk. After attending college on Florida's East Coast, she returned to help run her family's seafood businesses. She came back to Cortez because she appreciates the history of the place, the friendliness of the people, and the strong work ethic of the industry, but she sees challenges and changes in its future.*

**Interview with:** **Karen Bell**
**Date of Interview:** **April 23, 2010**
**Interviewer:** **Anna Hamilton**
**Subject of Interview:** **Cortez, Florida, and the Bell Family**
**Transcriber:** **Anna Hamilton**

**Hamilton:** Would you introduce yourself?

**Bell:** My name is Karen Bell. I am a resident of Cortez Village. My family has been a large part of this community since the late 1800s. They came here from North Carolina. They are fishing people. I am fortunate enough to be able to work in this industry. And what do I do? I do all sorts of things. I work at AP Bell Fish Company, which is my family's business. I also work here at Starfish Company, which is my little business. And pretty much entrenched in the fishing industry in Florida.

**Hamilton:** How was your family's business started?

**Bell:** AP Bell Fish Company was started in the '40s by my grandfather. He had previously had other companies where he'd partnered with other people, but he was somewhat of a rogue and would apparently drink and fight with his partners, and get new partners. So I think in 1940 he decided… he was pretty intelligent… and he decided he would be better off working for himself, therefore he started his company and he had 7 children, 4 or 5 of them which continue to operate the business today.

**Hamilton:** And one of them is your dad?

**Bell:** Correct. My dad is the oldest living. Their older brother, named Warren, died in World War II in a ship that was sunk. He was lost at sea.

**Hamilton:** How old was he?

**Bell:** Gosh, he was like 19. Isn't that terrible? Eighteen, nineteen... The first to go. And then my dad followed. And four of the boys, I believe, went off to World War II. The remainder made it back, but Warren died in that ship in I think…'44. No. Wait. When did the war start? I'm terrible at history. It was one of the first years when he died. It's out there on that plaque, if you've seen that, there's a memorial out there to fishermen lost at sea, and also veterans lost at sea. There's maybe 15 people on it. The date of his death is on there. It's pretty cool. It's a bronze statue of a fisherman pulling in a gill net. It was put there in memory of the gill net fishery, because that was banned in 1995. I think we got a grant also from the Florida Humanities Council that funded that statue in maybe '99. It's beautiful.

**Hamilton:** What did your dad do when he got back from the war?

**Bell:** Originally he fished when he got back from the war. I guess his brother was running it, the next one down, two down, I don't remember what order they were in. It wasn't going too well—there were some family issues. They basically…I think one of the other brothers or my grandmother maybe said, their father had died by this time, it was the early '60s. And Aaron had died in '59—his father—but they told my dad if he didn't run it they were just going to shut it down, because I guess they just didn't know what to do. They didn't really have anyone to stay at the fish house while everyone was out fishing, so the year I was born, 1963, he started working in the fish house. And fishing occasionally, but mainly staying at the docks.

**Hamilton:** I remember you telling me that the building there now is not the same one your dad worked in.

**Bell:** The original building was more similar to Fulford's Fish Company, or any old time Florida fish house, which maybe was a 75- by 75-foot square building over the bay and it just had a simple structure on it—two floors, the top floor where they had their boxes and nets, and the bottom floor where they had the ice machine and the black coffee pot that they always like, the old percolator kind. You might not remember that, but I do because it was always this stained black… I mean, it looked disgusting, those pots they would have on a fire… and anyway, a little office and trucks would back right up to it and load fish.

**Hamilton:** I remember you talking about playing in it, on the nets.

**Bell:** Mm hmm, we would go upstairs and play in the nets because all the nets had been cleaned and lined when they weren't in use for whatever season and they'd store them out of the sun. Either in something like a net camp over the bay, which we still have one out there, or in the fish houses up in the second floor. So yeah, it was fun because we could drop through… they had poles coming down where they'd drop boxes through and we used to just play up there. It was fun. Beautiful. Right there on the bay. I don't think when you're little you think of it as being so beautiful, but it was nice memories.

