Interviewer: To begin with, let's just introduce yourself, and feel free to tell me your story of fishing. How did you get into it? Just tell me your story.

Interviewee Interviewee: My name is Interviewee Interviewee, and I got into the fishing industry because I grew up in it. My father was a commercial fisherman all my life. I came from a big fishing family. All my uncles, my cousins, my grandfather, my great-grandfather – they were all fishermen. I have two cousins who don't do fishing, and that's it.

Interviewer: Right. That's interesting. Was fishing a natural progression for you?

Interviewee: Yes.

Interviewer: In terms of what you were going to do, what you were going to be?

Interviewee: Yes. I always wanted to be just like my father. So I always knew I was going to be a fisherman. Didn't please my father too much. [laughter]

Interviewer: Why? Did he have hopes that you would do something else?

Interviewee: He always wanted me to do something else. Yes. I went to college and everything to please him, and I have a degree in English.

Interviewer: And then you came back or did you do it here?

Interviewee: I went to UVI [University of the Virgin Islands]. It's the only place I get the in-state tuition.

Interviewer: That's true. What a great school though, too.

Interviewee: Eh.

Interviewer: Yeah? How many generations of fishermen in your family?

Interviewee: Like I said, it goes all the way back to my great-grandfather.

Interviewer: Your great-grandfather. So, it's great-grandfather, grandfather, father, you. Do you have kids?

Interviewee: No, I do not, but if I ever did, I would teach them. My niece and my nephew live here. My sister has two kids.

Interviewer: Do they engage in fishing?

Interviewee: We've taken them. I've taken them and the kids on short [inaudible] since they were small, and we help them as much as I can, but I make them do their own fishing.

Interviewer: Nice.

Interviewee: A lot of people come there, and the parents are doing the fishing; the kids, they're playing on the iPad and all that. I make them do their own fishing. The only thing I do is bait the hook, and when they catch the fish, I take it off the hook for them. [laughter]

Interviewer: Do you shore fish or do you fish from a boat?

Interviewee: I fish from boat.

Interviewer: Both commercially and when you're doing recreational stuff with your kids or the nephews?

Interviewee: That's an onshore tournament, so you have to fish from a dock. When I was a kid, you could fish anywhere in St. Thomas as long as you were onshore. Now they've changed the rules, you have to fish in Red Hook off the dock.

Interviewer: Okay. How is onshore fishing here in St. Thomas? I know in St. Croix, it's interesting. In the East End Marine Park, they have bonefish and they have all kinds of interest – do you guys have similar kinds of –?

Interviewee: Yeah, I've seen bonefish here. I've seen people come down with the fly fishing rigs to catch them. They're all in it. It's all catch and release, though. It's all for the fight and all that.

Interviewer: Right. Interesting.

Interviewee: I see people hook tarpon, too. It's the same thing.

Interviewer: That's what I heard. I heard there’s [inaudible].

Interviewee: It's because he's a big fighter. He's a big fish, and it's all catch and release because there's no point in bringing in a tarpon.

Interviewer: What about food fish from shore? Do people fish for subsistence, and they go out there to catch their – ?

Interviewee: I see people out there. When I'm out in sea, I see people. I pass some of the points going out, and I see people out there on the rocks fishing. Because, like I said, there's no road. They've climbed the rocks at a good point to get out there. I don't know what they're catching.

Interviewer: It's quite an effort, huh?

Interviewee: Yeah. They're putting in quite an effort to get out there. They don't have a boat, so they're doing the best they can to get from land. They're trying to get the farthest point out to catch something.

Interviewer: What do you think that they target? Do they target jacks and snappers?

Interviewee: No, I think they're targeting the bottom fish, like the hind or the butterfish.

Interviewer: You've been fishing all your life except for the time you took – when you went to college.

Interviewee: Even when I was in college –

Interviewer: You were fishing.

Interviewee: – I worked fishing.

Interviewer: You're forty, say pushing forty.

Interviewee: I am forty.

Interviewer: You're forty. Then you have your father, your grandfather, and your great-grandfather – if your grandfather or your great-grandfather were sitting at this table here today and he were to describe the fishery in his day, as compared to you sitting here right now describing fishery, what changes would you see in the fishery between your great-grandfather's time and your time?

Interviewee: Well, in my time, we fish much more out there. My great-grandfather – my father used to talk about going in sea with him, and they didn't fish the [inaudible]. They didn't have to in those days. They fished much closer. We go West; we go East. They never did that in their days.

