If you could tell me your name and age please.

Interviewee Interviewee Interviewee, from Vieques. I'm 50 years old.

Fifty years. Thanks, Interviewee. And how many years have you been in the fishing industry?

Since I was a little girl, since I was 11 years old.

Eleven years. And how did it start?

With my dad, he didn't have anyone to help him, he asked me if I could help him, and I said yes.

What did you start doing, what did you start helping your dad with?

With trasmallo, catching balajú, we also caught jarea (White mullet, \*Mugil curema XXXVI\*) in the Kiani lagoon, robalo. (Snook, \*Centromus undecimalis XXI\*)

And was he in the boat?

Yeah.

On a boat, on his dad's boat.

Yeah.

What else did the family fish?

At that time he and I, but before I started, all my brothers were fishing.

How many siblings do you have?

There are nine of us all.

And was your father the first in the family to fish or was your father's father also?

Yes, my grandfather was also a fisherman before.

Also in Vieques?

Yeah.

And how did he fish, similar to his dad or-?

Yes, just like in the old days, when the houses were right on the base itself, on the base grounds. And then my dad learned, and then he came here—how can I put it?—to a neighborhood here, and he continued fishing.

When he says-

My dad used to shop at what they call today, La Curva del Sixto Interviewee. They call it La Curva de Sixto Interviewee because that's where my grandfather lived; it was on the base grounds.

When you say base, what do you mean?

How can I tell you? Where the Navy used to be.

[00:11:05]

Did he fish where the Navy was?

That was before the Navy, exactly.

Before- And how many years did you fish there?

A lot, that was his whole life. I didn't know my grandfather well, I saw him in photos. And then when the Navy expropriated them.

What happened?

They took them out.

And where did they go?

My dad was given a piece of land, which he bought in the Martinon neighborhood.

And you grew up there?

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little about your life during this time, fishing and also going to school, or how it was?

Yes, I fished, but my teacher also told me, "Interviewee, I know what's going on at home. Don't leave school to go fishing." So I went fishing, and sometimes I went to school like that. I took turns.

How many hours a day did he fish, at eleven?

We started at seven in the morning and left at three in the afternoon.

Could you tell me again? Because I didn't hear you well, please.

We started at seven in the morning. Carlos, come here. This came up on the commercials. Let me see, I'll get back to you.

I still hear it.

Now.

Okay. He was telling me a little about his days back then.

Yes, well, I fished some days, and other days I went to school. But my father taught me, and thanks to him, I'm a full-fledged woman, and I've helped my daughters thrive. And I'm grateful that he taught me how to fish.

What are the things your dad taught you, what do you remember most?

How to throw trammel nets and all that. When I was little, my dad had pigs. He raised us raising pigs, plus fishing. He sold pigs.

Also.

Yeah.

I wonder, in the fishery, what were the classes like, the classes that you had to teach them at sea?

[00:14:07]

How to throw the trammel net so that the fish wouldn't get out along the bank, so that the fish would hit the trammel net, he gave us a 12-foot rod, so that we could grab it and whip it around in the water, so that the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) would be scared and hit the trammel net. We had to be able to pull out our guts to be able to hit the rod.

And do you have any memories left over from those days with your dad?

Yes of course.

Or something special, or something that scared him, something like that.

I went through some, one day he was cutting a little hook, a hook, because we couldn't get through, and I accidentally put my hand out to grab the hook, and the stump came loose and cut my hand a little, and he got scared because he saw a lot of blood, and I told him, daddy don't be scared, I'm going to squeeze it, and he'll hold it, the bleeding will stop and we can keep fishing, and he didn't, no, let's just pull it in and go. No daddy; he squeezed for a little while and when he saw that the blood stopped coming out he was happy and we kept fishing. But he got scared.

It was very strong from the beginning.

A little, yes, because a little stream came out and he got scared.

But you were very strong.

