Interviewee is into artisanal fishing, and you're into recreational fishing, right? Tell me a little about when—let's start with Interviewee. When did you start fishing? What year? And how did you start?

I started fishing as a child because my father was also a fisherman. And I was always raised around fishing. My father fished for queen conch (Strombus gigas) and snails. He also fished in creeks.

So, since she was little. How old? She doesn't even know?

No, no. My whole life.

All his life.

Yes, because my dad was a fisherman.

And your dad, where did he learn from?

We are from Vieques.

What does this mean?

Vieques is the other island.

No, I know what it is – but what does it mean to be from Vieques?

No, we're from Vieques. That's where we grew up and learned the concept of fishing as well. He made his own fishing gear to make it easier for him to catch and sell fish.

And what instruments did he build?

He built a snail fishing net. It was made like a kind of grappling hook, and he used it to pull snails out of rocks. He also built it for fishing octopuses, which he would pull out of caves. And he had his floating drone so he could cast his catch and avoid being attacked by sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*).

And was your dad's dad into fishing too?

No.

You are the second generation in fishing.

Yeah.

Do you have more brothers or sisters?

I have sisters and brothers, yes. But I was the one who learned more.

Yes, I get it. And you, how did you get started in recreational fishing?

Well, I learned recreational fishing from an uncle of mine who has since passed away. I started by watching him fish. His tricks, like how to fish. And that's where I started. I liked fishing, but actually, it's been fishing my whole life, too, because my father fished since he was young. And from there, I've evolved little by little. I've learned many new things from my father-in-law too, who passed away. Well, I learned many things. It was there, as they say, that they honed my knowledge of recreational fishing. And to this day, I still fish. Not like before because now I have a mechanic's shop, but I take my little breaks from time to time, and I fish.

[00:03:19]

And what kind of boat do you have?

I have two boats. I have a pleasure boat and a fishing boat. I have two boats.

And tell me a little bit about whether it takes – How much time, more or less, does it take to go to sea and do recreational fishing?

Well, that's when I have a break. For example, weekends, when the sea is good. It depends on the conditions, the currents. Because sometimes the currents get in here, and you really can't fish. And since I don't fish with a tank, I fish with lungfish. Well, it's a little more complicated on the shores, because of the waves and all that.

Can you tell me a little bit about why it's more complicated, and what it does?

Because of the currents. Because with a tank, you're heavy. And you're on the bottom the whole time, and you have [INAUDIBLE] to hang on with your lungs, like I do. You have to be up and down, with the currents, with the waves. For me, it's a little more complicated than with the same scuba tanks.

And can you tell me a little about how you fish on a typical day? What do you do?

I, at least if I'm going shore fishing, use fishing rods. And I use squid as bait. I understand that's what the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) like most from the shore. It's the most attractive, and there's a little bit of everything.

Can you give me an example of what it is that you are into?

I've caught sama. (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) I've caught sharks. (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) I've caught, on a fish boat, porgy, groupers, (Sea basses, \*Serranidae\*) red snapper, and a little bit of everything.

And all the recreational and artisanal fishing that you do is done here, on the shore, more or less?

Yes, around Culebra. And also within the bay.

Inside the bay?

Yes. There is good marine life.

Can you show me where that is here on the chart?

It's the same page.

In here. This thing inside the bay.

Back in my day, when I fished with my dad, I find that there was more fishing in the bay than there is now. Because before, there was more life, more—I mean, there was more movement of fish than there is now. Because before, we used to go with my dad, and that was fishing. Now, you have to find the specific spot to find good fishing in the bay. There are good seasons and bad seasons. But before, back in my time, when I was a kid. I was about ten years old. My dad used to take me out in a rowboat. We'd go to any little corner, and we always caught fish. But now, it seems everything has changed. A lot of sailboats, you know? It's not the same life as before. That's what I've noticed right now in the bay. It has beautiful seabeds, yes, but fishing there in the bay is different from how it used to be.

[00:06:45]

Is this your impression too?

I couldn't compare because I grew up in Vieques and then came to live in Culebra. I've been here for 20 years, and everything has been pretty much the same for me. The color of the corals is the only thing I've noticed a change in; they used to be very colorful, but now they're yellow.

When did you first notice this change?

I'd say it was about ten years ago, more or less, that the change began. All the corals were beautiful, but it's not the same anymore. The seabed doesn't look the same.

He told me, "There used to be much more abundance. Now, not so much." What? What period is he referring to when he says "before"?

Well, before, like in '95, around there. There was a lot more life. And everything has also changed because of the climate. Global warming. There are fewer corals. Before, you could see the bottom, you know? It's still crystal clear.

The water on the shore is boiling.

And that changes because if you go to the beach, the water is very hot or the coral kills you because it's hot water.

Very hot. It's very hot.

But around '95, I fished with my dad. And that was catching fish, catching fish, catching fish. Now you go there, you're there for an hour, two hours, and you don't catch anything. Sometimes you have to move to be able to fish. I mean, that's if you're going to fish inside the bay. Outside, there are many more places to fish, which is much easier. But the bay used to be overfished, and that's good.

And in general, do you like fishing in the bay or do you go all over the place?

I go everywhere. It depends on how much time I have, how many hours I have to fish. There, I choose my spot to fish. I can fish in the bay one night, just as I can go to other fishing spots.

Or we fish from the docks in the bay.

Or the same docks in the bay, we can fish.

Yes. You don't have to go to the middle of the bay. From the shore, you fish. Whatever the case, something always falls.

[00:09:04]

There's always something that falls.

But the change you noticed, did you notice it more in the bay or did you notice it in general? Or is the bay an example?

That's a great example. The bay is a prime example, because fishing is actually everywhere because they're deeper inland. The bay is a little shallower, so perhaps other types of fish don't find it. But there has been a change, indeed.

And is there a fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) or a species that you think has changed much more than others?

No, no. I don't think so. No, because all kinds of fish can enter the bay. I mean, not all kinds of fish, because there are some fish that don't fit because of their size and all that.

What fish normally come in there?

Well, there goes the – I caught sawfish. I caught grouper, (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) snapper –

There are sharks. (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*)

Sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) have made their way in. Not as big, but –

There are small ones.

There are small ones.

What kind of shark?

We here call it the reef shark. That's the reef shark. Yes, it's the reef shark. There's also the gata, which is another type of shark. But we can't compare it to a reef shark, which is different. Yes, but I've seen them. One day I was fishing off a pier and one stuck to me. It wasn't that big, but it wasn't that small either. But I couldn't land it.

There is everything.

There's a little bit of everything.

The menu is good.

Except for tuna. For example, tuna isn't included.

We have to go outside. Exactly.

The fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) sails. It doesn't enter the bay. Neither does the cartridge, because the cartridge is already for the bay. It's for the depths. Now for you, you take a cartridge, well, that's it.

It just comes out.

Far out. At 1,000, 1,200 feet. They told me they're catching them at 800 feet. They're fish that don't enter the bay. They're fish from deeper waters.

And you don't normally go deep?

No. No. Unless I'm going to, for example, troll.