Interviewer: Was that because the abundance was there or the technology wasn't there?

Interviewee: Well, a little bit of both. There was a lot of abundance of fish. They didn't need to kill themselves to get to them, and they only had so – I think a six-horsepower is the biggest engine they could find on island. [laughter] Where are you going with a six-horsepower?

Interviewer: That's as fast as rowing, isn't it?

Interviewee: Kind of. In those days, you had to – when you use the seine, then when you come in, you have to hang it up to dry. You don't do that today because seines are made of different material now.

Interviewer: Even the gear was different.

Interviewee: Even the gear.

Interviewer: Called the same thing.

Interviewee: Right. That's what a seine was in those days, but it wasn't made of nylon in those days, so you had to hang it up and let it dry because if you didn't, it would mold.

Interviewer: Right. Were there, back in those days, people that specialized in net mending and things like that?

Interviewee: Any of the guys in the seine industry would know net mending.

Interviewer: So they would know how to do it themselves?

Interviewee: Yeah. My father was always a seine fisherman. I never knew my father to have fish traps. Never saw him haul. He always did net fishing or line fishing his whole life. The little bit of line fishing he did was trolling, like for kingfish. The amount of times I've seen him go night fishing, I could count on one hand. He was mainly a net fisherman, and because he was, he knew how to hang a seine; he knew how to mend a seine.

Interviewer: What type of fishing do you do commercially?

Interviewee: I do net fishing.

Interviewer: You do net fishing.

Interviewee: I do line fishing. I'm trying to get into trap fishing. It's not easy, but I do as much as I can.

Interviewer: What side do you fish off of? Are you on the North side, or are you on the [inaudible]?

Interviewee: I'm on the North side. I'm out of Hull Bay.

Interviewer: You're out of Hull Bay. Twenty years ago, when I was in shape and fit, I used to surf there out of Hull Bay.

Interviewee: I swim out. When I have the time to, I swim to the point and back for exercise.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: Takes me about an hour.

Interviewer: It's beautiful underneath, though, isn't it?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: I love the curvature of the bottom as you swim out and make a right. As you go out towards in between the two – the island. You look at that bottom and it sets the perfect A-frame wave when it comes in through there because it's got that perfect –

Interviewee: They surf on the other side. They don't surf on the point side.

Interviewer: I saw the shallow end over – that’s a long paddle, by the way.

Interviewee: I swim out to the point.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: When you get behind the point, it really drops off. The water gets dark blue and black. There were these little fish, came to hide under my shadow. I’m like, “Oh, yeah. I'll save you.” [laughter]

Interviewer: Right, right. You became a FAD [fish aggregating device].

Interviewee: They were like, “We see something crawling; let's take our chance to move here.” [laughter]

Interviewer: Wow. That's a long swim.

Interviewee: Well, like I said, I do it for the exercise when I can fit it into my schedule, and it takes me about an hour.

Interviewer: Wow. That's a good swim. That's a good swim.

Interviewee: They say swimming's good exercise because you use every muscle in your body.

Interviewer: That's true. It's like a perfect cardio. Do you spearfish? Do you do any free diving and anything like that?

Interviewee: Yeah, I do. In the net industry, you're constantly free-diving.

Interviewer: You're going in and setting the nets in the water?

Interviewee: No. You don't set a net. A seine –

Interviewer: You do a seine in a circle, right?

Interviewee: Right. And then you have to work the net manually. You have to get in there with the fish and everything.

Interviewer: Oh, okay. Wow.

Interviewee: A seine doesn't – you have to tuck fish and things like that. You have to know how to use it.

Interviewer: That sounds rather dangerous.

Interviewee: Well, not if you know what you're doing. That's why you don't see too much people out doing seine. It's a lot of work.

Interviewer: How many people do you think use seines on St. Thomas?

Interviewee: Today? There's maybe three or four crews. Like I say, a crew because it's not something you go out by yourself. You go with at least a crew of two or three.

Interviewer: Okay. How many crews do you think there are?

Interviewee: Maybe three or four on island, but it was never a big fishery.

Interviewer: And you find it still to be productive today?

Interviewee: Yeah, it is. Now, I'm not going to say that it's not, but the only problem we're having in these days is we don't see the bait like we used to. See, that's what you do with a seine. You go with the bait, and you see what shows up for the bait. You're hoping a school fish shows up for the bait.

Interviewer: Makes sense.

Interviewee: But if there's no bait to go look at –

Interviewer: I've heard the bait comment for the last few years. This isn't something that's brand new in St. Thomas.

