

Zach Mason: Alright, so today is January 26, 2021. My name is Zach Mason, and I am interviewing Will Benson as part of my NOAA Heritage Program project, combining oral histories with data visualization to illustrate two decades of change in the Florida Reef tract. Sorry, it's a bit of a long title. Sometimes it gets stuck there. I am calling in from my home office in Baltimore, Maryland. Will, could you go ahead and introduce yourself for me?

Will Benson: Yes. Hi, Zach. Captain Will Benson. I'm a lifelong resident of the Florida Keys. I'm a fly fishing charter captain down here based out of Key West, Florida. I am the sitting flat fishing seat on the National Marine Sanctuary Advisory Council here in the Florida Keys, and I'm also a board of directors' member for the Lower Keys Guides Association.

ZM: Awesome. Thanks, Will. Sounds like you've got a lot going on. But before we jump into all that, I'd like to start at the very beginning. Can you tell me when and where you were born?

WB: I was born January 23, 1980, in Stock Island, Florida, which is right in Key West. So, I'm a local native conch. It's what they call folks that are born in Key West, Florida.

ZM: Awesome. Well, happy belated birthday, by the way. So, it's just this weekend. Yes, you're welcome. You said that you're a native and they call that a conch. Florida culture is kind of fascinating to an outsider. It seems very kind of like insular. Can you tell me a bit about that and the whole conch, freshwater concert conch, what's going on there?

WB: Yes. So, it's just kind of an endearing term that the locals use to identify each other as a conch. And folks that have moved in, like my parents, who came from the Northeast and moved here in the mid 70s, they're recognized as freshwater conchs. They've assimilated into the culture and the environment, chosen to raise families. My parents are freshwater conchs. And since my brother and I were born here, we are saltwater conchs. And that comes out of a tradition of when the locals down here in Key West had a baby, it was a kind of way to show the community that the baby had been born and that it was successful, and they would put a conch shell outside of the door of their house. And that was a way to just kind of show that a new member of the conch community had arrived. That's where the term conch comes from.

ZM: Oh, wow. That's pretty neat. I actually had no idea. I've heard people use the term conch, but I never heard the origin. Do people still do that?

WB: They do. The locals still do that. We did it for both of our children, Looe key and Alice, who are second generation saltwater conchs, and they both have a conch shell that was put outside and still remains outside today. It's part of our family and our house.

ZM: Got you. That's pretty cool. That's a neat tradition. You said you were born in Key West. Can you tell me a little bit about growing up there? If people don't really know a lot about Florida and the Keys in particular, they at least know that name, right? That's kind of like the happening spot in the Keys. Can you just tell me about being a kid there?

WB: Yes, being a kid here was just an extraordinary experience. I feel very much like an outlier that I was just fortunate to have been born in a place where the resource, the reef, the fishery, the islands, and the waters surrounding the Keys was my backyard growing up. And that's provided just a huge, enormous leg up for me as a fishing captain, having spent a large part of my

childhood on the boat, venturing out into the waters as early as seven years old with my first boat. I was able to get to log 10,000 hours of expertise far sooner than I otherwise would have had I not been born in the Florida Keys. So, it's an extraordinary leg up. Just happens that my parents moved here, and I fell in love with the water and fishing, but very thankful. It's a wonderful place to grow up. Like I said, I grew up on the boat fishing and diving and exploring the Florida Keys. I'm 41 years old two days ago, and I have a little bit of historical context, having spent my early childhood diving places like Looe Key and American Shoal Sand Key, places down here in the southern Florida Keys. I've seen those reefs when I was a kid and I've seen them as a 40 year old adult male, and I've seen the changes that we've witnessed. I feel I have some context and I think that historical knowledge and what I've seen and the changes that I've seen have very much driven my desire to engage and participate in conservation efforts, to join the Sanctuary Advisory Council and work with my Lower Keys Guides Association to champion sustainability and prudent conservation measures that will help our community thrive. Our community is very much based on the water. Our tourism is all about the water. The water is our lifeblood, and we need to ensure its survival and sustainability if we want to have an economy down here. I've tried to dedicate as much time as I can to that effort because I feel I have a unique perspective.