Or they invite you, Some friend invites you.

And then, I go with them. And there you can find a little bit of everything. A little bit of everything. I even bought a small tunic once. A little bit of everything.

Are there many people who go fishing far away?

There are several people. Not like in the old days, when the Fishermen's Association was there before. There were many more fishermen. There were a lot. The number of fishermen was higher. Even up to ten came to sell their fish here in Culebra. When the Fishermen's Association closed, practically many fishermen left because they couldn't sell their catch. And it became very difficult for them.

[00:12:12]

And did they stop being fishermen, or what happened to them?

They're doing it right now—there are two or three fishermen, they're doing it, as one says, for pleasure. "I want two or three little fish," I go, throw my little pot, or I go and throw a little line, and that's it. But they're not fishing like they used to catch a lot of fish.

And before they sold it here in Culebra?

At the Fishermen's Association.

And it was sold for local use, nothing more?

For everyone. Whether you're a local or a tourist.

Where the fishing village was, the boats would come in right there and buy the catch. And take it away.

I worked with the Fishermen's Association for about four years.

Have you been here for four years?

He took.

No. I took.

When I was young.

In the past?

In the past.

But now there is an association?

Yeah.

But it's not fully working yet.

They are still there working on some permits.

They are working on it.

By then–

Starting over.

Starting all over again.

And you had four years. And you left for the same reason: you couldn't sell.

No. During those four years I was working, I left because I was still studying. And then they shut down the business there. The Fishermen's Association was shut down there for a while. And I went to that job with my brother, who also worked there. And he kept me working for about ten years.

And did you have time in the association?

No.

No never?

No, I lived in Vieques.

Oh, again. When did you move here?

I started living in 2005.

Well, there's plenty of time now.

Yeah.

But you never got involved with that?

No. Not during my time. They weren't open for very long.

And what do you do with the fish you eat?

It's for ourselves or the family.

Just to eat?

Yes. I don't sell it.

Not selling?

No no.

¿No?

I use it for family only.

And when you say, "family," do you mean extended family?

Exactly. My neighbors, my friends–

Oh, neighbors too?

Yes, my relatives. Of course.

Can you tell me a little about that? How do you share the fish when you catch it? And what do you do with it?

I don't know. We like to clean the fish a lot, and we give them everything ready to be cleaned and thrown into the pan, as they say.

Are there any special recipes you make with fish or anything that comes from Vieques or not?

No.

How do you eat it?

[00:15:01]

The fish, well, lately he's been filleting it, which I think is the best way we've enjoyed the flavor of fish. That's how we're doing it right now.

Yes. Who cooks?

Me. And so does he.

Also?

Who cooks what? For example, at my house, my husband makes the beans.

Ah, well, at home, he makes breakfast. I make lunch. And at dinner, well, he makes it more than I do.

We split up.

We split up, yes.

Yeah.

Are there many women who do what you do here?

I don't know what to say. I don't usually talk to many people here. I'm mostly working. I'm at home. Crafting requires a lot of hours. I hardly have time to go out. And when I have my days off, it's on the weekends. I go with him on the boat, and I enjoy myself and relax too.

How would you define craftsmanship in Culebra for yourself? What does it mean when you say, "I dedicate myself to art and craftsmanship"?

Craftsmanship. I have to create the product myself. Yes. And, for example, the fishing stuff I do, which I do a lot, for example, for lobster fishing. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) I make hooks for octopus fishing. (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) I make the hooks, the verguillado [ph] as well. I make weights, which also requires a lot of time. And apart from that, I do other handicraft stuff, and I use sand and snails from here in Culebra since I visit the beaches. And I also use them in my business.

And how did you learn to do all that?

I don't know what to tell you. My dad had a lot of skills, and I learned a lot from him. He made cabinets. He did a lot of things. He welded. He was more of a fisherman, more of a maker. He did everything. So I grew up with a creative mindset.

Do you know of anyone else who uses similar tools or things in artisanal fishing? Or are they unique?

So far, no one is doing anything for artisanal fishing. No one is doing anything. They just sell the product, and the person has to set everything up.

Can you explain a word about the fishing technique you create? "Enverguillar." [ph] You mentioned that word. Could you explain what it means? Is it?

The wire is a metal. They come in different sizes—for different weights, for different resistances. And I braid them onto the hook. I braid them and leave them ready for the person to put them on their fishing line. I do that type of braiding. Pretty sure. I'll show you right now. I brought some things for you to see, yes. I brought some things.

[00:18:34]

Even with the same fish we catch. For example, if we catch a big shark, we do the same screens it already has.

Exact.

They're made from genuine shark teeth. Just like the chain. So we try to use everything that's natural.

They are very pretty.

To make crafts. For example, like dried coral, we go to the shore and collect little shells. And from there we make them.

Landscapes and everything.

We make some landscapes.

I have my sister who does it too.

And there it is made and snails are mounted.

And you use that just for yourself? To keep it in the house?

I have a souvenir shop like this. I'm in the same plaza, and I have a variety of products in my shop. I do a bit of everything. Not just fishing, because tourists don't all come here to fish.

You sell those things in your market. And do you also sell the stuff you use for fishing?

Ah, the hooks. Yes.

Yeah.

He sells everything.

I have everything there.

And who are your usual clients?

I have local customers. And I also have tourists in the same plaza. I want to show you a photo of what the business looks like from the outside. Just to give you an idea. See how it's like a cart? And I put everything there. Here's the fishing stuff. In this area here. Here. And I have a wall with all the fishing stuff. And on the outside, I have the other part like the ties. Let me show you here. These are the ties. That's where I zoomed in.

To catch lobster. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*)

For lobster fishing. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) And here I have one hooked. I don't know if you can see the hook pointer.

There are few people I know who do –

The ties?

The loops and the gaffs. The hooks.

I have next to me –

I know several people from the shore. Yes.

Well, at least the hook thing was a little difficult for us because we couldn't find a stainless steel rod. We found a yellow one, but then you throw that rod in the water, you take it out, and it corroded. And that's why we decided to discard it. Until finally, after almost a year, we managed to get a stainless steel rod. It's a little harder. It's much better. It takes a little more work, but—

[00:21:29]

It feeds us a little more.

We managed to make and get a good rod to be able to make it – yes, because I'm not going to sell you something that will last –

May it not last at all.

Two or three days.

So that?

Practice makes perfect, they say.

That's right. That's right. Just like the bows we started making, and we didn't like it. And we looked for another strategy to improve.

To pass it on –

To improve the quality of the snare. If you're fishing for a spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), you won't have to go to the trouble or struggle to land it.

And not having to use two hands. Just one hand.

You mentioned earlier that part of the motivation—well, your motivation for becoming a fishing gear artisan was your father, who was a sailor. But to do it specifically with fishing gear, like from cabinetmaking to jumping into fishing gear. From artisanal to fishing gear is quite a leap—

He did a lot of things. He worked in factories in New York and learned cabinetmaking. He worked with a fan and welded. He did a lot of things back in the United States. And when he returned to Vieques, he brought all the knowledge with him. But my dad only made it to seventh grade. He had a lot of ideas.