Interviewee: No, it's been getting bad and worse and worse.

Interviewer: What do you think is the problem? Where is the bait? I'm from Barbados, and we haven't seen flying fish forever. That's the number –

Interviewee: I see them here from time to time, running from the boat, and not like I see any big schools.

Interviewer: Right. Well, that's the thing. That used to be the number one food fish in Barbados, was flying fish.

Interviewee: I've heard that.

Interviewer: We don't see them hardly anymore.

Interviewee: Those are good bait.

Interviewer: They're great bait.

Interviewee: That's why I tell people, “Eat them.” “No man, put a hook, and he'll come back with a wahoo.

Interviewer: Wahoo. Exactly. We always say that the third world's dinner is the first world bait. You know what I mean? Do you think that there's something happening that's causing there to be a reduction in bait?

Interviewee: No, I don't think so. I think the only thing that's done in the bait here, I think there was a lot of mismanagement in the fishery. Things that were allowed that shouldn't have been allowed and we're paying the price for it now.

Interviewer: In terms of how would that impact bait? People taking [inaudible] –?

Interviewee: They allowed people to go catch bait in areas they shouldn't have.

Interviewer: Like nursery protected areas where they –?

Interviewee: Right. There's protected areas where they allow – stuff like that.

Interviewer: You think that that was just an over-harvesting and a bad practice that people engaged in, which affected the abundance of bait today?

Interviewee: Kind of. It's not that cut and dry.

Interviewer: What other things might it be?

Interviewee: Some people think it's the seaweed chasing it because we're getting a lot more than we ever used to.

Interviewer: The sargassum?

Interviewee: Right.

Interviewer: You guys seeing a lot of sargassum here in St. Thomas?

Interviewee: Yeah. More than we – I remember sargassum in the past, but never to this scale. You see some beaches where it comes in when the wind's blowing from the East. When we get that stiff East breeze, there's beaches that are on islands that are uninhabited out there on the Keys. There's some beaches that are wide open to the East, and you'll just see it there just piling up for days because it's wide open to the East, and that East breeze is just blowing, putting every piece of seaweed – shoving every piece of seaweed that way.

Interviewer: Do you think that that's having any impact on the fisheries today?

Interviewee: Like I said, I think it might. There are a lot of guys who think there's a theory that it's chasing bait because it's going into a lot of areas where the bait used to hang. See, the bait goes in there. They say they see the seaweeds all out, and they leave.

Interviewer: So they go with the seaweed?

Interviewee: They –

Interviewer: Or, they run away from the seaweed?

Interviewee: Right. They run away is what some people think.

Interviewer: Interesting. What sort of cultural connection does the island, St. Thomas, have to fishing? Are there parades? Are there ceremonies? Are there things where people celebrate the fisheries or that the fisheries is a part of?

Interviewee: Well, you'll see one celebration this weekend now, Bastille Day, the big party. Because a lot of us are from French heritage, including myself. My great-grandfather, the one I told you about, came here from St. Barts. Both my grandmother's father and my grandfather came here from St. Barts. My great-grandmother too. My great-grandmother on my grandfather's side, however, did not. She's the only one that did not come from St. Barts. She was here when it was Danish.

Interviewer: Wow. What was the rationale for them coming over from St. Barts? Was there opportunity? Was there –?

Interviewee: Yeah. Opportunity because things were so bad in St. Barts. My father told me his great-grandfather would tell him stories about them picking salt and in the salt pond because things were so rough there. When he reached St. Thomas and saw where he could make a lot more opportunity, he – my father said he was around when he swore [inaudible] swore he'd never go back to those conditions in St. Barts. It's so funny because look how different St. Barts is today. That's where all the millionaires go to hang out. [laughter]

Interviewer: That's crazy. Did your great-grandfather reside on the North side as well?

Interviewee: Yes, he did.

Interviewer: Was he also a farmer or was he just a fisherman?

Interviewee: He did fish and then he did farming when he got older in life.

Interviewer: What did he farm for? Was it just foods and vegetables?

Interviewee: Bananas and avocados and things like that.

Interviewer: Nice. Are there any sites underwater that are archaeologically important? Are there any sort of historical sites that exist underwater or anything that goes back to like a sunken ship from the –?

Interviewee: I've heard stories about pirate ships here and I think the Wreck of the Rhone – I think they take the tourists there and all that.

Interviewer: Is that a dive site?

Interviewee: Right. Like I said, they take the tourists there, and that's the big thing. They'll dive the Rhone. It's a sunken ship, but that's all tourism. That's nothing to do with the fishing industry.

