Interviewee D

Recording, perfect. I'm going to put this here on the area so we can hear you really well. Here, this is actually good. Perfect. Today is October 10th, 11:24 we are in Culebra with?

With Interviewee Dabone resident here of the Municipality of Culebra. I'm 28 years old. That's just a good start, so let's see [INAUDIBLE] first question.

Why don't you start by telling us what do you do and?

Right now I am a chef and fisherman. I've been doing that my whole life since I was two, three years old. I've been cooking and fishing. Recently I've left more from the kitchen and more focused on doing commercial fishing which really started when I moved here to Culebra in 2013. My first job was really just, I met a cool guy here and I started doing small time commercial fishing with him. And then I got into my full time commercial fishing license when I came back from New York. I was working there in the city. When COVID came that's when I really delved into the into commercial fishing because that was my only option at the time because everything was closed, the restaurants and whatnot.

You grew up here and then went to New York for school and work?

My dad is from Culebra, my family is from Culebra. They moved here from San Juan in the 60s. And my grandpa was also one of the first families that move to Culebra and he had a restaurant here where he did his own fishing for his restaurant. Fast forward, my dad moved to The Naval Academy when he was younger and then I was born in South Carolina. And in the military I lived all around the US but I always visited back to Culebra every year because it's where my grandparents were living. And then I moved here about 13 years ago.

And the move was due to the COVID pandemic?

No. Sorry I moved here when I graduated high school and I worked here for a few years but then I was studying in upstate New York. I was studying to be a chef in The Culinary Institute of America. I studied there in between here and there and then in 2017 I graduated college and then I moved back here. I worked here for a few years in the kitchen and then I got invited to work in New York City. Then I was there for about half a year and then COVID came and I left the city before I got stuck there and then I came back to Culebra in April 2020 I think.

You've been fishing commercially ever since?

Yes.

Can you tell us a little bit about- your family is originally from where? They moved in the sixties you said. From where?

From San Juan from the Bayamon area.

They're from Puerto Rico?

Yes. And my ancestors on my dad's side came from France to Puerto Rico in the 1700s.

What kind of fish do you target when you go fishing?

When I first started fishing when I moved here I was really immersed in spear fishing and free diving. I was doing that a lot and I was taught by one of the top people here in Puerto Rico at the time. He was one of the best spear fishermen free divers here. He taught me. I was just doing that maybe two or three times a week. And we would sell the fish at the restaurants here and do some trawling and some other types of fishing with a rod and reel but mostly focused on spear fishing. But now I have always done line fishing. I just do a single hook and line fishing, trawling where you're moving- where you're dragging lures behind the boat. And recently in the last two years I've done a lot of focus on the deep water snappers. Where you're fishing with electric reel offshore around anywhere from 500 to 2,000 feet deep.

And how you have a bigger boat then [CROSSTALK]?

It's funny because I started off fishing in 10, 12 foot little dinghies and now I have a larger 20 foot boat which is pretty comfortable for me right now. When I first started doing the commercial fishing after COVID I was in a 14. We were in a 14 foot handmade boat and that's- I was doing that for a year and a half in a small boat. We're fishing anywhere from 80 to 100 hours a week.

When you say handmade boat is it [CROSSTALK]?

It was a frame. Here we call it [INAUDIBLE]. It was just a frame. And then we rebuilt it up with fiberglass.

You were involved in building?

Yes. And then we did it a few times, because it's homemade you learn how to do the fiberglass work better and then you have to fix the boat. It'll crack eventually. Stuff like that.

Who do you work with usually?

At that time I worked with my companion. His name was Anthony Negron. He was the first fisherman here. He lives in the states now. But right now I have a couple people here that sometimes are available but this really is difficult factor here is to find people who to go fishing with. Because the kind of fishing I have to do for the deep water snappers it's a full two three days process each- one day to catch the bait because there's no bait available here. You catch the bait and then you'll prepare everything, prepare all the lines, prepare the boat and then the next day is a 12 to 16 hour day fishing. And then the day after that will be cleaning the fish and then trying to sell it here. To find somebody to help with that usually I would do 90% of the work where I go fishing getting the bait, I get everything the boat ready. I go fishing with somebody. That fishing is pretty dangerous to do by yourself. You want two people, everything's going to move, change very quickly and then the next day I do cleaning and selling the fish by myself. It's just a lot and I do that right now in my days off from my current job.

