

Mike Blackwood

Interviewed by Jen Brown

June 21, 2022

Corpus Christi, Texas

Transcribed by Alyssa Lucas

[Mike Blackwood]: Go ahead.

[Jen Brown]: Um, okay. We are recording. This is Jen Brown. I'm here with Mike Blackwood in Corpus Christi, Texas, and it is June 21, 2022, um, and we're doing a Baffin Bay oral history. So, for the record, do I have your permission to record?

[Blackwood]: Yes, you do.

[Brown]: Okay, thanks. Um, so this is an oral history, and we like to start off, can you tell me more about your background and early life?

[Blackwood]: Well, I grew up in this area. I went to Ray High. My family was involved in different areas of the Corpus Christi business and what not. My father was a children's dentist. My mother was a teacher, and so I—but my basic interest away from sports, playing football, and so forth was fishing and hunting, and you can't find a better place in Corpus Christi for fishing and hunting, so, you know, I gravitated to that over the years. I've had boats that my dad gave me that, shall we say, were almost falling apart, and I'd have to turn around, fiber glass and epoxy the bottom, and so I could keep going, so basically had a life on the water, lot of fishing, lot of hunting, duck hunting, so forth.

[Brown]: And did you—so you grew up hunting and fishing?

[Blackwood]: I, you know, I loved to bird hunt. I don't do a whole lot of big game hunting except with a bow and arrow. I go to Colorado, and I bow hunt for elk. I like to do that. I also have some neat pictures, of sometimes when I don't shoot anything, I just take pictures, like bears coming into a waterhole I created and stuff. I've got some neat shots of that, so it's been—I've had a lot of fun. There's a lot of fun in doing things on your own. That's why I designed my—I started designing my own lures back in the 1970s, and I found that I could make lures that fit the needs of the fishing conditions I had a lot better than what I had to buy because basically lures are made to sell to fishermen. They're not made necessarily to catch fish but to sell to fishermen (Brown laughs). That's the reason there's a gazillion colors. Ask David McKee, Dr. McKee about that and all the bingo colors. So, that kind of gives you an idea, and I went to the University of Texas. I was there for a number of years and graduated with a degree in microbiology and specialized in primarily viral virus studies and so forth and after I left there, didn't know what I was going to do, came back to Corpus, and looked around for a short time and then got introduced to, with my background, some people involved in medicine that said

my background fitted very nicely and was promoting products to physicians in hospitals for medical use and from then on until the time I retired, I was in the, what they called detail activity where I called on physicians, and I called on pharmacies, and I called on pharmacy benefits managers and hospital people promoting the products but also making sure that they were used properly because one thing that—I worked for a company called Novartis, and one of the things I prided for them was they were very honest and straight forward with exactly what we did, and they were primarily a European firm and so as a result, as long as you took care of making sure that the patients were first and then the doctors and pharmacies were next and then your personal family and everything came last, but the patients came first so make sure they get the best results, and so that was always the way I focused, the way I worked, and it did well by me. I retired finally in 2009 whenever the government got rather strongly involved and was beginning to make things awfully difficult for promoting drugs, some of it good, but a lot of it bad, and it's made it very difficult. I know a lot of patients now a days are probably having problems getting the meds they need and trying to figure out can they do it or can they not and then you have people that are advertising all these side effects, a lot of them never, have never happened. They're just—happen by accident and are just normal, incidental deals that don't have any tie down to the meds, so medicine is changing a lot, and so my heart goes out to anybody in medicine in the future. So, that kind of gives you as much background of where I came from and where I'm going.

[Brown]: Yeah, so what was the hunting and fishing like back when you were a kid?

[Blackwood]: It was always great. I was lousy at it, and I got lucky. I got on to a lot of good people that taught me a lot about hunting. I had my father who would take me hunting with him and take me fishing and then I got to know a lot of people and as time went on, I became more and more interested in special aspects of it, going from just basically what we call blind casting. In other words, just going out and throwing out a lure or bait or whatever and whatever hits it, hits it and then I started getting involved in the—about 1975, '76, I met some people that were doing what they called sight casting or stalking, getting up on primarily trout and redfish and casting to them with lures, spoons and whatever would get them to hit. It's much more effective. It's very—it's great for your exercise too. I mean, you'll—you can cover two and three miles in mud and sand and at the end of the day, you'll know you've done something. It's not like sitting by the edge of a bank, and it's very gratifying because the results are very good.

[Brown]: Do you remember the first time you fished Baffin Bay?

[Blackwood]: Yes, I do, interestingly enough. Uh, we had—my father had heard the word that there was lots of trout down around the Point of Rocks, which is right at the edge of Baffin, and we had a boat called a Yellow Jacket. It was a molded plywood hull, and my dad and I and a friend went down and he'd been told pretty much where to go, and so we went down there and was looking for birds feeding and so forth, and we were basically blind casting, but the interesting thing besides catching all the fish we wanted and many more, was I looked down one time and saw a funnel of trout, a school of them. We were in water, about three to four

feet deep, and it was very clear, and it was just a solid school of them just traveling together, and I could see them at about forty, fifty yards away, and they weren't panicky and then most of the time they wouldn't hit just a standard thing, about three, you started working the lure erratically near them, and they'd hit it, and that's when I learned that a lot of fish look for injured, injuries. They don't want to do a lot of work, they want to find something that can't get away. That's basically nature. I mean, the lion hunts the nilgai or the impala that's fallen behind the rest of the herd because that's the weakest link, and that's just the way nature works, but they would—that became more of an interest, watching them hit the lure, and I remember getting off on the shoreline after we caught a bunch of fish and seeing my first large trout cruising on the shoreline. I didn't catch it, but I got to see it, and that kind of got me interested that has lasted to this day, and that was about 1958 or '59.

[Brown]: Okay. Um, what do you think makes Baffin Bay special?

[Blackwood]: Uh, big fish and back in those days, the unknown. Most of the people that would go down there were told constantly about the rocks and what they call, the Baffin Bay specials, which are big storms that would come up unexpectedly, and you're down there, and you've got to figure out how to get out of there and maybe you're away from your boat, and you can have winds go from dead calm to fifty, sixty miles an hour and water spouts and everything else, and if you're smart, all you do is get on the shoreline and relax for a while or get behind something else, but a lot of people try to come back and a lot of people don't make it. I mean, there's a lot of history of people that being swamped and not living through it, so it's kind of like any wilderness kind of thing. At that time, there were some guides fishing it but not talking about it too much, and so I started doing my own looking and checking and going down on calmer days where I knew it was not going to get real windy, and I started checking out different places and as I did, I found large trout that I liked to hunt and cast to them and get them to hit and learned more and more about what makes a large trout hit. Most of them are solitary fish. They're not—sometimes there's two or three or four, but those are mostly what we, at that time, called half-grown fish, fish in the twenty to twenty-six-inch range. Only, the bigger they got, the slower they got, just like grandma. They can't chase it as much, and they would generally hide on shorelines and wait for a dumb mullet or a pin fish to accidentally swim by, and they'd hide sometimes with their head in the grass, and so that became part of the game, was to sneak in close, get their attention, get them to hit your lure and then the fight was on, light tackle but of course big trout have the nickname of weak fish because that's really what they are. They have a very weak lining to their mouth, so you had to fight them on light tackle and be careful because otherwise the lure would pull loose, and you would lose the fish. So, that's what kind of fascinated me about it, and the more I was told about this and that, rocks here, watch out for this, don't go there, and the more I found that was incorrect (Brown laughs). That was—we used to call that a decoy. A lot of guys that knew much about it would use the big decoy. In other words, they'd tell you, "Oh, you don't want to go there. There's rocks all over that place," and this and that, and I'd go in there, and I'd say, "There's no rocks here." Most of the time it was mud line and lots of fish, but they were decoying you away from where they wanted—they didn't want you to know about their fishing and then I started finding areas myself that nobody else knew about, and that's when the fun really began because I had a number of good years

where I caught lots of oversized fish, which I caught a lot of static about eventually because that is what I loved to do, was chase the big fish, the fish thirty inches, thirty-four inches in length and weighing up to twelve or so pounds.

[Brown]: Wow, and so you're known for having the state record trout. Can you tell me about that?

[Blackwood]: Yeah, that was a long time ago, obviously, 1975. We were—I was down staying at a cabin with a good friend, a fella named Louis Peetz. We had Donnie Wilkie, Wilkie Tires, one of the local businessmen. Mr. Peetz is gone from us. He's with a good friend, but anyway we were staying in his cabin. We went into Baffin just thinking that we might have a chance, and so he and Donnie started fishing. We went to East Kleberg which had another name, which we can't use anymore because it's considered to be bad. Interestingly enough, it's named after a fisherman that happened to have dark skin, who used to have a cabin there and therefore that's why it was called that point.

[Brown]: Oh.