**Hamilton:** So a lot of your childhood took place here?

**Bell:** Well not a lot, but mainly on the weekends. When we were little we had horses, so we spent… Actually from the point I was 10 years old I got my first horse, as much time as I could I

would be at the barn. That's just where I loved to be, but on Sundays we had to come out, we had to spend time at my Grandma's house at the docks. We had to spend the day out here. And at the time, you know, I kind of resented it because I'd rather be at the barn, riding by the river or something, but today I'm glad that I was made to do that, as most kids grow up realizing. Family.

**Hamilton:** Could you tell me about the kinds of things you sell here?

**Bell:** Most of the seafood we sell here comes off the boats here. We do lots of grouper. That's probably what we're most known for. A lot of mullet, stone crab claws, shrimp… That primarily comes off of all our boats. The things that are not from here would be like the wild Alaskan salmon, oysters (you know we don't produce oysters in this part of Florida), the scallops are not from Florida, and then we have a good hamburger and hot dog, and chicken, we do have a good grilled chicken sandwich. But most we try to focus on Florida seafood *(phone rings).* And most of the ads that's what we… If I talk to anybody, I try to push that, because there's been a movement lately about local foods, and don't try to ship in so much if you can help it because of the impact on the environment… The fuel getting it here and that's kind of nice to see that happening because it helps support what we do.

**Hamilton:** So most of it is Florida-based?

**Bell:** I'd say 90% of what we sell is right here off our docks. From next door. And our bay and Gulf. And we do, like I said, have the salmon and scallops we don't produce here, oysters we don't produce here, but maybe 15% is not from here. And again we try to go for really good quality direct from the producers if at all possible.

**Hamilton:** I've read some statistics about how much seafood Americans eat, and how much of that is from other countries. It's like a huge amount, and I think it's incredible that you provide as much local seafood as you do.

**Bell:** Oh my gosh, it amazes me, especially some of the… I'm not going to name any names, but they all sell…Who was it the other day that came in, and I asked him… He brought in a piece of *basa*, right, which has gotten popular but is literally farm-raised catfish from like Vietnam or Taiwan or something and I said, "Why are you eating that when you live right here?" And he sells it, it's cheap and he sells it at his restaurant, the customer that brought it, but people don't know. If you don't know seafood, it's hard to distinguish between different types especially if it's something really light, a mild fish. I rarely eat seafood anywhere but here. I mean unless it's someone's house and I know the fisherman. Cause I'm kind of spoiled. Lucky.

**Hamilton:** Has it always been focused on local seafood?

**Bell:** We really don't do imports. I get calls all the time because after the net ban, which was really frustrating because the answer that everyone would give you when you'd say, "Well, who's going to feed America?" "Oh, we can import it." And that's just so frustrating because first of all it's selfish because it's like, oh, we'll just go to their country and take their resource and we're going to protect ours here so we can play with it or whatever or protect it or whatever, but that's not the answer. The key is you want a balance, you want to protect your resource so it can be used as a resource. But we've never gotten into imports. After the net ban people said, "Well, you're going to have to supplement your business plan to increase sales." What we've done is

frozen more product for people because we have the capacity to do that, and prices have gone up making somewhat of a difference. Basically, we've never gotten sales back to where they were prior to the net ban and we probably never will. But that's just how it goes.

**Hamilton:** Can you tell me about the net ban?

**Bell:** The net ban was really grueling because it affected me because I spent literally two or three years lobbying. I would go and speak to groups against it and the problem with the Florida seafood industry is exactly the same today: It's little tiny businesses.

*(recorder problem)*

**INTERVIEW #2**

**Interview with:** **Karen Bell**
**Date of Interview:** **April 30, 2010**
**Interviewer:** **Anna Hamilton**
**Subject of Interview:** **Cortez, Florida, and the Bell Family**
**Transcriber:** **Anna Hamilton**

**Hamilton:** What are your earliest memories of Cortez?

**Bell:** Probably the earliest memories I have are out here spending Sundays at my grandmother's house. And they always had to kind of drag us out here because we preferred to be at the barn with our horses. But once we'd get down here we'd have fun. We'd play on the sand dunes (they'd kind of filled in some of the fiddler crab flats) and there were net spreads all over the water so we used to crawl across the net spreads. So it was fun, we used to get to pick up things out of the water, so it was nice.

