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RW: I'm talking with Cam Sigler here, and we're talking about Joe Brooks. Cam's going to give me a little background information. Do you remember when you met Joe, [and] the conditions and circumstances under which you met him, Cam?

CS: Well, I met Joe in 1960, when I went to work in a sporting goods store in Richmond, Virginia. It was The Sportmans Shop, and Joe traded there because that's where he lived for quite a few years. His home was in Richmond. My first association with Joe was in the store, he would come in the store to talk to the people I worked for who were very good friends of his. I met him there. As time went along I used to sit and talk to him, and for some reason he took an interest in me because he was interested in all young people who were interested in fishing. When I really became involved with Joe was when I started doing work for him and setting him up with his trips. For example, that story I related about having thirty-eight of Joe's Orvis rods to repair in about a two week period as he was preparing for a trip.

RW: Was this a saltwater trip?

CS: If I remember correctly this was a trip to Argentina, trout fishing with a good friend of his, Bebe Anchorina who he fished with in Argentina for years. Of course Joe had, at that time, a twenty-nine pound brown trout on a fly, which he caught on a skipping bug, and I think Bebe's record about three years ago was a thirty-one pound fish on a fly.

RW: Was that out of Argentina?

CS: That's out of Argentina. He had brought these rods over... I don't think he took all thirty-eight to Argentina, but they all had to be repaired for up and coming trips. His schedule was such that when he ended one trip he started right on another one. He always amazed me because he traveled so much. He was one of our best goodwill ambassadors, I

think. He fished practically every country of the world. He was such a gentleman that I'm sure he was one of the best goodwill ambassadors we've ever had in foreign countries.

RW: You said he used to fish about three hundred days a year. Did he have a tight schedule?

CS: He had a very tight schedule. At that time he was free-lancing and he had a very tight schedule which he set up for himself. He used to spend his winter months in the warmer climates. He liked seventy degree weather when he could get it, I think. [laughter] He'd spend a lot of his winter months in Florida, the Bahamas and the Caribbean Islands fishing. He always fished at a certain time of the year in Scotland or in England and the European countries. He tried to make a trip to Argentina as many times as possible, and then he would always come out West in the summertime to Livingston, Montana and trout fish. But he did all types of fishing. He was quite a bass fisherman. I think the first book he ever wrote was on bugging for bass.

RW: Do you have any idea when he became a fly fisherman?

CS: Ralph, I don't have an exact date, but I remember Joe recalling stories of him as a young man in his early teens, fly fishing in Maryland, and saltwater fly fishing and fishing for large mouth bass in brackish water. So he had been a fly fisherman from his late teens.

RW: When do you think he took up serious saltwater fly fishing?

CS: Serious saltwater fly fishing? He started seriously saltwater fly fishing when he started writing in his early- to mid-thirties, when he fished Florida quite a bit with a fly. He really pioneered saltwater fly fishing in Southern Florida. If my recollection is correct, he was the first to take a tailing bonefish on a fly, one of the first to take tarpon and permit on a fly. He held the world record for permit on the fly four different times and each time he had broken his previous record.

RW: Is that still a record?

CS: No sir, I don't know who's got the record now, but Joe's last record was broken a few years ago... which he was always glad to see. He always felt he had numerous species of fish – saltwater fish – on a fly that had never been previously taken on a fly. He probably was taking more different species of fish than anyone else. People used to mention his world records and Joe's response was, "They are there for one reason, and that's to present a challenge to another angler. A world record or any kind is there to be broken." That's what upgrades the whole – whether it be fly fishing or anything else – that's what brings things into its own is the challenge involved and the competition. He was a great competitor.

RW: Do you have any idea how many species he did catch?

CS: I would be afraid to quote a figure. I think if I were to remember right I heard a figure of forty-two at one time. I don't think that's documented anywhere. He was quite a pioneer in that field, really, the true pioneer in saltwater fly-fishing.

RW: Well that's what I understand from anybody that's been down there. They give Joe credit for being the first in Florida.

CS: And he really created the first true saltwater fly pattern – the blond flies like the Argentine Blond and the Honey Blond and also the Skipping Bug.

RW: Most of these were cast flies, these weren't [? trolled]?

CS: No sir. The only true fly fishing is when the angler casts and creates the action of the lure, and not to have any way upon a boat or anything else. That's part of the specifications that are written in the Saltwater Fly Rodders of America rules.