ZM: Yes, definitely. When you were a kid growing up on the water, you said you were out on the boat at age seven. And this is kind of a two part question. First, who was it that got you interested in fishing and diving and boating? Was it a family member? And second, as a kid, you haven't seen the rest of the world yet. Did you have any kind of a sense that this resource was unique and special?

WB: To answer the first part of your question, my mom and dad had a boat and we used to go out on the boat. So, I was exposed to that at a young age. And then I took it upon myself to - maybe seeking some independence and some adventure, I was always looking out at the horizon and wondering what was just past it. The way that I would get to the horizon was on a boat. At seven years old, my dad and I built my first boat out of Plywood, and I paddled out towards the horizon to see what was out there. I'd say my parents maybe gave me the spark. But, in regards to fishing and my future boating endeavors, I think it was really inside of me. It was something that I felt the drive to do early on, and that appetite has continued throughout my life. And the second part of your question again, Zach, what was the second part?

ZM: Yes. so, as a kid that's growing up in Florida, that's all you knew, but did you have any kind of a sense that the resource that you were exploring was special or unique or did that come later?

WB: It came later. I'd say later on in my childhood, when I was maybe twelve or thirteen, I started to really fall in love with fly fishing and saltwater sight fishing. I started to read books, everything from Hemingway to Zane Gray to some of the great fishermen like Lefty Kreh and Mark Sosin, Stu Apte. I consumed all of the books and the knowledge that I could. And I think throughout that process I started to gain a respect for just how special the Florida Keys was. I was very lucky. My folks moved to France, and we spent time growing up in France when I was a kid for a few years, and then I later went to college in New Orleans. I've been living away from the Florida Keys at various times in my life, I think that too has helped inform me of just how special this place is. Later on in my adult life fishing, I've traveled to other magnificent destinations like the Seychelles and Myra, Australia, so on and so forth. I've seen similar

habitats, the Bahamas as well. I think that also helped put some context in my observations of the Florida Keys. The Florida Keys certainly is special, and I think I kind of realized that pretty early on. Maybe not right away, but pretty early on.

ZM: Yes. When you look back growing up in the Keys, what really strikes you? What do you remember most about this resource?

WB: I remember the vivid colors, the clarity of the water, and really some of the acoustics. The snapping and popping and the alive sounds, the crunching of the parrot fish, all of those things were kind of this sensory experience that I had when I first dove on the reef down here. I remember that Looe Key particularly impacted me, just how alive that place was when I first dove on it, which would have been maybe 1987 or 1988, something like that. I just remember how colorful and how alive it seemed, and the sound was almost deafening, how alive the crunching and popping and snapping was on the reef.

ZM: I should ask this now, but what types of fish were you mainly catching during this early 1990s type time period?

WB: So, when we went out fishing at that time, it was not sport fishing. We catch some Barracudas various times, but a lot of snappers and groupers, stuff that we would eat. That was mostly what we were doing. It wasn't until I started to fall in love with flat fishing that I began targeting bone fish, Tarpon, and Permit, which is the bread and butter of my household these days. But early on, it was more the snapper, grouper, the occasional barracuda, which we wouldn't eat, but they would bite the line, and they were fun to fight. That's what I grew up catching as a kid.

ZM: Got you. You mentioned diving in the late 1980s. When did you become a certified diver?

WB: I was snorkeling, so, let me qualify that. It wasn't diving. It was just free diving, which is something that I basically do much more of than scuba tank diving. That's been that way throughout my whole life. I'm pretty accomplished free diver. I don't have the street creds [credentials] of some of the real good spear fishermen and whatnot, but I can get down there and comfortably dive in some pretty deep water. so, free diving has kind of been the way that I've explored the reef over the years, not with tanks. And I would add to that I had a very memorable experience as a child. Our family traveled on a sailboat out to the Dry Tortugas for a fourth of July vacation when I was young, and we dove out there, and I was similarly struck by the magnificence of that resource. That's another point of context. I have not done much diving out in the Dry Tortugas since then, but I did get a chance to see it when I was a very young kid. And again, the overwhelming abundance of life and health of the resource, it was just truly amazing.