**Hamilton:** Would you tell me about going to Grandma Bell's on Sunday?

**Bell:** Sunday was always family day. And it was always a big huge dinner, and it was always at one o'clock, which my mother thought was always odd, because to her "dinner" was always six o'clock and this was lunch, but whatever—I guess this was a Southern thing and my mother's from New York. It was almost a big conglomeration of people; some were family, some were extended family, some were just people in the neighborhood, and literally there might be 20–50 people there, depending on what time of the year it was. It was nice.

**Hamilton:** What would you do when you would go to Grandma Bell's house on Sundays?

**Bell:** We would mostly stay in the yard, because the house was all the women cooking. My Grandma had nine siblings in her family, seven of which were women, and a lot of them would come help her on Sunday. There'd always be at least three or four of her sisters. So we'd kind of stay out of the house—they'd be busy—and we'd be back in the garden or around the dogs. My uncle had dog pens, he raised greyhounds. Or just roaming around down the shoreline.

**Hamilton:** And what kind of food did she make?

**Bell:** She made excellent food. It was all, of course, relatively Southern. And generally, the main thing was either fish or steak or shrimp. I don't really remember her making chicken which is interesting… maybe she made fried chicken *(phone rings)* on occasion. But anyway, lots of vegetables, most of which were home-grown. There was always usually potatoes. And she made a really wonderful—I still remember this—a banana pudding with vanilla wafers around the edge. Did you ever have that? Oh my God. So good. I've never had any that compares, or I don't know if it's just inflated in my memory—this point of excellence that nobody can achieve, you know? But God it was so good. She could cook *(phone)*. The woman was a good cook.

**Hamilton:** So a lot of your family would be there?

**Bell:** Well, you know, depending on what they were doing, a lot of the family was there. My cousins were generally there, the ones that were my age group. Then, yeah, a lot of the aunts and uncles were there. It was a big turnout. Not necessarily the same ones every Sunday because some would go off, some would be from out of town, so that's what that was.

**Hamilton:** Do you remember what Grandma Bell's house looked like?

**Bell:** I do because it looks exactly the same today as it did back then. After she died, my one uncle, he's just paranoid if anything moves in the house. Like once I took some photos off the piano, which is every child, most of which are wearing, if they were in the military they're wearing their military outfits. Those that weren't it's their high school picture. Anyway, these 8-by-10 photos lined the piano. And he had a fit when I didn't bring them back in a week or so. But it's exactly the same: It's the dog-trot style house, which is the center kind of a hallway open down the center. On the right-hand side are all the bedrooms, and the left-hand side is the galley kitchen. At the north end, a big huge kitchen eating area, and then the dining room, and then the living room is right at the front door on the left when you walk in. So I think it's a typical style for Cortez. In fact my house, which is the Greene house, built by the Greenes in '22 or '23 is the exact, pretty much, copy. The porches are different. On Grandma's it wraps around on two sides of the house; on mine it's just across the front. But today the couch is still the same. It's this blue, kind of shiny, swirly pattern. I can't remember what those patterns are called. It's like a brocade, I think, is the material. And then real heavy curtains that are kind of gold, and the carpet's gold. And the ceiling, instead of the beadboard that is up there somewhere, they put in a drop ceiling, sometime in the '70s. And it's still just like that. Well it's really ugly. I mean, you know… *(laughs)*. I like the ones that are still more like the way they were when they were built, which is the original beadboard on the wall. Which Grandma's has in the hallway, but in the living room they put up paneling, which I think in the '70s they upgraded. But in my house I went back and stripped off all the paneling and took the drop ceiling out, so my house has more of the original character. But it's a really nice house and it's really big on Cortez standards. Probably 1800 square foot. And interesting story about that house is, it's on the corner lot, and Aaron, who is my grandfather, he originally had a little tiny house on that lot. Well after the '21 storm there was a lot of damage and he decided to build a new house. So they picked up the tiny house and moved it one lot west. So it still sits there today, and he built this larger house on the corner, he wanted the corner lot. I guess he thought it was nice to be on the corner.