From being a chef?

Yes. I own a pizzeria here in Culebra.

Is it the pizza we eat yesterday?

No. I only open from Friday to Monday.

Do you sell any fish at your restaurant?

No. Because right now we're a little pop up because there's no spaces available here to actually get a brick and mortar restaurant. It's just right now I have a trailer, a big pizza oven, it's on a trailer and we go down to the [INAUDIBLE] set up for a few hours and I take it back home. I would like to in the future but right now.

There's a lot of questions I have. You mentioned that the job is dangerous when you do this job on the water. Can you tell me about [CROSSTALK]?

Yes. With this, the start right now the fishing grounds for this area is about anywhere from 12 to 30 miles from the coast. Just being that far from the coast already presents an amount of dangers because you're already an hour and a half two hours from any land and that's on a good day with good weather, you can go that fast. But being that far offshore is dangerous because if anything happens. You have to have everything prepared on the boat in case to respond to any type of incident. For example, some incidents could be you work with a lot of long lines on this type of fishing maybe anywhere from 30 to 60 feet's with 15 to 30 hooks online and basically with an eight pound lead on the end. Pulling up that line the electric reel I use to pull up the that long line only gets a certain part and then the rest of you to pull in my hand. You still have 60 feet you have to pull it by hand. And you have to put it in the boat in a certain way so the line doesn't get tangled itself. The line isn't tangled with you. Any of the hooks could hook onto your clothes, hook onto your hands and then the scary part is that sharks come up and just rip it back down. Because you have to pull it up a certain way quick enough where you don't give the sharks any chance that could possibly be there to come and bite the fish. But also you can't pull it up crazily where you get tangled and then you can get into more problems. That's one part. It's the tangling, things changing really quick like that. There's also some fish that are poisonous like these dogfish that live in the bottom. They have spines on their body that if they hit you with that spine you get some of the poison. It's right to the hospital with that and they're very active very aggressive little sharks. You have to take them off the hook in a certain way to avoid being pricked by them and whatnot. And then they're mixed in with the fish. It's all those things happening at the same time of pulling in the fish, watching out for the sharks and the boat, watching out for the sharks out the boat. And being offshore all those things you have to keep in mind. Doing it by yourself is possible but I'd rather not take any risks like that. It's not worth it.

How do you do that job if it takes a helper or two? How do you divide the labor?

I have one person holding a line and watching to make sure he could call out if he sees a shark then he would just let go the line. If you see a shark that's close enough then you let go of the line. Or with two people you can pull the line quickly. A person will spread it out along the boat things won't get tangled. It's a lot easier with two people. And then with two people you can always constantly be working. And you can fish a lot faster with two people, which is a great part. It's safety and then also you can fish a lot faster with two people. But when I don't have a person to go with me I usually would change my method of fishing. I would do a whole other type of fishing just because I got to have somebody to go with me to do the fishing that I would like to do.

What other type of fishing [CROSSTALK]?

Then by myself I would do more inshore within five miles or less. [INAUDIBLE] I would do jigging, just wind up with a single hook, jigging some bait at the bottom. Sometimes anchoring and try to get some other species that are here a little closer to shore or trawling around the island. But nothing offshore really.

This is a small island. There are about 600 families that live here.

Yes. There's about I think 1,200 residents, full time residents.

And how many commercials fishermen are there?

There's a lot of fishermen here that right now I'd say they're going to be people over the age of 50 the majority of the fishermen. A lot of them have been fishing their whole life but they never got commercial permit. But commercially fishing where they would come and sell their fish to the- in a commercial way not just to their friends or whatever. I would say that's a handful maybe eight to 10 fishermen. But currently fishing maybe one or two. And then there's myself and one other person here that's the same age as myself that does the fishing here. But other than that there's a big gap of age and people that fish. And then there's not really anybody of the younger generation that I've noticed that is looking to go do any fishing.

You think there's-

It's just- Yes, there's a handful there's a very small amount of commercial fishermen here.

Then that's enough to supply the local market or it's enough customers for you?

