Do you consider yourself Puerto Rican, Viequense, Santa Cruz?

No, I am a pure Viequense born and raised here.

At what age did you start fishing?

At eight years old.

And how old are you right now?

Sixty-six.

You've been fishing for 56, no, 58 years. And what kind of fisherman are you?

I am a diver, I dive.

Okay, we haven't had a diver. This address is being requested because you'll eventually receive a sum of money by return mail.

No problem.

So, let's begin the interview. And I'm going to ask you, on this map, for each of these little squares, two nautical miles apart, to first mark for me, with orange, the fishing areas, where you call them fishing, that you know as a diver, that you've identified: that there are no coral reefs, that the ground is bleached, that there's no marine life anymore, that there's very little.

What no longer has marine life.

Nothing, that's what you're going to mark for me first; then in pink, you're going to mark where there's abundance. Be happy with the map, mark all the areas you think are right for you. Don't feel pressured; you have all the time in the world here. OK?

No problem. Okay. These buoys are used to mark ravines or keys or something like that. I'll explain why I marked this area. This area here is the outer part of Punta Quebrada.

[00:03:29]

The corner over there.

The corner over there. This side here is practically dead, because first, you've overexploited them in terms of diving. They've put them here; they have the bad habit of catching an area of ​​conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*), for example, and instead of collecting the shells, since you pull them out on the bottom, they leave them all scattered.

The helmets.

The hulls, instead of picking them up. I pick them up at the bottom, but I pick them up, and I hit one with the other, so that when the other queen conch (Strombus gigas) comes here, I'll hit it, and since it doesn't move, it moves, but it maintains life in the area. The guys here pick it up and throw them, and what they do is, they create a minefield in an area of ​​queen conch (Strombus gigas), and that's what happens with this whole area here.

And the queen conch (\*Strombus gigas\*) does not return to the area.

The queen conch (Strombus gigas) doesn't return. What it does is, it's done here with the dead conch, and since it's done one here, one there, it stays in this area, and it gets scared off and leaves, damaging the seabed itself. In the Cayo Blanco area, we have the problem with the buoys.

That's north of Vieques.

Yes, we're talking here, to the north here. Cayo Blanco is the little key east of here, that key is the largest site, they catch lobsters, but the Coast Guard or whoever puts out the buoys comes, and there's a site that's 40 feet deep, a reef, you can go there, jump into the water and see it, and in those 40-foot sites, they put a buoy that exerts a pressure of a ton when there's a swell, and they put a 200-foot chain on it. What happens? When that one starts to turn over?

Break.

It breaks the reef, it leaves it dead, you can see it, wherever there is a buoy the key is completely destroyed, and there is no more life, it is completely dead.

You say that those buoys are placed by the Coast Guard.

The Coast Guard. They know they'll survive. If there's 40 feet of water, put 60 feet of chain on it, so it reached that point, but didn't break. Right now, you're going to Cayo Blanco, and you can come anytime. I'll take it so you can see. The key is pulverized. I mentioned this to them at the dock, once when they came and held some meetings. I told them about the problem with the buoys. The buoys are fine, they mark the reef, but if you put a 200-foot chain on it, 40 feet of water, when that chain pulls, when there's a swell, it kills everything in it. And they, well, stayed that way. I told Mike this, I told a lot of Wildlife officials, but in the area below Puerto Diablo, up to Puerto Negro, it's the same old thing: bombs; bombs explode in the water.

[00:07:03]

Are they still exploiting them in the water?

Right now, the ones they can't fish out are being exploited in the water, but the ones they can fish out are being exploited outside. But when it was there, it's going to take a long time for the key to return to what it was before. There's life, but it's not the life it used to be. When I started fishing, we fished in 20 feet of water, and at 20 feet you caught fish that were an incredible amount.

What fish did you catch when you started fishing?

In the old days, we caught grouper, guajiles, white groupers (Sea basses, \*Serranidae\*), spotted groupers, or sweet potato groupers as they call them, we used to catch species that we are now going to tell you, are not there, they do not exist.

What do you think was the cause of the destruction of marine life, the Navy's bombings?

The vast majority are bombed, and the others are the traps that people here make, but they make the traps, and they tie them with stainless wire. Thank you. And they put stainless wire on the doors, and they tie everything with a pin, they're also made of stainless steel, and the wire is two and a half years old and five years old; those traps get lost, and those traps are killing there for five years, that's not it. Before, the wire was galvanized, and the doors, you put iron wire on them, which pulverizes in a month, and the door falls, and everything comes out, but now it's not like that.

And has there never been any kind of cleaning of those traps, where they hire someone to remove them from the water?

The problem is that when they throw them, if a trap falls 200 feet, 300 feet, the ones that fall on the shore, today I found two, and I break them, because it's a shame that you go and see a line of 60 or 70 traps, I don't know, seeing the size, lost, imagine the amount of fish that kills.

When you mentioned that the wire lasts two to five years, it means that it lasts two to five years.

It's right.

In what rots and then releases.

In what rots.

It's right.

If you want to continue that discussion, because I have a question about, you mentioned that when you started fishing, there were fish that there aren't today.

Correct.

If you could give us a little more detail about that fish that isn't available today.

[00:10:05]

At least the gaujil grouper, the white grouper, which is the spotted grouper that's now banned for life, but the guajil, there's one, there are four or five different types of guajil grouper; that grouper used to be abundant, but now, at least so far this year, I haven't seen one, and I dive five days a week, in Cayo Bravo. Today is a day when I was diving in the south of the island.

What time do you start?

I jump into the water at six in the morning, until 11, 12, today a little earlier.

To clarify, is this the guajil you are referring to?

This is one.

It's the coney cephalopholis fulva, and what other species of grouper?

[CROSSTALK]

This is abundant.

Is the Nassau grouper (\*Epinephelus striatus\*) abundant?

That's goat.

The goat, which I didn't see.

Cabrilla, the tiger grouper, that's what this is.

Yes, that one too, but I see that one very little.

So we have here the Yellowmouth, mycteroperca interstitialis.

That, look, that disappeared.

And the grouper (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*) is not there, we did not mention it.

Black, who is mideropescavona[ph].

That's the regular one there.

The regular one.

Is there a lot?

You see very little of it, it's gone now.

And these?

No, that's the most we took.

That's the one you mentioned was the white goby.

It's right.

What is the yellowfin, poisonous mycteroperca.

And look for the cherna. (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*)

That doesn't exist anymore.

In the waters.

The black. (Nassau grouper, \*Epinephelus striatus\*)

That is prohibited for life.

Correct, yes.

There is very little of that.

Is there very little?

To clarify, the white marlin you mentioned, the yellowfin, is the poisonous mycteroperca.

Yes, that's where we caught them before, if you catch three, let's say in the area where we people call it, those from Culebra call it La Pusó [ph], which is a buoy that is three miles southeast of Culebra, that was an area where I have dived that is more abundant with those groupers, (Sea basses, \*Serranidae\*) they are gone now, you can go and if in a week you catch three, you can get a prize, they are gone now; the only thing that is being caught is cabrilla, which is that regular grouper; the butter grouper, (Graysby, \*Epinephelus cruentatus\*) which is the yellow grouper, the one that came before, that one no longer exists, there are many species that have disappeared, they no longer exist. We say, the gringo grouper, it is the white grouper, this big one that is from the sand, that is already very difficult, there are many.

And when did you notice that change?

[00:13:10]

That has been going on for years now.

But do you have any idea if there was anything specific that caused these fish to disappear? Can you identify any of them? You've already told us about bombing and overfishing.

That's correct.

I ask you, do you think the impact of the construction on the coast, the landfill there, and the discharge of sewage?

That definitely drives away too much of it, just like in the southern area. When it rains, all of that, what was used for farming, before you could go to the beach in Vieques, here, and the mijúa and sardine stain would reach from the pier, almost to the airport, the entire coast, that no longer exists, it no longer exists.

Mijúa, you are referring to-

Like the Ceti.

The ceti.

The ceti.

You know it's always in schools, and what's more, I can tell you, I'm telling you, in more than 30 years, I don't know what a school of mijúa is in Vieques, but it's like I told you, right now they're putting in the treatment plant, it's releasing here.

And it's an area where there's no life anymore, right?

There's no life there anymore, because all those discharges are being dumped into the water, and so everything there, between Cayo Blanco and Rompeolas, there are about seven keys, giant keys, giant reefs, but life there, this is discharging all those chemicals there, there's no life there anymore. Before, you could catch spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) there; I caught them in bunches on one side, but now there's none. We're diving 70, 80, 90 feet, even 100 feet, to be able to fish. On the south bank there was a place that was an incredible thing, today I went there, I was diving, I used three tanks, I was there for about three and a half hours, 60, 70 feet, and you can see the fishing there, what was there was barely 20, 25 pounds of first class, and like 20 pounds of lobster, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) and nothing else.