RW: You said something about he started Saltwater Rodders, is that right?

CS: He didn't start the Saltwater Fly Rodders. I guess you could say he probably did because of his pioneering saltwater fly fishing, and his association with all the boys on the east coast who instigated Salt Water Fly Rodders of America. He was very instrumental in it, but at that time his schedule was such that I can't honestly say that he started it, but he planted the idea.

RW: The Salt Water Fly Rodders are a member of the Federation of Fly Fishing. At least, they were.

CS: Yes sir.

RW: Well, then, you said that Joe ran the *Miami Herald*?

CS: He was the first director of the Miami Metropolitan Fishing Tournament. He lived in Florida at that time.

RW: Do you have any idea how many years he was director of that?

CS: I don't. I found out a ton of things so much over the years that I lose track of dates and times, but I think it was three or four years.

RW: And then, as I understand, he went from there to the editor of the *Outdoor Life* magazine?

CS: No sir, he.... It's interesting about *Outdoor Life*. When he took the editorship of *Outdoor Life* I was talking to him about it and he said, "You know, they offered this to me about twenty years [ago] and I turned it down." He was strictly freelance after he left the Miami Met Tournament. He spent most of his writing career as a freelance writer so

that he was able to schedule himself and write what he wanted to write, without restrictions. He had a lot of ideas. He was always thinking and always trying new methods and new techniques. He was interested in educating as well as just making a living from writing. I'm sure some of the things he has written and some of these methods have been a little controversial. By being freelance it left him that flexibility to do exactly what he wanted to do.

RW: Does he have the credit to any saltwater patterns or things of this nature?

CS: Well the Blond series, and also the Skipping Bug.

RW: And they carry his name, do they?

CS: Well, a lot of people refer to them as the Brooks' Blond and the Skipping Bug, and then, of course, for striped bass, it was devised off of a fly pattern which was used for spinning, also which was called the "Old Joe" by Phillip's Fly and Tackle. But he was instrumental in designing a lot of lures. I think the initial Skipping Bug was Joe's idea and his design, and he worked very closely with Bill Upperman up in New England, who actually tied the flies built the first flies for him and later Bill Galash from Richmond tied them.

RW: I'm trying to trace where Joe originated now, in his fishing? He started in Maryland?

CS: He started in Maryland.

RW: And then he went along the Atlantic coast?

CS: He fished the Atlantic coast, south.

RW: This was all freshwater fishing at that time?

CS: Freshwater fishing, yes. But he at the same time fished stripers. On the Atlantic seaboard up there there's a lot of striper fishing, inshore fishing in brackish water, and you get a lot of striped bass and large mouth black bass in the same water together. And then, years and years ago, he was fishing stripers using, the same method used for black bass.

RW: How did he get west, into the Montana area?

CS: Well, he and Dan Bailey had been friends. Dan's originally from the east coast, I guess. I don't know the exact story of how he got west, but Joe was the kind of guy who wanted to fish for every kind of fish. I know another good friend of mine who's a writer and I was there when Joe gave him a bit of advice. He said, "If you want to be a fishing writer, he said, "fish every opportunity you can get, in every place in the world you can possibly fish, for every kind of species that is a game fish." This was Joe's philosophy

and he wanted to fish. He read a lot about the western streams, he always wanted to fish the western streams and he went out to Montana and started fishing. The date, I don't ever remember him telling me the date that he first came to Montana, but I think Montana he probably really loved more than any place else that he'd ever been. He would have liked to have made his home there but it was kind of out of the way for his business. It was very convenient for him to live on the east coast. He had a great attraction for Montana and Florida.

RW: Do you remember his favorite streams in Montana?

CS: Well, I think probably Armstrong Spring Creek and the Yellowstone. He enjoyed the Henry's Fork of the Snake River down in southern Idaho, around Last Chance. He enjoyed the Spring Creeks of Montana a great deal.

RW: Yes, I think he fished the one at Lewistown, and it seemed to me he wrote some stuff on the Big Hole.

CS: Right. He fished all the great western rivers and wrote about all the great western rivers. I think Joe often wished that there [were] more hours in the day and more days in the year so that he could have fished more of the rivers that he wanted to fish. He was a great offshore angler as well as a great fly fisherman, and a good bass fisherman. He fished for all kinds of fish. To quote him "I never caught a bad fish all fishing is good".