**Hamilton:** That's cool.

**Bell:** I know, and my dad was actually born in the house that's next door, the tiny little one that they moved. And it sits right there.

**Hamilton:** Would you tell me about how you came back to Cortez?

**Bell:** Well I attended college at MCC [Manatee Community College]. Well then it was MJC [Manatee Junior College], for two years, and I did really well, and then I moved up to Gainesville. Which I think—I had applied to a bunch of different schools, I was a pretty good student—so I think I had been accepted to all of them. Dad wanted me to go to Gainesville because of the Gators, he just loved the Gators, he still loves the Gators. So I went up there for about a year but I didn't do very well. In fact it was the first time away from home, I wasn't very disciplined, I didn't go to class a lot, first time away from anyone watching over me and I took it upon myself to not watch over myself I guess, and I just played a lot. So then I got put on academic probation in Gainesville, and I was shocked because I'd been, like, president of the Honors Society at the junior college, and I think I was just like… I shocked myself, that I would allow that to happen. So I picked up, I called my dad and told him I was going to go down to Florida Atlantic [University], which is a smaller school in Boca Raton, and he said, "No, you're not." So I called one of the drivers—I still can't believe I did this—I told the driver to bring one of the company trucks up one weekend. I had arranged, I had rented an apartment down there on my own—I'm still shocked that I got away with all this. The trucker—the driver—came up, I'm sure he… He must have okayed it with my dad, I guess, because I know he didn't just steal the truck. He came up, piled up all my stuff, and followed me down to Boca, and then I got back on track at a smaller school. So then I finished my degree down at Boca Raton.

**Hamilton:** And what was your degree in?

**Bell:** Business administration, marketing.

**Hamilton:** When did you decide to come back to Cortez?

**Bell:** When I was in Boca, that was a big place for IBM, and I actually started working at IBM. I actually had a tentative job offer, but I can remember I called my dad and said, "Dad I want to come home." And he was just… I told him I wanted to work at the dock… and just was thinking I was nuts. Because he said that, you know, the fishing industry, there were so many things impacting it negatively, and he felt in the '80s there were state regulations, federal regulations, just image issues. He wanted to see me I think in more of a 9-5 job. But, I told him I missed this coast. I don't know if you've ever been to the East Coast—it's beautiful and it's nice, but it doesn't have the warmth of this coast. The people aren't as friendly, this is home to me. I don't know if I realized I missed Cortez then, but I definitely missed the area and the people and my family. And was like, "Well, if that's what you want to do." So I came home.

**Hamilton:** So what do you do here now?

**Bell:** I work mainly… Well, I do a few things. I work mainly over at AP Bell Fish Company, which is where my dad and his brothers own that company. In 1996, I bought Star Fish Company, I mean it was struggling. The gentlemen who owned it had died and left it to his son and he wasn't working here, he had other people running it, and not being an on-site owner he had a lot of things happening that were beyond his control. So I bought it from him in 1996, I got an SBA

loan, and then in addition to that I, in 2004… I have a part-interest in the old Sigma Fish House and we've turned that into a boat yard. So I've owned that now six years. Part of it—I own a third of it. I started with a quarter, and moved up I think in 2009, I believe… Yeah, last year... 2008, 2009… I don't remember. I own a third of it now. So I'm doing something in the village generally. I have some rental cottages I bought after school also.