When did you leave and why did you go to New York?

He was young at the time, and he had his family there. I didn't exist yet. We're talking about the 60s or 70s, around that time. My dad was older. He was in his 60s when he died.

In his youth, he spent a few years in New York.

Exact.

And then he came back. Do you know why he came back?

Personal problems, I think so.

Personal problems.

He had to return to Puerto Rico.

Did you return to Vieques?

Yeah.

He returned to Vieques. And did he get married afterward?

Yes, with my mom.

I understand. Do you think someone will learn the craft from you? Or is there someone? No, you told me you're the only one. You already told me.

I'm teaching my nephews too.

Your nephew?

Yeah.

Because?

[00:24:00]

They are learning the practice of fishing as well as the art of it.

He told me he shares the fish with his family. And that includes –

My sister, my mom.

And neighbors?

His parents, neighbors, friends.

And then, family is the people who live around you.

That's right.

That's what he calls the family.

Culebra is small. Almost everyone knows each other. And it's inevitable to be friends with everyone there.

Tell me a little about the Culebra community. How do you see it?

Culebra is a very quiet town. Very quiet. I don't know. I don't know what to tell you, honestly, about that. I really like Culebra because Culebra is beautiful. But I don't really put much emphasis on socializing. I don't know. I don't know how to explain it. I spend more time with my family, working, and doing my hobbies. But yes, I have a very good relationship with my neighbors for the same reason, because I'm hardly ever around. It's better not to know. I prefer to live like this. I'm very distant from everything. I don't know. I find out about things late. I don't know. I'm not focused on anything. I'm focused—I'm focused on my business.

Just work, work.

Yeah.

A lot of work?

Yeah.

Tell me a little bit. Were you here for Hurricane Maria and another one?

Irma.

Irma? And in the past, nothing else?

I was there since Hugo.

Was Hugo there too?

I was very little, but I don't know much about it. But yes, for Marilyn and Irma, Maria, it was six or seven years ago.

Did George take it from you?

¿George?

Did it all affect you?

But very little.

In Vieques, when I was in Vieques, yes, he was there.

What happens is that George, over here, was –

It didn't rain much. It was dry.

Yeah. That was like –

More breeze. A strong breeze –

Like Maria, Maria brought a lot of water. For me, George was like that. It was a lot of water, a lot of flooding. Yes, it was a strong hurricane. But not like Irma, like Maria, like Hugo.

Can you tell us a little about your experiences with those more recent hurricanes that you remember well?

Well, I remember Irma, who was recently. A couple of years ago. We were staying at my brother's house. And it happened during the day, and at 4:00 in the afternoon, I got in my bus, desperate to go to my house to check. Thank the Lord, nothing much happened to her.

[00:27:15]

We have wooden houses.

We have wooden houses. Thankfully, nothing much happened, but we went out into the streets to clean, visit friends, and check on the houses that—

Open the way.

Clear the way. At least for Irma. Yes, that's what it was for Irma. But for Maria, well, it wasn't as direct for Culebra. It affected Vieques more than Irma. Irma, at least here, did have quite a bit of impact. And then, to make things dizzy, it only took a couple of days. Well, the little bit that was stopped, that was already damaged, it took it all away. Yes.

And how did you recover afterward? Or what did you do afterward to get back to where you are now?

I worked voluntarily on the streets together with my wife to –

Culebra should be lifted.

We hit the street in a cart. I had a golf cart at the time.

We set up the saw and go to –

We're going to help the community get back on its feet, because many homes were affected.

Many trees –

And we helped each other from both sides, and we got up.

What are the things they did?

What I did was mostly chop down trees. What I told them was, "I can help you. I chop down all the trees." And a truck came and took them away. Do you know why? They were big trees, and chopping them with a tree branch was very complicated. And we helped them. We also helped the mayor a lot at the time with the supplies that arrived on the island. We were there all day, helping, distributing groceries. Helping everyone.

Is that something normal for this community? Doing those things?

Look, here in Cullera –

It has already become a habit.

Here in Culebra, there is a lot of help.

Does it help a lot?

We help each other a lot. We help each other in every way. That's the good thing about Culebra Island: even though it's small, we all help each other. We all help each other.

What are some examples you can give me about something else or other instances of help that exist?

Well, as I explained to you –

Small or big. It doesn't matter.

As I explained to you, we did – chop down the trees. Remove. How do I explain it to you? [INAUDIBLE] Excuse me.

[00:30:18]

I don't know what to call this one.

Let's continue. Let's continue.

In that part, we helped her in the village. We removed what little of her belongings remained from the house. Everything. We did everything.

And does the whole town do the same thing or what?

Yes. Many people helped us. They supported us. From the island itself, we had friends who sent me things so I could keep working. Because communication was already very difficult. There were specific points we could make calls to at that time. And from there, I mean, I helped and I helped. That's my motto. "If you help me, I'll help you." And I stuck with that. And I helped everyone. Everything I could do, I did with them. I received help. I also gave help. Everyone was in the same boat. We had to help each other because I'm not going to leave you overwhelmed. No, that's not my way of thinking.

How long did it take until you were able to return to your normal recreational fishing activities and what you were doing?

Wow. I was there for almost a year. Almost a year, because during that time my boat broke down. Then the pandemic hit. During the pandemic, you couldn't go fishing unless you had a commercial license. I came there, applied for my commercial license, and went fishing. We managed to go fishing again when they were able to reopen because commercial fishing wasn't for everyone. So, that's when I got more involved in fishing. We went out. I had a lot of trouble with the police, with the Fura guys because they'd already stopped me three or four times, and it kept going. They'd break my lines. Yeah.

I don't understand that. What's the relationship with the police? I don't understand.

Because at that time, given the pandemic, only those with a commercial license could go fishing.

And did you work?

I had my commercial license. And the guards would stop you for that because they had to check if you had your license, everything about your boat. Because if you didn't have a license, you know they could be deadly, and they would escort you. Because I couldn't be on the water. Because unless you had a license.

[00:33:01]

And is that open to people who were fishing from the shore too, or is that not – that too?

That's true. I want to add something here. For the pandemic, for COVID-19, just like in the United States, there was an executive order from the governor of Puerto Rico.

Yeah.

That he was not allowed to be outside his house.

From his house.

It wasn't allowed. Only for emergency or basic services. Since commercial fishermen are at the top of the food chain, just like farmers, they—they only allowed commercial fishermen to go fishing. Recreational fishing wasn't allowed.

No.

Go fishing. Only commercial fishermen were allowed to sell their products. Since they were at the top of the food chain, they were allowed to fish. And since the gentleman had a commercial fishing license, he's still there.

By that time, when I had my commercial license, I had the privilege of at least going fishing. From there, he added commercial fishing to sell his products. Didn't that happen here in Culebra? Here in Culebra, they gave away the fish.

Tell me a little more about that.