RW: Do you know if he ever fished New Zealand?

CS: He did, he fished New Zealand, yes sir, and Iceland. I talked to him one time – we used to just talk in conversation – and I think the only major country and major area he'd never fished was Russia because he couldn't get in to Russia. But he said he did cast a line into Russia once.

RW: From where?

[laughter]

CS: He named a little town, and it was – I can't recall the name – but I distinctly remember him saying he couldn't fish Russia, so he went over and he cast a line over, figuring that the middle of the river was the dividing line.

RW: That was a pretty long cast!

CS: Depends on the river. I'm sure it was one of the bigger rivers.

RW: I don't think I ever read any of his stuff on New Zealand, though.

CS: Well, he's got a book *Fishing Around the World*, where he lists every country that he fished in. I don't have the book with me so I can't say, but I know he did fish New Zealand at least once.

RW: And you did say that he's...

CS: Well, he fished New Zealand because he was telling me about the lemmings. He was a very interesting man because he took so much interest in the people in the foreign countries that he fished. He really enjoyed the people and the animals, and he could describe all the different types of animals that they had. He'd tell me the story of the lemmings, so I know he fished New Zealand. Also, there's an animal there, a snake that's very poisonous that he was telling me about. I can't think of the name. I know he fished Australia and New Zealand more than once.

RW: And, of course, I assume that when you said South America you were talking about Peru and Chile and the Amazon.

CS: Joe fished the Amazon. He fished South Africa. In fact, he found some very good friends all over the world that he met fishing.

RW: You were telling me about, when Joe passed away, that you had his little good luck piece. Can you elaborate a little bit on that?

CS: Well, not many people knew about his little duck. He had a lucky duck and I used to pack him for his trips when I lived in Richmond. I remember one evening I was packing him to go somewhere – he was always on the go and I can't remember where it was. This one day I'd go over and I'd pack dry flies and wet flies, and the next day I'd go over and I'd pack flyrods, reels and saltwater flies, or marlin gear or something of this nature. I remember he had a counter that we worked on, and in a little plastic box with some tissues, Kleenex, he had his grooved nail for tying nail knot and these little clippers, and a little wooden duck. I was a little curious so I asked him about the wooden duck and he said that he never went fishing without that little wooden duck. Apparently – in the conversation he never really explained the whole story except that it was a good luck charm with Joe – he had been carrying it around, I think, for twenty, twenty-five years. That's something that not many people knew about. I was very proud of the fact that when Joe passed away Mary Brooks sent me the good luck charm, which was a little hand-carved duck.

RW: Do you remember where it originated?

CS: If I remember right, he got it in Norway, years and years ago. I could be wrong.

RW: I'd be interested to find out. Maybe that's in one of his books or something.

CS: I've read all of his books except the first one which is *Bass-Bugging*, and no reference to the duck.

RW: No reference to the duck? Do you think he was superstitious?

CS: I think a little. He was the same way about his old Swiss Army knife. I remember losing it up on the Babine River, and I took a lot of guff for a long time when we found it three days later in the bottom of my shoe. I think Joe thought I was trying to get away with his knife. He really didn't think that, but he was sure pulling my leg all the way home.

RW: Did Joe do very much steelhead fishing... fly-fishing for steelhead?

CS: He did quite a bit. He fished out west here, oh, I guess fifteen, twenty years ago, and then he started coming back in 1966, '67, and fishing the Babine River.

RW: Incidentally, was that the time that Gene Andreg was there?

CS: Yes.

RW: And was Enos there? Enos Bradner?

CS: Enos Bradner was on the trip. Joe made, if I recall, four trips to the Babine, and Gene wasn't there the year that we went, and Enos wasn't either. But Joe did make a trip with Enos Bradner, and also Gene Andre.

RW: Well, I know he also made one with Don Ives?

CS: Don Ives. Bill McGuire. Doctor Rex Palmer, here in Seattle. Jack Albright from Seattle. Ed Reddy from Palm Beach Florida was on part of the crew. Doctor Paul Lyons who had flown in from Seattle was always a part of the crew. There was a whole entourage that had been going up there for years and years. Joe did quite a bit of steelhead fishing. He didn't do as much as he would have liked to have done, although he fished the Oregon rivers: the Rogue, the McKenzie, all the great rivers on the west coast he had fished at one time or another.