Yes. Then, on another occasion, we were in a small lagoon, and a male mullet flew toward the boat. When it flew toward the boat, he stabbed my foot, and he stabbed it exactly where there's a vein; a jet of blood came out like this, and he got scared. I told him, "No, daddy, we're not leaving, no. I'm going to squeeze it, the jet of blood will stop, and we can keep fishing." He squeezed it for a while, and the bleeding stopped, and then he calmed down. But he wanted to leave, but he didn't like seeing things happen to me, and since we had been fishing for hours and hours, well, after that, he calmed down.

And what did they do with the fish after they caught it, what did they do with it?

We would get home and start scaling it, and wash it, and put it in the freezer, and since people liked snook (Centropomus undecimalis XXI), jarea (White mullet, \*Mugil curema XXXVI\*), male mullet, they would come to the house and buy it.

That is, he was selling his house.

Yeah.

And you never sold at a market or anything like that?

No, a man from the island came and bought the fish from him.

And when you say island, do you mean Puerto Rico?

From Puerto Rico.

A gentleman came sometimes, or regularly.

[00:17:09]

Sometimes.

Sometimes, you don't know when. And what else did they buy?

He had come once a month.

Once a month.

Yeah.

And what did you buy, everything, or some special fish?

Of all, snooks, (Snooks, \*Centropomidae\*) jareas, smooth male, that is.

Can you tell where you were fishing at that time?

At Kiani Lagoon.

It is near the shore, the shore.

That's where the base was.

From the base.

Yeah.

How has your fishing changed since your dad, I suppose he's gone now, but you continued fishing all your life, how has fishing changed for you?

Afterwards, what I did was, he left me the boat, he inherited the boat, all the trammel nets, and I continued fishing.

Are you the only daughter in the family who fishes?

No, there are five of us.

The five of them are fishing.

I'm the only one left, I mean, everyone left.

But in their lives they were also sinning.

Yeah.

I understand now. Can you tell me a little bit about your fishing with your dad, or if something's changed?

No, my dad's no longer with us. He died, so I still fish. I want to throw a trammel net, catch balajú. I have lines of twine that I can throw out, and I also throw out to catch mutton snapper (Lutjanus analis), whatever I can catch. I wear diving suits.

Also divers?

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little about what a day of fishing is like for you, from morning to afternoon?

We leave at five in the morning, and we can arrive at two in the afternoon with the fishing.

Where do they arrive at two in the afternoon?

We arrived at the breakwater.

There.

Yes, to the port.

From five to twelve, they are just on the road, or they are fishing all the time.

No, we go up from five in the morning, we take an hour to go up, and the boy waits for the sun to come out a little, and then he jumps into the water to dive.

You bring someone with you to help you.

Yeah.

Just one person?

Yeah

[00:20:09]

Just one person. And that's every time you go fishing, you go out with someone?

Yeah.

And that's a young boy?

He is an adult.

And is that the same every time, or does it change?

No, every day. Six days a week.

And he does the diving and you do another type of fish, or what is it like?

Yes, while he is diving, I can throw the line, catch collubia, sama, (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) whatever is at the bottom.

Most fishermen are men. Have you had any experiences in fishing just because you are a woman, or how do you feel in this role?

Very well, because since we're from right here in Vieques, we know each other. They see me and ask if everything's okay, and I tell them yes. Because when they see that I'm a woman, I'm out at sea, they come up to me and check if I'm okay or not.

The community is good, you feel good in the community, very united.

United, exactly.

Are there other women in Vieques who do the same thing as you?

The one who was there died. The one who did the same.

Who did the same thing. Wait a second. He's been in Vieques his whole life, right?

Yeah.

Are there any special things about Vieques or the waters of Vieques, any traditions, or anything that is especially important to the people of Vieques?

When there are occasions like Holy Week, when people gather on the beach and launch their boats to race around, that's good.

Holy Week.

Yeah.

Is there anything happening around there? People are out on the beach in their little boats, enjoying themselves.

Exact.

Are there any special beaches that are used during that time?

All.

All beaches.