Here, they gave away fish because there were many people who couldn't go fishing, but there were many people who liked fishing. Since they couldn't, you needed a license. If you didn't have a license, you couldn't do anything. Well, what many people did was clean their catch. They came to their dock and cleaned the catch. And in little bags, I think, four fish, they vacuum-packed them. They went house to house distributing their catch. Giving away their catch because, if they wanted, they could sell it. But they didn't see that as, "No, we're in a pandemic. Let's help each other." And they helped a lot of elderly people. They helped a lot of people.

But when you go fishing in the boat, you use gas. Gasoline, right?

Gasoline is used.

So how?

But at that time, people didn't think about that. People thought about putting a plate of food on the table for someone who couldn't go fishing.

Is that something you've noticed with most of the fishermen, who were able to get out?

Yes. That's right.

Do you think that happens anywhere else outside of Culebra?

On the island, they did it. On Vieques, they did it too. There are many more fishermen on Vieques than here on Culebra. Right now. And they did it too.

[00:36:06]

Do you know how many fishermen there are here? More or less.

In Culebra, right now I have no idea. But before there were about 50, 60, 70 fishermen. I can't tell you how many fishermen there are in Culebra right now. But there must be two or three. There are still two or three fishermen left.

And there are young fishermen.

And there are many young fishermen.

Are there two or three?

No, no. That's a way of—two or three fishermen, yes.

More or less.

There are about 20 fishermen, more or less. But there are many young people now dedicating themselves to fishing. This is thanks to Nicolás's project at the Fishermen's Association.

They are motivated.

It's motivating today's youth to take up fishing.

And since when did that start?

It's been like two years, right? More or less. Nicolás's case, like two years, more or less.

I understand he's been preparing for this for many years. Because he's really doing a good job.

Nicholas. Who is Nicholas?

The one from the Fishermen's Association, who's working on it right now. The one the Fishermen's Association is trying to open.

Yes, with another group that is also working with him.

We were talking this morning with Tomás. Yes, Tomás.

He works with Tomas too.

Tremendous too. A very good person.

Tomás. Tomasito. He shared the catch they caught with other fishermen. They would scale their fish in vacuum-sealed bags and share it. He helped many Culebrenses here, too, during the pandemic.

And it's still helping.

Go on.

What does he do now?

He is a fisherman.

No, no. To help in that regard. What else?

What we're saying is, he doesn't know how to say no. If someone asks him for a favor, he likes to help his community.

He looks for a way to solve it.

Yeah.

For him, there's never a "No." It's always "Yes." Like me, there are times when I can sometimes say no to you. But most of the time, I say "Yes."

You're opening up a small island there. We're not going to be living here to limit ourselves. It's here to help us all grow. Because we have enough limits with the lifestyle we lead. So it's best to make things easier.

What limits do you have?

Well, we have limits, just like in doctors (Doctorfish, \*Acanthuridae\*) specialists. I'd say even in food variety. Sometimes we have to travel to get extra things for food. For everything.

[00:39:00]

Like what?

Of limitations. We have to travel to –

For doctors. (Doctorfishes, \*Acanthuridae\*)

If we need a household item, we need to go out too.

I'm fine, I'm fine, I'm fine.

The doctor. I understand there's a hospital here now.

Yeah.

Yes, there is a hospital.

But, for example, my mom, who just had surgery, is three weeks away. I have to get to San Juan to see her specialist.

Yeah.

And that's weekly.

Weekly?

Yes, weekly.

That is expense, time.

Yes. A full day. I can't work. I have to travel. It's expensive on the trip. It's uncomfortable. She's freshly operated. I have to transport her freshly operated. The facilities are very limited now. We also chose to live this way, but –

We like to live like this.

We like it. We like it.

I love living on this little key.

It's not something to give up on.

Me, 40 years here. My age, living in Culebra. If I move to the States, it's going to be very different and uphill, because already –

I don't see myself leaving here.

Exactly. It's a different culture over there. It's different in terms of fishing, though.

A more favorable life. Here we live more –

[CROSSTALK] Getting to a fishing spot. It's not like here, where you just get to any little shore, pull up the boat, and keep going. We go fishing. I think I'll stay here because going there—for example, if you go to the island, it's practically the same as in Culebra. Anyone has a lamb, and you fish. But in the United States, I find it a little more difficult. Because you have to travel so many miles, so many hours to get to a fishing spot, and then turn around. It's difficult.

Here, how long does it take you to get to work?

It's in the house.

Seconds. Now I open the door and I'm at work. Seconds.

I understand, I understand. What else did you want to ask?

And where you live, was it where you were born and raised?

Yeah.

Did your mother live there? I mean, does your mother live there?

Exact.

My mother is still alive.

On the lot next door. The one where we have the workshop.

The thing is, compared to the old days, the land isn't like it is now.

They were large plots.

They were large plots.

It's where the school is. Plots there are –

Those are my mom's plots of land, and there are four houses. There are two houses here, two houses here. They're two stories high. But my mom lives downstairs, and I live upstairs. So, the one next door is my land, and my workshop is there. And now, little by little, with God's help, we're starting to build a little house.

Having our own house.

What else did you like to do? And I'm asking you too, but you're from Vieques, another island, right? I'm from the Big Island. And I know about the ban, too. What else did you like to do when you were kids? Or did you enjoy the ocean a lot? That's the question. Did you enjoy the ocean a lot since you were kids?

[00:42:14]

I, at least, enjoyed them with my dad, because my dad always likes to fish. He'd leave school and say, "Let's go fishing, let's go fishing." He'd go to work, for example, because I've always worked since I was a kid. Since I was 12, I started working and left work and said, "Let's go fishing."

Did you have any traditions with your father or your family regarding fishing?

No. For me, it was a normal thing that they would say, "Let's go fishing," and we would go, right?

And I say that because sometimes when you're little—well, it happened to me with my dad. There were things we did almost all the time, and I liked them. He knew I liked them. Things like that. I imagine.

He loved fishing and –

I was going fishing.

Exact.

That was our thing. Since my dad is getting older, he's more limited in his ability to go fishing.

So, he goes with the grandchildren. With my kids, they go fishing, and he entertains them. Because my dad knows a lot about fishing. Yes, he knows how to cast a net. I don't know how to cast a net.

But he taught you.

He taught me, but I've already forgotten. That's a different story. I mean, throwing the cast net to catch the sardines is difficult for me. And the easiest thing for him [INAUDIBLE]. "That's it. Let's go."

Another art.

The experience.

That's another art too. Because you have to know that art.

That's one of the questions I had for you. Have you taken up, or even learned, how to make cast nets? Or do I know they won't be used here because it's not cold?

No, I haven't. But my dad taught me, I've forgotten, how to make hammocks. And it's almost like that. What changes is the size of the seam. But yes, I used to make hammocks with him.

But here was a time –

And he fixed his own cast nets.

Here there was a time when the hammock was also used.

He even used it.

But a long time.

He took it to use, but never in the bay.

I knew how to use it because they mostly use a seine net when a school of fish comes in. A school of fish is where the sardines, cojinúa, are. How did they do it? I don't know. As they made sure the broth was gone, they would lock it up. That's something I never learned. Because it's done with a small boat, releasing the seine net, and you quickly pick it up and pull it to the shore. And when you come to check, the fish are there.