RW: What do you think Joe's biggest contribution to fly fishing has been?

CS: I think his biggest contribution to fly fishing was... well, there were a lot of things. One was the type of man he was. If I had to really describe him, Ralph, I would say first he was a gentleman, then he was a fly fisherman. I think the two really go hand in hand.

RW: And you also classified him as an ambassador, a goodwill ambassador.

CS: A goodwill ambassador. One of his greatest loves was young people. For example, he was one of the first original founders of the Brotherhood of the Jungle Cock back in Thurmont, Maryland.

RW: I'd like to know a little bit about that.

CS: Well, what the Brotherhood was... they had a group of outdoor writers that had gotten together in Maryland to go fishing. They were in a little mountain cabin and a storm came up and they couldn't fish. So they sat down and they thought that they should organize and put together an organization for young boys, and the idea was to take a boy fishing. So they put together an organization that was designed specifically to teach boys stream manners, to teach them fly fishing, and to take a boy fishing at least once a year, that was the motto: "take a boy fishing, at least once a year." Now Joe had a group of boys, I think, myself included, and a young fellow by the name of Burt Lindler from Williamsburg, Virginia – and I'm a little bit older than those boys – Marvin Williams and Robin Church from Richmond. I can remember Joe taking Burt and Marvin up to the Brotherhood when they were just little shavers. Both of those boys now are probably two of the great fly fishermen and real gentlemen, and that was through the influence of Joe. The Brotherhood came out of the fact that they couldn't go fishing so they sat down and they wrote a creed on a paper bag. I can't remember the fellow's name – it was an outdoor writer, I think from Baltimore, an editor of one of the local papers – and they all got together, all these gentlemen, and wrote the creed of the Brotherhood on a paper bag. What happens is, every year in April, they get a group of men and a group of boys. The last time I was up we had about three hundred and fifty boys and about fifty men for three days, and we took them fishing. It's one of the few things that I've ever done where I come away from it about three feet off the ground.

RW: Could you put a date on when it originated, roughly?

CS: Ralph, I should know, because it's on the creed! [laughs] I can't tell you, [but] I can get the information for you.

RW: Well, is this Brotherhood a living organization now? Does it have officers?

CS: Yes sir, it has officers. I haven't been since I've been out west here which has been about five years, but I used to go when I lived back east. Unfortunately, I'm sorry I'm so far away because there's nothing I'd rather do than take my two boys to it because I think it's one of the most rewarding things that I've ever been associated with.

RW: Did Joe have a family of his own?

CS: No sir, just Joe and Mary. He never had any children.

RW: And you said a while ago that you're trying to persuade Mary to do a biography?

CS: Well, I think someone should. Joe and I talked about it and he always wanted to do his autobiography. But he had so many ideas and he just didn't have enough time to write all of his books and do his autobiography, which I think should be done because it would be very interesting. It's really the true history of a fly fisherman, without a doubt.



RW: When Joe passed away, was [it] his desire to be buried in Montana... in Livingston?

CS: It was, yes sir. He really loved Livingston and it was his desire to be there. As a matter of fact, as most people would probably know, he specified that any contributions of any sort be made to the Yellowstone River Chapter of TU, which is now the Joe Brooks Chapter of Trout Unlimited. He loved that country in Paradise Valley, Montana, and he fought very hard to prevent any damming of the Yellowstone River and to keep that river a wild river and not destroy the beauty of Paradise Valley. It was his wishes, and that's what we have attempted to do here in the fact that for every book of Joe's that's sold we donate a dollar to that particular chapter to fight that Yellowstone River project.

RW: Now Mary is now... she has moved from Virginia...

CS: Living in Montana.

RW: To be close to Joe?

CS: Yes sir.

RW: They must have had a very close relationship.

CS: They were, very close. I think, Ralph, you know, as far as Joe's concerned, he's probably had more influence on my life than any single man that I have ever known. He's really been responsible for me being at least involved in fishing and in the sporting industry as I am... through his effort. I think there are a lot of people that owe Joe a great deal, and, admittedly, would admit it because he was a very unselfish man. I've stated that he could be two thousand miles away from you and if he saw an opportunity for one of his friends he would pursue it on his own. There aren't many men left today like that I don't think. He was always thinking of his fellow man, and to make things a little bit better for everybody.