[00:23:13]

Yes. They're gathered wherever they are, a group, with their boats and everything, their camping huts, all that.

Are there any places around Vieques where you know you can catch a special type of fish, for example, somewhere there are a lot of conch, (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) is an example, are there places like that or not?

There are many places where conch (\*Strombus gigas\*) can be found.

I'm not just asking about the queen conch. (\*Strombus gigas\*) Places where there's an abundance of some type of fish, which is important.

I can only tell you that, you have to go out to sea.

Further out?

Yes, that's the time when the sama is there, (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) they catch them there, they go to a place, and they are there, and if there are ten fishermen, the ten fishermen come out with a lot of sama. (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) Sometimes depending on the current, they don't catch any, which is good.

There is a place-

Shop assistant. They can take 80.

Is that north of Vieques, or south?

To on.

To the south. You were there for a long time and fishing for a long time. Can you tell me if you've seen any changes in the marine environment, with the fish, the water, the land, since you started fishing until now? If you've seen any changes?

Well, yes, I've seen it, because when I was fishing as a kid, there were no jet skis chasing the banks. Where I catch balajú, the skis pass by a lot, and the balajú leave where they are, fleeing from the jet skis. I used to catch the breakwater right near the shore; now they have a business there with jet skis, bringing tourists, but the balajú haven't been involved there for years. From the road, I saw the balajú and I said, "There they are," because the balajú from afar, when the sun hits them, when they move a little, they shine, and I can't see them anymore.

When did you start to see that they were no longer there, when was the first time?

Since 2018.

Two thousand and eighteen?

They're no longer visible there. Because the jet skis are up and down right there on the shore. So last year, I'll give you this example from my side, last year, I was at the beach for Easter, and the jet skis passed the shore within 50 feet, one of them was swimming on the shore, and the waves were rough, with kids there, because they're seeing babies on the shore swimming, and they don't care. I don't agree with the jet skis passing close to the shore.

[00:26:53]

Does that happen all year round, or are there months in the year that are more common?

All year round, because what they have is a business, that's a business.

Is it a local business or who?

Yes, from some Americans. It's local.

And what else have you noticed in terms of changes in the marine environment, have you noticed anything else?

Yes, now the sea is eating away at the shore and the land more.

Is there soil erosion?

Exactly, erosion.

Same question. Do you remember the first time you noticed this?

That started from, I don't know if it started from there, but from Hurricane Hugo onwards.

Since Hurricane Hugo. Let's talk a little about hurricanes. These are the most important ones from what I understand. Hurricanes Hugo and Maria were very difficult for the Vieques community.

Intense.

Can you tell me a little about what you remember, especially about Hugo, who was a little further away, what happened during and afterward with the community; when he returned to fishing after the hurricane?

It took months to start fishing. It took months.

Because?

Because we had run out of electricity.

During Hugo or both, Hugo and Maria, both?

Yes, for both of us, because we lost power, and it wasn't easy to get out.

Is there a difference between Hugo and Maria, in the sense that—the power of people to do things, to go fishing and continue with their normal lives, was it the same? Sorry for the sound.

Yes, it was the same for both hurricanes. It was the same. Thanks to the help they gave us, to find food and all that, they also brought water to our homes, and food. Or else, when they didn't come, we had to go to the mayor's office and they would distribute it to us there.

What happened to your boat, was your vessel okay afterwards?

[00:29:54]

It turned out well because I had it here in my house.

How did he know to bring him here, or how did he protect her?

I always don't leave her in the water, we have the trailer to take her there and back.

I understand. I know a little more about Hurricane Maria, which lasted for months, like more than six months, until the power came back on in your community. Can you tell me a little about what you did during that time, those six or seven months?

Nothing, just stuck here in the house, because we couldn't go fishing.

Why couldn't you go fishing?

Because there was no electricity, and it wasn't worth going fishing to ruin the catch. You could go fishing, but if you could, you could give it away.

I understand, light was important.

Yeah.