For the supply and demand is really tricky here because I've got- and a lot of it is based on, it's going to be based on the season because it's very seasonal here. Right now is the slow season. I went out fishing a couple weeks ago and in that one day fishing I filled up the restaurants for the next three weeks so now I can't really sell any more fish here. It's not really convenient for me at all. Then I have to do other types of fishing and try to find people in the mainland. Then I have to go over to the mainland to go sell my fish. If that works out.

And you do that sometimes?

Yes. I've done that. Because when I get a certain amount of fish that I know it's too much fish for here in Culebra I would just go to the mainland and sell the fish.

But that mostly happens in the slow season?

It'll happen in the high season too. Because sometimes I prefer to just try to sell the fish all at once instead of running around all day to sell the fish. If I have one person who can buy, for example, 300-400 pounds of fish I would sell them, one person all that fish. Instead of here I would divide it between restaurants and wait for different checks, different people, all that. I would rather just get it out of the way. But when I have less fish I would go to a restaurant here, maybe I'd say here right now I could probably do 250 pounds- [INAUDIBLE]. No worries, I can do probably about 250 pounds of fish mixed throughout all the restaurants here in Culebra. The other thing is a lot of places here don't pay the price that I would sell the fish at because some of these deep water snappers are at a higher price due to the risks and equipment because it's high risk fishing. But also the equipment for that you have to have a nice enough boat to go out that far. The sounders that you use to find the fish at those depths are anywhere from five to $10,000 for the sounding system. The machine itself is $5,000 for the electric reel and et cetera, the amount of ice, cooler, the bait and everything [INAUDIBLE].

The capital for you to invest in that kind of equipment came from the work you've done before?

I was lucky enough that there was a- I had money saved up. I had to pay out-of-pocket for the boat, out-of-pocket for some of the machines and everything's out-of-pocket. But a lot of the equipment that I've got, was it a few years ago, there was a foundation that came by the Blue Tide Foundation and they were giving out some funding. Then I requested with them and they brought over a bunch of equipment for different fisherman here, which was really helpful. And that equipment I still use because it's very expensive equipment, just the braided lines and the plastic lines, the weights, even the swivels and the small pieces that add up quickly to a couple of $3,000 to $4,000. A lot of it out of pocket but some of it was with grants but most of it always out of pocket. And I don't qualify right now for the full time fisherman status in Puerto Rico, because I don't make- 50% or more if my income isn't based out of fishing. So I can't qualify for the additional helps that are offered via [INAUDIBLE] department agriculture, which they can help you to give you some tax reliefs. There are some different breaks and payments to those purchases, but I don't have that option.

What's the percentage of income you make out of fishing?

Right now? It's going to be somewhere- It's probably somewhere between seven to 11%. It's not too much right now because I only fish once to twice- or once a week if I get the chance to. But at the beginning of this year, or at the end of last year and beginning of this year, I was waiting for my boat to get some repairs done on it because it's still with the factory insurance. I'm going to wait for them for them to cover that and I don't have to pay that money. Whatever delays they had they gave me a lot of excuses. But it was, my boat was out of the water for almost six months. I had six months I couldn't fish and that was in the high season of October to March. That was in the best season of people and of the fishing that I do. I missed out on all those opportunities to do that. It's bad that that affects my eligibility for certain things. Is that just because I couldn't fish it means- I can't fish and so I can't be eligible for that. Even though now I do as much fishing as I can do. But you know that past time still affects my current time now. [INAUDIBLE].

A cumulative lower year.

Exactly, yes.

But let's say if that didn't happen what would be the percentage that you think?

I was that was doing an extra 1,500 to 2,000 a week extra. It would definitely have been 20, 25% for sure.

And then the rest is from the-

The rest is from the pizza, exactly.

The majority is there?

Yes.

If you could show me on the map the areas that are valuable for the type of fishing that you do, that would be wonderful. And you said snapper? You can put it on the table. Wherever is comfortable for you.

There's more areas, mostly north of St. Thomas that aren't here on the mark on the map just-

You can write it, north of St. Thomas.

Then there's just different- It just depends on the fishing types of this is going to be-

You can just tell me what type of fishing they do. And this is?

The triangle is going to be deep water snapper fishing. And then in the square here is going to be trawling and single hook live line and jigging fishing.

And trawling for everything.

Yes. Trawling is going to be for the pelagic species and then this is going to be mostly my target species would be snappers and groupers.