A question, changing the subject a bit, have you been involved in fishing all your life?

I used to dive in the port, I mean, I worked for the port authority, but I dived, but I fished every day.

And did you fish for sale, or for sustenance? So we can't say you raised a family with the proceeds of fishing, but rather that it was a combination.

Let's say with the two, because there are nine boys, with just the fishing.

And a question, who did you learn to fish with?

[00:16:20]

With Héctor Medina, a former diver who has since passed away.

So in your family you were the first fisherman.

Yes, my brother Ruben, who is also dead.

Did he teach him how to fish? No, the other person taught him how to fish.

They both taught me, because we were always fishing. When I was fishing with a line with my brother, I learned to fish with a hand line, but when I was with Titín, with Héctor, with Medina—it just so happens that they were both named, one Héctor Rubén, and the other was called Héctor Medina—I fished and dived.

Why diving in particular?

I don't know, every fisherman here does something different. We do it all, but I prefer to jump into the water than be hooked up to a boat with a little line. I jump into the water, I kill whatever I need. When you're on the line, for example, you caught a candlestick, I don't know what you call it, this is garbage, it's dead, you throw it away.

Son jugallo[ph].

Jugallo: Well, I'm not like that. I don't kill animals. I don't kill just for fun. I kill what's necessary. I've never killed, I don't even kill chickens.

And did you have any training? Did the people who taught you to dive have training, did they take diving classes, or was it learned?

The vast majority of what I've learned, at least during my time, is nothing in scuba diving classes, because when I started, there weren't even any tanks, and there were none on Vieques. The first time I saw a scuba tank, I saw it when I was, I'd say, about 15 or 16. What I started using were scuba compressors.

How about diving compressors?

Compressor, you were pumping air, and you're at a 100 or 200 foot hose.

Like a diving suit, like with the thing?

Yes, but not a diving suit, it was just a mouthpiece tied here, with lead, and so on, but it was in the deep places, because there was a multitude there, there was life there, but when I say there was life, there was everything, there were sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) that bothered each other. And we didn't fish like we do now, when we are, I leave here, I throw myself out there in the middle of the canal, wherever, before it wasn't possible.

Because of the number of sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) there were.

There were a lot of sharks, (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) a lot of them.

That's an excellent question. Is the presence of sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) no longer what it used to be?

No, not anymore.

And you know what that means, right?

[00:19:22]

They are being killed everywhere.

And won't it be that then, the health of the ecosystems around the island, in the water, are no longer so healthy and the sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) then no longer-

It's possible, it's true that it is. I don't dare say yes, because you understand, but it is possible. I can be sometimes; I throw myself wherever I want. Today I had problems, but it was with a cat, which broke my sac and ate my fish, but with sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) if I tell you that I've seen one in a month, I'd be lying, and I'd tell you that I throw myself wherever I want.

However, yesterday I was talking to a fisherman, who was telling me that he went with Soni[ph] near the big dock in Esperanza.

Son[ph], si.

He told me that near that little island, he sees a lot of sharks there.

But it is not a thing.

It's not like before.

No, it's not like it used to be. I assure you it's not like it used to be. Before, you couldn't, or at least, you couldn't carry a sack of fish in the water like we do now, where we go along the bottom dragging a sack with lobsters, fish, and everything. Before, you couldn't do that. Before, you couldn't. Before, the presence of sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) was something, to the point that, in an area to the east, right here, between Culebra and Vieques, you'd shoot and already have three or four sharks (Requiem sharks, \*Carcharhinidae\*) on you. Now, you can't. I'm not saying there aren't any, but it's not like it used to be.

Are you going to ask a question? Now I need to. You've already marked and told us about the areas where there's almost no fishing. Could you tell us where there is plenty of fishing? We're not interested in knowing your fishing spot, not that. Where have you identified where there is plenty, where there's still plenty, or at least relative abundance?

It's important for the ecosystem here more than anything, there are nurseries, what are they called?

Nurseries, where there are small nurseries.

Nurseries.

Yes, where the babies gather.

OK. At least there's plenty of fishing in this whole area.

It's in Culebra. And in Vieques?

In Vieques, here is this whole area, because this is a lobster area, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) the turn of this here is already deep, but here, in the southern area, outside.

[00:22:22]

So, for the area, nothing to do with it.

No, nothing to do with it.

What bathing beach is there in that area?

Here we have Yayí, which is here, that's Icacos Beach; there's Puerto Diablo Bay, Carrucho Beach (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*), and Tamarindo Azul. Here we have, from there down, we have, what's it called? Blue Beach, we have Caracas, and all that-

What area belonged to the Navy on the map?

What belonged to him?

Yeah.

What will they use it as practice?

Yeah.

This here, from here up.

Mark me with the orange one. Mark it, make a different mark so I can identify it.

That they would use for naval practices, this here.

And then, where did the bombs explode in the water?

That whole area, but right next to the coast.

So, though, you're telling me, these dots, this is pink, right?

Yeah.

How is it that only then, if bombs were exploding all over this coast, is there an abundance of life here?

Because the bombs were always detonated inland, on the shores. What's destroyed is the shore. Here we have to fish, as I'm telling you now, out at 50, 60, 70 feet, but the entire area, the entire inland, the coast itself, is destroyed. I'd like you all to see.

Could you please put your name on that map for me? To identify it as-

Right there?

Wherever you want.

What fishing techniques do you normally use?

What I use is the scuba tank?

But to catch the fish?

Shotgun and lasso, harpoon and lasso for catching lobster. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*)

If you could tell us a little bit about the purpose of the diving you do now, and if it's changed over the years, I mean, what I'm trying to understand is, you told me that you're selling the fish now, in the recent past as well, where you sell them, do you keep any for home, or how you do it.

[00:25:25]

Yes of course.

And he also told me that he is also a very precise fish, that he takes what you want and nothing else, too many questions.

No, with confidence.

Why do you choose certain species?

Because in Vieques not all fish is sold, with the island, for example, on the island there are many places on the island you can sell horse mackerel, (Crevalle jack, \*Caranx hippos\*) cojinúa, snapper, the different snappers, (Snappers, \*Lutjanidae\*) red snapper, (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) mulatto snapper, yellow snapper, grunt, feather, (Porgy, \*Calamus spp.\*) cotorro, all species.

Which is considered second.

Yes. Second, but you don't sell that on Vieques. Right now, it's difficult to sell captains (wrasses, \*Labridae\*) on Vieques.

And why do you think?

Because the vast majority, and we return to the bombardment, the vast majority of captains (Wrasses, \*Labridae\*) go around the island, and apparently all the captains (Wrasses, \*Labridae\*) in the south poison.

Ciguatera.

Ciguatera. And that's right, nobody wants it, so right now, if I start catching all the species I saw today, mutton snapper (Lutjanus analis) 25 to 20 pounds, but why would I kill it if it's no good, I can't sell it, so I'm not going to kill it to give it to someone, because it'll die and they blame me, that's a problem. There are no sales for fishing either, the sale of spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) or queen conch (Strombus gigas) or fish has decreased.

But has it decreased because we are in the low tourist season, or has it decreased for some time now?

At least we've been doing this for about three months, and honestly, there are times when I have to stay home because I can't find anyone to sell to.

Who do you sell your catch to?

To my son.

Interviewee only.

And to the fishmonger.

So you don't distribute to local restaurants. Are the local restaurants your son's clients?

There are some that do.

From Puerto Ricans or from foreigners?

Of the two.

Of the two. So we continue with the questions. Another person arrived who's going to— In your years as a fisherman, have you been approached by young people who are interested in fishing and you've taught them?

[00:28:30]

Yeah.

To whom have you transmitted the knowledge?

I have taught quite a few divers from around the island.

From around the island of Vieques?

From here, from Vieques, and right now they are in Naguabo, and others are in Culebra, they are young boys who have come, I have taken them, I have taught them, and they have learned a lot from me.

In that sense, what has it been like to teach these young people the same things you learned? But over the years, you must have clearly refined them; you, I presume, have also learned from the mistakes you once made.

Of course.

So what is that experience of being able to teach young people like?

What I'm most curious about is that right now, the kids I've taught, including my own children, because my children are divers.

The nine?

Not the nine, the men, Interviewee, Juan Manuel and Hector Roman, they are divers, they are-

Was that your son?

This is another boy, his name is Egui[ph] Saldaña.