ZM: Yes. I'm wondering, as a kid, or even once you got a little bit older, you've been spear fishing, you've been free diving. Did you ever catch and sell tropical fish for the aquarium trade?

WB: I did not. I never engaged in commercial fishing of any sort, apart from a handful of times growing up. I was a mate, I went out snapper fishing, commercial snapper fishing. But I never was a licensed holder, and I never did any tropical fish collecting.

ZM: Got you. Okay, let's see, it sounds like you spent a lot of time out on the water growing up. When did you realize that this was more than something you wanted to do for fun? You wanted to make a living out of being out on the water?

WB: Oh, I don't know. I think it was always something that I thought in the back of my head, that I was passionate about, and I fell in love with it. I got my captain's license at nineteen years old, that would have been 1999, and although I had aspirations of attending law school or going on to get a master's degree after college, really the ease of making money through guiding, I just kind of fell into it and it stuck. I found that I just loved it. It's been very hard for me throughout my life to ever leave it and I don't know if I will. I fell in love with it throughout my teenage years and got my captain's license, and perhaps for a minute thought I might be something else. But that was quickly put to rest once I was engaged in taking clients out, and showcasing this environment, and telling them my story, and telling them how special it was. I realized that this is my calling. I've been neck deep in it ever since.

ZM: So, 19 seems to me at least seems really young. That's a lot of hours. Is that normal for people to get their captain's license so young, or were you kind of like an outlier?

WB: I was very much an outlier at the time. I think now there are some kids, young adults down here in the Keys who are eighteen, nineteen, twenty years old, who are successful charter boat captains in their own right. I think I may have been somewhat of a pioneer of my time in my era, but I think that there's others that have followed that same trajectory down here.

ZM: Yes, that must have been a really big step. It's a big accomplishment no matter how old you are, really. But for a nineteen year old, that seems huge. How did it feel to finally get that license and then have the ability to basically do whatever you want? You're young, you have your captain's license.

ZM: How'd that feel?

WB: I think it felt natural to me. It didn't feel special. It didn't feel wrong. It felt very right and very natural. So, I never really kind of considered that it was a special thing. I just did it, and I think I've continued to do it. I think maybe the leadership charge that my father had with me early on. When I was running a boat but didn't have a captain's license, and I was just out there fishing and taking friends out, and so on and so forth, I was in control of the boat. I was the captain, and I was the leader on the boat there. I think I learned that lesson early, early on as a kid, so, getting a captain's license was just kind of a natural follow up for me. I don't think it was special. I think it was just a formality of sorts.

ZM: Got you. You mentioned that you did go to college. Can you tell me where you went and what you studied?

WB: I went to Loyola University, and I started in the business school and ended in the liberal arts school and got a degree in philosophy.

ZM: Got you. Was that Loyola in Maryland?

WB: No, Loyola in New Orleans. New Orleans Jesuit University, St. Ignatius. And yes, Loyola University in New Orleans.

ZM: Got you. And can you tell me a little bit about that? That must have been a big change. The Keys to New Orleans. What was that like?

WB: Actually, I don't think it was that big of a change. I think the two cities are considered sister cities of sorts, so it felt kind of natural for me there. New Orleans is kind of a bigger brother to Key West. Different in its own way, but very much in the same family and lifestyles and cultures that exist in both of those port towns. I found it really easy. I love the culture of New Orleans and began to work in a fly shop there when I wasn't in class. I ended up falling in love with the bayou and the marsh of Southern Louisiana and ended up taking my flat boat up there and fishing out of New Orleans. Just fun recreational fishing up there. But I fell in love with the marsh up there as well, so I think it was very similar to my experience here in Key West. The only difference was literally the type of habitat or the fish that I was catching. But apart from that, I found a lot of similarities between my growing up here in Key West and becoming a young adult in New Orleans.