Pelagic species can be?

In this area mostly it's going to be [INAUDIBLE], it's going to be mackerel. You can get mahi and the blackfin tuna. Those are the main three. The blackfin tuna because they get- the yellowfin tuna is a different story for here for sure.

Any swordfish?

No, that's going to be mostly at the deep water as well, the swordfish. The ahi, the yellowfin tuna, those are going to all be species that you would catch more towards, in the [INAUDIBLE] area.

In the [CROSSTALK].

Can you show me that in the area?

Sure, yeah. I haven't- I'm not really proficient in that fishing, it's something that I haven't really focused on. But yeah, sure.

But you know that that's where it is to fish?

What's important is that it's going to be just the deep water, the drop. [INAUDIBLE]. There, you can find it sometimes here. It's just not- you can find that here. And then all along the whole north drop here you can find fish out here.

You called this the north drop?

Yes. North of- I call it, looking at a map like this the north of [INAUDIBLE], which I know out here there's- let's see. You don't [INAUDIBLE] by chance?

Sure.

The good part about spending a lot of time for the deep water snappers is I get- and also looking at some of the [INAUDIBLE] I can find which areas are going to be muddy, which areas have rocks. Just for example, looking at the lead when I pull up the lead and I see on the lead there's mud on it, now I know this area is a muddy area. Or if I throw my lead and I see it's all chunks like it hit something I know there's a rocky area. Or if I my line gets stuck pulling it up I know it's a rocky area. You start learning to read the line and then to see how the bottom is.

It's called bathymetry?

Yes. See my sounder doesn't have that function anything. Out here and a lot of these you can find in the [INAUDIBLE] videos. Out here it's going to be rocky, rocky, and here rocks. And then on different maps you can actually see crevices that go all along here. And then as you fish close to those crevices that's where you'll see a lot more rock and structure but the rest of it any area outside of this is almost all mud. And fishing there is very unpredictable because sometimes you can get big fish but a lot of times in the mud you'll get some of the species that you don't want, like some of those bottom sharks and whatnot.

And you said, just remind me, in the pink area here you said that's what species?

The pink is going to be- it's going to be more of the pelagic offshore species, which are targeted by a lot of people. But I'm not very efficient. It's going to be they call it yellowfin tuna, wahoo and then the larger mahi's.

You catch the smaller mahi's?

Around here, yeah, exactly. Smaller is going to be from this- from a couple pounds to 10 pounds. But the larger ones can get anywhere from 60 to 70 pounds in size.

And they're there?

Yes. I know that they're there. I've seen them. Sometimes I've seen 100s of fish around the boat, especially in the south of Vieques and not one of them bites. You can't really do anything about that. They're just there. They're just hanging out.

If it's [INAUDIBLE].

Yes. You just I think in Spanish they call it [FOREIGN LANGUAGE]. It's just a large group of mahi's, especially offshore. I've heard really far offshore that's where you find- you see schools of hundreds of them together swimming, migrating, but sometimes they're hungry sometimes they're not hungry or sometimes you don't have the correct bait that they're interested in biting at that moment.

What do you think is the bait that's best for mahi?

I imagine live bait is usually the best for sure for species like that. They just the action and everything and a lot of fish only eat live or high quality bait.

What is some of the bait you use?

For the deep water snapper fishing the ideal bait that I use is bonito or other certain types of the smaller tuna species because it just works the best for me and I know a lot of people use that. But again here there's no nobody that sells that. I have to go out and catch it and try to catch those fish. I spend six eight hours the day before just trying to catch enough bait to use the next day fishing or in the future and whatnot.

I know you started fishing in 2020, not that long ago, but from what I understand you grew up here. Can you speak at all towards any environmental changes that you noticed in the environment?