That's right.

But here in Culebra, you don't see that.

[00:45:03]

But it is still done in Vieques.

That tradition was learned.

Yes. There's a man who goes to Kiani Bay, and he goes in an aluminum boat. And he pulls his hauling net there.

Kiani Bay?

Kiani.

Which part is it? The south?

In western Vieques.

In the West? For –

Punta Arenas.

Punta Arenas.

For the breakwater. Is that the area?

If you follow it, you reach the breakwater.

Where does the power cable go?

Yes, yes. Before. Long before.

Before?

Before there is one –

And there's marine life in Kiani Bay, too. And you can catch sea crabs. (Marine crabs, \*Callinectes spp.\*) My dad used to fish there. He'd pack the cages with chicken legs and catch the sea crabs. (Marine crabs, \*Callinectes spp.\*)

Look, with this I caught the cocolía. (Marine crab, \*Callinectes spp.\*) This is the loop of the –

From the lobster fishery. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*)

De langosta. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*)

May I take a photo of you both with your fishing gear like this? As if showing it off.

That's what I wanted to do to him.

With this ribbon, I was once in that bay when we were on vacation, and I got curious. I saw so many cocolias. I'd never tried cocolias before.

When you go down to Kiani Bay, it's like a bridge. And from the bridge, you can see the marine crabs (Callinectes spp.), which you can catch right there.

To the other side?

To the other side.

Exactly. In Playa Grande.

You can see the antennas of [CROSSTALK]

That's for Playa Grande. Exactly. That's how the radars are. Exactly. You have to take the radars and go through the northern area and turn south. Take that street with the radars, and you'll get to the southern part, to Playa Grande.

Have you ever fished in a seine net?

No, but my dad did.

Did your dad do it?

If you have any experiences or anecdotes you can tell us?

Of that type of fishing, or what he did with us, were shore fishing and crab fishing (marine crab, \*Callinectes spp.\*).

I saw her, but I never –

He didn't learn how to do it.

Never. But I did see how they did it. Because there you have to know, as they say, the wind positions. Because you're rowing. So, you can't use a motor because you're letting out the trammel net from the back. That's rowing. And the other person who's trammeled doesn't get tangled up, because that's a giant ball of net. And you have to untangle it, and the other person has to row. It's not easy.

A really big size?

Yes, that's right.

Mesh?

Yes. At least the last one I fished with in Kiani told me he had about 100 feet. Plus the rope, which was about 300 more.

I also used trammel nets.

[00:48:00]

And he would follow. He would reach the shore, and when he was about to finish his fishing, he would reach the net with the rope and pull it in.

I also worked at Fish and Wildlife. That's Wildlife. I worked there for two years. One year was through the same school, which is part of a federal grant. It was called The YCC. That was a while ago. And I also had the experience of working with a seine to rescue turtles. I really love that.

Is that a trammel net?

It's a trammel net.

move it

With a trammel net. But it's the same thing.

It's the same. Yes, a network.

You have to throw it, and they tell you, "Raise your hand when you see a turtle," and they stick right next to you. But the problem is how they get tangled up down there. You have to know how to pull it out quickly because they die. And it's a really good experience because when you see so many turtles, you have to catch them quickly. You have to know how to catch them because when you catch them, they look and bite you. And that bites hard. Because that's like a stone in the beak. It's like the macaw's. (Rainbow parrotfish, \*Scarus guacamala\*) It's really hard.

What kind of turtle was it? Don't remember?

That's what they tell him –

Whitefish? Hawksbill?

Is tortoiseshell green?

Dog.

That one. But that one doesn't nest here on Culebra. I was told it nests on Vieques. But the leatherback turtle nests here on Culebra. I also went for the leatherback census. Very good for erosion. How to open a nest. Egg counting. How many turtles make it to the water? All of that was a tremendous experience for me. My son was at the YCC this year and learned a lot about birds and nests. He couldn't do the turtle thing because it had already been done. But he says the best, the best, is the turtle.

Is the kid interested?

He likes it a lot.

Did you like it? Did you like it?

Did you like it?

Yeah?

He liked it.

He likes it a lot.

How old is he?

17.

He's already in his fourth year. He'll be leaving this year, God willing. Next year.

Well, I see you have some of the things you build. Could I film you until you explain what you do with each one? What's each one for?

Interviewee, you do it.

I'm going to start now. Show me what you have. What do you have there?

[00:50:54]

[00:50:54]

This is a verguilla. I make the seam of the verguilla, which is this braid that is here on both sides. And we use this so that the fish, (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*), when it has teeth, doesn't break the thread. I also have this grappling hook here that can be used for octopus fishing. (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) It is made of textile, EVC [ph] and wood inside to hold it and give it strength so they can grab on if the current is strong too. And from here I have the fishing ties that are used for lobster fishing. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) It can be used for crabs. It can also be used for cocolías fishing. It is about four feet long, and the rod is stainless steel thread. And here I use aluminum pins for greater durability.

And those are three of the things you sell?

Yes, and I also make lead. But that's a bit heavier to carry.

And he buys that locally, he told me.

And I get the bar, and I melt it myself. And I have a mold, and I prepare different sizes of lead.

Made of lead. And the fishermen here buy it mostly? From here?

Yes, mostly from here.

Mostly from here. And why do you think they're so popular?

I couldn't say. Maybe the local markets don't have the lead variety at that time. And since I already make them, they'll come to me.

And in general, of those things that you didn't show, of the other things that you showed, are they also bought here?

Yes. Local fishermen use it. They really like it. They use the homemade tools.

Why do you think he likes it so much? Or a lot?

For example, with the lasso, they can have one hand free. And they like it because there are other types of lasso models that require a rope to pull it. In other words, you already need two hands, plus you have to figure out how to release the lobster. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) However, with the weight of the lobster (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*), it closes. And the more it moves, the tighter it gets until it manages to pull it into the sack. And the moment you pull it into the sack, it opens by itself. You basically don't have to use your hand.

Do you know if they are used like this in Vieques?

Yes. Many fishermen from there have bought from me.

Many?

Yes. I went once—I think it was last year or the year before last. I went to an event I was invited to, and the local fisherman there was really supportive. Yes.

And do you think there are a lot of people who use it in Puerto Rico or on the main island? You don't know that?

I don't know. But at least in Culebra and Vieques, yes.

In Culebra. Are you visiting Vieques?

[00:54:01]

Yes, and also since my mom lives there, she takes some of my merchandise if they ask for it. And then, she's in charge of distributing the -

His mother –

He lives in Vieques.

Still. I thought here. I understand, I understand. Well, I just wanted to ask if you think you could show me on the chart if there are any very important fishing areas and some fish that need protection. Or what are important for the fishing in Culebra and Vieques that you could show me on the chart?

Of fish that cannot be caught?

No, no, no. Fishing areas.

Important areas. Important areas for fisheries. Commercial recreational areas that you know about. Areas of Vieques or Culebra that are important for fisheries.

