-I'm here, could you tell me your name please?

-Interviewee, and my name is Suzana. As I was saying, I'm working with the University of Miami. Today is February 14, 2025, and we're in Aguadilla. Can you tell me a little about your work, Interviewee?

-I've been a commercial fisherman, practically all my life. I was taken fishing for the first time when I was 7 or 8 years old, and well, I'm now 30. I've been fishing for quite a few years. I practically come from a family of fishermen that's been fishing for almost 200 years, dating back to my great-great-grandfather.

-Tell me a little more about that, 200 years of fishing, of a family of fishermen, always here in Aguadilla?

-In Aguadilla and on Crash Boat. That is, since my great-great-grandfather, great-grandfather, grandfather, and my dad.

-And what stories did you hear about your grandfather, your grandfather's grandfather? What was fishing like back then, if you know anything?

-The fishing, at that time, they said it was too good.

-In what sense?

-A lot of fish were caught back then, much more than now.

-Much more than now?

-Yeah.

-Did grandpa say that?

-My grandfather. Well, I didn't know my great-grandfather, but it was with my grandfather that I started fishing.

-What did he teach you? How did your grandfather fish?

He fished deep-sea, almost always. He taught me how to catch sea bass and silk snapper. After he passed away, I went with my godfather, and I'm still fishing with him.

-And your dad never fished?

-Yes, he is a fisherman.

-Also, but you never fished with him?

-Yes, I only caught a few good fish. By the time I started fishing, he was already retiring from it.

-And in what context did your grandfather say there was a lot more fish at that time, and complain in a certain way?

-The fishing was good, climate change had changed.

-Already, how much?

-At that time the water was quite cold, now the water is warm.

-Interesting. Your grandfather's experience was that the climate was colder, compared to…

-And you can tell the difference.

[00:02:55]

-Do you know, just in case, in what years he said this?

-That was before he died, it was quite a few years ago, around 2008 or 2009, more or less. But the sharp change in climate change was felt about two or three years ago, so you go there now and the water is warm.

-2 or 3 years?

-Yes, for two or three years, the water is warm. Without thinking about it, Hurricane Maria changed everything, in terms of depth, it changed everything in the area.

-Tell me a little more, what did you write down specifically?

There are areas where I used to fish, like the ones known as El Rabo, which is right here. There are areas where fish were caught, but after Hurricane Maria, fish weren't caught there anymore. Now they're starting to come back. That's El Rabo. It's one of the most recognized fishing areas in this entire area.

-After Maria. But now he's coming back?

-Yes, it's slowly coming back. The mess Maria made was severe.

-And what other place did Maria change, if you remember?

-Practically everything, it changed everything. It's slowly returning. I imagine the currents were so strong down below, due to the hurricane itself, that it did quite a bit of damage.

-And how did the hurricane change fishing for you? Because everything changed.

-Completely.

-Tell me a little more about this, like what you did, what you had to do to...? I suppose you usually went to the same places. El Rabo is one of them, right?

-Yes, exactly, El rabo, Desecheo, Mona.

-And now that Maria has passed away, what do you do, what did you do?

-What we did was look for different areas of the water, deeper, shallower, to see where the fish moved. (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*)

How long did it take until you felt like, 'OK, I know what I'm doing now,' like before?

-Months. Within months, one was already experiencing the area.

-And here he told me that in El Rabo the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) is slowly coming back, and the same thing is happening with…

-All.

-Everywhere. So, is the water returning to what it was before Maria, or are there still changes?

-The water is still warm.

-Yes indeed?

-Yes, the water is still hot.

-And how have you noticed changes in how the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) acts?

[00:06:06]

-About warm water? Right now, dorado (dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) fishing isn't the same as it used to be. Dorado (dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) is a cold-water fish; when it's not in warm water, it senses warm water and seems to move farther out. They're not catching the area like they used to.

-That is, the abundance of dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) has decreased.

-Yes, it's noticeable. There are times during the day when you feel the water is cold and dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) come down, quite a few dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) pass by, just as there are days when the water feels warm and not many pass by.