Absolutely, because since I started off doing spear fishing that's great because I could visually get an image of everything that was going on. I've done spear fishing all around to around Culebra, around every small island, [INAUDIBLE] small keys around here anywhere, that's less than 100 feet I've done spear fishing here. So I put a lot of hours swimming. Definitely back when I first moved here and 2013, 2014 there was a lot of life that I would go off just from the beach. And you could easily get 30, 40 pounds of fish just from the beach shore. And then a few years later you could definitely notice things moving farther out. Then you have to start going out in the boat. Then you start going out 40, 50 feet. And then now it's definitely more challenging at least the last times I've been out where you have to start out 60, 80 feet to try to find the correct sizes that you're looking for. And then you start learning the moons because you can't- Before you can always go out every day and get all the fish that you like, all types of species. But now it's more set on this moon you have to go to this this place and maybe you'll get these fish. It's a lot more I guess science based or it's more a lot more specific now. It's not as easy as it used to be for sure. For the spear fishing aspect of it and for- I mentioned the bonitos because I get those for bait, all the time trawling around a lot of the corners here around the corners of Bustania[ph], around the corners of [INAUDIBLE], around the corners of Culebrita you would always get bonito one or two of them going around those corners. And now I haven't gotten any going around in the last years around those corners. Even this year compared to last year I've gotten a lot- it's so hard to find certain species of fish like the bonito. This water temperature has just been so hot. The top of the top water has been very hot. I can't say the number because I don't think my GPS is- my sounder is programed correctly because it says 91 which I know- that it has to be like 88, 87 something like that. But definitely it's been a very difficult year to find certain species those like the bonito.

Do you know more or less what possibly the change in top water temperature has been from 2013 to now?

No. I couldn't.

[CROSSTALK]. And what you said that your- you have a long ancestry here have you heard any stories from them about anything that could be important for us to know about environmental changes like that?

Not really. I think my grandpa mostly did- he did some spear fishing but he also did trap fishing with traps. But I'm not really sure about what how fishing was. I never had really a chance to talk to him about that.

Do you know what trap fishing he did? What kind of trap fishing?

I think it was the square fish traps. He would get a cage. He would throw a cage down.

No. But what species was he targeting? [INAUDIBLE].

No. It is for fish.

Any type?

Yes, exactly. He put a bait and then any type of fish went into that trap.

And that was done offshore?

That was done- well before the reserve of [INAUDIBLE] was a thing a lot of times they would do in that channel there was really good. It was pretty close by in those times. I'd say three miles or less. And in front of [INAUDIBLE] go out there until maybe 100 feet deep. And then in the towards Vieques [INAUDIBLE]. They still do that now. They still plenty of traps in the canal between Culebra and Vieques.

Can you point us in that area?

For which one?

The one that you told right now from [INAUDIBLE]. The one that you got the fish traps?

I just- we've played around trying to do fish traps, but it was never successful. Lobster traps you can do some-

But that isn't an important area for the commercial features?

It's going to be there and then ice and then it's going to be out here you'll find them, kind of here, here, and you'll find it really close to the dropout there and that little peninsula out there.

You think you're doing- the last big hurricane? 2017?

No. I was not here. I came right after.

2020 you returned and but you have family here?

Yes. I have family here.

What stories have you heard about what happened?

I know it wasn't so much Maria as much as it was Irma. That really affected Culebra. But it was, you have a couple weeks without power, without water. And then the thing is whether it's a small storm or a big storm. It always tends to ended up being the same way that- it's the reaction of Culebra. We're really loved because our community helps out a lot when it's big storms. We have our own generator here which has been very nice, especially when the island is out of power. We were one of the first CPOs to have power after the hurricane was here. But then of course challenges of bringing things over, because everything has is brought over, all the food and everything has to be brought over, assessed. But I know there was a lot of relief that came. It was difficult but I know it wasn't something wasn't impossible for Culebra to handle.

You mentioned also earlier that there's not a lot of fishermen, and especially not a lot of young fishermen. Why do you think that is?

I know that fishermen can be very difficult when it comes to showing people where they fish, showing people their knowledge, because of course, that is what sets you apart from the next guy, next to you is your understanding and knowledge of that. But at the same time, it has to be known that sharing knowledge is how the things continued. You can't just hold on to the knowledge and then think it's going to be passed on or whatnot. And well, I know that there's a lot of education around fishing here in Culebra. There aren't really many opportunities to bring people out, as in like, you have to know somebody, and they have to, it's not easy. It's not an easy job either. The hours and the work, and especially beyond the ocean, a lot of people aren't comfortable with the ocean. A lot of people here who live in islands, still don't know how to swim. It's challenging that people who are really interested in fishing, because it's not really, you don't see it in the social media. You don't see all fishing. It's not that thing you see, a cool thing and then this, it's just a lot of work and a lot of people are more focused towards computers, electronics now, instead of younger generations versus how it used to be. I think I was one of the last generations of people who played outside before it switched to electronics. I remember that switch happening when I was younger.