That is, areas where fishermen go very frequently because they are good.

I would say the part here.

Show me.

That is being the –

Is that from Culebra?

Both. Both.

I don't know much about Vieques.

It is used –

But at least I don't know about Vieques.

Here, around Culebra.

Culebra. If you don't know about Vieques, tell me about Culebra.

Snake. This is here in Cayo Norte.

Can you drive there? Make a circle.

Cayo Norte. In Culebrita –

On the reef.

In Culebrita, there are two parts. You fish here in front, which is where—well, in Culebrita [CROSSTALK]

There's no fishing in Culebrita. There's everything.

You can't fish Culebrita, because there's a small pier here where you can fish. You can fish in the back. Right now, sharks are getting in a lot right here. And spiny lobsters (Panulirus argus) are getting in a lot in the front, so that's helped me with Culebrita, right? That's the turtle.

He spoke to me a little quickly. Can you tell me what's new there?

Here in Culebrita, we catch a lot of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), queen conch (Strombus gigas), and true tulip snails (Fasciolaria tulipa).

Snail. (True tulip, \*Fasciolaria tulipa\*) All the burgaos.

Yes. Yes.

Well, here they call the little one "el burgao."

Which is a type of conch, (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) but which –

No, it's a snail. (True tulip, \*Fasciolaria tulipa\*) They call it "burgao." The thing is, here we call it "el burgao." It's tiny.

It's like the one that is stuck to the stone.

It is stuck to the stone.

And the large snail (True tulip, \*Fasciolaria tulipa\*) also sticks to the stone. It's the same. That's why we –

We are looking for size.

That's why it's used—I have it at home. It's the same, thicker, but it doesn't have the edge you have here in front. It's flat and blunt.

And more elongated.

So, it's as if you've pulled out an octopus. (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) You put it in from the end and pull it out. Because the burgao (West Indian Top Shell, \*Cittarium pica\*) is easier. You grab it and pull it out.

That tool –

The true tulip snail (Fasciolaria tulipa) is not easy to remove from the stone. Remember, it's a snail. (True tulip, Fasciolaria tulipa) The West Indian Top Shell (Cittarium pica) is small, like this. The true tulip snail (Fasciolaria tulipa) is like this. It's much larger and harder to remove.

It's harder. It sticks to the stone.

In this area, in what is Culebrita, what is the lobster, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) –

And reef fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*).

And reef fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) is very good.

[00:57:15]

What do you call me?

Fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) from the reef.

Ah, reef fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*). But what kind?

Reef fish, I say they're fishing from six feet away. It's on the shore. From the shore.

Octopus is caught. (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*) I've also caught octopus there. (Octopus, \*Octopus spp.\*)

There is good marine life.

Good life.

Have you seen, Culebra or Culebrita, in the area where you snorkel or go fishing, any changes after the hurricane, or what have you seen that climate change has done to the area or the species?

I saw it in Punta Soldado.

Soldier Point?

Soldado Point. You used to go fishing, and you'd see the reef more colorful. Much more colorful than it is now.

Luis Peña.

Luis Peña. The reef is also –

The area that is seen –

But there in Punta Soldado, I think Nicolás is planting reefs, and he is also planting – he brought the [CROSSTALK].

The oyster?

The oyster. He's doing the oyster project.

But look, in that area there hasn't been any oysters. Here in the bay there has been oysters. There are two large yellow buoys that you'll see on the little key over there. Pirate. They've already harvested oysters there. But those at Punta Soldado haven't managed to harvest oysters yet. I don't know if it's because it's out in the open sea. There are a lot of currents. I don't know why there hasn't been any oysters (Clams, \*Crustaceans spp.\*) there. But they have planted corals and they have been given -

Nutrients too.

Could be.

The oyster cleans everything. But you can see it at Punta Soldado. Have you seen the change due to climate change?

Before you used to go fishing, and you caught great fish. Now –

From the shore and everything.

It's not the same as before. When you catch fish, you'll see two or three. But not like before. There used to be a lot more marine life, just like Luis Peña.

I find the cat is too much on the shore too.

Yes. The nurse shark.

The cat shark. Yes. Because before –

It's damaging the fishing. It's damaging there. I don't know. They've been there more than before, close to the shore. The same Culebrita. There are many on the same shore.

It would have already been filled with sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) that are there.

Yes, but that doesn't do anything.

They took my fishing bag. Thanks. I'm already –

What did he have? What fish did he have? Lobster?

They fished, and – first I went under.

That day, we had a snapper and we had a grouper. (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) And listen to me, and suddenly –

I was giving it back.

He took the whole sack. He swallowed it.

I'm not going to fight. When I saw him open his mouth, I said, "All yours."

Are they big?

No, in the water, I don't fight with him.

[01:00:05]

No, it was bigger than her. It was bigger than her.

About seven feet tall. "All yours. I'll give it to you."

But like I said, I'd rather give it to a cat than a shark attacking you.

Yes, but whatever.

And then, there my father-in-law, he made a contraption, like a drone.

It's a drone.

He picked up a garbage drone, one of those plastic ones, and the donuts used for boats.

Orange ones?

That orange one.

A lifeline?

Exactly. I put the drone there with a rope. Then, inside that drone, he gives an example. An example, the boat hooks, the loops –

To put the accessories.

To put accessories on. And it's good because if, for example, you killed a fish. (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) It bleeds a lot. You put it in there. Nothing happened. It's like carrying a sack. I've already noticed that.

Spilling blood over there.

If it comes close. We were fishing in Luis Peña once, and it passed us by. A shark swam right next to us, and I was with the kid.

Oh, how dangerous.

And we had a scare. I was also having trouble with my shotgun.

The only one that worked, I had.

And it's a danger that a shotgun isn't working for you, so at least you can stab him so he'll go away. There was nothing I could do.

"Shotgun" refers to a speargun? A harpoon?

To the harpoon.

Harpoon?

Yes, I had a lot of trouble with the harpoon that day.

Oh yeah?

Yes. And I told my wife, "Look, there's already a shark. Let's go." Because we didn't have a bathroom. We were fishing with a sack. And the kid had the sack. And then I told him, "Give me the sack. Go on to the boat, we're leaving from here." Because it's dangerous to see a shark there.

But he keeps bleeding.

Keeps bleeding. Keeps calling it a shark.

Ah, yes.

And it is a danger.

So, I'm not into fishing. I'm not a biologist. Could you please tell me a little about how you fish? But from what I understand, you go out in a boat one way or another. You go swimming.

We go in different ways.

Can you tell me a little about those ways?

Well, look, if we're going fishing, for example, in Culebrita, I have to go by boat. We prepare everything on the boat. Before we launch, we check everything, make sure everything's organized, and then we launch little by little. We mark some points more or less. We're going to reach a certain point. From that point, we turn.

But at that point to the boat, it took us four or five hours of fishing.

Fishing because we're not going fast. We're going slow. Looking at the bottom. What's there? What's not there? What can we catch? What can't we catch? Because right now—

[01:03:03]

The hours pass very quickly.