Interviewer: Right. Do you find competition between tourism and the fishing industry?

Interviewee: I have before because I do seine fishing. We have to sit, and you wait for a school of fish, and you do a lot of waiting sometimes. Finally when the school of fish shows up, somebody who's rented a jet ski will drive through it to see the birds go in the air. My uncle has thrown some choice words at them before for that.

Interviewer: I don’t doubt that. You mentioned that you guys came over from St. Barts.

Interviewee: My great-grandfather.

Interviewer: Your grandmother was already here from Danish – your great-grandmother was here from –?

Interviewee: One great-grandma.

Interviewer: From Danish times?

Interviewee: Yeah.

Interviewer: What other mix of people are involved in the fisheries? What other ethnic groups are involved in the fisheries here in St. Thomas? Do you have people from Jamaica, or do you have people from –?

Interviewee: I know a guy that came here from Jamaica and he was determined to become a fisherman. After years and years of doing bush work, the landscaping, he finally got on a boat and he's been on a boat ever since. Over twenty years now, he's working the back of someone's boat in the trap industry. But that's what he came here to do. Found out it wasn't an easy industry to get into, so he had to do something else to support himself. But when he finally got his shot, he never went back.

Interviewer: There you go. Are there other groups, different groups of people? Hispanic descent?

Interviewee: I don't see too many Hispanics out there. Maybe in Puerto Rico. They come over here for the holidays. Any day off – any three-day weekend, they come over, and they call it the Puerto Rican Navy. They all come to Magens Bay, and they anchor onto one side. I guess they really like it there because, like I said, any three-day weekend, they're there.

Interviewer: Really?

Interviewee: Yeah. Then that's a long –

Interviewer: And they ride their boats all the way over?

Interviewee: Yep, all the way over and then all the way back to go back to be at work Monday morning.

Interviewer: You can feel like you got beat up doing that, couldn’t you?

Interviewee: These are big boats they're coming on. We're talking over forty feet. Those big marlin boats, that's what they're coming over on. Those have air conditioning and everything, better than first class on a plane.

Interviewer: Right. A floating hotel. So you don't see much ethnic diversity. You don't see a lot of mixes of people that –?

Interviewee: I see African Americans in the fishery.

Interviewer: Are they involved in the management side of things?

Interviewee: I saw one guy one time, but more in St. Croix you see them in the management.

Interviewer: What about the role of women in fisheries? You mentioned that your grandfather, your great-grandfather, you, your father, you all – what about women, do they play a part in the fisheries? Whether it's actually fishing or some other aspect, marketing the fish?

Interviewee: I have seen guys that have sent their wives to sell fish and sew, but that's never been in my family. My mother always worked a job. Both my parents always worked. My mother was never a housewife because that – I have three other siblings. I have three older sisters. My parents always had four kids, so they were always working, and my mother always worked another job. My father never made her come out to clean fish or sell fish or anything like that. I've never seen any of my uncles or my grandfather, anyone do that either. I've seen other families do it, but not my own.

Interviewer: Was it important for women to have a job in terms of to help the household income? Or was that because they wanted to be busy, they wanted to do something, they wanted to be a professional, or –?

Interviewee: I think what's important these days – I couldn't tell you back then because I wasn't around, but these days where what's important is when it comes to getting stuff like insurance – I run my own – I'm self-employed, so it's really hard for me to get insurance. I've even tried to buy it, and they won't sell it to me because they won't sell a single policy. You see other guys who are in my situation – I'm not married. I'm single. Their wife gets a job, and the income isn't important, but the benefits are.

Interviewer: The benefits are.

Interviewee: And you see, they're able to insure their spouse and their kids.

Interviewer: Now this is your health insurance and things like that?

Interviewee: Right. My father was luckily covered under my mother. My mother was allowed to insure a spouse, and he was covered under that. He battled cancer for three years with many surgeries, two of them major, and thank God he had insurance, that my mother was able to get insurance for him.

Interviewer: I imagine the bills.

Interviewee: Exactly.

Interviewer: Let me see here. What sort of challenges do you see facing the fishery today? What things do you think make commercial fishing difficult?

Interviewee: Well, the challenges I see today, this island always had it in their culture and in carnival, and everything's a big deal. But you see cultures changing and these kids these days, it's nothing like their parents and their grandparents, where their idea of fish is fish filet at McDonald's. [laughter]

Interviewer: Do you think that there's an aging out of the fishery?