[Blackwood]: But anyways, people will know what I'm talking about. But anyway, we anchored—we'd ease in and very cautiously come into it, not like people do nowadays. A lot of people just blow in, throw out anchors, playing their ghetto blasters, and I think most people know what a ghetto blaster is. Fish have an amazing sense of hearing and that just drives the fish away, playing, that bottom of that boat's a great sound chamber. I mean, they can hear it for miles, but people still do it. They don't learn. People have never really learned real well. That's why people don't study history real well, and they get in trouble, and that's why I'm a big history fan. You try to learn from it, but anyway we got on the shoreline, and they started fishing out deeper and were seeing a few fish deeper, and I wanted to go check out a place that I hadn't fished before, which was around the corner, and I walked around the corner, caught a real nice trout, about a thirty-one incher, eight or nine pounds on the corner, and I eased around the corner and on the first sand bar that I came around the corner, there was a little side bay. There was what I thought was two trout, and it turned out to be just one, just one extremely large fish about six feet from shore and luckily my cast—I went, cast beyond him or her that is, and hit on the sand and then pulled the lure in to the water and right next to it, and she started following it, and I jiggled it and would twitch it and everything, and she was following very slow and lethargic like big fish sometimes do, and finally she just came up and just kind of sucked the tail hook in and then the deal was on and interestingly enough, she went by. I dragged the rod low as I found because sometimes with a single hook, you don't necessarily have a good hook up, and you'll pull off and loose the fish, and I drug the second hook into her side jaw, so I had a double hook up and the funny thing was when I finally landed her, that was the hook that was still there. The tail hook was no longer hooked up, so basically, I was able to make sure I caught the fish and anyway, the story after that gets kind of confusing. We came back in, and at that time because I think I told you earlier that I carried a commercial fishing license from 1975. We could still sell trout, redfish, and so forth, and that kind of supplemented our fishing, and so I—the next day, I took the fish in, and I had already gill gutted

the rest of them and that fish, when we got in at the fish market, which was actually, at that time, it was Hat Marine, and it was a marine launch site, and they checked it, they put it on a shrimp scale that they used to sell shrimp off of, and it weighed thirteen and three quarters on that shrimp scale, which was well over the state record at that time, but everybody was saying, “Oh, that thing, that’s an old scale,” even though it was FDA approved, so then we went back to town and the next day I took it to a place called Seven Seas Fish Market, which I used to sell fish to, and I just sold the rest of what I caught to them, and I had them put that fish on the scale and on their fish scale it was fourteen too and then I’m scratching my head. Let’s see, it’s weighed three times now, and it’s weighed a different weight three times and to try to make the long story as short as possible, we weighed it eight or nine times, one time even on a doctor’s baby scale (Brown laughs), and it only weighed the same thing twice and that was right at thirteen and three quarters, but I took thirteen nine because I did not know how the state would view how long it been since that scale was checked because I’d gotten a very bad view of scales by that time, and so that was a place called, trying to remember what—Model Market, I think was what it was called, and it had been checked one week previously, and it was thirteen nine, and that beat the old record by a half a pound, and that was fine, and that turned out to be a very useful item because after that people would believe anything I said about fishing (Brown laughs), so in other words, when trying to promote conservation or some idea, people paid attention, so I got to give talks here and there. I even went to Houston to give a fishing show talk and all of a sudden, I didn’t feel like I deserved it too much, that I hadn’t earned it yet, so that’s when I got more into building my own lures and studying the fish and that made it even more fun, and although I never caught a bigger fish then that, I caught a lot of very large fish and had some, some of them are big in my memory, as big as that fish was. One that got away is even bigger than that because it got away, and I made it into a story for that Ananias Fishing Club, so that kind of gives you a background on that particular fish.

[Brown]: When you first saw that fish, did you know it was a state record?

[Blackwood]: Oh, no.

[Brown]: What was going on—

[Blackwood]: —No—

[Brown]: —in your head?

[Blackwood]: I thought it was two fish when I first cast at it and then when I landed it, I noticed it was oddball shaped. It was more like, we use the term football. It was not long and slender like a lot of trout do and of course, this was March, the fifteenth or sixteenth, I think March sixteenth of 1975, so that’s cool time of year still. I’m still in waders, and so I know that they’re going to be at their biggest at that time anyway, and so I just knew it was a big fish and when I held it up, of course, Mr. Peetz and Mr. Wilkie were pretty, were pretty at awe, a little bit upset that they didn’t catch it, but anyway, but I knew I wanted to weigh it because I knew it was bigger than anything I’d weighed at that point. At just how big it was, I didn’t know, and we’d

always say, “Well, let’s see if we can catch the biggest fish, the biggest trout and set the state record for Baffin Bay,” and that’s interesting because that’s where most of all the large trout I ever saw caught came out of Baffin or somewhere around the mouth, and I don’t know if it’s the serpulid rocks or if it’s the remoteness of it. I know it’s got massive amounts of bait fish, particularly large mullet, and that’s their favorite target, is a large mullet, although they’ll hit small lures. They seem to prefer not having to work real hard. As I said, grandma likes to just grab the whole meal for the next three days and kind of like the old saying about, you eat an elephant and then you don’t eat for a week. So anyway, I knew it was a large fish, just didn’t know how big, but it’s been measured and looked at so many different ways. In fact, I even—at that time, I believe it was the National Seashore, had a research lab out near the Island, and I took it in there later just to have them look at what was the belly contents because I was afraid somebody was going to say, you know, when you do that, you’re afraid are people going believe it or not, and so it’s not like it really is now. Nowadays, now you bring it in, it’s weighed, and it is what it is, and some fish, you know, that really don’t weight that much, I mean, you take some of the scales, if you put a fish on it one way, it weighs half a pound more than it does if you lay it on that scale the other way. That’s the problem with scales even in grocery stores. Cantilever type scales just aren’t always that accurate, but I was very worried that it was—since it was my probably one chance, and it was. It’s the largest fish, heavy weight I ever caught. I caught longer trout, but I never caught anything heavier than that. Now, I’ve caught some twelve pounders and some—lot of elevens and tens, but it was a special fish, and I knew it at the moment, and so I went ahead and registered it, and it was accepted for the state record.

[Brown]: Tell me about the one that got away?

[Blackwood]: Well, the one that got away is—turned into a story that I really—it was half true and half fantasy, and this was in a place called the Graveyard Hole which is away from Baffin Bay interesting enough and Baffin was really windy at that time. It’d been heavily—I think we had a brown tide. It was hard to hunt fish, and so I was down there, and I thought I’d look for big trout because—and Ananias by the way, whoever’s president is the person who catches the biggest trout, so I hadn’t caught a big trout that year, so I was looking. Now, I was push-pulling along a grass shoreline with a light north wind behind my back, and I’d been push-pulling for probably two miles, caught a few redfish when I saw—a boat came by off to the side, uh, probably running about, oh, half a mile away from me but when he went by, and it was dead calm, I saw a weight come off of the back of it heading my way, and I knew it was a big fish. I didn’t know what kind. I figured it was a big redfish. That’s mostly what we see, and when he got closer, it went through a sandbar that I could see it for about, oh, sixty, seventy yards away, and I realized it was a trout and then it immediately went back in the grass again, and I’m push-pulling as I said in the widgeon grass field, and where it goes through, there’s a head of it’s some—there’s a little pothole, sand bar pothole maybe ten feet across, and I throw one of my homemades in there and bring it by in front of it just as it comes through it, and it grabs onto it, and the fight after that is all over the place. It’s bounding about, and I finally had to get out of the boat and go after it because it went in the opposite direction, and I couldn’t stop it, and so I ended up landing it about a hundred and so yards from the boat. Boat was anchored up in about calf deep water in the grass, and I turned around, picked the fish up, and I realized it was

a big fish, that it was in the upper thirties. It wasn't going to be as heavy as that big fish, but it was just an exceptional fish. I hadn't caught a really big one like that, probably eleven, maybe bigger than that, I don't know, in a while, and so I carried it back to the boat, and I got back to the boat, and I got the hook out of it, took the lure out of it, and I'd walked a hundred yards with this fish and been out of the water and been fought down. I set it on my ice chest which has the big measurements on it and when I set it on the ice chest toward the back of the boat, I held on to it for a minute, and it did two big flips and went over the back of the boat into the water. Well, I dropped my rod, and I go after it. Well, I pick it up, well, it comes out of my hands again and this time goes under the boat. Well, I shoved the boat to the side and find it one more time as I remember and have it in my grasp and then it gets off again and all of a sudden and this is where the story turns into a little fantasy. All of a sudden, I set out, and I—in my letter that I wrote to Ananias, I said, "All of a sudden, I heard—up in the clouds, I heard 'We got Blackwood, we got him,' and started laughing, and I looked up there and there goes a boat away in the clouds, and it's got Doc Ford Allen and Chatter Allen and Smiley Davis, all three of my old teachers in fishing, and they're just grinning away, and Chatter and Smiley go off, and I yell at Doc because he was close, and I said, "Doc, what did you mean you got me?" And he said, "Well, we work for the saint up here who handles all the deals of getting back at all the people who think they're just really good at what they do," and I said, "Well, who's that?" And they said, "Saint Murphy," and so Saint Murphy wanted to make sure that we got you, but it wouldn't hurt you or anything, so that's the reason the fish got away, but anyway, you learn maybe someday you'll want to work for Saint Murphy (Brown laughs). Anyway, that's how the story ended, but obviously that last part is kind of fictional, but it added to the story. So anyway, that was one of the larger fish that I just had on and lost. I had another one up in Baffin one time. I push-pulled in on one that was laying up in heavy grass on an island that, by the way no longer exists. Half these islands, mud islands I used to fish in Baffin don't exist anymore. A lot of that with the pollution and so forth and heavy fishing and what not, a lot of them just went away, and you can debate why it happened. There's everything from pollution to the King Ranch clearing. I don't know if 20,000 acres of land that is now cultivated, and their people used a lot of herbicides and in fact, that was being looked at and then I don't know if anything was ever solved. It kind of disappeared, but the bottom line was all these grass islands kind of disappeared and nowadays most of them just have moss and a fungus on them that used to have lots of tall grass. I mean, some of them were several miles long and half a mile across and were unbelievable fishing, particularly for large trout because they'd lay in that grass and try to ambush the mullet like I said earlier, the larger fish, and so that was kind of what was—kept me going back into that area, but I got that fish on that had a tail that looked to be almost ten inches from one top to bottom, I mean, massive trout, and it was laying in the grass, and I did what—I got it on by casting, got behind it, waded in on behind it downwind from the fish and cast a noisy lure to the side of it and started twitching that lure to get that fish to wake up and the fish's tail goes down and about half a minute later all of a sudden that lure is in, just impaled, and I fought it and fought it and fought it and all of a sudden it just was tied up in the grass, and I waded up in there until I find my lure, but the fish is gone, and that fish, I have no idea how big that one was, one of the biggest tails on a trout I ever saw. So, those are a couple of them then one of them that I thought was a big trout, I'd been told was down there just around the corner from a place called Penascal Point, and they said, "Man, she's massive. She