-And is the size of the dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) the same as before?

-Yeah.

-Yes, more or less?

-That varies. There are large dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*) and small dorados (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*), it varies.

-Do you live solely from fishing?

-From fishing, yes.

-And do you think you have a good, economic life and that you have a future?

-Yes, there is a future, we have to work, but there is a future.

-What is a work day like for you?

-Tough. You have to get up at 4 in the morning, and I'm a fisherman who gets home at 6 in the afternoon. Whether I catch a catch or not, I have to get home by 6 in the afternoon. You know, it's tough work. Anyone who wants to get into fishing has to work.

-Are there many young people like you who work like you?

-There are quite a few young people, yes, who fish.

-Was it always like this in your opinion?

-As?

-That many young people want to work in fishing.

There was a time when it wasn't, but now there are quite a few young people who want to fish. It makes everything a lot easier now, GPS, there are boats, you know, fishing is easier. Before, when I started, there was no GPS, none at all, all we fished was in small wooden boats. You know, not everyone can handle that either. Fishermen in the past had to learn how to get to the spots by going to El Rabo, you have to mark yourself with this area here, with the land, you have to have a good view, you have to know how to mark yourself to be able to get to the spots. Not now, now the fisherman has a GPS, gets to the area, caught fish there, and marks it with the GPS; much easier.

-Do you do that now too?

-Yes. I started doing it with dirt, but since the GPS makes it easier, it's better.

-Does it cut down your browsing time or how do you, besides making it easier, spend more time getting to the places where…?

-You get there faster with GPS. So, when you have to see the land, you have to go a little slower, checking to get there. But with GPS, you can find and get right to where you're going.

[00:08:55]

-Are there things, other technologies that you've learned from your grandfather or your mentors that are more traditional that you still think are better than more modern technologies, for example?

-No, there wasn't any technology for that time. Before, everything was the old-fashioned way.

-But when I say technology, I also mean how to prepare traps or the line or the weight or things like that.

-Yes, that's how it was. It's the same as before. I mean, the only thing that changed is the GPS, but the line fishing, the trap, the seine, everything stayed the same, just like before.

-What tools do you use or what type of fishing do you do?

-I fish for dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) (dolphin), silk snapper, sea bass, sierra (cero), practically all fishing except traps.

-And you tell me that today you can have a good economic life, was it the same at the beginning when you started?

-It's harder. When I started, I didn't know much; I had to work a little harder. Now, it's a little easier.

-What are the things that give you the most difficulty in this business?

-About fishing?

-Yes. At work.

-Selling fish is very difficult, and the weather is also very difficult. Right now, if you want to go fishing for silk snapper or queen snapper, you have to consider the currents and the winds. There are months, like right now, when it's windy all the time, and there's no calm.

-What are you doing these months, not leaving?

-Dorado (dolphin), to catch dorado. (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) It's dorado season now. (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) The dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) already has a natural closed season, you know, that this is dorado season (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) and there are times when dorados are not caught. (Dolphins, \*Coryphaenidae\*)

-I'm trying to understand, if there are months when you can't fish much, how do you deal with the economy, how do you deal with this?

-There are times when you don't catch dorado (Dolphin, \*Coryphaena hippurus\*) what you do is go and catch silk snapper, queen snapper, change fish.

-He changes fish, but does he always go fishing?

-He always goes fishing. All year round.

-All year round he's fishing for something…

-Exact.

-And during Maria or COVID, when you couldn't fish much or sell much, how did you manage to get by with money?

-It was tough with María. With COVID, it wasn't as tough because they still allowed us to fish, and we still got a few fish, but it was tough for María. There was no electricity, no water, we had to go out, gasoline was very hard to come by, but we were still able to go out and find sustenance.

[00:12:03]

-And from what I understand about the Fishing Village, it was very good before Maria, but now there is no Fishing Village, how do you sell the fish?

-We sold it to a fishing buddy, who started helping the fishermen after the Fishing Village fell, and he's in charge of removing and selling it.

-And do you take out similar money as before?