He was telling me about his experience teaching young people.

The funny thing is, right now there are kids I've taught, including my own children. I see them in the water, the way they handle themselves, and it's truly worth it. You feel good. I feel good because they're better than me. I'm carrying on, imagine, my whole life. But they're good divers and good human beings.

As a Viequense, do you feel that you are leaving a legacy for new generations?

Yes, and I really feel very good. I feel good, and the guys, especially when I put them on my boat, the first ones like this one, who are boss, boss, don't call me boss, I'm not even a boss at home, and so, no, it was with you that I learned. I have guys on the dock, including one whose name is Moña, but his name is José, I forget.

José Luis?

No, they call him Moña, but his name is José, and he's José Acosta. And that kid, when he started, he was about nine years old, and he's still fishing today. He dives into the water and all that, but he's more of a roper.

[00:31:33]

String.

He's a little stringy, but he's still there, he has his equipment, he has his boat, he has everything, and he's a very good, very good boy.

And you haven't taught girls?

Yes, my daughter, she's not here right now, but all my daughters hold their own in the ocean, all of them, they hold their own. But they're university students now. I don't know if you've been to the Blok, the Blok Hotel.

Safe.

Well, the one at the reception, who's a furry one, who has, Nana, they call her Nana, that baby is mine. I have one in Alaska, I have one in Fajardo, Ibia[ph], I have a bunch of girls, four and four.

But aside from your own daughters, have you taught other girls from Vieques, or is it not common for girls to learn to fish here?

No, not me. I can tell you that I've put sick kids, little sick kids, wheelchair users, little sick girls, into the water all the time, so they can learn to defend themselves. When someone comes along, or someone wants to have that experience, well, I do it. I've taught girls to dive, my wife, but they don't use it first, they use it to—

You've explained to us that there's a lot of mortality around here, and that fishing isn't what it used to be. Do you think Vieques youth have a future in fishing?

At least in terms of diving, I don't think so, but if they are developed enough to fish at depth, and with deep-sea equipment, I think so.

Is there enough depth here to fish for snapper and conch? (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*)

In the south, yes.

And aren't there many chilleros in the area?

In Vieques, very little, there aren't any, but the thing is, in Vieques, everything is difficult. In Vieques, everything is bad for you, because first, if you bring the equipment from the island to Vieques, it already costs twice as much. We don't have an area in Vieques to buy equipment, because right now there's not even rope, or wire, or buoy; everything has to be sent elsewhere, and the truth is that the Vieques fisherman is like the one who lives here; he suffers too much, everything. Everything is twice the price, everything is bad. On top of that, every time we go out, the federal agents, the police, they release one, they catch another. I don't blame them, that's their job, but there are times when it really is a problem. Fishing has really decreased so much, in all aspects, because everything is difficult for us. Buying fishing gear isn't easy, a poor person here can get eight, nine thousand pesos to buy a motor, to buy a boat. Imagine buying a boat for $70, $80,000.

[00:35:31]

No, it's impossible.

There's no way. So, you can't complain too much either, because if you complain too much, you're already a terrorist or something. You can't raise your voice too much either.

But I've heard that the people in Vieques are very brave.

Definitely, but they take you to the very end.

You mention that everything is becoming more difficult for you because everything doubles in price, because you don't receive— Do you receive any kind of help from the government, have you received any kind of help at any point?

Some fishermen have received, some.

And do you know where that money came from?

No. At least I know what Interviewee can tell you, because they helped him when he got out of the problem he had, they helped him with some motors and such. And they gave some fishermen from La Esperanza axes, some things for bottom fishing, but that's not for all fishermen. Now, I say, that's a select few; that's not for all fishermen. With bad weather right now, from Maria onward, it's hard to believe they've given help to some fishermen from Vieques.

Obligatory question then, there is a question, Fishermen, do you have your license up to date?

Yeah.

And does it yield statistics?

No, I don't provide statistics.

So the license isn't up to date. If the license isn't up to date, there's no chance of them receiving government aid.

I am currently taking them, I used to take them, now I don't, and as they told me, I am 66 years old, and-

Lifetime.

No, they didn't refuse me either.

The lifelong one?

Yeah.

Because?

Because I supposedly didn't have a fishing license, and I'd never had one. This one is October 2025.

It is in force.

And I'd never been a fisherman. It's incredible, this same lady. What's her name?

[00:38:35]

Mirna.

Mirna? Yes, she works here, she was the one who filled out the paperwork for Interviewee.

No, I don't know who.

She's a woman who works in Vieques. Her last name is Bonilla, Hilda Bonilla, that's her name. She's the one who helps the fishermen. She even helped me, and those who sent her the letter back, telling her I'd never had any fishing records, and I've had a license all my life. Imagine if the last one they were releasing was the one from NOAA.

For fish of-

Yes, the NOAA one so I could fish, be here. I called there, sent a piece of paper and this with a check for $35, and they sent me a permit, which, by the way, I also stopped sending because they haven't sent it to me in the last two years.

The permit, paying for it?

No, they didn't send it to me. Just like Natural Resources. I sent them for more than seven years, and you send the check, you send it for renewal, no renewal, no check, never. Ask any of the fishermen here if they haven't had that problem: they send it for renewal, and they don't send you the license or the money.

Let's talk a little about the fishing traditions that are lived in Vieques. When I asked you where you were, you told me you were a pure Viequense.

It's right.

At no point did you tell me I was Puerto Rican.

No.

So you don't consider Vieques- You see Vieques as something separate from the big island.

It's right.

Because?

Because yes. The day I know someone is coming, be it to any government entity, to help here, that day I'll say I'm part of there. We're 19 nautical miles away from there, or 18. I'm from Vieques.

And your entire family is from Vieques, born and raised here?

My whole family.

What fishing-related traditions or celebrations are held here in Vieques?

Until now, the only thing that was done before was patron saint festivities.

And the procession of the Virgin of Carmen.

That's what's always done in July, during the patron saint festivities. But if I told you about it here, I'd even let that slip.

The tradition of the-

[00:41:37]

Up to that point. You can search in Vieques last July; you can find out at the Catholic Church, or with anyone from the church. In the procession, they went down like every year, and there was only one boat, one.

The one the Virgin was wearing.

Mine. It was the only one.

No one else came.

No one else came.

Do you think this is a result of generational change, that perhaps the number of older fishermen has decreased now, and the fishermen who remain are younger and unfamiliar with the tradition?

I think so, although let's say, from my time, there are only two of us in port, Sergio García and me, from my time; the rest are young, and maybe that's why, well, I don't understand, because you give them notice, you give them a month's notice, to see if at least we move [INAUDIBLE] and coastal, it's strange.

And what does the procession of the Virgin of Carmen organize?

The Catholic Church.

And does the Catholic Church communicate with fishermen or is it a-?

There is a spokesperson for them, it's Marta, her name is Marta, we call her Martita.

And no one joined you in that-

Nobody, there was nobody else.

Outside of the procession of the Virgin of Carmen, he did not even travel by land, only by water and his boat, no one followed him.

The only one that was built, at least, on the Paseo de la Virgen, on the ocean, the only boat there was was mine. By land, they always come from the plaza, there to the town, to the beach, from the beach to Santa María, that walk always takes place, but anyway it's decreased a lot because before there were many fishermen, many, I remember, in fact, there were so many fishermen that the Virgin was carried out on the port authority ferry.

With so many fishermen, has the number of fishermen decreased here on Vieques?

It has decreased a lot too, a lot.

At that time you mention, when you tell me there were many fishermen, give me a number like that off the top of your head.

I would tell you there were more than 150.

And now?

Now, I could tell you that, counted, around the island, there are not 80.

[00:44:39]

Would you tell a son, a grandson of yours, to leave it, don't do anything else and dedicate yourself to fishing so you can make a living from it?

Of course I would tell him.

And can a person make a living from fishing these days?

But as I told you just now, in the area already-

You won't find anything.

It's difficult. You have to be 150, 200 feet deep, because first, the looting, just now we were coming down there, and there's a boat from San Tomás, that one, that one, it's another thing, it's another thing, I can't understand how it's possible, that these people from San Tomás come, they have traps down here, all the way to the Verdiales Lighthouse, they have traps all this way, all the way to here, but if we go fishing there, they mess with us. And they have, I tell you, they come and fish north of Culebra, they've come all this way here, the Santobeños fish up here, they come and they really throw traps.

That leave them lost.

They get lost, they get tangled up in the key, it breaks and goes away, and there you can't do anything with them because they're 200 feet down, and those traps are there. Right now I can take them to the eastern tip, at 90 feet, and there are a lot of traps piled up there, and God knows how many years they've been killing.