must weigh twenty-five pounds,” and I went in there, and I looked and looked. I made two trips. The third trip, I finally see her, and she’s waddling up near shore, and she’s massive, looks like girth is probably twenty-five inches. I mean, just head looks like—and all I’m seeing is the back of it, and so I make a cast to it and bring the lure up to the side of it and about that time, it raises its head up and gets ready to jump on my lure, and I took that lure away so fast. It was about a twenty-five pound alligator gar (Brown laughs). It wasn’t a trout at all, so sometimes what you think is going to happen, doesn’t happen the way you think, but we get a lot of—Baffin gets a lot of gar whenever you get a lot of rain and, you know, find them all up and down, I’ve seen them up to six, seven feet long on the shorelines. They get lost and they’re trying to figure out how to get out. They don’t know how they got there either, kind of like I’ve seen alligators in there and rattle snakes swimming the shoreline trying to figure out, “How do I get back on land?” Because it’s too windy and the winds blowing them away. That makes for interesting fishing (Brown laughs), so anyway those are some of those that got away, some of the more memorable ones.

[Brown]: Yeah. So, if you answered this, that’s fine, but what’s your most memorable experience about Baffin Bay?

[Blackwood]: Oh, any one single memory in 1996. There was an area up in Baffin that all of a sudden got real pretty water in it, and a massive school of large trout moved in, and I was all by myself and found those fish on a place called the Fish Hook Bar, and some people will know what bar that is and some people won’t. I won’t go into—because it really doesn’t matter. It doesn’t exist anymore.

[Brown]: Hm.

[Blackwood]: It used to have spots of grass all along it and the fish, particularly trout and redfish, would lay off the rock side edges of it and would just wait to ambush bait fish. I got on that thing at about nine o’clock in the morning and until six o’clock that evening, I’m in trout nonstop, and I am selectively casting at fish that I just want to land and being very careful because I don’t want to get them to hit the lure too deep because then if I throat one, I’ll have to keep it, and that’s what I ended up having to do, was I let a lot of fish go that I would have loved to have kept that were quite large, that were in the thirty, thirty-two inch range but I would then throat one because the smaller fish are a little more aggressive, would take the lure and when they bleed then it’s mine. I have to keep it and so till six o’clock, I landed over thirty trout, large trout of which twenty, that if my counting is correct, I think I landed thirty-three trout, and I had at least twenty of them that were thirty inches or better and two of them I brought in and put them, submitted them to the GCCA at that time. I think it was GCCA. I don’t know if it changed to CCA but anyway, either one of them would have won the STAR [The State of Texas Angler’s Rodeo] Tournament, and I won the STAR Tournament with, one of them weighed eleven six and the other one was nine six or ten six, and that’s a June fish, June the sixth, and so that’s about the most memorable day and although I’ve had other days I caught ten or twelve or whatever, that one was just unbelievable, to just be—and I had to finally just had to leave. It was getting late, six o’clock in the evening, sun’s getting down, and I’ve got to

take care of these fish, so that's probably the most memorable single day that I don't expect to ever have again. That's a real rarity. It was the best ever for me.

[Brown]: Wow. So, what does Baffin Bay mean to you?

[Blackwood]: Uh, it's a piece of my history and a big piece of my past and a part of the fun and the time I spent. It's kind of like when I go in there, and I'm like visiting, I'll go into places that may not have any fishing possibilities at all, and I'll see things that remind me of days gone by and times gone by and fish I've caught, fish I haven't caught, things that have happened, casting at what I thought were a great big trout, and it turns out to be a thirty-five inch redfish that I have to fight for an hour to get that back in (Brown laughs), so there's—all this kind of, makes it add up to be a special place and then have to watch it go downhill over the past, about the past fifteen years has been very sad that, like, part of the area that I used to see big trout in, I haven't caught a fish, a trout out of in probably fifteen years and haven't even seen one and then some of the areas are so covered up with commercial guides. We have possibly some of the most guides of anywhere in the saltwater. I was told at one time we have close to five hundred people who were registered guides and if you see advertised most of them, people want to go to Baffin to catch the trophy trout, the TT, the trophy trout, and trophy trout have changed. It was interesting. I got honored by a group of people who like to do this last year and one of them, I was talking to him about it, and he said, "Well, you started talking catching big trout and trophy trout and then you said something about half-grown. What's a half grown?" And I said, "Well a half-grown trout is twenty-four, twenty-six, twenty-seven inches long. It's not a grown fish and grown until it's thirty inches or better." He just shook his head and said, "Those are our trophy fish now, your half-grown," and I said, "Well, that kind of says it all," and of course, then last—in 2021, we had the big freeze and didn't see as many killed fish as I saw in the 1983 freeze. I mean, I went down with a fella named Bill Sheka after that, just saw massive amounts of large trout that have been killed and in 1983, I didn't catch a single fish out of Baffin Bay until the end of summer, and it was redfish. I'd go down and look for trout, and there wasn't anything, had killed dang near everything, so Baffin Bay is subject to some very dramatic changes. If you go back in the history, I think we were talking about Murphy Givens, if you look in some of his old stories, that Baffin became famous years ago. There's a place to go collect salt. They'd go in those bays that would get under a high tide and of course, the Land Cut didn't exist so freshwater had to come from the north only and so those bays would fill up with saltwater and slowly in the summer as the tide would go down, that water would evaporate and all of a sudden, it would be just solid salt, it'd be two and three inches thick, and people would get it because salt was a big important commodity back in the 1800s, and so it has a big history of big swings so to speak, and I'm hoping the swing that we have going now, that it can go the other way. It's going to take a lot of work and take a lot of people to look at what happened that we've already heard about from Tampa Bay and the researchers that turned Tampa Bay around and also what happened, the dead area up around the Mississippi River when the people up there sponsored are bringing all the cattlemen and crop people who raised corn and so forth and bring them down and let them see what it was like to have a dead area where nothing lives. There's no oxygen. It's just dead. I mean, even the sea worms and the mullet, everything's just dead and then all of a sudden they go a little to the side and all of a

sudden they catch nice fish, trout, and redfish and then they began to get interested in this, and they started trying to get settlement ponds to get rid of some of the phosphates and nitrates and also cut down on the amount of pollutants that were going in the water and even use less fertilizer and found that they were growing better crops and found out the lesson of more fertilizer must mean better overall results. Of course, the Russians tried that many years ago. There's an old *National Geographic* photograph I used to have that showed a picture of a big cutter going down the Volga River, and it was two or three years after the Russians tried to equal American farmers by using a lot more fertilizer and then they had heavy rainstorms and that river got nothing but heavy fertilizer and all of a sudden the fungus and the red tide and all the different algae started growing and looked like an ice cutter going through green and brown ice and so there's a hard problem for people to understand that good water is water that has nothing else in it but water, oxygen for the fish, and the grass to take on the CO₂ and to give off the oxygen and just basically has no pollutants in it, and that's where Baffin's going to have to try to go, and that's going to mean you're going to have to involve some major little towns, well known towns in South Texas, Alice, Kingsville, Riviera Beach, Ricardo, and the King Ranch, all these have inlets that go into Baffin Bay and tons of studies have been done, and we already know a lot of the problems exist and the problem is how do we get people to realize that there are solutions to this that doesn't hurt them, and it helps them and maybe helps the future. One of the things I would like to see, a study, like I know that the fellow that owns Water Street Oyster Bar has been doing mariculture with oysters, growing the oysters and had got a license to grow them, and they're wonderful filter feeders. I don't know what their affect would be on that water so far as the nitrates, phosphates, and clarity, water clarity, but that would be an excellent opportunity to see what that would do. There's a lot of things that can be done, everything from people involvement to fishermen involvement to commercial involvement, I think that all work.