**Hamilton:** How would you describe your businesses?

**Bell:** I describe my businesses as my children. I know that sounds ridiculous, but I consider them… I've always said this to people, that if you take care of something—be it a business or a child or something you care about—it comes at some point that it takes care of you. And that's how I see Star Fish Company, definitely the marina, which is still a little tiny baby. I mean, it still needs a lot of attention and a lot of actually money to help it grow. But I'm hoping one day, you know, the same thing that will happen with this, which is Star is doing very well, it supports itself, it supports many people actually. You know, there's I think eleven employees here. It takes good care of them. It has a really strong customer base and it takes care of them. So that's kind of my theory about your businesses, or my businesses anyway.

**Hamilton:** How have you seen Cortez change in your memory?

**Bell:** Here's an example of a change that occurred in the past few years. Somebody put a fence up in one of the yards. Somebody bought one of the houses—amazingly—for like, close to a million dollars, one of these little tiny cottages. It is on Sarasota Bay, but that was during the boom, maybe three years ago. But when they put the fence up, I don't think they got a permit, because I don't think they would have been allowed to get a permit. At one point you could walk the entire shoreline from the end all the way down to the FISH Preserve, because it's almost like the shoreline belonged to everybody. I mean it was where everyone worked, it was where everyone played, it was where they could freely come on their own time frame. When the fence went up, you know, it was really weird because you'd be walking and you're stopped. It's just a strange feeling because, you know, years ago, that's not how people looked at the waterfront, like that was their chunk of land. It was kind of like, yeah, you lived there, but these were your family and neighbors and everyone was just all over the place.

**Hamilton:** Have you seen any other more drastic changes?

**Bell:** Well there have definitely been some other changes, as far as some homes have sold. I mean, especially some of the fishing families after the net ban they sold out for what at the time they thought was a lot of money. You know, they might have gotten $150,000 or something. Which is, you know, a significant amount of money but it won't tide you over forever. You know, if you're planning to live off that I don't think it's possible unless you're extremely frugal. But yeah, a couple of the fish houses have closed. Fulford's closed and my one uncle bought it and that was really kind of sad because that was one of the original fish houses. Fortunately Calvin did buy it because it remained exactly the way it was when it was a fish house. I mean, he hasn't changed it at all, and actually we just dock boats there. It's a little different today but I think Cortez is unique in that it's the same too. There's still the commercial businesses that are primarily on the water—you have AP Bell and Star, and then down the road is Cortez Bait and Seafood, and the boatyard Sigma, the old boatyard—Cortez Cove it's called today—which is

what I own part of. So still similar to what it used to be, maybe not quite as much, but stronger than a lot of other places.

**Hamilton:** And do you think that the fish houses are unique because they are still running fish houses?

**Bell:** I think they're very unique, because especially during that time when property values escalated so much, you wouldn't believe how many people said to my dad, "Why do you keep this?" Why don't you get a better return for your investment by selling it, by maximizing the value that you have in your property? But to them, this is their life, this is what they do, they're not big money people, money is not their God. I mean, they want to be able to pay their bills, they want to drive nice pick-up trucks, but my dad's is 15 years old *(phone rings).* But he loves the particular style and he bought it at auction, that's the year he loves, 1995. But I can remember him saying to me, "As long as you have enough money to pay your bills, you're doing well." That's the premise I think he lives with. That's why they're still there. I don't know what they'd do without it, they're not going to travel or something. Whenever I talk to him about traveling, he's like, "I traveled in the war." He went all over the world in World War II, and he's pretty content here.

**Hamilton:** You told me your dad had some kind of guiding rules that he told you when you started working with him. Do you remember what they were?

**Bell:** There were, when I first started working, he always, he will to this day generally come down in the evening when it's quiet and he'll come down from his office and sit with me. He did it last night. Sat there maybe 10 or 15 minutes and we just talked about the day, or things that were coming up, or customers, what was happening. I remember sometime close to the beginning, he told me, I think it was like five things that were really important that were like his golden rules. And I don't know if I can remember them all offhand. But they were, always pay for your fish promptly. You're in the fish business—if you can't pay for your fish you have no business being in the fish business. Give good weights, never take advantage of a fisherman. Things like, as much as you can, keep your money locally. If you're going to buy goods and services try as hard as you can to keep it within your community. The same thing with donating money: try to, if you're going to support causes, keep it on a local level so that you can see what your money is doing. You know, so that you can see what is the proper thing for it. Just, there were just some rules like that. There was another one I can't remember I was thinking about the other day that's slipped my mind. I really should write them down and frame them or something because they're classic things, you know, and that's why I think he's as respected as he is. I think he's real fair and he's an honest man and very principled so I'm lucky to have him as a guide.