ZM: Got you. Yes, that's interesting. You've just gravitated towards the water in both of these places. When you finished your degree, what brought you back to Florida?

WB: I think I had kind of grown out of New Orleans or I was ready to come home. I think the clear water and the pristine nature of the Florida Keys was a little more attractive than the dirty, muddy water of the bayou, which is beautiful in its own right, but I think the pristine waters of the Florida Keys with big silver tarpon and tailing permit was where my real, true passion was. Coming home here was a natural - my dad ran an electrical contracting company, so I was able to go to work with him doing electrical work. He allowed me the freedom and flexibility to take up trips when I had them, and that was really cool. I kind of got a chance to be a guide and an electrician for a period of time until I firmly planted my flag in the guiding world and decided to do that full time.

ZM: And what year did you graduate college? It was it early 2000s, 2004?

WB: Yes. It would have been 2002 I believe.

ZM: Okay. How long did you work with your dad for?

WB: I'll still pull some cables from time to time with him if I need to. I grew up through my teenage years working summers for my dad, doing electrical contracting work and continue to do electrical work. Even after the storms, when we had [hurricane] Wilma, the fishing kind of dried up, so, I put the tool belt back on. I have a skill set in that trade, so, occasionally I go back to it if I need to. But certainly, for my late teenage years, when I was able to work in the summers, I was on construction sites during the day, and then I'd rush home and jump in my boat and run out to the flats and try to catch the last couple of hours before sunset to go fishing.

ZM: Yes. It seems like you have skills in two different trades and you've got different ways to make money, and each seemed to have given you some freedom. Did it feel that way at that

point? Did you feel like you had the freedom to work as much as you wanted and kind of explore the Keys still, or were you kind of working all the time and a little overwhelmed?

WB: No, I think I had the freedom. Living in the Keys is expensive, and even after college, I was paying rent, I think even paying rent to my folks. When I was at home from school, from college in the summertime, my folks would charge me rent, so, I would have to work. But I would always balance just the right amount of money to pay rent and afford the fuel and bait bill. Never putting any money away, but taking every other free moment that I had and wasn't making money, I'd be out on the water chasing fish.

ZM: And you said you and your dad built your first boat out of some plywood, but at this point, what kind of boat are you fishing from?

WB: Right now, I fish from a state of the art flat skiff. It's called a beaver tail skiff. That's the brand. The model is a seventeen foot elite, and it's a small, technical flat polling boat that's designed to float in shallow water and be very stealthy. It's really the vessel of my trade. There's a polling platform on the back that sits atop the engine, and it's a very recognizable, distinct shape, and there's lots of other guides down here that fish out of it. It is specially designed to target fish in shallow water, sight fishing on a fly and not a spin rod. So, that's my day to day office.

ZM: Got you. And how shallow is the water that you're fishing in? I know at least reefs can be really shallow, fifteen feet to even less than that. What's the draft like on that boat?

WB: The draft [how shallow your boat's hull can go in the water], I think depending on the fuel and weight, is about seven inches, and oftentimes I'm kind of bumping the bottom polling quietly. I'll kind of push over the seagrass or kind of touch the bottom in seven inches of water occasionally when I'm targeting really shallow fish. We fish in very shallow water, but very important. We're not running trolling motors or running the engine. We're using a push pole as a stealthy and very careful, delicate form of maneuvering in that shallow water. We don't want to harm the bottom, and we don't want to alert the fish to our presence. The boat is designed to target fish in very shallow water.

ZM: Got you. Yes. That's really interesting. That's really shallow. That's cool, though. So, real quick, I'd like to take a little bit of a step back. You said you got your captain's license in 1999. In 1990, the Florida Keys National Marine Sanctuary was established, and then real regulations kind of went into place, more like in the later 1990s, like 1997. And I know you were younger in the early 1990s, but do you remember this time period? I've heard that it created a lot of animosity and some divisions within the fishing community. Do you remember how people might have felt about the sanctuary?