[Brown]: Can you tell me more of the changes that you've noticed to Baffin Bay overtime historically?

[Blackwood]: Primarily, massive amounts of increase of activity, mostly it's people, and the biggest problem you have with people is people are people, and they have their desires and nowadays, we have the desire, "I want what I want when I want it, I don't want to have to wait on it and to hell with everybody else." A guy name Charles Elliot wrote an article for one of, I think it was filmed and streamed years ago, that was called *To Hell With You*, and it kind of described what he was seeing happen in hunting areas and so forth, people taking advantage of each other, hunting downwind in a duck season of somebody else's decoy spread, trying not to have to put out the decoys but take the ducks that were headed for the other person or shall we say put out illegal baits to catch a chance at a big deer or a big elk when it was illegal. I've had a lot of friends that are game wardens and some of the stories they tell are just amazing, some of the things that people will do and want to claim that it's wonderful, that they got it, it's theirs, they got it, doesn't matter how they got it, they got it, and that's pervasive in our society nowadays. We have a lot of people that. I mean, how do I get the money, how do I get the fame, how to get the whatever, anything they'll do, and that's what happened with a lot of fishermen. Commercial fishermen did the same thing. They didn't mind breaking the laws using

gillnets in places until they just literally over-harvested, got very good at that, went from being a cloth gillnet to a nylon net and all of a sudden these fish, they stay in schools, one gives out an emergency call, a red or a drum or a trout and then they all go together, and so you'll have a completely empty net in one area and then you'll have a thousand pounds of fish in one other. So, the fishes, they understand them, they have better equipment, the rods and reels are better, the lures are better, the fishermen are, shall we say, better at going about the idea of catching as many fish as possible and if you have somebody that's being paid to do that, be a commercial fisherman who is catching fish for sell or taking somebody down there to get them to catch a big trout, big red, big whatever, and, yeah, that sounds wonderful. I knew many guys that wanted to be fishing guides. I mean, it's wonderful, except for the fact that you can't all be that, you can't—everybody be there. It's not the Horn of Plenty. There's only so many fish and every time you go down there, no matter what your boat is, you're doing something that polluting, making noise, changing spawning habits, there's all sorts of things that can happen, so the bottom line really is just increase usage by everybody and increased pollutants coming in from the different water ways that enter into Baffin Bay, the three major different ways that it comes in, and then you have people that don't take care of how they defecate on their boats and whatever, so you add it all up, and it's just like everything else. It begins to deteriorate, and that's been the deal. It's just been less and less—interesting, I don't see as many brown tides anymore, but I don't see as many fish. I haven't actually fished Baffin Bay because every time I try to go down there, it was either windy, nasty, or I'd go down and there'd be so many people in places I wanted to fish that I couldn't even figure out where to go to, and so it just kind of has become less of a target for me. For the last few years, I've spent most of my time, as I told you, primarily catching drum and reds, primarily drum. Drum are a lot of fun on an extra light tackle, get them to hit your design and normally they're a bait fish, and so you have to use cut mullet, shrimp, whatever, but I found that I can make them hit certain lures and on light, ten-pound tests, twelve-pound test line and a slimmer rod and then they're delicious on the table, and they're very smart. They're hard to catch and when you're sight casting them in the flats, it makes for an interesting day and of course, the red fish are still there, but I caught maybe four or five trout this year. When I was working the shoreline, I kept two for the year, and I probably won't try to catch anymore because it's just—if I accidentally hook one in the throat, and it's over twenty-three inches, I've got to let it go, and I know it's a dead fish, so I just assume, let them go for a while, let them have a day of calm, and I'm thinking that pretty soon we're going to have to have a people take a hard look at what Colorado and New Mexico has already experienced, and they have special waters where there's lures only, barbless hooks, limits of only one or two fish, uh, light tackle only. They've got all sorts of places like that. They realize the beauty of it. Baffin Bay is very likely going to see that probably not in my lifetime, but I have a feeling that eventually it'll become a trophy area, which will be maybe lures only, maybe single barbless hooks. I don't know what they're going to do because there's just not enough there to keep trying to keep filling up a box because that was the deal for years, box fishing. I grew up in that area because that—I used to sell fish until I put myself out of business when we passed Senate Bill 1000 and then all of a sudden, I couldn't sell fish anymore, which was fine because I had a wonderful time up till then.

[Brown]: Yeah, can you tell me, you mentioned earlier when we were walking over here of

having a commercial license as a kid?

[Blackwood]: Yeah.

[Brown]: Can you tell me about that?

[Blackwood]: Oh, yeah. A commercial license was great for kids. It kept us out of trouble and kept us like—there's nothing harder than trying to—because we were still using—we'd either would get up in the morning, and I'd get on my bicycle, and I'd throw my bait box on to my little basket, and I'd go over to the Moody household or I'd go somewhere else depending on who I was fishing with, and we'd go out there with a push net and push up our shrimp, and we'd go out there and cast our shrimp out with either free shrimp or under pop and cork, and we'd catch ten, twenty, thirty trout or whatever and then we'd fillet them and following the guidelines and then we'd take them down to the Seven Seas Fish Market, and they'd pay us, we'd get up to twelve cents a pound for them. That was good money for a little kid, when you're eight, nine years old, ten years old.

[Brown]: Where was this at?

[Blackwood]: In, uh, on Corpus Christi Bay, and so at that time I obviously, I didn't have a boat or a license or anything else, so I had a bicycle, and so I went down there with different parks and the—Dr. Foy Moody who was, Moody High School was named after. He was kind of at one time almost a semi-second father to me. He took care of my mother when she developed breast cancer, and he and my father were good friends. We did a lot of things together, and the Moody boys, we were pretty close at one time, and so we had a little fishing club that—we had records, who had the biggest red, who had the biggest trout, and I didn't have anything. All I did was try to catch up with them. They always did better, so it was a friendly competition but then we also, we said, "Well, the only way we can convince our parents that that was the something to do in the summer rather than getting a summer job was to make some money off of it," and we didn't make a lot. In fact, even in the summer, I used to sometimes—I worked for CP&L [Central Power and Light] selling light bulbs (laughs). I'd go bicycling around and sell people light bulb deals from Central Power and Light, and so like I said, I had different jobs in the summer, used to shock feed. Most people wouldn't have any idea when you hear shock feed, that's when—used to work with my dad. We'd take, back in those days, there weren't square bales or anything, you had these little round bales that were about, oh, four feet long and maybe a foot through and to keep them from rotting you'd go out there in the field and you'd haul and you'd shock them and what you did is make miniature teepees where they would literally be nice and dry and stand up and then you'd go back and get them when you need to feed the horses or cows or whatever so summer jobs, kind of like, I must admit, fishing and catching fish and selling them was a heck of a lot more fun than bicycling around selling light bulbs and shocking feed and other things that I did in the summer.

[Brown]: (laughs) Yeah. Um, can you tell me more about getting involved in conservation and the things you started doing?

[Blackwood]: Well, I think a lot of it, you start getting a little bit of guilt in yourself for your having a much, as good or better than anybody else, and you're learning more and more about how to catch fish, you're getting better at it, and there used to be a form that suggested the different phases sportsmen go through. 1) is you want to catch one or two, 2) you want to catch five or six, 3) you want to catch a box load of them, 4) you want to catch the biggest one, 5) you want to catch the biggest one on special tackle, 6) you want to catch them on your design lures or rod and then the next step is get them on fly rod with your—and so it's kind of a step by step deal self-challenge. It's no different than challenges in golf or whatever. It's just trying to do better and better at it as you hunt or fish or whatever, to get better at it, and what that leads to is eventually you get more and more respect for the animals that you pursue. It's kind of like, I feed the heck out of white wing right now in my backyard. I have white wing, and I have squirrels that come up, and I can't tell you how many white wing I've hunted, but they're kind of like pets right now, but you get a respect for the animals that you seek and respect for the fish, and all of a sudden, you begin to get a little guilt feeling about, am I doing the best that would be good for the future, for either my children or somebody else's children or for the sport in general, to preserve it and make it enjoyable? And as I said earlier, there's no way we go back to exactly what we had years ago. You can't go home again. That's an old, old statement, and it's very true but what you can do is try to see if you can fix the home up and make it a nice place, and that's what we have to do with Baffin Bay and so forth, is to improve it and conservation, I've worked with game wardens and so forth just like every person out there at one time in their young life, they broke the law themselves and did things they shouldn't have and you felt guilty. You got away with it, but you felt guilty (Brown laughs), and all of a sudden you say, "Well, you know, I need to stop this, need to improve it," and so as a result, I got to be friends with a large number of game wardens. In fact, I promoted with, when I was an officer in GCCA back years ago to get a table set up strictly for the game wardens because I had gotten to know many of them. One of them eventually became the head game warden for the state of Texas in Austin, a guy name Jim Robertson and Jack King was up there with him. These were people that were close friends. We hunted some together and fished some together. There's some funny stories about them. I even push-pulled them one time. They thought some guy was laying gillnets in an area, but he wanted to look like a fisherman and get up close and see what he was doing before he tried to arrest him, so I got him on the front of the boat, and we push-pulled along, and he caught three nice redfish for supper while he could of said, "No, he's not doing that so you got enough?" He said, "Yeah" so then we left, but I ended up push-pulling a game warden just to check out a commercial fisherman that was back in an area that he couldn't get to (both laugh), but conservation, and you see the value of—I think the biggest thing you learn in life is that nobody appreciates something they've never seen. Nobody appreciates passenger pigeons. There's none of those. I mean, considered to be the most numerous bird that ever lived, were hunted because people hated them, they'd be like grackles getting in a tree and just literally defecate all over things and then people would shoot them and eat them and all that kind of stuff. I think, was it 1918 whenever the last one died in a zoo in Chicago, something like that, the last one out of billions of birds at one time in the 1800s, so there's no question. We can literally over harvest anything. I mean, just like oil and gas. We were trying to figure out exactly how do we get the right amount, how do we treat it right, how