-Take it out, it takes a little longer but it takes it out.

-Why is it that the Fishing Village has not yet been built or is operational?

-Many people putting their foot in it.

-Many people, who are these people? No names necessary, but…

-People who live right there on the beach, who want to do tourism, tourist areas, Natural Resources is one of them.

-Natural Resources is an institution that's supposed to help you, right?

-Supposedly.

-And he puts up barriers, what kind of barriers?

-Permits, you bring them the permit, you look for more permits, you give them what they ask for, they look for more things to bring. We've been doing this since Maria, it's been going on for, what, 7, 8 years, that's what.

-Do you think you're going to win in the end?

-Yeah.

-Yes, do you need patience?

-Exact.

-Are you involved in this process?

-Yeah.

-If you're looking, it's like putting... And I understand that there are about 30 fishermen in the Village.

-Yes, there are like 30 people.

-Are the 30s equally involved, like motivated to…?

-Yes, the 30-year-olds are motivated. If you call them quickly, they're there quickly. If necessary, they'll always be there.

-What is the role of the fishermen? I'm trying to understand, if there's a community of fishermen, do you feel it's more than just professional, like friendships and help in bad times. It's not necessary during Maria, but if, for example, one of the fishermen goes through a more difficult season, is there a community in the sense that other fishermen help them?

-Yeah.

-Yes, is that the case?

-There are times when a fisherman doesn't catch anything, and for example, I catch something, another fisherman catches something. At least he gives him fish to use for fuel. You know, we're practically, even though we're not blood relatives, we consider ourselves family, all of us. If something happens at sea, if someone gets lost, if the engine breaks down, everyone will go out to find it. Everyone will go out to find it, until they find it.

[00:15:10]

-Have there been any very difficult things that have happened to the fishing community?

-Yes, like the Fishing Village. When the Fishing Village fell, that was a huge change for the fishermen.

-How have you dealt with that? I guess it's almost psychological damage in a way.

(Oh my god, thank you so much, very nice)

-Yes, it's a psychological toll. Almost all the fishermen had to take their boats home, because most of the fishermen had their rowboats, which they left on the sand at the water's edge. They had their gear, each one had their own little room to store their equipment. Now they don't. Now they have to go home. It's much more difficult for them. They have to bring their gear from home and bring it down to the beach...

-Is it more physical work, almost?

-Yes, yes, a lot, twice as much.

-Double? However, most sell similar or make similar money, which means there's more time and effort to compensate.

-Exact.

-That's difficult. Have you observed other changes in the maritime environment?

-The reef, the reef is not the same as before.

-When have you noticed changes in the reef?

-Since Hurricane Maria.

-Ah, since Hurricane Maria.

-After Hurricane Maria, the waves and currents were so strong that the entire shore was ripped away. I was a shore diver, and I dived this entire area. After Hurricane Maria, no more coral was seen there. Now it's growing back.

-Is he coming back?

-Yeah.

-Did you do the diving at the same time as the other type of fishing or did you just do diving?

-Sometimes I went. You know, I used to go in the morning when I was in school. You know, I didn't go fishing; sometimes I'd leave school to go diving and stay on the shore. When Hurricane Maria hit, on the same shore, it was 10 or 12 feet deep, and that used to be sand, you know, that tore away everything that was there.

-And now he's recovering, he told me.

-Yes. Now…

-Where are you recovering?

-Almost always... Crash Boat, it's been like this around here. This whole area is recovering. This area, well, I don't know how to tell you, of course...

How do you see the future of the fishing community here?

[00:18:09]

"I think it's going well. You have to put your heart into it. Fishing isn't easy. For me, fishing is one of the hardest jobs there is in the world. Fishing, especially in Puerto Rico, isn't easy."

-Why is it that despite the fact that fishing or fishing as a fisherman is very difficult, you choose this job?

-More than just fishing, I've been fishing all my life; it's in my blood. Practically, it's in my blood. There are people who want to become fishermen and they do twice as hard, but it's in my blood.

-Are there any women in your family, in history, who have been fishermen?