And what do you remember like? [CROSSTALK]

Well I remember like when the iPhone just came out. I remember when those things started coming out, the MacBooks, touchscreen phones. I remember, it's when I was in seventh, eighth grade, all those things started changing. And then after that, video games started coming out. I definitely noticed a different switch of people's pastimes and where people's focuses were going wasn't less outside and more inside.

What kind of opportunity for young people does this island offer in terms of making money or career or jobs?

Well, this different restaurant. It's going to be tourists and based businesses. Restaurants, car rentals, taking care of, cleaning, working with the Airbnbs, the hotels here, that's kind of the only option. There isn't a lot of open places for people to make a career with. It's not really many career options that I put it that way. I've had to make my own career path with a restaurant that took me a few years now to study, going with a restaurant, but that's been a lot of time. And you can imagine dedication to opening that but a lot of people don't have that support, or they don't have that motivation to go and do their own path. And again, like fishing here, really, there isn't a large fishing community. There isn't a central area yet. I know we're working on the Via Pesquera right now here, so I think see it, because there's a few young kids who may like fishing, but it just not seem to be right calling right now to people.

Tell me a little bit more about Via Pesquera.

That has been a project that we're working on for almost two years now, trying to get that opened. I am the treasurer on the board members on the Via Pesquera. It's just been a battle mostly just with political bureaucratic battle working with the mayor here, and also his, the mayor and working with the political standpoints that think that space can be used for a better thing, to make money for somebody else. Or, because a lot of times places in Culebra are used as political bargaining. For example, there's a program here for houses that you can apply to as a resident. And it's been known for the past generation of mayors that instead of being allocated those to residents, they are bargained off to certain people who live in the mainland and have no right to have that space. And all of a sudden, people who aren't from here, who don't have a necessity, like a need, who aren't low income, they have a nice parcelas here, just a lot of, it's not really great management of certain things.

What are the benefits to the mayor [INAUDIBLE]?

Well, I could imagine that it would be, well, you could use it as just bargaining tokens for depending who person may be bargaining off to, you could benefit your campaign for example, yeah. The Via Pesquera has been challenging, because I think the mayor has visited only once or twice over the two years, the current mayor, to the Via Pesquera, which, of course, we would like to see more support, because they always say, "We support you", but then there's no demonstration of that support. It's always contrary. It's always like, Oh, wait, why is it a sign? We are always trying to get something signed. We have, for example, this project, where we're trying to do a lot of good things to rebuild in Cayo Pirata, in the bay where they're going to get more things done, like a very large federal funded grant. It could take a $20 million grant that we have everything ready for it. We say the secret for the mayor, and it's sitting on the desk for more than zero days. It's something that's, I don't know why, it's not something that's been signed yet. It doesn't make sense to me. Something that's ready to go, very beneficial for everybody in Culebra, but it hasn't been signed yet. I just understand that myself. And I mean, I don't know what political, if there's any politics involved, I imagine there is. And I know right now there's about to be an election, so it's a big influence on certain actions being taken for sure.

Tell me a little bit more about the ground, what it would do and how it would benefit?

Well, I believe it's going to fix and add new moorings to the bay. Cayo Pirata, that little island in the middle is going to be rebuilt. They are going to build a marine museum on there to tell the history about Culebra. It's going to be probably a potential future spot for certain businesses that offer maybe food or beverages there. Also, I know it was fixing Cayo Pirata and installing mooring, also installing all the slowing down buoys, and the five mile an hour buoys, no wake zones, all in the bay, partially for the manatees, but also for the people's docks that people will fly by because there's a buoy, so we can't legally do anything about that. And there's supposed to be buoys, there have been but they just don't last very long. It's just a project to advance the marine side of everything, but it just hasn't been signed yet.

And that grant was submitted and?

I can't tell when it was submitted, but I know it expires at the end of November.

But who submitted the request?

A couple of other members of the Via Pesquera.

Is the Via Pesquera then [CROSSTALK]

Absolutely, yeah.

I understand. And that was from the federal government?

Mm-hmm. Yeah.