**Hamilton:** How was your dad in a family setting—was he a good dad?

**Bell:** I think he was as good a dad as he could be, considering how volatile my mom and dad's relationship was. She was pretty feisty and she was almost, I think, resentful for his passion of the business. We spoke about that before. He would—that place requires a lot of time and attention, just like a wife or a family would—but when a boat would come in or a truck, or a customer would call in the middle of the night, he would leave the house and come down here and possibly spend the night here doing whatever was happening with the boats. And I think my mother really resented that. I think she felt that she should be more of a priority and the business second.

And I don't think that it's that Dad put her second, I think it was more… to support the family you had to take care of the business. And so there was this continual tug and pull between them and she just never seemed very happy. She died in 2000, so she's been gone 10 years now. I remember they fought, but at her funeral he actually cried. And I don't see him cry very often. He's one of those guys from generations before, where men just don't cry. But he did at her funeral and I thought that was pretty nice. Because they weren't real nice to each other a lot of the time.

**Hamilton:** What was your mom like?

**Bell:** Mom's pretty feisty. She was from New York. She never felt very welcome in the village which is kind of sad because I think that was her more than… They may have been somewhat resistant to an outsider, which is what I'm sure they thought of her as being, especially being from New York—She was a Yankee and they're extremely Southern here. I think had she maybe looked above that or just ignored it and kind of persevered that she finally would have been accepted, but she always… she chose to stay away. She chose to think that the people here just weren't very educated and that's why they didn't accept her. And what it did, it just made for this life, the whole thing resenting the business, the family and her not being included like she felt she should be. I think I told you when she asked my grandma… I don't know if I told you this, but when she got married she asked my grandma what she should call her. Mom or Jesse? Grandma supposedly said, "Mrs. Bell is fine" *(laughs).* Which is funny. But I guess then warmth isn't one of Grandma Bell's characteristics. "Mrs. Bell"… *(laughs).*

**Hamilton:** Could you tell me about the traditional role of women in the village?

**Bell:** From my perspective, I think they held a lot more of an important position than they were acknowledged for. Grandma was still… Even after Aaron died, any major decisions they made at the dock they would defer to my grandmother. She still owned the company at that time. Her husband died in '59. I think Grandma died in '76, I believe it was. But she truly was the head of that household. Even though she had all those seven children, six of which were boys, she still was the controlling force there. And the same was kind of true with the women who worked at the fish houses. Even thought they weren't called "managers" or truly given titles of any sort, they were still the ones that knew what was going on sales-wise, book-wise, and that was pretty important to keep your business functioning. So it's kind of interesting.

**Hamilton:** It is interesting, and I remember I asked you a question a while ago about whether you thought the village is more masculine or feminine.

**Bell:** I consider it more masculine, because the boys are more out there. What's a word for that… more expressive or, you know, they're more obvious. When you look around you see men. The women are more back in the shadows, almost more like the worker bees from my perspective, even today, you know, like at our fish house. I kind of have an idea of what's going on—of course Dad is still the main manager—but Cortez Bait and Seafood is the same thing. John is the owner there, is generally out fishing, and his cousin Kim is truly the one managing the fish house. You know, she's in the office, she's making sure the boats are unpacked, and all that kind of thing. And it's interesting, because the women do play an integral role in the function of what's going on in the community, even in the nonprofit, it's mostly the women who are

making things happen. Like the festival, during the net ban, the women were the ones who went out and spoke at, you know, Kiwanis halls or whatever, and the men they want to go fishing, they want to work and really want to be left alone and have someone else handle the day-to-day tasks I guess. And it seems to work out pretty well.