Interviewee: Well, I see them buying fish, but it's because their grandmother or their mother’s on the phone telling them to make sure to bring home fish. [laughter]

Interviewer: You guys live in Hurricane Alley. You guys have been smashed – 2017 with Irma and Maria, Hurricane Hugo back in –

Interviewee: Well, I thought Hugo and Marilyn were much worse.

Interviewer: Oh, really?

Interviewee: Yes, Irma –

Interviewer: Even though these were category five [inaudible].

Interviewee: Yes, but Hugo was a category five.

Interviewer: True, true.

Interviewee: Marilyn was a category three, they claim. There was always some gray area there. Because even if you go to Wikipedia and look up Hurricane Marilyn, it will tell you how, when they go into the eye, they found hail, and it's only those big ones like category five that produce hail.

Interviewer: That produce hail.

Interviewee: Yes, not those little ones like category three.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: That showed you right there, that was a really big storm, bigger than they were admitting.

Interviewer: What year was Marilyn? Do you remember?

Interviewee: 1995.

Interviewer: '95.

Interviewee: Yes. Showed up here on my birthday.

Interviewer: Oh, man, that ruined your birthday. What do you do? I mean, knowing that you're going to see hurricanes almost every year, what steps do you take to prepare for the hurricanes? Are they just so commonplace?

Interviewee: Well, we try to always have a place to haul up the boat, keep the mooring clear as we can, because if you don't watch your mooring – because the winds blowing the boat while it's anchored there, it'll tangle up. You want to keep it clear at all time because even if the hurricane isn't going to hit the island, even if it's passing close, you're going to get a [inaudible] out of it. You want to make sure that you're mooring – if you're not hauling the boat out, that it's clear, and it's –

Interviewer: Do you pull up or you pull boats out or you just tie up out in the water?

Interviewee: For a [inaudible] sea, I tie out in the water. I'll make sure that all the ropes and all the clear because I'll give it – once it's clear, it has scope to go over the seas. But if you don't give it that, if it's tangled, it can't do that, and that's what will cause you problems. I make sure everything is clear. But if the hurricane is going to make landfall, I haul the boat up. I'm not going to leave it in the water. I've known guys that tried that in Irma, and not one of them did it work out for them. Do not know why they thought that would work. Because they saw – in Hugo and Marilyn, we hauled up, and even then, we were lucky to get what we got.

Interviewer: Now, at those points in time, you guys would go – with Hugo, I think it was six months without power.

Interviewee: Oh, more than that.

Interviewer: I think it was five months at least, with Irma and Maria.

Interviewee: No, I had power back by October.

Interviewer: Oh, did you? Okay.

Interviewee: Yes. That's why I was telling you Irma wasn’t – there were people who had damage, but we only got the back half of the storm in Irma. The biggest part of the storm missed us and hit Tortola, which usually is the other way around. Usually, like in Hugo and Marilyn, we got it, and Tortola got the back end with the weak side.

Interviewer: I looked at some pictures after they came through, and it made me cry seeing what I saw at St. Thomas and the devastation. I looked at Red Hook, aerial views of Red Hook, and those areas. I was upset because I thought, “Who wakes up the next morning from that and goes, ‘What do I do now?’”

Interviewee: Well, just imagine that, and with Hugo and Marilyn, it was ten times worse. If you look those storms up on Wikipedia or some kind of site that has the history of them, they'll tell you the percentage of the island they left homeless, and it's a lot bigger than what Irma did. Because we got both sides of the storms and both of those hurricanes.

Interviewer: How do you come together? Do you come together and help? Is it a do-it-on-your-own kind of thing?

Interviewee: You're forced to help each other. Everyone has to help each other at that point because that's all you got left at that point.

Interviewer: Is that what’s nice about having so much family on the island, or is it just friends as well?

Interviewee: Yes, it's friends, it's family. Everyone comes together, even people you don't know.

Interviewer: What things did people do to help each other out after a storm?

Interviewee: Well, you see a lot of people because even to leave your house, you can't get out. A lot of people help you with that because you might not have a chainsaw or something to that magnitude and will cut out your driveway, so you could at least get out your driveway. A lot of big trees or so. I even noticed in Irma, a lot of the poles were still up afterward. The lines were down, but all the polls were still up. After Marilyn, Hugo everything was flat.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: They all changed. Then they came and said they're changing the poles because they think that they've been through enough and they need to change. They didn't need to make that decision in Marilyn, Hugo; everything was on the ground.

