



***A Pioneer Son at Sea: Fishing Tales of Old Florida* by Gilbert L. Voss, edited by Robert S. Voss. 2016. University Press of Florida. ISBN 978-0-8130-6252-5. xxv + 173 p. US\$18.84 (hardcover), US\$9.99 (Kindle).**

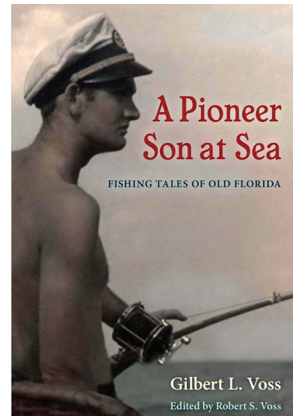
I was thrilled when invited to review Gil Voss's *A Pioneer Son at Sea*. For many years I heard about the book, and now I'd have a chance to read it. I worried, however, of potential bias, as I have always admired the author's work and philosophy of life. In the interest of full disclosure, I am proud to say that Gil Voss was my major advisor for the best part of the five years I invested as a doctoral student at the University of Miami. (Gil passed away in January 1989, a year-and-a-half before my PhD dissertation defense.)

The book is edited by Gil's son Robert Voss, a well-respected naturalist in his own right and curator of mammals at the American Museum of Natural History in New York. Robert wrote the foreword and afterword that fill gaps in the account of his dad's life, and prepared short headnotes and endnotes for each of the book's eleven chapters. The headnotes are very useful, helping situate the fishing tales into their broader contexts and time.

Reading the book brought back many memories, as I was fortunate to have heard oral narratives of some of the stories told by Gil at lunchtime at the "lab's" cafeteria (Gil and other members of his generation would refer to the Rosenstiel School of Marine & Atmospheric Science, University of Miami, as "the lab," refusing to call the institution by any other name).

The stories encompass episodes of Gil's life as a young fisherman, his tenure with the US Coast Guard during World War II, and his attempts, with brother Frederick, at earning a living from fishing after an honorable discharge from the Coast Guard in December 1945. As the title of the book implies, these are stories lived by Gil before his life as an accomplished and world-renowned marine biologist, oceanographer, and conservationist. Although the author did not plan on discussing his science vocation, the book helps readers understand why a seasoned seafarer with an inquiring mind would want to pursue a career in science. The war had ended, profits from fishing were low, and a science career would enrich and complement the "real world" experiences Gil had accumulated in his previous, seagoing life. Gil enrolled at the University of Miami in June 1948, and soon after became a student at the Department of Marine Sciences, working with the legendary and charismatic FG Walton Smith in the department's expansion into the Institute of Marine Sciences, later known as the Rosenstiel School of Marine & Atmospheric Science.

More than anything else, the book provides great examples of the commercial (and recreational) fishing techniques prevailing in Florida from the Great Depression through the post-World War II years. In addition, Gil's powers of observation and interest in natural history and conservation are casually woven into the fabric of each chapter. There are descriptions of life traits and behaviors of fish as diverse as sailfish, Spanish mackerel, pompano, red snapper, and mullet. It is interesting to note that Gil and his brothers, as deep-water charterboat fishing captains, were already practicing (and enforcing) catch-and-release as far back as the late 1930s. No killing of majestic sailfish aboard their *DREAM GIRL*! (Gil's prewar involvement with sailfish led twenty years later to the inception of a successful University of Miami sailfish tagging program.) Gil was open-minded and showed a deep appreciation of other cultures and ways of life. These traits came in handy to him when executing his duties as a Coast Guard Boatswain off the coast of western Florida. He hard-hat dived for sponges



with a close-knit group of Greek divers based in Tarpon Springs, sipped good rum with visiting Cuban fishermen, learned gill-netting tricks from Bahamian out-islanders, and was well-respected and liked by local Floridians, seaworthy or not.

Individual memories and allegiances aside, at the core of this little tome is its great value as a record of Florida's maritime memory, narrated in a straightforward yet very personal manner by an extraordinary native son. Gil was fortunate enough to look at the ocean and the life it supports from many different angles and many moments in time. Are there weaknesses in or with the book? Only one: I wish Gil had expanded the scope of the book to continue with narratives of the research trips he led aboard "the lab's" vessels in the heyday of biological sampling and exploration. I strongly recommend *A Pioneer Son at Sea*.—José H. Leal, *The Bailey-Matthews National Shell Museum, Sanibel, Florida*.