**Hamilton:** So it's kind of like labor versus…

**Bell:** Administration, mm hmm.

**Hamilton:** Do you think there's more of a recognition of women's roles now?

**Bell:** I think they know, I think the guys would acknowledge that. I think what's interesting about the women here is that they never seem to have the need for big ego. You know, I think they all are…well I'd say that for the men too, and the women. They all kind of know what they do, what they accomplish, what they need to accomplish. They're not the kind of people here who need a constant pat on the back, or need someone to say, "Wow great job" or "What would we do without you?" So everyone kind of knows what they're doing and they do it. That's what it takes.

**Hamilton:** Well here's a kind of open-ended question: Why do the people here do what they do?

**Bell:** That's a good question, actually, and I don't know if I know the answer. I can speak for myself… and I mean from my perspective… I've been all over the world, and I haven't spent vast amounts of time, but I've traveled to Europe two or three times, I've been to South America, I've been… you know, I've traveled pretty extensively, and I always, always want to come back here. There's something about the physical location—just the beauty of this place. I think the simplicity of it and the bay. Sarasota Bay on this end is just gorgeous. I mean, last night I stopped and I went over to the end of the dock and watched the sunset and it was beautiful. It turned really, really red and as it sunk into the horizon it turned this pinky orange that cast a beautiful color over everything. There's just something that just draws me back here. And then, on top of that, the people are amazing. To me... I mean they are straightforward, they're funny, they're smart, they work hard… I just think that's who I want to be around. People who are true, who're very real. And I think in a lot of places… Boca was not like that. And I have nothing against the people of Boca. I'm sure there's great people there, too, but what I saw there was more people caught up in trying to impress other people, or just… I don't know, things that to me just seem kind of silly. Whereas here, people seem at least anyway, to be who they really are.

**Hamilton:** How would you describe Cortez to someone that's never been here before?

**Bell:** I always say to someone that's never been here that it's almost like stepping back in time as you drive into the village. Because, initially, the first thing you see, the first realization is that the houses look different. They're all real tiny cottages. They have boats and nets and gear all over the yard. I think they're beautiful, some people think they're not. They think it's junky, but it's their work gear in the yard. So you're taken back immediately as you drive off of Cortez road into the village, and then if you get out and start talking to people, they're relatively friendly and they're happy to talk to you about what it is they do. Because that's an important thing, we want people to understand why we're here and what we're doing, so the people are really friendly and down to earth, and so I think that would be the next most impressive thing that people would no-

tice, is that how nice people are. And I think that's partly why Star is so successful. I mean they come here, they get to see all this, they typically get to talk to someone walking by—a fisherman, or one of the Village residents—and just chat with people like that.

**Hamilton:** What are the challenges you foresee for the future?

**Bell:** Well, a business challenge would be my dad and his brothers are all getting older. They were never able to get on the same page for like a buy-out plan, so there's an issue with one of my uncles—what is he going to do with his stock? If he gives it to one of the uncles, there's a chance he could sell the whole place, which would be devastating to me. If that doesn't happen, a challenge is trying to modernize the company a little bit, inventory the freezer. We have a 3 million pound freezer that is somewhat inventoried in my head, and probably more so in my dad's head, which is no place for an inventory to be, in anyone's head. But I'd like to work on that, I think it's extremely doable. Lots of companies do it and we can do it but we just need to get there. From an industry standpoint there's lots of things to be concerned about: there're federal regulations on the Gulf that are effecting us, that oil spill off of Louisiana, that's definitely something that could be a huge negative impact. Think on how it affects the Gulf. So there's all sorts of things. State regulations, we're not real popular in Florida. Commercial fishing never has been. I always try to work on that image. People seem to think that inshore fishermen are these people who hurt the natural resource when in truth most commercial people are some of your best stewards. But I'd like to on a state level work on that a little bit more. There's lots to do.