Because the fish needs to be frozen. But for people's immediate consumption, didn't he do that either?

Look, I didn't go out. Since no one had electricity, it wasn't possible, only those who had electricity, and that meant spending money on gasoline. We couldn't work; we had to spend the little we had saved, stashed away for any emergency, on gasoline.

Maybe he was with the other fishermen from Vieques that you know of, they didn't go out searching?

Yeah.

You lived there during the Navy's time there. Can you tell me a little about how you worked, because I know there was a lot more land to fish during that time. How were you able to work as a fisherwoman during that time?

For me, to be honest, I would have preferred the Navy to stay. Why? Because with the Navy, you could catch oxen; they let you fish wherever you wanted. Now with Wildlife, you can't; they're very restricted. They don't allow you to catch oxen up there. Certainly, when I have a pass, I think for a month, I think it's a dozen a day, and they don't let you pick coconuts because they'll fine you. Sea grapes aren't allowed either, because for them, everything is food for the cobos. The cobo will eat anything.

[00:33:25]

You tell me that there are more restrictions now with the Department than with the Navy.

Yes. Up there with the Navy, they let you fish, even at night. Only Wildlife has had one day for a while now that they let you fish, which is Saturdays, and they give you a permit. If I don't have a permit, I can't enter.

Can you tell me a little about what you have to do to receive a permit?

Go to the Wildlife office, you give them the information, your name, what vehicle you have, the license plate, for when you're going to leave, or they check, make the rounds, see that the permit is on the dash.

And the permit is valid for a whole year, or for how much?

Exactly, for a year.

And what is it that you can't fish, or can fish with that permit?

You can't catch oxen, they definitely don't allow you to catch oxen there.

But the rest, all the rest?

You can fish. Now, when it's closed, you know you can't catch it, even if you're at the base.

And is that something you'd like to catch because it's something people like to eat, or it's easier to catch, or why? I'm trying to understand why that fish is so important to you.

It's irrelevant. You can throw out a line, you don't know what fish will fall on it.

Of course.

If it's closed, and you have a license, you can only catch three; you have to release the rest, even if it's closed.

I see. What if you let him go? Can he survive?

Sometimes they don't live, and what they say is, this is food for the other fish.

I get it now. Have you talked to other fishermen? What do they say about this thing, that it's the same?

I don't talk to them, because everyone has their own ideal.

Of course. And what do you think about—? During the Navy, you didn't have any restrictions on how you fished, or on the territory you used; you didn't have any problems with that.

[00:36:32]

No, there was no problem, because the guards themselves knew what we were going for, we were going fishing, and if they were going to throw bombs, they let us be, because they knew what we were going for, and they left us alone.

There was an understanding of the work you do and they do.

Yeah.

What do you think the future of fishing in Vieques holds?

How was it?

What do you think the future of fishing in Vieques holds?

This will help young people who are just getting ahead, and there are many who like fishing. There are many.

Do you have someone who can teach you, like your dad taught you?

Exact.

Have you taught any young people yourself?

To my daughters.

To your daughters. Do your daughters go fishing anyway?

Yes, they were going fishing with me.

How old are they?

One is 23 and the other is 19.

And that's what you want to do with your life, you want to buy your own boat?

No, but they like to go fishing.

More pleasure, more of everything.

Yeah.

And what do they want to do with their lives then?

There is one who is studying a bachelor's degree in nursing.

Just one? That's what happens when you're at home, and it bothers you. They want to do other kinds of work. They like fishing.

But he likes it.

Have you noticed any climate changes on Vieques, changes in the quality of the sea air or the fish, during your time there?

No.

No. When you talk about barriers to accessing marine resources, the only barrier you see now is Wildlife, the Department of Fish and Wildlife, or are there others that you see, can you see another barrier, or is it the only one?

Yes. Wherever you go, you can sometimes use the ramp, where they have a ramp for launching your boat. They also tried to fix it, but they didn't do it properly; they left it like a bump, so when you go out in the boat, the spur exerts a lot of force, even though it's reinforced.