do we keep it from polluting our areas, how do we do this? I've even had some ideas about oil and gas being transferred up and down the Laguna Madre that—ideas for catch areas if somebody starts getting a leak and having problems with their boat. All this stuff kind of plays into the idea of somewhat conserving what we have, of what I've seen, and try to act on the ideas that you or other people have had. There's no such thing as a bad idea. Sometimes I used to conduct in my business, I'd conduct these brain storming deals and tell everybody the key element, there's no such thing as a bad idea. It may not work but some part of that idea, it may either tell us we can't do that at all, but it also might lead us into another thought, and so ideas about conservation and proving Baffin Bay and so forth, and I'm a believer in attacking it from all ends, and then finding out which thing works. You begin to see improvements. It's like I said with the oysters with the oysters' filter feeding. If they had an oyster farm or two down there since, I mean, you've got so many restaurants in those areas that could use increased oysters. I mean, that's what the people that run Water Street Oyster Bar are doing, and they're doing pretty good. He's learning as he goes, and we're now getting hatcheries for the immature forms so then they could put them—because they can attach to the seashells and then those are filter feeders. They clean the water, and they do a good job, and they love it, and they're good, and they're edible, and so there's certain things we can do that would benefit maybe like that. How much that would work, I don't know. It's just like, I've even heard of the idea of drilling down whenever we get the hyper-salinity too much back in Baffin and getting into the saltwater that comes out about, oh, fifty, a hundred feet down that's about eight or ten parts per million where the water in Baffin can sometimes get up to forty to sixty parts and get up to where it just doesn't support anything. Well, all of a sudden, you have those working off of the continuous windmills that they use sometimes overseas to protect some of these towns that are subject to tidal change and maybe that pumps out and desalinates, shall we say, indirectly here. You're putting less saline into the water, but you then have to research what else is in that water, so everything has its pluses and minuses, you just have to evaluate it all. It's kind of like what's going on in Corpus right now with the freshwater. Uh, we forever have had this just set policy of you let go so much water out of our water, freshwater source into Corpus Christi Bay, and it doesn't matter what the salinity is at that time, how much heavy rain. We may have had a hurricane and then we let go a bunch of water that might turn out to be valuable later. I mean, it should be based on scientists that know what the proper water level of salt and so forth should be and then can advise us, should we release it or not, and just like areas that get lots of rain and don't need it. If we had an interlacing pipeline system that goes all across the United States to areas that are going through drought and all of a sudden, areas that have too much water can pump their water to them so kind of like the interstate highways, so there's lots of little ideas that can work, and that Baffin Bay can be helped by. There's even been talk about bringing a conduit under Padre Island that would bring more water that is the offshore water, which is much less saline than in the water in Baffin, could even change that and give a better exchange pass and put it over a gigantic conduit. I don't know if they've ever done anything about that, so what I'm trying to get at really and maybe getting away from the topic, but there's always a million different ways to handle these things and the key element goes back to try them all, try them all, try to cut down on pollution coming in, try to come up with a way to remove the pollution that's there, try to get fishermen to cut back on how many fish they need to catch, try to turn more people into true sports people as opposed to harvest

people. Harvesting is one thing, sport fishing and so forth because there just is no way Baffin can supply. It couldn't supply and look at the drum population and even the drum population has dramatically been hurt. Scott Murray found that out about the small fish—small shellfish that they feed on is, shall we say, been dramatically harmed probably by pollution so now then the drum are not thick up in there, so the commercials are having to go elsewhere since drum is still not only a sporting fish, and I'll tell you, they're a good sport, but they're also a commercial fish. People go down to any restaurant and they'll look on the market and hope they see drum because it's a delicious fish. So again, it's trying to look at the problems and trying to look at all the solutions and try all of them, every last one of them. None of them are bad ideas. As I said earlier, that's the key to brainstorming is to try any idea and let people try it and then record—it's no different than research and science. I mean, you—microbiology, I mean, that's how we learned a lot of things about viruses and a lot of issues about how to do this and that's part of probably why we're in trouble right now. I won't go into those details but (laughs)—

[Brown]: Well, can you tell me more about founding the GCCA?

[Blackwood]: GCCA was an interesting deal. We'd had SOS, which is Save Our Seas and that got into lots of arguments. We'd have meetings and then we had several other meetings of people wanting to form groups and—

[Brown]: —Can you tell me what is SOS?

[Blackwood]: SOS was Save Our Seas. It was very similar idea, same idea, only it was a group of much more aggressive. It was much more aimed at eliminating all commercial fishing, eliminating all sorts of things. In other words, trying to be a preservationist rather than a conservationist, if you know what I mean, trying to go back to things that shouldn't be. So anyway, GCCA looked at it from the conservation idea, and there was two groups that got together, Corpus Christi group and a group in Houston. Walter Fondren was the guy up in Houston that put together a lot of his people. He had tremendous background, well known from his football years and everything, and he was a big-time competitor, offshore fishing and what not, so he put together the Houston chapter and down here, we put together the Corpus chapter, and I can't remember exactly how many of us there was initially in the founding group. There was about twenty-five to thirty of us, and we just founded it together and said, "Well, what we're going to do is try to raise money and try to pass laws," and Paul Wimberly was one we just recently lost, was one of the key drivers because he put his energy behind it, and that was the thing good about Paul. I mean, he one time got some illegal gillnetters and held them at gunpoint until the game warden showed up (both laugh). I mean, I don't know how many people know that, but he did some things that maybe weren't all that swift, but he did a citizen's arrest so to speak. So, that's the thing we begin to have is we had people that began to put, shall we say, their money where their mouth was, and their efforts where their mouth was, and some of us got into lots of trouble with it, like I knew all the commercial fishermen because I had sold fish to them for years and at that time, I was still selling fish until about 1980 I think was when House Bill 1000 was passed, and I think it was House Bill 1000 and then it made it where people like myself, if you didn't have at least fifty percent of your income from

commercial fishing, you couldn't sell fish anymore, so it put me out of business and a long with a heck of a lot of guys that I—but it was well worth it because we already saw the writing on the wall. We saw that we were catching less and having less even though we could still do it and were still pretty good at it because we knew how to work it, like people can run me off of three, four, five of my fishing holes, I know about two or three hundred more. No matter how many you run me off of, I'll go find another one because I've got that experience, so the key element was to find ways to, shall we say, cut back on the amount of red and trout, redfish and trout, and the red became the target because they seemed to have been, shall we say, the most devastated by gillnets. Their behavior and they like to hunt, they like to hang around the shallow drop offs and then they cruise up into the shallows every night. Big trout don't necessarily do that and most of the gillnets that they use would pick up the drum and redfish, and they would prefer the redfish. Back in the old days, I could get twenty cents a pound for a drum but forty cents a pound for redfish so obviously I'm going to go after redfish because if you fill up your boat with fish that you can't sell but for half as much. All the commercials would catch anything, and they used gillnets and as I said earlier, they used—got these monofilament, which are extremely effective, and they'd find out where a school of fish was, sometimes they even watched us and would know where we caught our fish. Many a time I've had binoculars on me watching me fish and if they found out a certain flat had a massive amount of fish on them, and we'd come in with twenty, twenty-five redfish off of it, they'd go in there, and they'd knock out five hundred to a thousand and effectiveness is what really got us in trouble. Everybody got better at it, better and better and then all of a sudden, we had people that wanted to be and a lot of the commercials, some of them didn't have, shall we say, the best ethics. Some of them would go out and break the law and use a gillnet one day and make a few thousand dollars, and they'd get drunk for the rest of the time, and so their ethics were not exactly—we were trying to convert some of them into thinking, you know, that's not the best idea. Why not catch them the right legal way, get rid of the gillnets, and a lot of them did and a lot of them are still around, lot of them became very wealthy because they found how they could use their experience to stay in the same area. They loved to live on the water and some of them still do and some of them retired from that as millionaires, but they learned to just use their knowledge the right way and then all of a sudden after we turned it into a sport fishing situation for trout and redfish then all of a sudden everybody wanted to do it and unfortunately I have to take a lot of the blame, a lot of the stories about the big trout and big trout in Baffin came from unfortunately me catching a large trout, and so I have to accept a lot of that's my fault, and it's the fault of anybody that loves to do things and gets better at it and then all of a sudden they become noted by other people and say, you know, I want to be like that guy. I've had guys tell me, it's kind of like Michael Jordan, I want to be like Mike only they're talking about me going fishing, which is flattery, but it doesn't necessarily mean that that's going to be the best if they get that good at it and a lot of them do get very good at it. And so, conservation as we get less and less is the key, and it doesn't matter what it is. It applies to everything, conservation of water, oil, gas, air, everything plays a part. If there's one thing I learned in medicine years and years ago, they always say, "Everything in moderation." There's—anything you take from, anything from water, food, drugs, whatever, there's a minimum and a maximum. You eat too little you die, you eat too much you die. You need to stay within that proper amount, and that is what is hard for people to adjust themselves to, to being satisfied