WB: I do not. That happened to be precisely the time that my family had moved to France for two years. So, we were physically away from the Florida Keys, and my engagement with fishing wasn't big enough at that point to be political or to be aware of these issues. I really didn't have any idea of what was going on or the controversies or the support for the sanctuary system. It's only later that I've learned that. I think my first real experience is out there on the water running my own boat at a time when the regulations were already in place. So, as far as I'm concerned, or

I know, this has kind of been the way it's always been for me down here. I'm not old enough and don't have the historical context to know the area before the sanctuary. I know it once those first regulations went in place, and have known it that way ever since.

ZM: Got you. Yes. So, it's just kind of like, this is how things are for you, which is really interesting. Are you in contact with people that have strong feelings about the sanctuary now?

WB: Oh, of course. There are folks within this community that are very supportive of the sanctuary. There are others that are skeptical, and even more some that have genuine animosity and feel strongly against the sanctuary. And part of my task as a Sanctuary Advisory Council member is to engage with dialogue from all different stakeholders down here and constituents. I have contacts that feel both ways about this and it's my job to listen, and those conversations inform my decision making or my input on the sanctuary.

ZM: Yes, and while we're talking about it, what are your feelings on marine protected areas and no take preserves?

WB: I think I'm naturally inclined to be skeptical of no access or no take. I don't know how well that's worked or how well it hasn't worked. As a fisherman, those are always hot button issues and for me, marine protected areas or closed areas should be a last resort. But there are special circumstances, such as a declining fishery, or the strong science that supports a closure at a multispecies aggregation spawning site, for instance. I think that there are very careful closures that could be very helpful in backstopping the decline of our fishery down here that I would be supportive of and have supported. But generally, I'm leery of big broad closures. This is a unique area in the Keys where we have this cross section of a pristine environment, a very important environment that's in decline, and also a huge economic resource. Our community depends on access to the waters and the environment around here. We're really at a difficult place of finding that balance between access and sustainability. So, I think we're kind of in a place where we're writing the playbook about how do you protect and conserve areas that are frequented by a lot of people and people like myself very much depend on that access to support their livelihoods. There's a challenge here and it's important for us to get it right.

ZM: Yes, definitely. A little bit of a follow up, do you believe that marine protected areas have hurt fishermen's livelihoods or have helped in general?

WB: I'm really not qualified to say that. I think that there definitely have been some folks that have been negatively affected by, for instance, some of the Tortugas closures. But I think when we look back with the privilege of history and we can see what something like the full closure at a place like Riley's Hump - that's a very special geographical feature and a biological benthic feature. Those kinds of closures I think, in the long run have helped fishermen, although it's come with some pain, and I can very much appreciate that pain. I think that overall, the net benefit is positive for that. I think the way in which we go about doing these closures and engaging stakeholders is very important. And, maybe some of the pain was felt because of the way that was handled and some of the folks involved. I'm hopeful to write a new chapter and bring scientists and regulators and fishermen together at the same table to find consensus on how best to protect and manage these resources. I think that's really the model for the future.

ZM: Yes. You mentioned a couple of things that I want to follow up on as well.