And how could you identify that they were theirs?

Because of the way they are.

They make you different.

Very different.

What materials do they make the traps out of here?

They?

No, you.

Here they make them out of black wire, and lately they're making them with panhold panels, which is something else. Do you know how long that plastic lasts? And without a door.

So they get stuck there and there's no way out.

There's no way. I just broke a new one, I tell you, I had to pick it up with one, to be able to undo the wire, because they don't have a door either. There's no way, that thing will stay there, killing you.

It's painful to hear this.

Yes, but it's true.

You know, in the years I've been working, one of my favorite parts is asking fishermen if they have legends, things that have happened to them at sea. One told me, for example, that he saw lights in the clouds, which he thought were aliens and things like that. What experiences have you had, what legends surround you, what interesting stories have you experienced while at sea?

[00:47:53]

Many.

We have all the time in the world, I want to hear them all.

No. For example, let's put Interviewee, Jorgito.

Your son, for sure.

My son. You can ask him. When he was a child, I'd say a child, eight or nine years old, I used to fish in a small boat at that time, I pulled by hand because I didn't have a winch, and the boat I used was a marine boat that I borrowed from the Agricultural Credit Corporation, imagine, and there once we went to the Puerto Diablo area, how would I say, three miles out, and when we passed by that time, from Fajardo, some people from Vieques got out, and they got lost on that journey. They got lost and have never been found, ever. So, when we were going to where my boxes were, about 100 meters away from the boat, I saw this mass floating, but it was like, I'd say it was more than 20 feet, scattered like that; I stared at him, and I said to Interviewee, Jorgito, let me check to see what this is, because it looked like a deformed mass, I don't know how to say it, to see if it's one of the corpses of the boys, to report, and Jorgito started to cry, he got scared, because he was a child,

Safe.

Daddy, no. And me, stay still, stay there, I'm just going to check, when I hit him, he did this and it seems like he got infected.

What thing was contracted?

What was in the water there, shrank like this, but it became round. A round mass about five feet in diameter, a ball, and in the middle, as if it were a bowling ball, like this big, like this lump, but it was shiny black, and it stank incredibly, the stench of rotten, like putrefied, a real thing- And I looked at it, and in the middle, this thing was holding on to something like a gallon of chlorine, like a little bit of rope like that, it was like it was held by there, but when I looked at it, I said, oh God, but something more curious, I had never seen anything like that, and even with that, Jorgito was really scared, but I grabbed the boat hook, and I went and stuck to it, and when I touched it with the boat hook, it kind of did, it kind of hurt him, and I was like, what do you mean by that? He did this with the ball like this, and it made like a hole in the middle and it started like— It went away. I tell him it's something, I say damn, but how can this be, this is incredible, I don't even know what it was.

[00:52:01]

And you've only had that experience once?

I only saw that once, but then, on other occasions, these are things that one shouldn't even say, I never tell that, I don't say anything to anyone, because they'll call you a liar.

There's no reason to doubt it, and what else happened to him?

I left here from the dock for a side that we called the Gulf, which is next to Saint Rock[ph], in San Tomás, the rock that is in the middle, we call it the Percantil. Well, we dived because there was fishing there, we went and selected lobsters by the quintal, fish by the quintal; This day I went with my son, with Juan Manuel, and I don't remember if it was that little boy Acosta that I mentioned just now, we were going up, and when I, we passed the eastern tip of Vieques, and we took the channel, right there at the rock, I said to my son, look at that, and there were some lights, but they were big lights, very powerful lights in the water, stuck in the water, like shining up, and he said to me, pig daddy, stop drinking, that's a plane that's crashing in San Tomás, and I told him, the lights are in the water, no, that's a plane. Suddenly it, whatever it was, came out of the water, but it was big, there were three lights together, and I said to him, look at it now, and he did- And it was like the clouds moved to the side when that thing went up there.

And he saw it too.

Yeah.

And what was his reaction?

Well, he stayed and told me, Daddy, let's turn around, don't go there, and I, let's stay there in Culebra, and I took off and changed course and went to Culebra, but it was an impressive thing, I don't know, even when it flew like that, you saw the water when it made the splash to the sides like that, and the clouds, as if it had broken through the clouds, as if it had gone up there. He looks at me, and I say, You see what I told you, what do you think that was, a plane? I don't know what it was.

[00:55:08]

You told me that was between Vieques and Culebra?

That was between Vieques and the San Tomás Brigantine, right in the middle.

I've heard you say this several times, you've told me three times, that you're from Vieques.

It's right.

What makes you proud to call yourself a Viequense? What about your fishing experience highlights the cultural heritage of Vieques? What makes you proud about that fishing heritage?

In fishing?

Yes, in fishing.

Everything, I thank God every day for the life he's given me, I wouldn't trade this for anything in the world. If anyone comes to me, I don't care who it is, anyone, and says, I'm going to give you, right now, five million dollars to get you out of the water, I won't take it, I'm not interested.

Do you know a poem that tells you-?

I was born in the water, and that's where I want to die, in the water.

Do you know a poem by Virgilio Dávila called Do Not Give Your Land to a Stranger?

No, I don't give my land to anyone. This is my land. I was born here, and I consider myself a Viequense, and I wouldn't trade it for anything. I wouldn't trade a piece of Vieques land for the biggest suite they could give me in the world. I wouldn't trade it. I was born here, and I'm going to die here.

We're back again. Are there people from the Dominican community in Vieques, are there people from Cruzán, are there fishermen from San Tomás who live here and fish?

No. There are Dominicans, but Dominican fishermen in Vieques that I know of, there's one, because the other lived in that little house over there, who we called Rambo, a good friend, a good companion, and they killed him there in Santo Domingo. (Blackline tilefish, \*Caulolatilus cyanops\*) And here's one from Higüey, who's a gentleman in every sense of the word, and he's the only one.

A single fisherman, who respects his environment, has a good relationship with the Viequenses.

All in all, the guy is a lady, a good man.

And does he collaborate with you?

Yes. There are many. There are Dominicans here who work in construction and all that stuff, and I'll tell you one thing, I haven't met a bad Dominican here yet. They help when you need them, they're there, they help, and I've never had a problem with any of them.

[00:58:34]

That's great to know. It feels good to know we're sister islands with these other islands and that there's a good relationship, especially in the fishing world, where there are often so many struggles, between fishermen and between communities. What's that relationship like with other Vieques fishermen? Are they grouped together in different areas, do they all work together, do they unite with the community, do they work for the community?

No. There's no unity among fishermen here. Fishermen, when needed, fight for each other, look for each other. For example, if a diver goes missing, they immediately spring into action, move, and set off, and until they find him, they don't return, that's true. Or if a fisherman has a problem, you know it has to be resolved. In that regard, yes, but uniting as fishermen for whatever it is, there's no unity among them. Right now, I've been—I was, I'd tell you I started working in '89 in the port, '89, around '91, '92. I was treasurer of the northern fishermen's association; I handed it over in '91 to a man they called Nazario Interviewee, and ever since then, I've been fighting for fishermen's parking spaces to be respected.

In the-

At the fish market.

You're talking to me downstairs.

Here, in the north, the fish market right now. If you saw when you came in there, the whole front-

It's full of other cars.

It was all full of cars, of people going to the island. But what happens is that since then, I've been fighting with the fishermen themselves. Look, we have to defend what belongs to us, because the time will come when we're going to arrive, and it's been happening for years, that we come to fish, and we don't have parking, because they go to the island for months, and they leave their cars there, and you have nowhere to park, but you fight with the fishermen to help. I arrive before you, of course, forget it, but when they don't have parking, they start to fight, and I've really tried, I painted them, the parking lots, I put the names of the fishermen on them; I did everything there, but the time came when I got tired.

[01:01:44]

And because one person cannot work alone.

Right now, if you look at the booths from the front, they are so pretty, they are well painted; when you look at the back-

That you speak too quietly to be able to record it well.

Sorry.

When you look at the booths from the back?

None of them have a door, because the fishermen use them, and when the door breaks, they abandon it, and that's how they leave it.

Who owns the fishing village here? Does it belong to the Department of Agriculture?

Yeah.

And has the Department of Agriculture done its job of supporting it?

It doesn't do anything. They handed it over there about six years ago, they gave it to the fishermen, and there were fights because they wouldn't give it up.

There are a few very important questions I want to ask you. These questions are very important to me. Where do all the fishermen here take their fish products to sell?

Some buy directly from Ante Angora[ph], and others buy in Humacao; I buy at the Dai Shop[ph] in Fajardo.

Those are for the teams.

Correct.