with getting a few and that's enough. I've got a doctor friend who just really was, got to be extremely good at it, and he's gone now to fly fishing. He loves to fly fish and the other day he didn't catch a fish when I went with him, but he had a great time, he had a great time because he tried. He did what he wanted to do, and I've got another doctor friend that's had all sorts of medical problems, and he's trying to get back to where he can do that. He told me the other day when we were talking, he said "You're living my dream." I'm still able to do it because as I told you earlier, I'll be eighty at the Christmas of this year, and I'm still able to do pretty much anything I want to do and can't play pro football (Brown laughs), but there's some things that don't make sense, so anyway there's limitations on everything.

[Brown]: So back at the time when you're in GCCA, can you talk about the relationship between sport fishers and commercial fishermen?

[Blackwood]: It was—the sport fishermen and commercial fishermen in the beginning was pretty testy. I became known as, um, Laguna Madre Deep Throat because I turned in so many gillnets, and the Deep Throat's come from Watergate and all that thing and like one time I saw a group of guys come in with a floating cabin into a place called the Graveyard Hole, and I'd been fishing down there. I was all by myself, and I was coming out late, and I saw them pull in, and I saw them leave and go out with a boat that looked rounded from a distance and then I saw a flash of light as they were putting binoculars on me, and they went back, turned around, that boat went back to the floating houseboat and later on as I came out of there just giving myself enough time to get back to Corpus because that's about forty miles down, and I went by there, and I waved at them and all they did was give me a grimacing look, and I said, "You know, there's something wrong here," and so when I got back in to the dock, at that time there was a guy named, Paul Eubank was a ranger on Padre Island, and I told him about what I'd seen. I said, "I think they're getting ready to gillnet because there's not going to be anybody else down there, and there's tons of fish," so he called a game warden friend named Ernie Lerma and Ernie said he was going down, and he would see what was going on and over the next few hours he got down there, caught them trying to go south running from there without a light on their boat, gave them a ticket for that, then they tried to run out tying a flashlight to their boat and he caught them for that, and so anyway he said, "There's definitely something wrong here because they're not real happy," but he searched the boat and couldn't find anything. So anyway, the next day, Jack King and a couple more wardens come down, and they bring a helicopter from the national—I don't believe National Park Service. I think it came from the Coast Guard and anyway they went down there, and they couldn't find anything. They're running airboats all overlooking because they said, "There's got to be gillnets down here somewhere." They can't find anything and of course, by this time, they're getting, shall we say, inappropriate gestures from the guys on the houseboat as they're leaving, and they say, "You know, well, they must not have done anything," and I remember Jack from, I remember him telling me correct—he said, "It's getting windy, let me go make one more run in the helicopter," and so he got on the helicopter, and they started running the shoreline and about half way down all of a sudden they saw a blue spot that looked like it was about four to six feet across, and he says, "What's that blue spot?" So, they got the airboat down there and ran down to it and in those days, the illegal netters used to use tarpaulins, and they'd tie lead weights on the

edges of it, and that would hold down the floats and the corks of a gillnet and under that blue tarp was thirty something thousand feet of gillnet worth somewhere around twenty, thirty thousand dollars so anyway, I got a nasty phone call about that, and that they knew who I was, they knew my boat, so for the next few years, I had to go fishing with a shotgun or a rifle on board just in case. Nothing ever happened but just like we had some people, I think Wimberly had his cabin burned and some other guys had their cabins burned and threats. I know some of the game wardens were threatened, and so it was a tough deal because there's money involved, a lot of money involved, and there's people who have always thought, "This water is mine, it belongs to me, the fish belong to me." It's never been that the fish belong to everybody, and we should be thinking about that, and I understand it. I don't agree with it, but I understand it. Sometimes you've got to understand your enemies reasoning and I say enemy, they're not really my enemy. They're just misled fellas, and I tried to convince some of them to become fishing guides and do what I said earlier. Some of them did do that. They became very good at doing things related. Some of them owned restaurants and so forth and made a lot of money and just doing what their knowledge is. I mean, one of them, I won't even use his name, but even when they cut back on the limit of shrimp, and we used to have massive shrimp move through the land cut back, oh, twenty-five, thirty years ago, but he could only have so much, he stripped of what he did. He had a superpowered shrimp boat that had about a five hundred horsepower motor which was a massive engine for a small shrimp boat, and he'd made double trips. He'd go down there, catch his limit, come back, sell them, and turn around, go down, and catch another limit and come back, sometimes could do that three times in a day, and he was legal. He did it legal because it was each time, there was not a set limit per day, it was a limit of what could be on the boat, so that's what I say is some people, and it eventually didn't work out because the shrimp runs quick which is another issue. I mean, we don't see the shrimp runs anymore. We don't see the massive groups of small fish anymore. Like I said, what I saw earlier, the big funnel of trout. Some of the things I've seen where you could throw a Mirrorlure with three hooks on it and catch three trout on it because they tried to take the fish—they'll try to take the lure away from the other fish that are fighting it. They don't realize it. The fish doesn't realize it, it's just hungry. So, the result was that we didn't get along—I got along pretty well with them. I would talk to them about it and say there's just no way that you're going to come out the winner on this, that all they can try to do is keep it where you can sell the drum, which we did, and they still do to this day and that you can still go for oysters. You use your knowledge of the water, your knowledge of the water, you can take people fishing, tell them where they should camp, all this sort of thing. A lot of them didn't want to do it, and so as a result they either tried to do things illegally and then came the confiscatory part of the law where if you're caught with illegal fish, and they took one guy that had got back, and he was pulling his boat on the trailer with nets on it and everything, and they took his boat, motor, and trailer, the whole dang thing. There was about thirty thousand dollars that he paid the price for, and so you make the penalty strong enough and makes a few people angry when do that sort of thing to them. It's no different than in the old days and in the mob when they all of a sudden had somebody try to take over their bootleg business. A lot of people got threatened. I don't know if anybody got killed over it or got shot at, but I thought about it quite a bit and like I said, I traveled with a gun on board for a while.

[Brown]: Did you ever get threats?

[Blackwood]: Threats?

[Brown]: Yeah.

[Blackwood]: Oh yes, two or three times, and sometimes it was—

[Brown]: —What did they say?

[Blackwood]: Oh well, it—basically, well, of course, this was long before you could do the tracing of a phone call. Everything, well, most of it, some of it was, shall we say, not good for going on the radio or TV but basically saying, you know, if you keep this up, we know who you are, we know where you are, and we'll take you out or in no uncertain terms or we'll set fire to your house or that sort of thing. Never had any of that happen, but I've had to call the police once or twice over some of these issues but just in case. That again was one reason I got to know a lot of police officers and game wardens and what not and constables and what not. I account them amongst some of the best friends. They don't try to make things take care of for me. They do it because that's what the law states. You cannot burn somebody's house down, you cannot burn down their floater, they cannot burn your boat, they cannot shoot you legally (both laugh), but yeah, I got some threats, but this was a long time ago. We're talking about in the seventies and eighties when this happened, nothing in the last thirty years, no. They realized it was over, and I've even told some of the fishing guides, you know, that there are going to have to be regulations on them that get a little stronger and they're going to have to be self-regulatory and a lot of them have done that. A lot of their tournaments are no longer kill tournaments, they're release tournaments. If you want to compete, you've got to have an oxygen chamber on board and if you catch a live fish, it gets registered and gives you points. If you catch a dead fish, you may lose points. So, they're putting the issue of reward versus bad outcomes if you don't follow it, and it's no different than people that—I had one game warden who became the head man. Jim Robertson called me one time, said, "Mike, I need to talk to you." I said, "Where you at?" I was working that day. He said, "I'm out on the Island." I said, "Okay, well, you at the Bird Island Basin? Yeah, I'll be there. I'll be there in about fifteen minutes." I came up to him, he said, "I want to know what your thoughts are on this. I just had a member of GCCA that I caught with several illegal fish and redfish, and he told me that because he's the big conservationist and doing all these special things to conserve the fish, that he should be, shall we say, let go, not be given any deal," and I told Jim, I said, "Well, what I would do is fine him twice as much because he should know better, and he's also insulting a game warden. That's just my opinion, you can tell him that. I don't know who it is, not going to ask you, but that's my opinion." He laughed and he said, "I'm glad you said that" and that's just my opinion. If you're going to act like a conservationist, you have to be a conservationist and sometimes it's hard. Sometimes you get in areas where you just catch fish after fish after fish and you just got to say, "Well, so much of this, now I've got to get away from it," and you just quit and go home and just say, "I had a wonderful day and then I'll watch this and didn't catch all of them, got close." I've been known to even throw lures at fish and as they get after it, I