The queen conch (\*Strombus gigas\*) cannot be caught. An example.

This season, yes.

This season is closed. After the conch season, the Nassau grouper season (Epinephelus striatus) begins, if I'm not mistaken, until February. After that, people try to find the fish they can catch. Shellfish can be caught, but there are many that cannot be caught.

Why can't you take it?

Because they are prohibited.

Of.

That's like they say, a seasonal ban. The queen conch (Strombus gigas) has already been closed, so you can't catch it until –

31. The 31st.

October 31st.

15.

Until the 15th? You can't pick them up until the 15th. So, if you can see a bottom of shells, you can't pick any.

Do you think those rules are fair or good?

Yes, they're fair. They should. I always say, "They should include the lobster one too." Because if I mention the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus), they'll hit it hard.

What is the spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) population like here now?

Very high.

Really high? Why do you think that? Is that normal?

No. There are many places here that eat a lot of spiny lobster. (Panulirus argus) And from Vieques and La Grande, they come to look for spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) here in Culebra.

No, but what I'm asking is, is there an abundance of spiny lobster? (Panulirus argus)

Yeah.

Yes? And fishermen catch it too.

Same as the queen conch (Strombus gigas).

The Queen conch (\*Strombus gigas\*) too.

There are thousands and thousands of queen conch (Strombus gigas) here. But right now, you can't catch them.

When is the queen conch harvested? (\*Strombus gigas\*)

On October 15, you can start harvesting queen conch (Strombus gigas), which is when the closed season for queen conch (Strombus gigas) ends.

Let me clarify.

It's the 16th.

I said wrong because I was mistaken about the closed season for land crab. The closed season for land crab ends on October 15th. The queen conch (Strombus gigas), as you said, ends on October 31st. October 31st.

It's two months. I mean, three months. August, September, and October.

The same (Mutton snapper, \* Lutjanus analis \*) are two months. April and May.

The samas, yes. And the groupers are three months old.

December 1st to February 1st.

Yes. They're fish that you sometimes throw away. Just like the Nassau grouper (Epinephelus striatus). You're fishing, for example, with a line, and the grouper sticks the most. You have to release them within that time because it's prohibited.

Yes, but that's only for certain types of grouper. (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) Not all of them.

Exact.

Well, to clarify, the grouper, (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) you say "the goatfish."

The goatfish.

The red hind. Because the grouper (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) is also called the one that's prohibited. The Nassau grouper, it's called. It depends on the area. It's in Aguadilla, and they also call the red grouper "la cherna" (the grouper) the red grouper. But there are other types of groupers. (Sea basses, \*Serranidae\*) But there are also groupers (Sea basses, \*Serranidae\*) that enter federal waters.

Are there groupers? (Sea basses, \*Serranidae\*)

Yes, that's right. Like the tiger grouper, the guajil. The guajil is also very cold.

[01:06:10]

But is guajil prohibited here in waters –

In state waters too, yes, around February. Or am I mistaken? I can send you the information.

Well, the guajil didn't know he was there.

I can send you the information so you have it handy.

What else did I want to ask you about the—ah, that. You were telling me about sharks. (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) A little bit about how they're well—you said you see them more. Did I understand correctly?

The nurse shark is doing well – I see a lot of it on the shore.

And that's something new or?

I didn't see it as much before. Especially when I was a child, when we went fishing, we did catch manta rays. But sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*), not as much as now.

Like the nurse shark, there is more abundance now than –

I don't know if they've overindulged in their abundance and now they're on the shore or not. But it's annoying because –

I would say it's like a plague.

You already caught him once, and now you have to leave because he's staying there.

I would say that it is like a plague –

Take one, two, three. Terrible.

They stay there because you pick them up and let them go.

But it stays there.

But it stays there.

Have you seen more recently?

Too much. Truly, in Culebrita that –

When?

I'd say, since the hurricanes. Since the hurricanes.

It was a little bit earlier.

From the pandemic –

No, a little earlier.

Culebra got stuck, they started too fast. Same as the water taxis. They take them to swim with the sharks. (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*)

They are stuck there on the shore.

They're there on the shore. You arrived with the boat, and you'll find them on the shore. And they're tame. They're there on the shore, but at the same time, you have some blood coming out of them—

Food or something.

It sticks to you in a matter of seconds.

Are there any others – excuse me?

And it's annoying because, imagine, with a sack of fish and they take it away from you. No, I'm not going to fight him in the water. He's stronger than me in the water. I'm like, "Look, take him." I'm leaving because I can't do anything. And it's something I find too much there in Culebrita. Too much, too much.

They don't respect the person's space.

You can be there, bathing with your family and the children are there.

When we get off, they're already there, but you can't do anything because they're there all the time. They already think of themselves as pets or as part of keeping people company.

[01:09:11]

In what area of ​​Culebrita is that?

In the part –

On.

On.

The one that's stuck here?

Yeah.

Not for the bay?

No, not for Turtle.

Here in the – at least the area of ​​–

For Tortuga, no. It will be

Would it be for this area?

That's right. There's a little dock right now.

And where I have seen the most of these sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) has also been in Punta Soldado, in Playa Melones.

But I haven't seen a really knocked-out Soldado Point.

But when it comes to fishing, they are there.

On the shore.

At night. At night they come closer.

And is there another species of fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) that you've noticed changes, perhaps in how they fare? I mean, the behavior you've seen: "Oh, well, that's not–"

No no,

¿No?

Just that one.

That's all. The nurse shark is the one I've seen change the most.

But the shark. There wasn't much here in the past. Is there more now?

I couldn't tell you if there weren't any or if they were getting closer to the shore.

More aggressive now?

No. They are not aggressive, but they are annoying when fishing.

For the fisherman.

For the fisherman.

For the fisherman. Yes.

And I imagine it's also impressive to see them. They're close.

Are they big? How big?

Yeah.

Are they too big?

Yeah.

How big?

More than us.

More than us?

The one who pulled me out and took off the sack was bigger than me. Yes, much bigger.

Seven feet or more?

More or less.

Seven feet, yes. He went under me first. And when he caught me off guard, that's when I saw him. My mouth was already open.

And the bag was a plastic bag?

No, it was a fishing bag.

Ah, a fishing bag.

It's made of mesh. Like tights.

They're like tights. That's right.

You open them and lock them. There are some that you open with a hook, and there are some that are—you pull it and put a pin in it.

Was it open or what?

No. Closed.

Closed.

When we put the fish in, he ate it all.

When we put the fish in that –

I had him here, and when I looked, his mouth was already open. Well, I let it go. I saw it in time. He was already stuck to my foot. I was going to fight him. When he opened that mouth, I said, "No, all yours."

That day I was fishing with a buddy. There were three of us. And he went down. There were about 25 feet of water.

To try to get out.

He tried to pull it out and couldn't.

His strength.

The force. [CROSSTALK]

I heard the sack ripping. Is that what you told me?

The sack, yes. So I can get the fish out. [CROSSTALK]

Struggling to break open the sack and eat the catch. But he even ate the sack.