But your catch, the fishermen's catch, who do the fishermen sell to here in Vieques?

The only person here right now is Interviewee and the fishmonger, Eric Torres.

So there is no direct distribution to restaurants?

No, I mean, at least not that I know of, at least not on this side. We sell to them, and they sell to the restaurants, but many of the guys from La Esperanza, like Mamén, a bunch of guys from La Esperanza, who dive, sell it on the street to everyone.

When you say they sell on the street, they get in the car and go selling house to house.

Correct, it is on the street.

I asked some of them, and they told me they didn't sell on the street.

Yeah.

And they announce with a loudspeaker.

No.

And how do people know they are in the area?

Why are they, for example, me right now, there's a man named Alejo Colón, and he calls me at my house, look, I need 100 dollars, between fish and lobster, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) for Thursday or Friday, and yes, no problem, I'll get them for you, I already know what he likes. I go and get them, I go and take it to him.

[01:04:47]

They have a selection of clients.

That's right. So this guy, José, Moña, as I call him, that guy, he fishes on Saturdays, he fishes on Sundays, (Blackline tilefish, \*Caulolatilus cyanops\*) these people don't buy from him, and he has tons of people, because I'll tell you something, what happens is that the fish market and Interviewee, my son, have people to sell to him wholesale in Puerto Rico.

To the big island.

Yeah.

So most of Vieques' fishing goes to the big island.

The vast majority.

Interesting. And where on the Big Island do they sell it?

Naguabo. No, I've made it as far as Cabo Rojo.

Who do they sell to in Cabo Rojo?

To a man called Cano, owner of a fish shop there.

White eyes, blue eyes, light eyes?

I think that if you go there, everyone is clear.

I'm from Cabo Rojo, that's why I'm asking.

They call him Cano.

I know who Canito is.

Good people too.

He is from Cabo Rojo.

The most he asks for are captains (wrasses, \*Labridae\*), that's the point. What I don't catch here, he asks for there.

We've talked about that. What's the most important species sold here on Vieques? What's the most sought-after food in Vieques?

Colirrubia, mero, sama, (Mutton snapper, \*Lutjanus analis\*) because you're not going to sell snapper in Vieques; boqui colorado, you're not going to sell it.

They are so good.

You are not going to sell the feathers (Porgies, \*Sparidae\*).

They are so good.

Nothing of the sort.

Not even the pigfish.

You're not going to sell the pigfish, it sells very little. I'll leave it, I don't kill pigfish.

And what do they make empanadillas out of in Vieques?

They prepare them from conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) or chapín (Trunkfish, \*Lactophrys trigonus XLVII\*)

Chapin chapin? (Trunkfish, \*Lactophrys trigonus XLVII\*)

Supposedly, chapín, (Trunkfish, \*Lactophrys trigonus XLVII\*) but they buy from the naseros, and from those who have boxes on the coast, lobster trap, (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*) because that is where they catch them, but I am sure that they mix it up the same as there with cotorro and pigfish and those things.

As far as you know, does Vieques have transit routes for fishing boats through federal waters, because state waters aren't supposed to be used by fishing vessels from other countries, but as far as you know, do large fishing boats come to the area?

Yes, I have seen it.

That they share with you the type of fishing.

I've seen some big boats fishing in this area, here, with masts on the side like this, I've seen them, and they go as far as Mayagüez. I've seen them fishing here, but I can't say if there's a route they establish, I don't know.

[01:07:49]

Do you think those boats impact your fishing?

At least, I don't think I would-

They impact you.

They bother me, because what they always catch is floating fish (Blue Marlin, \*Makaira nigricans XLII\*).

A very important question. You told us a little while ago that the Navy used to explode bombs near the coast, and that there's no longer any life in that area. But are there areas that you've identified as still having coastline near the coast, and do you think those areas should be protected in some way?

Of course.

How would you protect them? By declaring them reserves, but reserves where fishing is allowed, but not other types of activity. What kind of protection would you give them?

Honestly, I don't know if you've seen the canals and mangroves in Vieques.

I saw something.

At least that eastern area, the salt lagoon, that's why it's called Salina, I don't know if you've seen that there.

No. Should she be protected?

One hundred percent.

Is there healthy marine life there?

Chuleria.

Are you currently experiencing any impact from nature, whether from construction or discharges?

No.

So it's clean.

However, I would think that in the campaign area, in Puerto Negro, they should do something to open the lagoon, so that they can discharge it into the water, into the ocean, because if you go there right now, you will see quintals of small white mullet (\*Mugil curema XXXVI\*), tarpon (\*Megalops atlantica IX\*) and dead snooks (\*Centropomidae\*).

Because the water is accumulated, there is no water flow.

It gets hot, and thousands and thousands die, I would like you to see that, there are some ponds like that, that's when they dry up, blessed.

And that didn't happen before?

The truth is that since I was little, I always saw that.

Fish kill?

Yeah.

So it is a natural event in the area.

Yes, but if there was a way to drain the water, then all those fish would be saved; it's the same right now, you drive past Sun Bay, and the stench of rot wafts out into the street.

[01:10:59]

Because it's because of the water of Sun Bay.

That's one, but up there, but in the area up there there are two and three.

Near the landfill?

Above the dump.

And should they be areas that need to be protected?

They must be protected.

And what challenge does the Vieques fishing community face in terms of preserving these places? Why hasn't it been done? Why hasn't the idea perhaps come from you? Perhaps we're going to promote this becoming a reserve because we need these areas, so full of life, to populate them? Because if you tell me there are many juveniles, they'll be populated by other juveniles and adults will arrive in other places.

It's just like I told you at the beginning, you can't really make much of a move here, because Vieques is a place. I wouldn't trade it for anything, like I told you, first of all, but it's a very controversial place. In Vieques, it's hard for you to see the Viequenses themselves coming together.

And if you contradict a Viequense, because something is happening.

Remember, you are already a terrorist, or you are a- They will immediately stamp you.

And can any kind of violence arise against them?

Of course.

Like what for example?

Vieques isn't the same as it used to be. Vieques isn't the same as it used to be.

And what was it like before?

Before, it was really good and very supportive, everyone came together for everything, even to eat in the corrals, but not now. There are things that can't be mentioned here, but coastal protection is needed, a lot of protection. Now you can't go. Look, I'm going to catch some bait, I'm going to line fish because we're going to catch a few ruddy tailed breams, and you went in and maybe you didn't come out, at the wrong time, the wrong time.

There is movement of strangers in the area.

Dangerous.

That's a huge challenge in Vieques. What are the main outlets for fishermen in Vieques? The two areas you mentioned. What has changed in fishing in Vieques over time? Is it still a viable activity, is it still something people can make a living from?

[01:14:09]

I think so. I think so, by taking care of the environment a little, and taking care of the coasts themselves, and that, I think so. And another thing, by helping fishermen a little more to get deep-sea gear, good boats, and they really should do a few projects to teach young people, new fishermen, the sons of fishermen, how to use deep-sea gear and all that, so they can get ahead.

Did you know that the CIREN program brought this effort to educate children about depth through diving here on the island?

No.

Sixteen young men were recruited and taught to fish with a tank by a specialized, and obviously licensed, instructor.

I really don't-

You didn't know. The programs exist. I'm trying to understand why these efforts to educate young people aren't reaching Vieques.

I don't think so. At least before, when the rock was there at the Sportsman's House and in this area, the federal government sent a lot of aid to the kids, a lot of aid to the fishermen. There was movement, giving people wire, buoys, equipment, and there were a lot more fishermen than there are now. Now, though, things have also changed a lot regarding the youth.

Because youth, when you say it has changed.

It has been damaged.

I understand. But do you think they just can't find anything to do in Vieques and go that way because it's easier and they can generate more income without having to work hard, even though they're putting their lives at risk? Could there be any reason for that?

There may be some of that, and it's also the lack of help they have, because there are many kids who can get up and help themselves, but there's no la- We don't have the tools to deal with situations like that.

And going- Do you know what climate change is?

I think so.

You think so? Well then, you know what climate change is. It's brought us hurricanes like Milton, Maria, and Fiona. I know you suffered greatly from the impact. All Puerto Ricans, Viequenses, and Culebrenses suffered greatly with Maria and Fiona.

[01:17:17]

That's also changed a lot, the issue of climate change, water issues, and the impact it's had on the reefs and all those issues, that's changed a lot too, because Culebra is one of the most beautiful places there is, and there's a lot of dead reef. Look, lately, about two or three years ago, I've dived in some places, and I see that they're being born, they're sprouting, the brains and everything, they're starting to take color, at least there in this area, that area, right there, that should be a sanctuary.