WB: I'd like to back up for a second. I would like to say that this concept of marine protected areas is one thing. I think the flat fishing guides up in Florida Bay, which is just up the road from me here, they've been vocal, and it came with some real contentious dialogue. They've been in support of the national park implementing these pole control zones and no motor zones where there's still access is allowed. You can go in and you can sight fish and you can fly fish in those areas. It's just we're looking at the way that the users impact the environment and trying to modify behavior so that we still provide access but do it in such a way that it minimizes the impact. And I think that's really a model that we should look at. The big, vast areas that are closed to transit or even close to any kind of boating. I think there's huge political pushback on that and I think we need to identify what really needs to happen in these areas. Do we need to - snapper, grouper, special particular reef? What are the things that need protections here? And maybe we can approach it with a little bit more of a scalpel, a surgeon's approach, rather than just a broad stroke of closure. From looking into places like Australia and other marine protected areas that exist, there are serious benefits to large contiguous marine protected areas. I just find the politics and the access issues here in the Florida Keys for that to be highly problematic. So, I don't know what the right approach is ultimately. Sure, if you just closed everything off and let it go back to normal, would the place get better? It probably would. But that would affect an enormous amount of people and it would affect our tax base, it would affect our public schools, all of these other things that come into play. And that's, again, why we need to be careful and seek balance with every step that we take.

ZM: Yes, I've heard people say that there are solutions out there that work for other locations, but Florida is unique and requires a unique solution. That seems to be pretty true.

WB: Yes. You have twenty million people living in the state of Florida and it's surrounded by water, and everybody loves to enjoy boating and going out on the water. So, you're going to have issues. We've had the mismanagement of the everglades and the water quality stuff that's degraded the habitat here. We have climate change that's affecting the reef, so on and so forth. There are these large scale systemic problems, but they have to come into balance with the needs of a populace that enjoys recreating on the water and substantial industries like mine that are worth billions of dollars that require a healthy, sustainable fishery with access. It's a very big challenge, which points directly to the need for quality dialogue and engagement. So, that's where I've chosen to put myself, is to try to facilitate that.

ZM: Yes, you mentioned that Florida's Reef is a wonderful resource and it's so unique and it's really the only one we've got in the area. You mentioned that it's also in decline. And I'm wondering, growing up, was there a perception that this resource was in decline or when did people start to see that things are getting worse?

WB: I don't know. I'm not as versed in the historical timeline and exactly when. I can't really answer that question. I can say that it popped into my radar the more time I spent out on the water, the more times I saw it change. And I think it's grown from a few kinds of science types or environmentalist types warning us about it through data and analyses, to actually seeing the concrete evidence of it in front of our face with our own eyes. I'd say that that's perhaps, maybe more of a new thing, maybe within the last fifteen years, twenty years or so. You can really point

to your own experience and say, "oh, I've seen it with my own eyes." But I think that there's been a concern from lots of people that enjoy the water, and scientists that know about the water, for years and years. It has definitely risen in the conversations to the forefront, I'd say in the last fifteen years or so, twenty years, something like that, yes.

ZM: And can you give me an example of a change that you've seen yourself?

WB: Well, sure. I've noticed the migratory changes of fish. My livelihood depends on me being able to find fish for my clients to target with the fly rod, and we're catch and releasing those fish and very much worried about the mortality of the fish. So, we do everything we can to ensure a successful sporting experience that results in the fish swimming away healthy and able to live and fight another day. But just in the spot selection of where I go and when I go and what I'm doing there, I've had to adapt and evolve with the changing patterns of the fish migration. I've witnessed a lot of change in the backcountry. We used to have kind of another reef that was in the north of the Florida Keys in the backcountry that I snorkeled on a lot when I was a kid. And I've seen that kind of collapse, to the point where the coral heads that used to be there are no longer there. The sea fans that were in the bays and the sponges, all of those have been degraded and aren't there anymore. I've witnessed all of that. I've seen changes in seagrass habitat with seagrass die offs, impacts from storms, and recently, [hurricane] Irma took a huge impact with our mangrove habitat and our seagrasses down here. Wilma, when it came and approached the, Hurricane Wilma, when it came off the Yucatan and approached Florida and the Florida Keys on the north side. The winds actually kind of pushed from the Northwest. And I noticed after Wilma that there was a large amount of sand that had been deposited on the flats and covered up the seagrass which changed the fish patterns and the bait and the habitat. So, I witnessed that. And then we had a cold spell in 2011 that similarly killed a lot of fish and killed a lot of marine invertebrates and bait sources for those fish. I've watched that change as well. But again, my microscope on this fishery, or my lens that I look through this fishery, is very much through the tarpon, bone fish, and permit - the sports fishing that I do. I would say that my experience, my expertise is in identifying areas that those fish inhabit and where I can catch them. That's changed and evolved over the years and adjusted based on the decline or shifting habitat. Beyond that, just the recreational diving for lobsters, going out to the reef and spearing fish, or just recreating and enjoying taking a pleasurable swim on the reef. I've noticed many more people, businesses that have grown up to take lots and lots of people out to the reef. I've seen some of the impacts of mass tourism on the reef. That seems to have had a big impact. So, just my recreating on the reef tract on the southern side of the Florida Keys. You can't help but notice that there used to be Elkhorn coral and now there's just rubble. I don't know exactly the cause. I think it's a variety of things. And science tells us that it's nutrient overloading, it's acidification of the water from climate change, its storm impacts, too many people visiting the reef. All of those things are likely contributors to it, and all of which are not easy problems to solve.