Interviewer: How did fishermen respond after a storm like that? Is their primary thought, “Let's get out fishing so we can feed the island?”

Interviewee: That's a lot of it. As long as your gear is still working and you can still get out. I remember, after Marilyn, about maybe a week after Marilyn, we got our boat out back into the water and the seine and everything, and we went into the Magens Bay area and caught a big school of bonito, the little tunnies, which aren't a hot seller.

Interviewer: No.

Interviewee: It's work to sell them. A lot of times, we have them caught in the seine. We let them go because there's no sale for them. We pick up the seine, and we let them go. We've put in such a span, they don't even know they're caught. We hope there's other fish with them, but sometimes you don't see it and we pick it up because we have bonito in the freezer. We don't need more.

Interviewer: But what do you do when you go out and fish afterward? You share fish? You sell fish?

Interviewee: No, we caught a big school of bonito. We didn't even ice them. We went into market, and the people were looking for food so much because a lot of people took Hurricane Marilyn lightly, and by the time they found out they shouldn't, it was too late. They didn't prepare like they should have, and all that. All the supermarkets were gone. One of them, the biggest one, Grand Union, never even built back, never even came back. They took such a loss there that they never even tried to come back.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: At that point, it's only with the local farmers and the local fishermen and the local – maybe the farmers, the guys with the cattle and the goats – that are bringing – that you have left for food unless you bought some before the storm.

Interviewer: You mean canned goods and things like that.

Interviewee: Right. Canned goods. We went and caught the school of bonito. We went in. Everyone was grabbing three and four. No one was asking for hardnose and yellowtail. They were so happy to see –

Interviewer: Just happy to see food.

Interviewee: – happy to see food and something that's not in the can because after a week eating that canned food – [laughter]

Interviewer: Did you sell them or was it more of like, “I could trade you. Come fix my roof, and I’ll get you.”

Interviewee: No. We sold them. There wasn't much of a barter situation. [laughter]

Interviewer: No.

Interviewee: We sold them. The people came with money, and we took it.

Interviewer: When you were taking your time away from being able to clean up your property and fix your house by going out and fishing, when you came back, did you feel obligated for those that were helping you to give them food?

Interviewee: Well, anyone around me can always count on me.

Interviewer: You fed?

Interviewee: Yes. The only people that were helping me after the storm were the same guys that fish with me. My uncle and people like Patrick. Patrick worked with us for many years. I remember when my dad worked with Patrick [inaudible], and Patrick was young in those days, and he was a lot smaller. [laughter]

Interviewer: [laughter] Now the Hurricanes were one kind of disaster. COVID was another kind of disaster. Did COVID affect the way you sold your fish or marketed your fish instead of having open marketplaces?

Interviewee: Well, we still had open marketplace. Just everyone had a mask, and we enforced the mask rule as much as we could. I made my customers wear a mask, and I always had mine on. The only thing I can say about the COVID situation is when I was trying to get the vaccine, they wouldn't give it to me because of my age because they were only dealing with the elderly at that point.

Interviewer: That’s right.

Interviewee: Then they told me, “We're putting all the government employees. They're our next concern.” It's not them that's feeding the community and keeping everything going out here. I'm risking myself, and you won't even give me the vaccine when I'm willing to take it. [laughter]

Interviewer: Were you given an essential worker status, the fisherman?

Interviewee: Well, they were keeping it open to keep food coming in.

Interviewer: Coming in because you guys weren't able to get ships in with –?

Interviewee: Right. Exactly. We couldn't get anything in. We kept the fishery open as long as we could. I was lucky enough to get the vaccine finally because when I had to take my mother back for her second shot, she got it because of her age, but it's a two-shot deal. You come back the next day for your second shot. They told me that we have one if you want that someone didn't show up for.

Interviewer: For their appointment.

Interviewee: Yes, if you want it, you could take it. I said, “Yeah, I'll take it.” Once they gave me the first one, they had to give me the second.

Interviewer: Right. Smart.

Interviewee: They told me to take a rest, and you might feel tired. I went [inaudible] the next morning, four o'clock.

Interviewer: Serious? I stayed in bed the entire next day.

Interviewee: No, no, I went to work.

Interviewer: I felt like I had a cloud in my head.

Interviewee: I went to work the next morning. My eyes burned a little bit, and I felt a little bit tired, little fatigued, but I went to work.

Interviewer: You're tough. You’re tough. So, environmentally, have you seen changes over your lifetime of fishing? Are you seeing anything changing with the sea, or with the fish, or with the –?