[01:12:06]

It was big.

It was big, bro.

And do you hear stories like that from other fishermen?

I've heard of sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) that have had their coats removed. What's worse, a shark? Much, much worse. But not so much so, like that ...

They are accessories that people also wear, and that draws attention.

The shine.

I prefer to take everything off. I don't wear anything. I don't wear anything.

To hide money.

Nothing. I don't wear anything.

You are in the water and you have something that is silver and that shines.

It attracts him.

It attracts him. And that really bites hard. It really does.

Now in Dakiti, here in Arrecife, huge picúas are getting in. Yes.

Yeah?

Yeah.

And do you fish for picúas? To eat.

It depends on the size.

It depends on the size, I eat it. And it depends if –

The site.

The thing is, we camp on the water. And sometimes the picúa tends to—if the kids are in the water, they start circling. And I say, "No. It's either the kids or it's them." So, we have to eliminate it, because there are also sailors who go to clean their boats, and it's there. It's usually dangerous. I have a video of one we caught that was quite large and lurking.

Did they eat it?

No. The meat stank. Oh no. It got away from us. It got loose. It got loose. Just as we were about to take it out, it shook itself and disappeared.

The picúa too.

But that one was black.

And that depends on the place. It depends on the smell. Because I've pulled picúa, and I've seen people pull picúa, and you see it's really nice. And when you pull it, you smell it, it smells like copper.

What is copper?

Copper.

Oh, copper.

That's the smell. Well, you know you can't eat it because –

And why is that? Do you mean she's poisoned or?

Because of the smell of copper.

And what do you think that could be?

There's a plant they eat at the bottom. And that's it. And that's where the poison lies. Not all picúas are poisonous.

Exactly. My dad –

Not all picúas poison.

I don't know. He told me—I don't know if he made them up. Maybe they were true. He said that, with the same pollution from the Navy, for example, he wouldn't eat the picúas from the northern area. Because he said the plant they were eating was contaminated. And he ended up being poisoned by many of the picúas from the northern area. So he preferred to fish for the ones from the south.

[01:15:21]

Or come to Culebra to fish.

Or come to Culebra to look for them. But he doesn't eat the ones from the north, east, or north of Vieques. Many fish are in our meals from that area, nor from the mountains either. He would get poisoned.

On Vieques, even captains have been poisoned. (Wrasses, \*Labridae\*)

There are many fish that do not eat from that area.

Capitán (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) is the first.

I don't know if you've heard that part of –

I would say that those are the funds, because if it is contaminated there, well –

Corre.

Corre.

And they also move to different areas. So, for example, if I pick the picúas from the sun here in Culebra, I don't eat them. Because I remember my dad's story that the picúas from the north reach all the way to the south of Culebra. I don't know.

Yes, yes, yes, yes.

Maybe it's a bit absurd, but.

And when you say it's poisoning, what happens if someone eats something like that? What happens?

Just the hospital. The serum.

The effects? Well, vomiting, diarrhea, bone pain.

Bones. I've never had them poison me, but—and I wouldn't want to be poisoned either.

But I did see my dad. My dad used to try before us, and he was the one who came poisoned.

I taste the picúa before eating it.

Raw like this. The liver.

I peel it, open it, look for the liver, and put it on my tongue. If it goes numb, I don't eat it.

What if?

I'll open the squid, I'll scale it. I'll clean it inside. Remove the guts. I'll look for the liver. I'll make a small cut and taste it with my tongue. If your tongue goes numb, throw it away; it's poisoned.

I've never heard that before. That part about a fisherman. Because yes, I've heard many –

Many methods to try.

Many methods to try. I have tried none. I have tried none.

The fly?

If the flies don't stop.

The ants.

The ants.

The ant thing works.

Cats don't eat fish.

You can also do it with a peseta. With a peseta or a fleece. You make a slit in the skin. Put it there. Wait 15 minutes. If it stays the same color, it's good. If it turns bronze, throw it away.

I liked the first one you told me.

The one with the liver?

The liver one for me is 100% because –

Your mouth goes numb.

If it makes your tongue numb.

The tongue, the tongue.

The tongue. Because you're going to take the liver. You're going to put it there. You make a little cut. Do you see it? With your tongue. The tip of your tongue. If it goes numb, Daddy, throw it away because it's poisoning.

[01:18:14]

And where did you learn that from?

From my family. From my father. My uncles, who were very old fishermen. I had two uncles who were fishermen, and both passed away. And from around there too, as they say, from the people of the old days. Look, you test ants to see if they're good, but you can also do a thousand things with ants, you understand? But you test them with ants, with flies, putting them there and putting your tongue on them. And you've learned. I've learned many things about fish. To this day, I haven't been poisoned.

And what fish does that do?

With the picúa.

With the picúa. Is there another fish you need to take care of?

The sierra, they tell me. At least for me, when it comes to fishing and the sierra, I cut them by size. If, for example, I'm fishing and I see that it's too big, too big, I cut the line and leave. Because I'm not going to kill it, but I'm going to eat it. So I go down. Unless it comes back and falls on the ground. Well, no, that one has to be eliminated. It's like the only one. But I catch them mostly by size. Not a very exaggerated medium-sized one, so I can eat it more easily. Yes, because once they gave me a very large picúa. It wasn't poisoned, but look, the flavor is different. It changes between making a small picúa and a larger picúa a lot—it changes the flavors.

How much fish, per pound, do you have to eat for a week or a month, more or less?

The thing is, for us, the way I fish depends on the fishing. That also depends. I can't tell you exactly how much I'll catch each week. Because that depends on the weather, how the fishing is in that area. Because sometimes I can be fishing today and catch, for example, 20 pounds of fish. But tomorrow I go to that same spot and don't catch anything. On the same bottom. So it's ended up being a mistake.

But can you tell me how many times a day you eat fish? A typical day, or some of the fish in the house. How much is the fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*) in your diet? How much is it worth?

About once a week, we eat it.

Nothing else?

Yeah.

Just once a week?

Yeah.

Once or sometimes twice a week.

Yeah.

And how do you eat it?

Filleted.

Steak?

Passamos mantequilla. (Graysby, \*Epinephelus cruentatus\*)

butter (Graysby, \*Epinephelus cruentatus\*)

Butter?

Yeah.

Butter, (Graysby, \*Epinephelus cruentatus\*) a little bit of onion and that's it.

So that what goes into the water is taken away.

I understand now.

Because I can't eat anything fried.

Ah, why?

Cholesterol. Do you have high cholesterol too? That's normal. That's normal.

[01:21:08]

Yes, of course. Well, thank you very much.

Thanks. The fries are good, and so on.

Thank you so much.

But at least once a month.

And to you too for inviting us.

I'm so grateful for coming and for sharing your time, your story, and your anecdotes with us. I'm so grateful for sharing your work with us. And truly, congratulations.

Thank you.

And I hope your business really grows. And if you want to take it to the island, not just the east, but the west or the south, count me in. And count on my colleague Janet Ramos, too, because she's always doing [INAUDIBLE].