ZM: Yes, unfortunately, I wish there was a silver bullet or something. But yes, it's a lot of different problems and each one of those problems has kind of got a few different sources. So, you notice a few different types of change. You said that there's been more people coming out, more tourists. Can you talk about that a little bit? Are there more boats on the water? Or is it more like corporations are kind of growing and just taking more people out in bigger boats? Can you just talk about, what it was like before?

WB: Yes, sure. I mean, when I grew up, as a kid, you hardly ever saw boats in the backcountry. And now people are with the advent of GPS [global positioning systems], it's kind of reduced the fearfulness of folks. Before, you'd have to really know the waters or you'd run aground and cost yourself a lot of money. And now you can use a GPS and successfully navigate back there. So, it's empowered a lot of people to explore and go out on the water. We're seeing more boats out there. And I think along with that, the tourism industry here in the Florida Keys has grown substantially. We're getting more and more visitors every year, and particularly in Key West, our tourism has grown a lot over the years. One particular form of tourism that we have had is these large cruise ships that have come in. When I was first experiencing the water in the Florida Keys and fishing, we'd get some cruise ships, and they would come in and they were typically smaller. But over the years, that cruise ship industry has built bigger and bigger boats that have deeper draft that disturb the bottom and create turbidity. That silt and that turbid water then falls out onto the reef with the outgoing tide that has a negative impact. And just the volume of tourists coming in on the cruise ships. And the businesses that profit from that are a lot of snorkel boats and kind of mass - Lots of people on boats that are being ferried out to the reef to go for a dive on the reef for a few hours while they're here on a cruise ship stop. There's a source of tourists that are coming in that are finding their way out to the reef in one form or another. As we're watching our tourism grow, and the Florida Keys being marketed as a place to dive and fish and experience pristine waters, there's been businesses that have grown up and obviously profited from that, and that can be a good thing. But again, we have to find balance there. Loving it too much can harm it, and I think we may be a little bit out of balance with that. But these are all challenges that we face. It's very important that people go and see the reef and fall in love with the reef because that informs their conservation mindset and their love for this resource. We really need to strike that balance between showing people this resource and having them fall in love with it and having to provide an economic input for our community down here. But doing so in a responsible way that it doesn't degrade the resource but protects it.

ZM: Yes, let's see. Now is probably a good time to ask. I probably should have asked those earlier, but we've touched on a few different reasons. But if we could consolidate it, why is Florida's reef so important? And this could be economically, it could be culturally just, in your opinion.