Interviewee: Well, not the sea and the fish, but – well, the sea, we did see this change. Like I told you, the sargassum.

Interviewer: The sargassum.

Interviewee: I've seen sargassum here before, but not like how you're seeing it now. But I have seen the island change over the years. And even I can say when I was younger, I remember the days when – just so much over-development, and it affects the ocean, affects everything. That runoff is a killer, and you see that when –

Interviewer: That's what Patrick showed me when I was first here twenty years ago. He took me above Magens Bay, and he showed me where they were putting the houses in and showed me the mudslides that would run right down. We walked it all the way down from the mid-hill, all the way down and across the beach, and right into the water. He said, “You see this?” And there's no code enforcement. He goes, “This is what pollutes these areas.”

Interviewee: Yes, and it’s terrible. With all the rains we're getting, I see people posting pictures of the red waters, and that’s all run-off from development.

Interviewer: Wow. So, you see onshore issues having inshore problems?

Interviewee: Yes, and now you're seeing them reach new places in the island with the development, places you never saw that before, places when I was a kid, I never saw develop – you're seeing them. You're going down there, and you're seeing it now. They're even developing some of the cays. They wanted to develop a Cas Cay, but then I think that fell through. But they gave them all the green light to do it. We fought it as much as we could. But there's only so much you can do. We don't own it.

Interviewer: It is government-owned?

Interviewee: No, it's private-owned.

Interviewer: It’s private-owned.

Interviewee: They sold it, and the new owner wanted to proceed, but then I think the whole thing fell through because I think they had – I don't know – some issues.

Interviewer: Are there any stories or any spiritual connections, or religious beliefs about hurricanes or about bad weather? Iis there anything that you've ever heard of where people say, “This was a punishment,” or “This was a …”

Interviewee: No, not religiously, no. I mean, I'm sure people say that, but I've never heard them. But being a fisherman, I'm superstitious by nature because you see a lot of that in the fishing industry. I'm sure you see a lot of it in sports, too. It's the same deal. If something's working, because it's working, you don't mess with it. You ever see Bull Durham, the movie?

Interviewer: Yes, never mess with the streak.

Interviewee: Where he tells them, “You never fuck with a winning shriek.” [laughter]

Interviewer: And he thinks he’s winning because he’s wearing garter bands

Interviewee: Exactly. Then that's how it is. If you think you're catching fish because you're fishing this area or because you're not washing out the boot, that's what's working for you. [laughter]

Interviewer: That's interesting. Do you feel like your voice is heard in terms of controlling your fishery, your life, your occupation? Do you feel like you're involved in the process? If you don't, how could we at NOAA do a better job to make sure that we hear you?

Interviewee: Well, I try to do as much as I can to spread my voice, but it only goes so far. I was even banned at meetings at one point. They want to talk about issues behind closed doors, and they don't want people like me there. Then I told them, “Well, what happens if I don't leave?”

Interviewer: Who’s this? This is a local fishing association or a management –?

Interviewee: This was a government meeting. This was a government meeting. When I told them, “What happens if I don't leave?” then there was an enforcement officer who told me, “Well, I'll have to arrest you.” [laughter] At that point, that's where I left because –

Interviewer: Was this a council meeting?

Interviewee: No, wasn't a council meeting.

Interviewer: It was something V.I.

Interviewee: It was something V.I., where they were talking about putting in a new law and this and that, and I was there representing myself, and they told me how they didn't want me there to the meeting, and they only wanted their little group.

Interviewer: How can we do a better job to make sure that you're heard? How can we get you accurate information? How can we make sure that we have a dialog so that you feel like you're a part of this process?

Interviewee: That's a good question because I've even been on the Fishermen's Association and on the FAC [Fisheries Advisory Council], and I'm not anymore because I didn't think it was making any difference.

Interviewer: How do we make sure that the information that we share with the FACs and with people like Nicole Greaux, who's the fishery liaison – how do we make sure that we get you that information? Would you rather have it in some audio-visual form? Would you rather have a document? Would you like to have contacts for social media or something like that? What would be a great way for us to reach out to you?