RW: You mentioned that you fished Hosmer Lake with Joe and Mary one time. He went against the experts, as far as the fly was concerned.

CS: Well, Joe had such a vast experience, and I'm sure that he had fished a great deal, and I think he had probably been in the same situation before on some other river somewhere else in the world or some other lake somewhere else in the world. So we went to Hosmer Lake, fishing Atlantic salmon, and it was a consensus that there was only one fly to use and only one fly that would take the fish. The hatch would come off very, very late in the evening and then you'd maybe catch two fish and then it would be too dark. But it was a big caddis and they were coming off about 10:30 in the morning it was a short one and then late in the evening it would come off just before dusk. Well Joe walked out, and he hadn't even gotten in a boat or he hadn't cast a line in the lake yet, and he looked at the water and we were talking about fishing, all of us. He looked at the water and stated that this one fly was the only one that would really produce, and he

looked at me and he says, “Cam, use that little black fly.” He pulled out some black ants, so black they almost looked purple, and gave me a couple of them. Oh, I guess by three o’clock that afternoon Joe had seven salmon and unfortunately I didn’t have any. He had nailed it on the head. The little black fly was what they wanted. There were five of us altogether and we were throwing everything and Joe starts with his little black fly and caught fish.

RW: Was there a rise of any kind, a hatch?

CS: No hatch, no sir, no hatch, nothing like it. As a matter of fact he stood there in front of me – Mary and I – talking to us after we had fished in one area for about an hour, and stood in the bow of the boat talking to us, just leisurely casting – he loved just to throw a fly line – and took a fish right out from in front of us... on his little black fly.

RW: This was dry fly fishing?

CS: Dry fly fishing, yes.

RW: I take it from his writings that in Montana, at least, it was all dry fly fishing?

CS: He dry fly fished. I think, like most of us, [he] preferred to catch fish on a dry fly when he could. But he was an expert at nymph fishing and streamer fly fishing. He could make a nymph – I sat and watched him – and he fortunately gave me a little instruction on nymph fishing on Henry’s Fork of the Snake last year – and he could make a nymph do things that I’ve never seen other people make it do. It looked completely natural. It wasn’t a true downstream float, but he could keep that nymph flowing just like a natural. He enjoyed fishing nymphs very much and he believed that the larger fish that are taken, I think, are taken on nymphs.

RW: Do you remember any techniques that he might have developed?

CS: Well, I can’t really say techniques, because – and I don’t know which ones I could say he really developed – because Joe wasn’t the kind of guy that... if he developed a technique, he would show it to you, but wouldn’t come back and say, “I did this,” or “It was my technique.” He wasn’t boastful. There are a lot things I’m sure that he was responsible for that not many people knew about because he wouldn’t go around tootin’ his own horn, so to speak. He was a very quiet man.

RW: Well, this is one of the things that we’d like to find, really. What he did that we could nail down. What he actually contributed to fly fishing. I’m sure that what you’re saying is he probably did develop some techniques.

CS: Well of course, certain techniques [of] saltwater fly fishing I think you could say, particularly, that he pioneered it, and most of the methods used today are methods that were first used by Joe and his pioneering. And there was searching for tailing bonefish,

and tarpon fly patterns, and shock leaders for tarpon, and weight forward lines, heavy, short butted, weight forward lines.

RW: Did he have anything to do with the development of those?

CS: He worked very closely with Scientific Anglers and Cortland. In early years, he worked very, very closely with Cortland Line Company on the development of tapers and fly lines, and also the development of fishing rods - fly rods – with Orvis. They had a whole series of rods and he and Wes Jordan were very, very good friends and spent many, many hours developing tapers from which, you know, pretty well filled the standard in this country, for a long time, for quality fly rods. As a matter of fact, I guess all glass manufacturers have tried for years to copy bamboo rod actions.

RW: He was also connected with *Scientific Angler* for a while?

CS: Yes sir, he was, on the development of fly lines. I can distinctly remember at his home – a few years ago – having different colors to play with: white lines, and the different colored lines – greens, and also in working with him on sinking heads, sinking tips...