-Yeah.

-Yes, who?

-In the family itself, not mine.

-Not in his family, but in another family, yes.

-In another family there were fisherwomen, from before I was born, I never met them, but there were fisherwomen.

-Do you remember a story, a legend, or a tale you heard from your father that is connected to the life of a fisherman?

There are fishermen who have seen things in the water, whose true meaning is still unknown, people who have seen pirates. I've never seen one, but they have.

-But your grandfather?

-My grandfather, yes.

-Did he tell you things?

-Yes, he told me things about that.

-Is there something you remember that you can tell me, a legend or something that you said more often than others?

-One of the legends was that they had seen the pirate Cofresí.

-To the pirate who?

-Cofresí. And that was the legend that existed in that area. They had seen the pirate Cofresí coming in through the beach, and that was the most famous one, they said.

-And why was it, was it something interesting just because he was a pirate or because he did something else?

-No, because he was a pirate. He was quite famous back then.

-Were they afraid of the pirate?

-No. They said so, that they saw him come in and all that. It might not be true, but if it were true, I never saw them.

-And do you have a family, like a wife, children?

-Yeah.

-What, a boy or a girl?

-A girl.

-Are you going to support her if she wants to be a fisherman?

-Yeah.

-Does he go with you sometimes?

-She's very small, she's still one year old.

-She's tiny.

[00:21:01]

-But when she's old enough and wants to go, I'll take her.

-What is your goal for the next 5 years with your business?

-To be able to prosper more, to sell more fish.

-How do you think you're going to achieve that?

-Having a bigger boat, going out fishing more, although we go out almost every day, and hoping that fishing improves, that climate change gradually improves, and we can catch more fish.

-Do you think the job you have is a dangerous job?

-Quite dangerous. Right now, with the wind, it's about 30 miles out, and the waves are strong. If you're inexperienced, it's best not to go out.

-Do you feel you have the experience?

-Quite a bit, but with the sea you can experience the world, with the sea no one dominates it.

-What is the most important thing to stay safe in this job, to stay alive, almost?

-Keep a close eye on the water, never trust the sea. There are times when the sea can be so flat, like a sudden swell, you can roll in without realizing it, and you'll be knocked over right there. You have to keep a close eye on the sea, never turn your back on it, never go to sleep, always keep an eye on the water, never turn off the engines, always leave them on. Because if in an emergency you turn off the engine, the time it takes you to turn it on, the waves will knock you over. And if you find a fisherman in the water, the water is immense.

Have you had moments that have stayed in your mind that have scared you, like difficult moments?

-The boats were damaged, but thank God, we got out of it. They found us, they took us to shore, just as we ourselves found fishermen and took them to shore.

-And how do other fishermen know that when they no longer come, in time or how it happens?

-Time, the schedule. There are fishermen who, for example, I almost always arrive at 5 or 6 in the afternoon. If they see that you haven't arrived by 6 or 7, well, they'll be on the lookout. There are fishermen who arrive at 10 or 11. If they see that you haven't arrived, they'll be on the lookout; something's happening. They already know more or less the area the fisherman is fishing. And it's very important, every time you're going out, tell a family member or someone: 'I'm going to this area.' Something's happening, they know, more or less, that area where you're fishing.

-Do you think that the fisherman from Aguadilla, and you, first of all, who spoke with you, is a fisherman who, no matter what happens, gets ahead?

-Yeah.

[00:24:03]

-Why do you think this?

-Because you have to keep moving forward, otherwise you'll fall. Always keep moving forward, work hard, that's the word: work hard, otherwise you'll retire from fishing and have to find another way.

-If one day you can't fish, let's say for whatever reason, you don't have a boat, for example, or the sea no longer produces, what would you do?

-Find a way to sell fish, if you can, fish are sold, the way is to find money, to survive.

-Would you do anything?

-Yes of course.

Do you think there are opportunities for young workers like you in Aguadilla?

-Yeah.

-Yes, there is, in what?

-There's construction, mechanics, everything you need to know, you can get it, once you have the courage and the desire to work, you'll get it.