But not in Vieques.

Vieques really hasn't reached him.

He still hasn't recovered.

No.

So, these changes in the environment, do you think they're related to climate change? Some are due to climate change, and what do you think is due to military pollution? Because you must have lived through the Navy era.

Of course.

What was the Navy era like compared to now? Did the Navy's presence bring progress to you fishermen? Did it affect fishing? Now, after so many years, since the Navy left Vieques, or since we removed the Navy from Vieques, things have changed drastically. Life on Vieques with the Navy for fishermen is both in and out of the water. Now, without the Navy, it's both in and out of the water?

I think the damage he did, he did for many years now.

The bombing of the navy.

That's an incredible thing. I saw and was on that boat when they put it there, to the point that, as I told you before, with Héctor Medina, with Titín, we didn't use diving equipment; I was a kid, we didn't use it. We caught conch (Queen conch, \*Strombus gigas\*) whatever the Cayo Blanco bar ordered from us, and this went back and forth, those associations didn't exist either. We went, and they asked us—it's true it was much cheaper—the spiny lobster (\*Panulirus argus\*) was practically unsold; what sold a lot was hawksbill; we killed three or four hawksbills a day, and that sold like crazy. Now there are hawksbills that hit you in the face, and you can't pick them up, but before, lap esca on the shore, it was incredible, but now you can't be on the shore, because the shore, as I told you, outside, there is life, there is a little life, but the shore is made of stone, the shore is all shelled, everything.

[01:20:29]

And aren't the two things connected? Climate change and the damage caused by the bombers. You see them as separate things.

I think they are two separate things.

Because?

Because at least for me, the issues of hurricane changes and this have caused havoc, because they break reefs, they break everything, but it's not the same as you coming, bad weather, the reef that kills, for me, I'm not a scientist, I'm nothing, but what I see is that a storm surge comes, breaks reefs, breaks everything, but that comes back, like you cut a stick, that you cut and it sprouts. But where a bomb falls, that's chemical, whatever it has, those breaks stay there. I can talk to you about Culebra, I can talk to you about Bolefuche [ph], and those bombs, where they fall in the water, leave breaks in the reef, and that's dead, and it's the same here.

And climate change started later than the bombing?

It's right.

After the bombings, and the relocation of people, because we know the Navy took people from different areas where they were most active. How was it transmitted then, with that experience, with all the damage the Navy caused, how did it change then, and was the knowledge of fishing passed on to the new generations? Or has it always remained the same?

Not much has changed here. Over time, what has changed is the equipment, but the truth is that before, with the little equipment available, we caught a thousand times more than now. A thousand times more, because everything was weak; the wire was galvanized, which lasted a year at most, and everything was galvanized, and everything broke. Not now. The damage done by the Navy, on the one hand, with the traps breaking and killing fish and spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) everywhere, and all these issues, not only will they continue to affect the people who set the traps until there's a strike, but instead of tying with stainless steel, they tie with a line that breaks. This will continue, because that's a huge damage. It will continue.

Everything's fine. So you were talking to me about the changes caused by the bombs and all that. Has the community developed any kind of strategy to deal with changes in the environment, whether due to climate change or military impacts?

[01:23:48]

Not as far as I know.

And the government here in Vieques, the mayor of Vieques, has there been any instrument for how Vieques will manage climate change?

As far as I know, nothing has been done here.

The water in Vieques, do you feel it's warmer now, or is it staying the same?

Is it hotter?

Do you think that also affects?

I think, as I said at the beginning, there are times when the water is so hot in some areas, which are practically stagnant, I don't know if the tide has turned, I don't know how, but it's also damaging. It's damaging. As far as I know, the government here, in matters of that, I've never heard of them doing anything.

And what kind of damage does it do to you?

The short reef dies. The damaged horn over there doesn't die, and so on, but I think that's how it's always been.

Don't you think it's more so now with the heat, with the pollution?

With pollution, yes. Because there really is a lot of chemicals being spread everywhere here on the island. And even more so in the area where it's not concentrated, like I told you, I don't understand how it's possible. Those treatment plants where they dump all the filth into the water, and the lagoons up there, many of those lagoons are seriously contaminated. The water outlets near there, when they open, you can see how badly that water comes down.

Wastewater.

Yes. There is puddled water in the eastern area, in the bombing area.

But contamination from bombing or contamination from wastewater?

Because of the bombing, and here in the western area because of the wastewater.

So, if you know there's pollution, if you know there's climate change, how can it improve? How would your fishing practices, your way of fishing, have to evolve to be able to continue fishing in the future?

That's right, we're back to what we were talking about now, we have to look deeper.

But for the deep there is a risk of developing a bubble.

Yes, that's correct, but the only way is to get out of the water, as I told you just now, and create a program, something that helps the kids, or that teaches them how to fish in the deep; to fish for snapper, to fish over there, to the deep.

Because there is no other way.

There's no other way. Because, as things stand, in a matter of years, you're not going to catch a queen conch (Strombus gigas) anywhere, because right now it's that far away, and with all the strikes they're doing, which they're giving them for four months, I don't know, the queen conch (Strombus gigas) is deep, at 80, 90 feet, it's pretty deep, more. Here at least they've developed the nitor for diving, but in Vieques, where are you going to fill a tank?

[01:27:18]

Don't you have anywhere to fill up your tank either?

At least not nitro.

Do you have to go to the big island to fill up your tank?

Regular diving tanks, compressed air, are filled on Vieques, but there is no nitro on Vieques.

You also have the difficulty of having to buy the equipment, bring it in, and the price doubles.

YEAH.

Fill the tanks with nitro, too, because they don't have the facilities.

In Vieques, the fisherman, I spend $60, $80 a day on gasoline, $32 on scuba tanks, at eight pesos a tank. On top of that, right now my transmission broke, and I have to think really hard about paying for it, because things are going to be back to where they were before. An engine transmission costs $1,800 and up, and that's a lot.

And ice for fishing?

Ice is used for fishing, and we, like me, spend three days—sorry, three or four hours, no more. I go out, and the fish arrives fresh. The spiny lobster (Panulirus argus) arrives alive, but fishing with a line costs too much. In Vieques, five gallons of gasoline cost 20 or 22 pesos, there's no money to spare. And the oil is gone; a quart of oil used to cost one peso, 50 cents, now it's 10 or 12 pesos.

It's terrible. Going back now, you have many obstacles, too many obstacles here in Vieques, but we have the situation of climate change, which is an impact that will apparently be long-lasting, meaning things will never go back to how they were before.

That's right.

There's no turning back now, unless, perhaps, for many years, we have to change our ways of life, burning fuel, all these kinds of things. Do you feel prepared? Have you, and your family, and other fishermen, received enough information about what climate change is?

I don't think so.

So people here don't know how it can affect, when I say people, I mean the fishermen.

No, the vast majority don't. I dare say the vast majority don't, because I myself can tell you about the changes that have occurred on the seabed. Why? Because I'm there every day, I feel the cold water, I feel the warm water, I feel how it changes when a hurricane passes. From Hugo on, that seabed was as if it had been filled with gravel. This medium, which isn't a key, is a kind of cart, of gravel. Those were covered up, all of that was broken, and the water looked like mounds, mounds, as if they had been piled up, and all that changed. I can say that because I've seen it, but I can't tell you exactly in detail about the change.

[01:30:39]

And would you like to receive more information so you can not only educate yourself, but also educate others?

Of course.

In that sense, what kind of support or resources, whether from the government, scientists, or community groups, do you think would help you better adapt to the climate change that's affecting your fishing practices?

I think I would like to, but remember that as I say, I'm just passing through, but at least for my children, for the young people, and for this, we need help.

And do you think they would be willing to sit and listen to all this?

At least I know there are many who are. There are many who may be hesitant, but there are many young people who are interested. I think so.

You think young people would, but what about older people? Would they also be willing to listen? You do.

I do.

You and I are the same age, that's why I dare to call you old (Donkey grunt, \*Pomadasys crocro\*) with affection.

Not that it is, but I think so, there are many people in Vieques who are truly interested in this issue, but as I told you, they don't have the tools, and they are poor.

There is a lot of poverty in Vieques.

There is a lot of poverty, yes-

The Vieques fisherman, we, for example, know fishermen who make a living from fishing, and they make a very good living.

It's right.

But the Vieques fisherman mostly.

The vast majority of the elderly, and what's more, I dare say that more than 70% of Vieques fishermen are also poor.

More than 70%?

Yes. I dare to show you people who are, but very poor, to the point where they can't buy a motor, they can't buy equipment, but they do fish, they are good.