[00:39:55]

They're responsible for the boats, but they don't manage them very well. Is that what you're saying?

No, it's the way, they don't have it very well.

Of.

And if there are a lot of holes, the ball cage of the trailers also breaks a lot.

That's why.

And.

Do you think that if another hurricane like Maria were to hit, you, as the Vieques community, would be better prepared, or would you yourself be better prepared for that type of event?

Yes, as has happened many times, everyone here is already preparing.

How is it prepared?

They're starting to buy gasoline to keep it in stock. They prepare for everything, for food. We prepare well here.

Can you tell me a little about your house? Because your house was at least damaged by Hurricane Maria, how did it fare during the hurricane?

When Hurricane Maria hit, I tried to put everything in order so it wouldn't blow away, and I put storm shutters on the house, and we stayed here until everything passed. And we left the house when everything was calm, when there was no wind, nothing could blow away, so that's when we went out to see what had happened, what hadn't happened.

But your boat and your house were fine. Did you build your house?

Yeah.

You built it.

Yeah.

Can you tell me a little about that?

I was alive when the hurricane hit, I think it was around '99, I don't remember which one it was, I lived in a little wooden house, and it almost knocked down my entire house, so FEMA sent me a check for $5,000 to repair it, and I said, with $5,000 I'm not going to be able to repair it. I had my little boy, he was four years old, and all I could do was save that money in the bank, and whatever I made from fishing and other work, well, I'd put that away to build the house I have today, thank God, and that's what I did.

[00:42:55]

How long did it take to build it?

With the help of my brothers, I did it in about two years.

Nothing else?

Yeah.

Were you involved in the construction itself?

Yeah.

And did you have any ideas on how to make it stronger?

Yes, my brother worked in the government at the time, and he knew a lot.

I understand. I wanted to ask something, but I forgot where I was.

You remember now.

It wasn't that important, I guess. He told me a little about young people, that young people are interested. Aren't your children into fishing?

That?

Are your children into fishing or not?

No.

And at what age do you think you will retire as well?

When God takes me with him.

Never.

I don't think I'll give up fishing, I don't think so, because I like it, my dad taught me since I was little and I like it.

What do you like most about your job?

That's it. How can I put it? That's therapy. Being at sea is therapy; you get rid of all your problems, everything. I love it.

When he has problems he goes to sea to fish.

Yes. I go to the middle of the shore and throw out the line.

As you were talking, I remembered the question. As you were talking, you told me you built the house with the help of $5,000 and fishing, but also by doing other jobs. Can you tell me a little about how important other jobs are in your life now or in the past that you did?

Yes, since I liked fishing, I got a job at Toñín Medina's fish market, which was in the town, in the town mall.

And what was he doing there?

Scaling fish. And there I would take money when I got paid, go and save it at the cooperative. Since I've never had a vice, thank God, I always liked saving money, because I already had my first child; he was four years old, and my dad always told me that when you have children, you have to have money saved for any emergency that might happen, and that's what I always did.

[00:46:19]

And at the fish market. Can you tell me a little about the role of the fish market? Does it still exist? What's happening now?

Yes. The fishermen arrive and sell to the fishmonger. I'm not here now, but at the time I was, the guys who are here start scaling the fish, cleaning the shells. They wash them, let them drain, wrap them in bags, and put them in the freezer. It's good, I really love it.

And does that fish market still operate the same way now?

Yeah.

Yes. But you now-

It has another owner.

Another owner.

Yeah.

Do you know how many fishermen there are in the fish market now, roughly?

There are a lot. There are more than ten.

Like ten, more.

Yes, there are more than ten.

Do you consider yourself a commercial fisherman?

Yeah.

Yes, commercial. And can you tell me again, so I'm sure I've got it recorded, what kind of catch do you usually bring in?

Conch, (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) lobster, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) when the sea is like a plate in oil, they go and catch snails, we sell them here. When you can't, we sell them at the fishmonger, and so on, because they see us and say, 'What are you going to catch? Snails, lobster, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) you leave me so much, and they come and look for them.'