-As a fisherman, what did you learn? Do you know how to repair engines or things like that too?

-Yes. Repairing boats, fixing engines, almost always, everything related to the boat is done by oneself.

-Are you doing the repairs yourself?

-Yes. When it's something technological and you don't have the tools, you have to bring it, but you almost always do it yourself.

-One more thing, I wanted to know if the gentleman I spoke to before this interview told me that there was a time when there were more than 50 fishermen in the Fishing Village, now it's around 30, they've gone down a bit during Maria, what happened to those fishermen, where have they gone, you know?

Many have died, many have retired, they're older now, it's not the same. Before, there was more production; before, the children of fishermen wanted to fish, now the children of fishermen have gone to study, to work in other areas. But before, there were about 50 or 60 fishermen.

-Are there many young people like you in the Villa?

-Yes, there are a few.

-And do they come from fishing families or…?

-Many are fishing families, many aren't. But most are fishing families.

-Is there a tradition that you love that is connected to fishing or something like that?

-No.

-No? I heard about some Catholic celebrations happening.

-Yes, there is the Paseo Virgen del Carmen, but that's it, religion is different, it's too much for Catholics, before that was it, all the fishermen were there.

[00:27:08]

-Now it's just someone who belongs to a certain type of church that goes?

-Catholic.

-A Catholic. And if he's not Catholic, isn't it done?

-No of.

-And other celebrations like that that happen here, aren't they necessarily religious?

-That was the one that was used, which was the Paseo Virgen del Carmen.

-And now it doesn't happen as much or are there fewer people?

-Yes, there are people. But most don't do it… they do it out of tradition.

-Yes, yes, not because of religion.

-Exact.

-Understood.

-Before, that promenade was practically 90% rowboats. It belonged to the fishermen. Not anymore. Now you see boats, jet skis, you see everything, out of tradition.

-Besides coastal development, is there anything else putting a lot of pressure on fishermen in this area?

-In that way?

-I don't know, well there's development, are there tourists who eat too much fish or something like that or rules that put too much pressure on them?

-I feel the rules and the closed seasons are fine. The rules and closed seasons that Puerto Rico imposes are fine. You know, you notice the difference, like with silk snapper. They impose a three-month closed season, and you notice the difference: a lot of silk snapper is caught after the closed season.

-Is it a good thing?

-Exactly. There was a time when it was the queen snapper, and they didn't want to license it, but now they're doing well. There was a time when it was closed, and they didn't want to license it.

-Is it difficult to get a fishing license here?

-No.

-What does it mean, a little money, or what do you have to do?

-The first, which is for one year, is $10, after the year is up it's $40, which is for 4 years, and always keep the statistics up to date, at the end of the year have your payroll, merchant registration, after you have everything up to date it's fine, but it's quite easy.

-Well, if you had to give a recommendation to anyone, to make the fisherman's life easier in Aguadilla, what recommendation would you give?

-As?

-Well, let's say, if you have a chance to do whatever it takes to improve things here, what would you do?

[00:30:02]

-Almost everything is in place. The licensing is pretty good, it's easy, pretty straightforward. The timing; they should do it faster. Sometimes you apply for a license and it takes months, two months, three months, for the license to arrive, and you can't fish until you get it.

-Does that happen a lot?

-Yes. If Natural Resources catches you without a license, they'll fine you. As a fisherman.

-And the fine is big?

-100, 200, 300, whatever they want to give you. More if they catch you with fish, that's different too. It depends on the fish, the fines for fish, also during the closed season. For example, silk snapper is $100 per snapper if they catch you fishing during the closed season. Well, practically, it's fine; that protects the fishery a lot.

-What is the thing you like most about the fisherman's life?

-What I like most is the tranquility. It's not the same as the land. When you go there, you get away from all your problems and what you're thinking about, from fishing. That's the best thing you have, the tranquility.

-Well, thank you very much. I don't know if you have anything else you'd like to add to the interview.

-Thank you very much for everything and we are here for whatever it is.

-Thank you so much.

-Thank you.