take it away from them (Brown laughs), don't let them hit it. Well, that's just as much fun. The fun was getting the reaction. The fun was that you don't have to catch the fish. Once you have it hooked up, it's like I don't catch big redfish at all. I always give those over to other friends. I say, "That's your fish" because all my homemade lures and my light tackle, a twenty-five, thirty-pound redfish, I've caught a few of them like that. I didn't want to but every so often I'll accidentally hook one that I didn't see or was maybe blind fishing and I caught a thirty-nine inch redfish two years ago that I fought for almost thirty minutes around rocky reefs, but I got my lure back. The fish was released, but I got my lure back (Brown laughs), so it's kind of regulating and challenging yourself on issues that you think are good for the overall situation, good for you. The drum and redfish I catch in the last few weeks when I caught drum and redfish, I gave away ninety-five percent of everything I caught, close to a hundred percent. Some people, because they're diabetic, they couldn't get—they weren't getting the right, the food, they were eating too many flour tortillas and what not so now then they got some fish and some of them can't fish anymore because of injuries and hurt that I'm trying to get them back in the water, and I probably won't ever get them back, but they love the fish, love to eat the fish, so they ended up getting the drum fillets and redfish fillets because they don't get to go get them anymore, and so that's personally rewarding, and I'm not catching too many fish. I mean, five drum and three reds, that's not a lot of fish, and so on days when I caught that, most time I kept one fish. I'd keep one drum for us because that's what my wife likes to eat, and I don't care. I'll eat redfish, drum, trout, they're all good, but I happen to know I have friends that prefer certain fish.

[Brown]: Do you have any children?

[Blackwood]: No, no children. I have everybody else's children. I've been very lucky. I've had some young people that I've introduced to fishing, one of them I mentioned earlier, I think, Chad Clark, Dr. Charles Clark' son. Chad's a—I've known him when he was six years old. No, he was nine years old I think, took him on his first redfishing trip, and I push-pulled he and his dad around until—he casted six groups of redfish before he caught his first redfish. Now, he's a forty something year old guy, businessman making a ton of money, and he loves to fly fish for redfish and drum and trout, and we fished together here about two weeks ago and still, still close, and he's kind of a second child. He's not my—he is my child indirectly.

[Brown]: Um-hm.

[Blackwood]: And so that's what you have to do, is take pleasure in watching young people do this, and that's part of the reason we do this is so that they will have a chance in the future because it's what I said earlier that applies. If they don't see it, they won't miss it. If it's not there, how do you know what it was like? How do you know what it was? And so, that's the reason it's important to preserve part of it for conservation, but still have it where it's enjoyable but also learn from it, learn from it. That's what history's supposed to teach us, right (laughs)?

[Brown]: Yeah. Well, that actually kind of was one of my questions, is how can we get younger generations to want to be stewards of Baffin Bay?

[Blackwood]: Uh, stewardship is a hard thing to learn. You've got to love it, you've got to be introduced to it and till—there's big efforts being made. I used to do what they called the Rat Red Program when we first had GCCA, and we'd have up to twenty-five, thirty kids show up and this was—and it's supervised. It's down mostly off the pier. We'd have a lifeguard present obviously, and we'd have all the kids go out fishing. We'd furnish the bait and what not and for however number of kids we had, we had to come up with a reward for every one of them, happiest, biggest trout, biggest hardhead (Brown laughs), biggest this, largest this (laughs), stinkiest bait. I mean, we had awards for everybody because they were down there and participating, and they had fun, and they'd say, "Well, I want to catch a bigger fish," and so we just have to keep working at it sooner or later, and I'd sometimes sit down and talk with them. I used to give lectures occasionally for different chapters for GCCA. Most of the time, they wanted to know how to catch a bigger trout, how to stalk one, and cast to it, and a lot of that is disappearing. It's almost—you can't just do that alone anymore. I'll still see a few. I used to go fishing until about, oh, four, five years ago. I used to have two rods rigged on my boats and one had a spoon on it for drum and redfish and then the other one had one of my little floating diver plugs, and I had it where I could reach real quickly and change from one lure to the other because I saw quite a few big trout, don't see them much anymore. I've seen one big trout this year total, and it was a skinny, about a seven and a half, eight pounder, and that's the only one I've seen. Yeah, I've seen thousands of redfish, thousands of drum but only one big trout.

[Brown]: Hm.

[Blackwood]: So, that's the thing, that's—and it's an anecdotal evidence if you well know what anecdotal evidence is what you see. It has some value. You can't—science doesn't like it. They like to be able to put numbers on it and then get a P value that is appropriate, that is not a random deal, it is a true consistent pattern. In medicine, that's what you have to have to show that a drug is useful, is it consistent results? And so, this is a thing that in history that the most important part about it is to learn what the mistakes were and try to learn from them, trying to say I'm going to repeat them and come up with a different result. Some people think that I can do it differently. Look at what Putin's doing in Russia right now and for Ukraine. I mean, he's thinking he's going to be able to pull another Stalin and so forth. He lives in a misled lie induced environment and if the lie tells you anyway I get it is okay, well, if that's what tells you if I take this game fish or this—if I shoot and throw dynamite or do something else then it's just as good because I have it, but to me, it's like the old statement, most teachers will agree that the most valuable award you get is something you've earned. If you didn't earn it, and you just got it by accident, and you just had it given to you, it's not really—you didn't really earn it, the earned reward, and the earned reward of work for young people in conservation is that eventually they'll continue to have it and have opportunities and watch it grow and then they'll be able to say maybe that same thing that they felt when they fought their first big fish, kind of like Chad Clark. I mean, he pushes this, he takes young people and so forth out. He takes his son up, Charlie. Charlie loves to fish and Charlie's going to probably do the same thing when he's grown, and so you have to involve them. And so, the Rat Red Program and getting people, that many kids to show up, nowadays, you've got the risk if something goes wrong, you've got

lawyers that want to sue you for this and sue you for that for doing the best efforts and so that kind of cuts into people doing certain things because they say, "Well, what's the risk versus reward?" If the risk is I may get sued if I do this and something happens, no matter how hard I try not to, uh, what's the value of it? And when you begin to promote deals, fishing deals for kids, you have to worry about what kind of an environment and protection for them do you have to make sure you're doing right because if all of a sudden one of them accidentally sinks a fish hook into the little kid next to him and all of a sudden that mama wants to sue you for getting that kid a rod when he should not have had that hook and they should not have had it near her son or whatever. So, the risk has changed because people's attitude about fault and what is at fault. So many people want to find fault and sometimes there is nothing. Bad stuff happens no matter how hard you try. I mean, everybody's got stories, be they pleasant stories like a lost fish or something really bad where all of a sudden, the steering goes on a car and bingo, you're into a head on collision, and you kill somebody or somebody kills you. It's maybe nobody's fault and maybe it's not even the equipment's fault. Maybe it's an animal died on the highway, and you hit the blood slick. I mean, there's things that happen that if you hear about you say, "This can't possibly be true" but it is, and so until people begin to adjust to this and stop thinking about when something goes wrong, that they suddenly hit the jackpot. Now then they're going to get rich because their kid got a fishhook in them or a child drowned because they got near the water or something like that and yes, these are horrible tragic events but trying to always find fault is a very, very non rewarding, negative goal. It's not what life is about, and so that's going to be the hardest part as we get more of these trips because I don't see, I don't even know if they do Rat Red Programs anymore. I used to also do those for Greenwing Programs, Greenwing Ducks, and I'd take people out, and we'd go skeet shooting. I'd get some of the top skeet shooters around, would have them shoot watermelons and do all this, trying to encourage them and then all of a sudden, we'd start hearing about somebody accidentally get shot. My company, we sponsored an event in the north and one doctor shot the hand off of another doctor that was not. Well, guess who got sued? Not the doctor, the company because the company put it on and so horrible situation, but who was really at fault is the question and how can we possibly let this go so that people will be willing to do more, be willing to get their—look at the situation now with COVID. People don't understand, I mean, they just don't understand the microbiology behind the COVID disease. They don't understand that it's not a pandemic anymore, it's an endemic. It's an endemic disease, which means it's there. It's in the population. There's no way you're not going to get exposed to it. You can lie to yourself and go live in the forest but there's liable to be an animal carrier for it.

[Brown]: Yeah.

[Blackwood]: So anyway, that's the thing I'm saying is that people live too much in their fears and not, you know, back to doing things they enjoy like I flip boats. I've almost gotten killed in things like that, but guess what? I'm going to keep doing it because that's what life's about is the period of which you're able to do something you enjoy, and so young people need to go fishing. If they want to go, someone needs to take them and look at the cancer kids' program that just occurred where you have all the guides took all the kids out with bad cancers and got them fishing. It's a wonderful experience, gets them out and shows them a positive nature, and

we know about positive attitudes can do for disease states, that can actually be part of their cure, so there's lots can be done but you have to start young. You have to start them and show them that there's fun in it and that there's something to be gained from it, and that there's friendships to be gained from it and when you have twenty something kids on a pier, and you've got to come up with an award for everybody, there's going to be some people who don't like the reward that they got, the award for the stinkiest bait, but they've got to learn to laugh at it and then say, "Well, next time I get the award for the biggest trout or the biggest red," because that is a good goal and if you don't get it this time, you'll get it the next time.