And at home, what do they eat from what you are fishing?

The little problem here with my daughters is that one likes one thing, the other likes another, and I like everything. And I taught my grandson, who's now five, to eat everything from the time he was about two. I taught him to eat everything.

How many times a week do you eat fish at home?

Fish, not every week, it can happen once a month.

Once a month only?

Yes. Once a month fish, and conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) can be three times a month, and lobster (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) it depends on what each person likes.

And do you have a recipe that, for example, you learned as a child, from your mother or father, that is something that is only made with fish in Vieques?

[00:49:25]

Make salad with conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*), lobster (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*), pickled fish, and fried, stewed, a little bit of everything.

A little bit of everything.

Yeah.

Well, thank you very much for the interview. Do you have a question you'd like to ask me or something you'd like to tell me?

No, thank you for interviewing me. I didn't think you were looking for a female fisherman. If you look at my profile, I think it was in 2022, they made me the best female fisherman in all of Puerto Rico. If you look at my profile, there's a logo.

What do you think makes you the best fisherwoman in Puerto Rico?

Honestly, I love it, I love it, I like being in the sea, going fishing, feeling everything in my hands, it's really nice, for me it is.

But you think it's because you're fishing a lot more than other fishermen, or what is it, what do you have to do to be the best fisherwoman in Puerto Rico?

Keep fighting, for me, keep fighting.

I understand. Well, thank you very much for the interview, and again, yes, now I'm going to ask you if you'll give us permission to publish this interview, make it public, put it on the website, what you mentioned, which is called Voices.

If you found it okay, then go ahead.

I'm going to ask. I might have to send you a paper for you to sign. I don't know how I'm going to do that, but it's important. But I want to have the verbal consent, but I'm going to ask my colleague to help me, to show you the paper, and for you to read it, so you can make sure I know you're really giving us that consent. If you give me a second, please. Gary, are you still here?

Yes, I am.

I was trying to share with Interviewee, the informed consent, but I can't, it says I'm not allowed to share my screen.

Because you are not the main person on here. Is there a way we can email it to her?

Yes, it's just that I would like her to read it here and give us the verbal consent now, because I don't know, emailing that's going to be.

[00:52:27]

I'll tell you what. You want-?

I can email it to you.

Email it to me. Let me go into my email right now and try to get it for us.

Please interview me if you have a little more patience.

Yeah.

OK thanks.

One second, just opening my mail. alright, you tell me when you sent it now.

Yes. Just sent it to you, it doesn't have any subject.

Just waiting for it to hit, and I'll be happy to show my screen.

Just a moment, until we put it on the screen so you can read it in peace.

I also like to catch oxen.

Can you tell me a little about that?

Yeah.

Many people take oxen in Vieques and also Culebra I think.

Now there are a lot of people, but when I was collecting for 2010, in two months I would collect 200 dozen oxen, in 2010.

And how did he do it?

With a trap.

Do you do?

I would put 100 dozen in one room, and 100 dozen in another room; in cement rooms, I would wait for the buyer from Puerto Rico to come here, and I would sell them to him.

And you make the traps yourself?

Yes. I did.

¿Do you guys see my screen? I'm sorry to interrupt.

We do. Take your time to read this consent.

Just tell me if you need me to scroll up for you Susana.

Yes. He tells us when he wants us to move it higher.

Can you go up?

You can scroll up Gary.

OK, no problem.

[00:55:33]

OK, there. Can you come up?

¿More?

Yes.

That's about it.

Yeah.

There you go.

But no, I authorize it. Did you hear that, Susana?

Yeah.

I authorize.

OK. Thank you very much then. If there's anything I'm going to need, but I guess this is enough. I'll get back to you. If you please—Gary, can you stop the recording now?

Hold on one second, let me see where I can do that?

So we can take her information.

Yes, let me just stop the share and now I can stop recor