Do you think these fishermen, those who have a level of awareness like yours, like Interviewee, like Abdiek, do you think this group of fishermen could help create public policy to collaborate against climate change and good fisheries management? Do you think they would be voices that could bring information and collaborate to try to improve everything that's happening here?

[01:33:43]

I know that at least my son, and there are many young people, who have a little bit, are studying, studying, have studied, and have the ability to—how can I put it?—help, they have more intelligence, because you see me talking, you see me working with the government, you see me doing this, but you're talking to someone who didn't go to school. I only went to eighth grade.

And why did you leave?

For going fishing.

I've heard that story so many times. And you ran away and didn't make it to school?

I didn't go to school because my father was poor, my mother was illiterate, my brother, the one who taught me to fish, didn't go to school. The level of intelligence wasn't-

Not the degree of intelligence, because you are very intelligent, what you didn't have was a formal education, that's different.

But thank goodness, I learned on the street, and it's gone well for me so far.

What did your dad do?

Clean patios.

And your mom?

Ironing military clothing.

To the military of the navy.

Washing clothes for the military.

Interesting, and they raised a family, how many children?

My dad and mom nine, and I am nine so far.

And he raised them all with the first job he had and then with fishing.

That's correct, but as I told you, I've never stopped fishing, never. When I was a kid, well, what I did, to be honest, what I was, was a bandit. You know, when you're young, there was nothing here on the island. There were abusive Americans everywhere, and here, what we dedicated ourselves to was watching over them, and capturing them, and even stealing their shoes. But when I turned 14, I met a man named José Carlos Benítez, and an American woman who owned a boat, who was a pain in La Gloria, named Miss Jackie Jaqueson[ph], and with those two Christians I learned to make a living, to not touch what isn't mine, to walk straight. And then I got together with a lady. Not that I just went to live with her, but I went to live with a lady who was a nurse and I wanted to work in nursing. And then some plans came out, the government's Jet plans, and that was 90-day work-study. And what I did was, every time a plan came out, I I got involved, and I studied it, and so I worked for three years in medical emergencies. Afterwards, I didn't like it and I left, and then I worked sweeping the streets; I went fishing and came back to sweep the streets, I went fishing and came back to sweep the streets, and so on until I got married. After I got married, I was fishing all the time, and I started working for the port authority.

[01:37:53]

And what was he doing there?

Sailor of ships.

So he also drove boats.

No, I didn't drive them. To help the captain (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*), yes, but I wasn't a captain, (Hogfish, \*Lachnolaimus maximus XXXIV\*) I was a sailor. I looked after 586 passengers alone, I had to fight every day, it was an outrage, imagine, you were dealing with 400 drunks. I bought a little boat called El Cuco, I continued fishing, I went snail collecting, I had an accident and had half my face amputated.

With the boat?

On a rock. That's what it was, the stick in my nose popped out from inside.

The partition.

Yes. I can't breathe, I'm having difficulty breathing, a problem. They took 120 surgical stitches.

And why was that accident?

Picking up snails, peeling off the snails, I went out to check that there wasn't a swell, it came and picked it up, and all of a sudden I went and picked it up, what do I do? A swell came and hit me, and it took me up a ledge, and when I went up, there was a point like this, a split lime leaf, a point like this. And when I went down, I went down into the foam, but I put the clapper like this, my hands in case I hit it, because I couldn't see, I was able to hold on, but the stone went down the middle, hit me here, it tore all of this off.

And you were alone?

I was with a friend of mine, a friend of mine. When I came out, which I do like this, it was touching me here, I did this, trying to breathe, and it was touching me here. I'm alive because God is great; He doesn't want me up there.

Not yet. They say that bad grass never dies.

He doesn't die. And look, he doesn't die, because I'm supposedly suffering from acute vascular necrosis.

For diving.

Apparently, that's why I retired from the government.

And you're still diving? [INAUDIBLE]

I have this titan you.

You are bionic.

Up here. Just like all of this, and I'm still alive, thank God, so I shouldn't dive.

With all these difficult, painful stories you've told me, do you feel concerned about whether fishing will remain sustainable in the long term?

[01:41:03]

Yeah.

Because?

Because I believe Vieques is an island, if it were at least cleaned up a little. The issue is that we're contaminating all of us, all of our young people. I believe Vieques has great potential to be a deep-sea fishing port, fishing for snapper, fishing for floating fish in the deep. Catching and, I don't know, teaching these kids that, that's what I'd like to do. If I could, I would definitely do it.

So, if you could get the aid, you would be willing to educate.

To help the boys, of course.

You don't have to have a degree to pursue education.

It's not necessary. What's needed is experience, and I have it.

OK.

And there are many in Vieques who do have it.

And there are many young people who need to move forward. Thinking back then, about the hurricanes that have happened, which you've been telling me about, how did the community respond after the impact of these hurricanes? Did the fishermen play any role in helping the community get back on its feet?

Yes of course.

As?

The vast majority of us fished for the people, to give to the people. Everyone fished, the fishermen caught and didn't sell anything; they gave everything to the people.

Where did they distribute it?

Everywhere, when we arrived at the docks, there were people waiting. They went everywhere to get groceries, to get ice to bring here, and that helped a lot. The fishermen helped a lot. Every time there's a catastrophe, every time there's a problem, or anything, the ones who go out to get gasoline, and everything, are the fishermen, that's for sure. I can tell you that's true.

So you have the satisfaction, the biggest reference will always be Hurricane Maria, although obviously we there on the big island, every time a hurricane comes, I stay there in my house, my God, protect Vieques and Culebra, the island of Santa Inverteee, all these little islands, because the impact almost always comes from Africa, and you are the first to feel the impact of these hurricanes.

That's right.

And yet, you have the satisfaction of saying, we fishermen are the ones who have pulled this community forward, so that it can sustain itself, because you have difficulty receiving food from the main island, right?

[01:44:13]

That's right. Right now, when María—I don't know if Interviewee told you, or if you've heard somewhere—but when María arrived, they didn't want to leave the planes, helicopters, or anything. There was a little girl about to die, and Jorgito put her on his boat in bad weather, set off, and took her to the island. And every time that little girl sees Jorgito, she asks for his blessing, and her mother, and she gives thanks with her life, because the little girl is alive thanks to him.

I remember that story.

Yes, and that's what's happened here a lot. Any problem arises, you have to look for anything. The first, I say this, and I say it with pride, the first to move quickly is Interviewee. Because people have gone missing and we've all left. I've gone missing and everyone leaves, and so people from the island are lost, and everyone moves. The fishermen play an important part.

We know. There are also historical photos, from when the Navy was in power, and it was the fishermen who threw themselves into the sea.

That's right.

And that's history. So, regarding natural disasters, have the people of Vieques taken steps to protect themselves from other events?

Yes, of course. Remember, you learn from one thing, and everyone here has learned a lot. Thank God. I always say that Hugo, Hugo was a disaster, but he was a blessing for the people of Vieques.

Because?

Because the vast majority of the houses in Vieques were made of wood, and when Hugo, the federal government gave a lot of help. I was one of those who lost my house, my house was made of wood, I lost it, and they gave me $28,000, and I took the $28,000, and the house of my children's mother is made of cement.

Concrete.

Complete. I made it with the kids, with the help they gave me.

And to protect fishing livelihoods, is there any way to protect them, has anything been done here to protect them?

I haven't heard anything.

You told me that when hurricanes hit, what you do is go fishing to sustain, to feed the people of Vieques.

When there is a need.

So how do you all survive the challenge of not having any money in my pocket because I'm not selling my catch, and the rising costs? You told me about the rising fuel prices, fishing equipment prices, boat prices, engine prices, gasoline prices. How do you deal with that, with these fluctuations, with days when you can't go fishing, the competition between you, especially if boats from these fishing companies arrive. You told me the impact isn't huge, you've already mentioned that. But how do you cope when there's no money coming in because a hurricane hit and we're left without a way to go fishing and generate income, because there's no power either?

[01:47:47]

That's right.

There is no water.

But in that case, we almost always don't help each other, and another thing is, rather than letting the fish die out there, it's better to bring it to people who need it, but we always help each other, something always comes up. This is just a temporary thing. Look, I have 30 lost traps up there, we're going to struggle, we're going to look for them. Whatever appears, you grab it, and the little you catch, you give it away.

But then how do you generate income?

It all depends, because this is what happens. Remember, one by one you recover. When Hugo, it took longer than Hugo. When Maria, I already had something in 30 days.

It's true?

Yeah.

Luckily, I was without power for six months on the big island.

But here, when these disasters happen, we're never there for that long. I say the longest time was during Hugo's time, and no one can say he was there for four months.