Interviewee: I guess the best way I can think is to keep me informed with all meetings that are going on because I attend as many as I can. But then I hear of meetings that happened that I didn't know about. Then people ask why wasn't I there, and I tell them, “Well, I would have gone if I knew about the meeting, but I found out about it afterwards.” [laughter]

Interviewer: That's what we want to improve, especially from NOAA. Now we can't do certain things from the V.I. and that thing because that's not our government. We're the federal. But we want to make sure that we improve our service to the fishermen so that there's more collaboration, so there's more knowledge shared, so that your perspectives are heard in the management process, so you don't feel like you're missing something or being looked over or left out. This is part of what we're doing, and that's what's called the equity and environmental justice movement that's going on right now, and it's what we've been working towards, breaking down those barriers and finding better ways to do better service to people like yourselves that are involved in the fisheries. And things like this today – you may not think so – will go a long way to helping us to understand things and to improve and just getting the chance to meet you. I'm really thankful that you took the time today.

Interviewee: Well, you're lucky Nicole asked me. [laughter]

Interviewer: Yeah? Nicole's a good person. She's a good person. It's nice to know somebody who knew somebody I thought of as a friend in Patrick because he was just really nice to me.

Interviewee: Yes, I knew Patrick for many days. He fished with us for a long time.

Interviewer: That's cool.

Interviewee: I was really shocked when I found out about him passing away because –

Interviewer: I was, too. I didn’t find out for –

Interviewee: – he was a young guy. He was in his forties.

Interviewer: I didn't know for a couple of years after it happened, and I was blown away.

Interviewee: But this year alone, man, I'm surprised the amount of people that have gone.

Interviewer: Is it just age, or is it –?

Interviewee: Some of them are young people and weren't sick at all. The next thing you know, “Oh, they passed away yesterday,” and you're like, “Really?” 2024 is not making any jokes with the amount of people that aren't coming back.

Interviewer: Do you see the number of fishermen larger or smaller than when you first started in terms of the total number?

Interviewee: Well, they were doing a process to weed out all the people that were inactive, and so for a minute there, it was getting smaller.

Interviewer: In terms of number of licenses.

Interviewee: Right, and fishers. Then they opened it back up. Now I see everyone's reached back. [laughter]

Interviewer: Okay. So, you’re seeing in the growth in the fishery?

Interviewee: Right. Since they opened the license back up because there used to be a moratorium. The only reason I have a license is because I have my father's. When he got sick, to a point, he wrote a letter to the commissioner asking him to pass his license –

Interviewer: To transfer.

Interviewee: – on to his son so he could keep income coming in, since he can't make it anymore because of how sick he is.

Interviewer: Wow.

Interviewee: The commissioner at that time approved, so they didn't have to create a new license. I have the same colors and everything as my father because the same license, just a different – they removed his name, and they put mine.

Interviewer: Wow. Was that a standard practice at that point in time or was that an exception?

Interviewee: Well, that's what you had to do to get a – because –

Interviewer: Because there's a moratorium.

Interviewee: Moratorium. You write a letter trying to where – many times where the father's trying to hand off to the son. Father's trying to retire, and the son is trying to take over. In my case, my dad was getting sick, and he needed me to take over. There's also a case where people who don't have kids, maybe they can step down to the guy working with them. They can do that. Also, I think anyone could bring their case to the commissioner – why you might need a fishing license, and the commissioner was the one person who could grant you one. They can make their decision, and it can grant you one.

Interviewer: Wow. Okay. That's a new – or that’s always been –?

Interviewee: That's how it was back in the moratorium. You could bring your case upon the commissioner, and they'll make a – they'll either tell you yes or no, and either that, or you had to –

Interviewer: Now that they've opened the licenses back up, is it a license for certain fisheries, or is it you're going to be any kind of fishing –?

Interviewee: I think it's certain fisheries they took.

Interviewer: So that you can only be a line fisherman or –?

Interviewee: Right. I don’t think – I mean, don't quote –

Interviewer: You can be traps or –

Interviewee: I was going to say, don't quote me on this, and you got me on camera. You'd have to check with Nicole to be sure. I think none of the new guys can get into the trap industry because I remember when they set the control date.

Interviewer: Excellent. Well, listen, I thank you for your time. I thank you for [inaudible] –

Interviewee: Well, we do what we can.

Interviewer: Hey, I appreciate it. Let me go ahead –

Interviewee: I've seen the big NOAA vessel down here before.

Interviewer: Oh, have you?

Interviewee: Yeah, it came into Magens Bay one time, and we thought it was going to anchor. Really big boat. It said “NOAA,” going down the bow, going down to the bottom in an angle, and then it picked up anchor, and it left. We're like, “Oh boy, they really thought we were going to gang up on them.” [laughter]

Interviewer: They didn't want to see you hiding in the bush waiting for them. Do I just turn this thing off by hitting the record?

----------------------------------END OF INTERVIEW-----------------------------------