RW: I wonder if he was one of these fellows like Pete Schwab that used to take these various weights of line and then make his own bugs. The way that many of those... well, as a matter of fact, they all had to be originated this way. Did you ever hear that he did anything like that?

CS: Well, years ago, I know that Joe was one of the fellows that would sit, years and years ago, and make his own fly lines.

RW: This was before they were available commercially.

CS: Like I said, Ralph, he wouldn't talk about it much, but he was advisor to Johnson Reels. So he was one of the first promoters of the push-button spin casting reel, because he saw the merits in developing fishermen, not just fly fishermen, but in developing young people as fishermen because it was an easy method to use and it would readily take fish. He's most noted as a fly fishermen but he used all types of tackle.

[30.28-31.26 BREAK IN AUDIO]

RW: Well, Joe was a big man physically, wasn't he?

CS: Ralph, he was. He was about six two and he was in pretty good shape, a very strong man in his early years. Of course, I didn't know him then but we used to sit, as I said, and talk a lot. When he went into something he committed himself. I know he still holds, for example, the course record at the country club in Baltimore for golf. I guess you could class him as a semi-pro golfer. He was an excellent golfer. His parents didn't like it but when he was sixteen he signed with the Baltimore Orioles as a pitcher. He was a semi-

pro boxer, quite a swimmer – an Olympic-class swimmer. A lot of people don't know this but his first article ever written was on hunting. He was a great bird hunter – loved to quail shoot. But he had done big game hunting, and I think that, in his early years, he was like most of us when we were younger... we want to do everything we can possibly do. Joe was the type of individual when he made up his mind to do something he did it.

RW: He was a great competitor.

CS: Great competitor! For example, bowling – I don't know whether it's three or five – but I know he's bowled at least three- three hundred games in his lifetime. He loved competition.

RW: These are things that I don't think many people have ever heard about Joe Brooks. Certainly they're new to me.

CS: They don't, and I think that's why I would like to see his biography written. I think it would be a great inspiration to a lot of young people today, because he really worked at what he did, and when he went in he went in totally committed. He was not afraid of competition, just like his philosophy on world records. They were there for one reason, and that was to challenge someone else to break them. He didn't mind competition. As a matter of fact he looked forward to competition. He was always very, very willing – and I'm sure there are many outdoor writers out there today that owe a great deal to Joe Brooks – but even in his own profession he was always very, very willing to share anything he had... any of his ideas with other people in his own profession. He was just, in my book, quite a gentleman.

RW: In all the help that Joe did with the various tackle manufacturers, I never did see a rod with his name on it – the Joe Brooks rod.

CS: Well, Ralph, working for Eddie Bauer I thought about that, and Joe and I discussed it, but Joe's philosophy was that if you want to destroy an outdoor product you put a personality's name on it. It should be sold on its own merit and not on a personal name. That was his philosophy and that's why he would never let his name be put on a particular product.

RW: Well, he did some development work for you people here.

CS: Yes sir, he did a great deal and, like I say, he contributed a great deal – probably more than any single person in the tackle industry – but he would never put his name on it because he felt that... well, when you get involved in personalities there's certain people that care for certain personalities and others that don't. He felt that any product should be sold on its own merit and not on a personality. That was his philosophy.

RW: Did Joe have an ego?

CS: Certainly he had an ego. We all did. [laughter] But he didn't express it like a lot of people. He was very strong minded, very strong willed. You can see that in his competitive spirit, but he didn't go around telling people.

RW: He satisfied his ego by doing rather than by talking.

CS: By doing rather than talking about it. Yes, certainly, yes.

RW: This is a strong characteristic.

CS: He wouldn't talk about it unless he'd already done it. He might [have] the idea but he wouldn't say that he could do something unless... you could be darn sure that if he said that he had done something that he really in fact had. He was very sincere and honest in his writing.

RW: Would you say then that he was [the] "ego deflator" of certain experts?

CS: I think so. I heard him described once as a very selfless individual. In other words he was – that was one thing about Joe that I think a lot of his friends used to – I've been with him when I've wanted him to pop up and say something smart to somebody who had said something smart to him and he never would. He didn't think that people should necessarily be that way, but if you had to be that way you didn't have to be vindictive, and if you did something that was good enough – the fact that you were able to do it and you knew you could do it – that was his satisfaction.

END OF RECORDING.