[Brown]: What do you think (coughs)—excuse me. What do you think success looks like in terms of current efforts to conserve and restore Baffin Bay?

[Blackwood]: Huh, it's going to go a little bit here and a little bit there. It's going to be getting a city or two to desire to set up settlement ponds or reduce their nitrates and phosphates or human fecal material coming into the bay. Each one that stops, there goes another twenty, thirty percent of pollution. All of a sudden, we learn of ways to harvest those things like, as I said, maybe oysters will work. All of a sudden, we remove some of those by the filter feeding. Maybe we can actually chelate, or in other words, combine some of these chemicals. I don't know if this can be done or not. I've talked to some people that say, well, possibly it could. Nobody knows until you try it, but what success is, is people trying and then people comparing results and all of a sudden finding that some things have worked in certain areas, all of a sudden, they're successful. This part of the bay is improving. That part of the bay is not, it's staying the same. All of a sudden, well, what was improving, let's do this in the other areas and then—but we continue to try other things but again we continue to get more people involved and buy into it and say Baffin Bay doesn't need your trash nor your fecal material. I mean, find an island if you have to go and get up on the island and do it if you need to then bury it just like a good camper does in the mountains. It's easy to just hang it over the side and go, but it's not good for the environment, and in the old age it might not have been a big deal. Well, it is a big deal now because it's consistency and it's also if you do it around a young person, they say, "Well, if it's okay if he or she does it, it means I can do it," and so it's a learned experience and granted it's not a big deal. I used to take a certain physician, he couldn't go to the bathroom while on the water so he would—I would bring him up on shore, and he said he couldn't do it, but he thought it was a good idea anyways, so I'd put him on shore, and he'd go to the bathroom, and it was a little effort, and I'm not going to say I don't do certain things that I shouldn't do myself like that depending on the situation. If it's a mile to the shoreline, and I have to go, unfortunately nature necessitates an answer. So again, it's not going to be anyone thing or anyone—it's almost all victories come from little things here and little things there. I mean, look at golf, the way it's played, and one shot can change everything and look at, as I said in fishing, one extra fishing day and all of a sudden you find the biggest fish you've ever seen or all of a sudden you're wanting to catch that redfish that in the STAR Tournament is worth a boat, motor, and trailer, and you go one more day and all of a sudden you've got that redfish got a tag in it, so if you don't do it one day, you just keep going. There's the old saying and like as a salesman, one of the things is every no you get means you're that much closer to a yes, every failure gets you that much closer to a successful situation, and we learned. That's how we

have learned through time, if you look at the history. That's what we were saying about history earlier. People need to learn from history as opposed to trying to repeat it because unfortunately it's not going to change and saying, "I'm not going to be responsible. It's going to be everybody else." Uh-uh, everybody has a shared responsibility to a degree, and it's not easy to do it, but a lot of it you have to do. What is it they say about true virtue? It's something you do when no one else is watching (Brown laughs). That's true virtue, if you go out there and you catch one more fish than you should and you let it go anyway, but you want to keep it, but you don't because you can. You don't take a fish out of your ice chest that is smaller and put this bigger one in here because you've already killed your limit of fish. You let it go. Nobody saw it, but you knew about it, so everything is a victory, and so therefore I see for the conservation issue for Baffin Bay is everything that shows an improvement, be it the pollution, the behaviors, fishermen running the shoreline, running across everybody, we don't need any anger therapies. I mean, I've heard people talk about carrying guns down there and shooting at the people that—shooting at other people that shoot across their bow as a warning. I mean, that sort of thing doesn't and should not show up in sporting events. Fishing, hunting, golf, football, baseball, all of it should be—it's one thing to win by true effort, and it's another thing by harming somebody else, by ruining somebody else's day. The best fishing days you ever have are the days you catch a few fish, but you don't ruin anybody else's fishing day. That's a good day, really good day, whether you caught one fish or ten as long as you didn't ruin other people's opportunity. It's a tough deal to do some days, like nowadays with as many people, you've got hundreds of boats on the water. I mean, just literally going just this way, that way, and trying to think everything you do can affect somebody else's fishing so running a shoreline that you don't want to fish, that may ruin it for somebody that comes along later or maybe somebody's down there on the shoreline. I've had people run right by me on the shoreline when I was push-pulling looking for fish, I mean, literally run between me and the shoreline when I'm not fifteen feet off the shore, and they're literally running so close just to show me, laughing and joking and drinking their drink, how funny that was even though it's illegal. They're not supposed to do that, but who's going to chase them down, not me. You never know what—anybody else crazy enough to pull that kind of stuff, you don't know what they're going to do. Look at what's going on in the world today, so the key thing is to try to be an example, to be a good steward, being a good steward and understanding what you own in this world. You really don't own anything. You're a steward for it, be it the money you have, the car you have, with everything you have will eventually be given back. Land is given back, everything, you're a steward for it. You get to enjoy what you have with it but sooner or later you have to give it back. When you get buried, you don't get buried with everything you had, so you have to take care of it, and you have to think about what the future's going to be for that, and that's what people have to think about when they go fishing now down in Baffin Bay or hunting or any of that stuff, and the people that, shall we say, run fluid materials into the bay, they have to think in terms of that. Everything that goes in there affects it and so again, all of it individually is a triumph, is a victory, and it may not turn it, it's not going to turn it around completely as I said earlier, but maybe it can turn it around, ask people that did that to Tampa Bay. I listened to the lecture on that, and they got a lot of it back, lot of seagrass beds back, fishing improved, people's attitude toward each other improved, but it took a while. It took a lot of effort.

[Brown]: Well, I think that's the last question I had. Did you want to add anything else or talk about anything else for your oral history?

[Blackwood]: Only thing I'd add is that everybody needs to talk about it, everybody needs to get involved to some degree, and it's like, well, I'm here and there's other things I could do then talk about it and so forth. I talk about this all the time, but I think it's more invaluable that somebody who is willing to take their time like you did to put this down and let other people hear about and maybe get some other people some ideas. That's the most important thing, is don't give up on it just because—don't give up by saying everybody's going to do it. Everybody doesn't do these things, only a few people, and the more you give good behavior evidence, be a good steward of what you believe in, and the more everybody does it and the more everybody joins together, the better the outcomes will be for the people in the future because like you said, I'm not a young man, I don't have a lot more years on this earth, and I've had a lot of great times and had some great experiences. I've had some bad experiences and I've seen some bad behaviors by people, but I also have seen some great behaviors by people. I've gotten letters. I've got the last letter that Doc Ford Allen ever wrote as he was dying. I mean, that's in my safety deposit box. I'll take it out and read it every so often, doesn't sound like much, but it's the last letter he ever wrote about things we've done together, and so things like that mean a lot and that's what you have to focus in on. You can't focus in on the bad part other than saying what can we do to correct that. Maybe correct that behavior, some people, you can't correct their behavior. I mean, there's—as a background in academia, you know about the research, I'm sure, that they did years ago that they found how many people are just truly amoral, and it's something like five percent of people are truly amoral, and the only thing that keeps them under control is the law and the fear of getting caught and then there's that one percent who don't give a flying flip, and they're the ones that murder, rape, pillage, do anything they want, and they could care less. They have no caring about anybody else. If it feels good, do it and unfortunately, they're out there, and you can't look around and try to figure out who it is because it might be somebody you like a lot (laughs), and they're just under control. They're under control. They're saying, "Well, I'll do the right thing," but we know that there's unfortunately, there are—it's just like in the animal world. I mean, the behaviors of animals, there's a lot of people that behave a lot worse than the animals do (laughs), so this is just reality, and so you cannot go around worrying about this one or two might do. You try to figure out how do we stop them from doing what they do. How do we give out the laws and make the laws so stringent that they don't do these bad things, that they don't illegally net, that they don't illegally fish. With all this, all of a sudden, the value of it comes back to, as I said earlier, the virtue of doing something when nobody else is watching, that it is the right thing to do. I've always thought that was a great deal. There's a lot of great sayings that have come out from our great leaders of the past, and that's one of them, so I won't lie and say I know who said it but just about everybody said it, those same things just different ways, but what virtue has its own reward. So anyway, that's the thing I would add, is just everybody don't give up, keep trying, and enjoy it, and enjoy life, and keep putting efforts toward it and keep putting efforts toward your children and those around you to where they appreciate it too. Tell good stories, don't tell bad stories. Bad stories, that's for Steven King. I mean, if he wants to make money off his deal, I don't care for Steven King novels and stuff. I don't care, things like that, that try to,

shall we say, create fantasies over bad behaviors and so forth. I like the good stories.

[Brown]: I think that's a great stopping point then.

[Blackwood]: Okay (laughs).

[Brown]: Thank you.

[Blackwood]: Well, thank you very much. I appreciate it, Jen.

(end of recording)