How did you guys find out about that grant [CROSSTALK]?

Well, I know Nicolas. He is the Secretary, but he also the overseeing of everything that goes on at the Via Pesquera. I know he is very well in with a lot of because he used to work for a lot of biologists. He's been in marine biology. His Master's in that. He's well versed with like, who you need to talk to, and different programs and whatnot. I know he probably found this, not sure how, with whom, but I know pretty sure he started this. But it's also a project that past mayors have promised to work on, or it's always something that's been talked about is fixing the marine status and the bakers a lot of times, people just throw their anchors, like the sailboats that come in, they just anchor instead of having more, because there's no moorings available. This would be something that could also provide future businesses with a mooring, something where somebody can manage the moorings, and then you would charge for different services. And then there's all the trash, or all the waste from the boats, where to go. There's no service to take off the trash or waste. Of course, it's going to go to the bay, unless you have some responsible people that will take it to the shore. But it's not easy to do that. It could be the start for a lot of other, catalysts for a lot of other services which would be beneficial to Culebra's environment, the bay and whatnot.

Are there any women that are at all connected with commercial fishing?

Commercial fishing, no, but I know more towards some small town fishing they would do from the shore. And I know that there are women involved in the Via Pesquera that have worked late in the previous Via Pesquera, which my grandfather helped open that. And that was in the 70s. Here we used to have a Via Pesquera. And I know that there's more in the processing part of the fishing staff, but there isn't very many women involved right now. I know right now the current manager of the Via Pesquera is a woman.

What also, the Via Pesquera has, like, you said you're the treasurer and there's the woman who is the manager.

Yeah, we have the board is five members. It's going to be the secretary, treasurer, President, Vice President. And then here's the whole column, which is the spokesperson of trying to get people interested and to come to meetings and whatnot. And then we have a manager, which is it on the board, but it's we include her in the meetings now, because that person's going to be the day-to-day managing of the things that go on at Via Pesquera.

What are these things that go on?

Right now it's still not open. We are in the process of finishing some of the constructions to get our health permit and then with that, we can finish the rest of the processes. Right now, ideally, it's going to be a place where a fisherman could come and get ice, get bait before they go out. They would be able to sell the fish there later, and they would be able to clean their fish as well and sell it by themselves. It would be a place to clean fish and sell fish too. It will be a place for fishermen to hang out in from the land. It will be a fish shop that we will be selling, open to the public and also to the locals here. And it will also be a place to offer support for, I know, offer different workshops, different classes and could be potential financial support if we can get different grants that we've helped get to give to other fishermen, for example, a new engine. We get fishermen some new engines, some equipment for some person. And we've got dive equipment. If people want to do a dive scuba class where they can use that equipment to take a class. It's going to really involve all aspects of teaching, of learning, just a place where people can really talk about fishing.

A lot of the people we interviewed talked about how everybody fishes here from the shore, and that how fish is part of their daily diet or weekly diet so it's very important, literally. There are people who fish themselves and also buy certain types of fish. Is there a time where a celebration that there's a lot of need for a certain type of fish, for example?

No, there isn't really any celebrations yet. I know from a chef's point of view, I'd like it to be a thing in the Via Pesquera, I guess again, in the future, to have a fish fry for the town or once a month. Could be something that would be to collect money for donations or for funding or whatnot. But right now, there's not, there isn't any. I know in some countries that they have celebrated certain days. Celebration is based around certain fish. I wouldn't say that so much here, that there is a specific thing like that, but I know that during the season opening, so you have the different sea snails and the conch, like those different things that people really love having those one that seed was open for different species. But no, it's not really any specific need that I've noticed like that for fish.

How detrimental, I guess, would it be if, for example, you also cannot catch certain species of fish, like especially the shore? I understand that's a big part of the local use, shoreline fishing.

Well, it wouldn't really affect me, because I don't do much shore fishing, but I know that this, and I think a lot of people that do shore fishing, I think it's because fishing is mostly like also relaxation. So it's like they do it to relax, and they catch something great. But I don't really know anybody who does shore fishing to use that to make a profit from the fish, that makes sense?

In terms of like, just the family life, cultural life. Would that be an impact do you think?