Come here, and you use Facebook to sell your catch?

No, not me.

Don't have Facebook?

Yes, I have one, but I don't use it, because I come back from fishing and the person is already there.

And do you communicate with other fishermen through Facebook, do you make explanations using Facebook, Instagram?

No.

Did you know that during the pandemic and the hurricanes, some fishermen used these social media platforms to sell their catch here in Vieques?

Not as far as I know.

Not that you know of.

At least that I knew of.

Do you feel that the local government helps you, organizations from other places, help you recover from all situations?

I, as I said just now, very few fishermen.

And what criteria have been used for those few fishermen? You don't know?

I have no idea. I can name names, but it's not appropriate.

There is no problem.

But right now, if you look, the government here has only given super-giant boats to some fishermen; not to other fishermen, they don't even look at them. I'll tell you something, they've never given me anything, and I don't ask for anything either, but they haven't given me anything. The only help they gave me was, I'd say about 35 years ago, when I caught a bubble and went blind. I was sick, and I was stuck in a chamber in San Tomás for about two weeks. From San Tomás, they took me to Ceiba and put me on a barge in a chamber there. After that, that's when they gave me help, and the help they gave me was vague. I'm not ungrateful. I'm grateful for the efforts made by whoever made them, because I don't know who it was, and that's when they helped me recover a little.

[01:51:42]

It's great that you were able to get that help. What are the biggest threats to fishing here, to ensuring that fishing remains sustainable?

I'd say bad times. And I'd also say they should regulate a little. The problem with government regulations is that they make these laws, but they don't look for ways to help fishermen.

They make the laws. And you think they enforce the laws? Are there people here who make sure they're enforced?

I think the fishermen themselves, the vast majority, are aware. Some are unconscious, but others aren't. I think they're still vigilant, because the Department of Natural Resources is doing a good job in some areas, not in others, but in others it is. And the police themselves, I have to tell you that, because they really are working hard, but they should regulate a little more.

How do you imagine the people of Vieques will ensure that fishing in Puerto Rico, in Vieques, continues to exist for future generations?

Forgive me, I didn't understand you.

OK. What can your Vieques community do to ensure fishing continues for another generation? There are your grandchildren, my granddaughters, or my grandsons.

Yes, but I don't think the people of Vieques have the capacity to deal with situations like that. I think the government should do that, because, what are the people of Vieques going to do? What am I going to do? The only thing is stop fishing, because what can we do?

And are young people becoming interested in fishing, or are fewer and fewer of them coming to fishing every day?

I think there are young people who are interested, there are, but they don't have the tools, as I said just now.

And that's what discourages them, that you don't have tools?

I think so. Imagine, there's a kid right now, right there on the same beach, right now you're sitting on the beach, and there are young boys there, 13, 14 years old, desperate to go fishing, to be taken fishing, to be taught how to fish, but people—we don't have the facilities, I'd like to, but I can't put them on the boat because I'm busy with work. I'd like to put them on the boat and teach them like I've taught most of them, but as I am, I jump in the water, two or three tanks and I go, with what I've caught, because I'm not going to get enough. Like I told the boy, I go, and after I earn 100 pesos at 10 in the morning, everything's fine.

[01:55:31]

If you had the opportunity to send them, if they put you in the town square, and all these young people came and stood before you, what message would you give, whether they were boys or girls, to these young people who have shown an interest in fishing? What would you say to motivate them? You're standing there, and you're the guest speaker. What would you say to them, taking into account that you're respected in the community for the knowledge you've acquired over time, which assures you that you're a wise person? What would you say to these young men and women?

The first thing I would tell them is that first, before anything else, the first thing you have to have in the ocean is respect, the respect of one fisherman for another. They should learn to respect each other's equipment, the gear in the water, because that's something we don't have here. Everyone is always worried about what the other one threw in, trying to steal from that one. I have 120 crates, more than $20,000 in fishing equipment, and you can believe me, I've never had, never caught 70 pounds of spiny lobster. (Spiny lobster, \*Panulirus argus\*)

Did they steal from you, or did they make a fool of you?

They stole them all. I gave the last 40 I had to Adán, a friend of mine in Culebra.

So the message is to respect the teams. And regarding the sea in particular, what would you say to those boys and girls?

That's exactly it, more or less the same: learn to respect marine life, more than anything else. Don't kill anything unnecessary. If you're going to make a living from it, take it up as a profession, with the pride I have. I'm proud to be in the water, I'm proud of the ocean, I'm truly happy. The most beautiful thing that could have happened to me in life is to be a fisherman.

I always try to do it that way, my dad taught me that, and from what I learned, from what he taught me, I like to teach, because if you teach a person, as the saying goes, to fish, then they can eat every day, and I have a saying with my son, I say, the day I die, I'll see myself in kilos, because you're 17 years old, and you know a lot more than old people who call themselves fishermen. Because he knows how to throw a cast net, he knows how to dive, he knows how to fish with a trap, he knows how to make a trap, he knows how to fish with a line, he knows how to captain a boat, and I tell him, and you go out there with that cast net, and you have your family there, I mean, when I'm gone, you're going to have your children, your wife, you're going to have a home, you go out there and you're going to get to know Mala really well, you go with that cast net, you throw it out, and you catch a couple of sardines, (Sardines, Herrings, \*Clupeidae\*) and with that you arrived, you made a broth and with a package of rice, your whole family ate even if you have five, six children, you made a broth, and they ate rice and a fish broth. You're not going to die of hunger. But I've also told him, since I'm gone, if you want to have a head for the mountains, do you know what that means?

[01:59:15]

No, explain to me.

If you want to start doing things you shouldn't do, things I haven't taught you, that's your problem, and the people aren't going to judge me anymore, especially you, because the people know that when your mother left, I took it upon myself to teach you and lead you down the right path, just like your aunt and your two sisters. It's up to you, the day I'm gone, which path you're going to follow. I taught you that life must be walked cleanly, as [INAUDIBLE] said, I walk cleanly so you don't get sick. And now I can help you, but the day I'm gone, I can't help you. And I tell the same thing to the people I take fishing. I take you fishing and you go with me and I teach you and I tell them, I'm teaching you this for your own good. If you want to continue doing it this way, do it and you'll continue learning. If you don't want to learn what I'm teaching you, which I'm doing for your own good, that's your problem. And I can keep bringing you there, but the day I tell you, 'This is how it is,' don't tell me, 'I know it,' because I won't tell you anything else. That's why my son, people talk to him and say, 'Can I tell your son this?' Because he's a good baseball player, and I tell him, 'Tell him whatever you want, because I know he'll listen, because I've told him, the day they're going to tell you something and give you advice about anything, even if you know it, stay quiet, don't say 'I know it,' no, you listen to him, maybe he's telling you something I didn't tell you or that you don't know. And I do like to teach. I take people to places, I teach them, I tell them how to do things to the best of my knowledge. I won't teach them what I don't know, I'm not going to start making things up. It's done this way, no, not by me. At least I'm sure I'm teaching him well. My dad taught me that.

One question, and that's it, because that's enough. I could stay here much longer.

Yes of course, but I also have coffee there.

You have a life. Are there many young people among the people you take fishing, or learning with? Are there many young people among them?

It's true, there are people who have dedicated themselves to fishing. There are people who say the first day I went fishing was with Pumba, the first fish I caught of this kind was with Pumba. My friend says, a friend I have says, my son-in-law tells him, if anyone can teach you, it's your father-in-law, because what he tells you, he tells you in good faith, I can tell you the name, Manolo McClan[ph], my friend Manolo McClan, he tells my son-in-law, if you want to learn, you have the best teacher there, because what he teaches you, he tells you in good faith, because he knows it, and don't give more than he knows, but what he tells you, it's because he knows it, because what he told me, I've done it and it's true, I've realized that what he told me, he told me because it was in good faith. Daddy told me that things were given in good faith or they weren't given at all, and Daddy always said this too: it's better to give than to have to receive. You give without expecting anything in return, and I learned this from my dad, my pride and joy.

[02:02:49]

It's a good note to end on. Thank you so much for taking all this time out of your day to tell me about your life, your father's life, your children's life, and the life of Vieques. Thank you so much.

I hope you liked my answers and we are here to help you with whatever we can.

And how do you feel, since you told me you were dizzy?

Yes, but it's my condition.

Is it because of cancer?

Sailing around so much, I had a stroke, I've had cancer twice, I have arthritis, my face is bad, only God knows why.

But he still goes and still dives?

No.

The son doesn't dive anymore.

Not me, my son dives. I don't dive much.

He doesn't dive.

No, but I used to wear divers a lot.