Well, if they weren't able to catch certain species, I don't think that so much as in, if they weren't able to fish, just for example, if something was privatized and they weren't able to get access to a certain place, I know that would definitely affect some people because it's supposed to be here in Puerto Rico that the beaches are public. It's land of the people. It cannot be privatized. If that was the thing that happened, yeah, that for sure affect people.

Is there anything else you want to add, anything that you would like anyone who listens to this oral history to know about fishing in Culebra?

I know that, it's funny, one of the biggest challenges of fishing, usually is the fishing itself, going out and catching the fish. But for me personally, one of the biggest challenges is to find people to buy fish here. That's just one of the biggest challenges is to find sales here. Sometimes it's easier, sometimes it's not easier. I just wanted to talk about that some, but not really notice, fishing here in Culebra has always been something present in my life, present in many people's lives here for sure. And I would hope that there was going to be some, hopefully in it there will be always something, with the Via Pesquera opening especially that there will be more interest in younger, future generations that will want to help continue the legacy of Culebra being a fishing Island. It's hard for me to find places to sell. It's also very difficult too as a tourist or even a local, it's hard to find fish to buy. It's funny, because if people want fish, but it's hard to, because it's also a very, it's low income so certain fish, certain species, you can't sell as a fisherman and make money off of which as a fisherman, I would love to just fish and give the fish out for free. But I know it's not really sustainable for myself to do that. Because it's more of a passion for me more than a money making process. Hopefully, with the Via Pesquera, there will be a medium where the Via Pesquera can buy fish and that will definitely take away my fear of not having sales. It would be the Via Pesquera. Like last week, I didn't go out fishing because I knew I didn't really have anybody to sell it to so I was like, "Well, I'm not going to go fishing and catch a bunch of fish and then not have anything to do with it." Not also very responsible and what I deal with the fishing and I don't think it's good. I'm not going to go out and just take everything that I can take and, well, if I can't do it, then throw it out like this doesn't, nothing that it sits well with me.

Yeah, I find that it's very interesting that we noticed this phenomenon in Vieques. And here, I thought it wasn't as bad, the fact that you think it's fine fish, fresh fish, or freshly caught fish in almost every restaurant, and it's hardly a lot at all in the restaurant.

And then, because the prices of fish are nothing crazy, nothing far off from San Juan. And price of living, I'd say is more or equal to San Juan, with the cost of life in general. But with the fish, a lot of restaurants here all buy a lot of frozen fish. I think in part, because of the price, they can make a lot more money that frozen fish that you get imported from wherever, instead of buying local fish. But then also, the consistency of people be able to provide fish has been very fluctuating, I can imagine over the decades. Then it's better for the restaurant to have a constant supply of a better priced fish, instead of having not constant supply of a $1 or $2 more pound fish. Because it's a very tight margin for the restaurants, which, it sucks because I can't say there's a seafood restaurant that just sells fresh seafood here in Culebra, it doesn't exist. There's some restaurants that sometimes will sell fresh seafood when they have it, sometimes they won't buy it, even if they don't have it, because there's not enough money, it's just too close of a margin for them, and they want to make more money, which I'm not really happy about that, because it's like, how do you just say you sell fresh fish, but then you won't buy fresh fish from me?

Are the restaurants that you target when you sell fish mostly target also tourists as their clientele?

Yeah, the majority is going to be tourists. Yeah, absolutely.

Well, thank you so much for sharing all of this information with us. If you have any questions or if there's anything you want to add, please do so.

No, I think that's it for now.

Well thank you so much. This was very unique for me, so it was nice to- Let me start this. There's one more thing for you. The question is, you moved here because of the pandemic, would you like to continue the rest of your life here? What are your thoughts or feelings about that?

Yeah, because Culebra has always been a home to me, just having moved all the time, growing up and then having lived here for a while, like I considered here at home. I like to, of course, always include flavor in my life, and my passions are fishing and cooking so here has been always a great spot that welcomes that, opens up those passions that I can make a life with those two things I love doing.

And do you think you'll be able to do that?

I will make sure my life makes it work out. Because that's how I've been really trying to work on my life, to design a life where I can cook when I want to, and fish when I want to. Right now, I cook a lot and I hope really can change it over from maybe right now, I'd say 80% cooking, 20% fishing, to do at least 50,50, yeah and hopefully make my lifestyle to that way.

Thank you.