WB: I think it's those two things and others. First, it's a huge economic engine for us. People come to the Florida Keys to go to the reef, to experience our beautiful waters, to go fishing, to catch fish, to eat fish, to dive on our wonderful reef and our site. So, there's an economy behind it, which is important. It also is a cultural thing. We have a history and a legacy of wrecking. When cargo ships would unfortunately ground themselves on the reef, there was a big industry down here in the Florida Keys and Key West that was famous for its wrecking community, where these small boats would go out and would help save the cargo on the boats. And that was a whole industry in and of itself at one point. I think that's kind of parlayed into a cultural connection that we have with this resource down here. But even beyond that, we're looking at -We have a Navy base down here, which is something that our community very much loves. I think we're very thankful that the Navy is down here and that the other branches of the military are down here. And we have a very strategic base here at NAS [Naval Air Station] Key West. They perform a lot of flight training for our naval cadets and our naval aviators. I think that's a huge important national security issue. This base and the military installations are very important down here. When you look at what the reef does for them, it's a barrier, it's a defense. They're not bringing

submarines, enemy submarines, in. There's storm mitigation, the impacts of surge, of climate change, can very much be mitigated by the presence and health of that reef. So, that's another thing that I think a lot of people don't consider is that there's this barrier out there that shields us from mother nature when she gets angry and she throws a category four storm at us. We're not experiencing the tidal or the storm surges. The reef is breaking that down. And when it comes to things like our national security and defense systems, that's an enormous value that it's bringing to this community and to our nation as a whole.

ZM: Yes, sorry. Back to the tourism. Do you find that tourists are less careful with the reef. Divers that come in on these big cruise ships and things, are they more amateurs and they don't practice good buoyancy or they're grabbing corals, things like that, as opposed to maybe locals who this is their resource?

WB: For sure. I've witnessed tourists out on the reef touching the reef and interacting with it inappropriately. But I've also watched over the years with businesses that have grown up, they recognize how important it is and they're giving their guests and the divers these instructional talks before they get in the water. And I think that's very helpful. Things like the Blue Star Diving program and the Blue Star fishing program with the National Marine Sanctuary are great programs that empower captains and mates to inform their guests on the importance of the reef and the importance of interacting with it in a positive way. Unfortunately, things like - we enacted locally a ban on certain types of sunscreens here in Key West because we found that certain ingredients and types of sunscreens were very detrimental to the coral reef. We instituted a local ban on the sale of those sunscreens, and that was preempted by legislation in Tallahassee. So, I think we've attempted to make substantive corrections and changes down here, only to find that folks higher up the food chain or in the state legislative body just didn't see the value that we saw in that. And they preempted us and just said, "we don't care what you think of us, we're not going to ban the sale of any kind of sunscreen. It's wide open business for anybody. And if it cost us the reef, then so, be it." And that's sad. I think that when voters come together and they vote on things that they care about, and when it pertains to the reef down here, it makes a lot of sense and it's something that we can do. So, to have politicians not support that, it's troubling. The special interests - it's a problem. I think we need to do more to stand up for ourselves and take charge on issues like that. Hopefully we'll be able to do that, and hopefully we can put that - when you look at the economics of the fishery, the reef, the tourism, these are big bucks. And maybe the legislators can pay a little more attention to that and see that if we don't protect this and do the right thing and be prudent, we risk losing it all. And if you want to talk about something that anybody can be fearful of, let's talk about the economics of what happens when we don't - when the fishery collapses and the coral reef dies. I mean, that's a doomsday situation, and that would be the worst economic picture we could paint. The Keys is a great place to come and listen to music and talk about Hemingway and have a drink down on Duval Street, but ultimately there's a lot of other places that you can do that in. And the thing that separates us is this beautiful waterscape and the coral reef. So, we've got to do something that - we need to do more to protect that.

ZM: Yes, sorry, I'm just making a quick note here. so, you mentioned when you were younger, having a memory of diving on Looe Key. I think Looe Key the reef there. Have you been back recently?

WB: Yes, I think we went out there two times this summer with my kids and dove on Looe Key.

ZM: How's it changed? It could be for the better or for the worse?

WB: No, it's not for the better. It's a skeleton of what it was, let me just put it that way. I think it's still a pleasurable day to go out there and see the reef, but every time I get in the water it saddens me.

ZM: Yes. Can you elaborate a little bit on so, you've seen this resource thirty years ago. And then you've been around and seen the decline over the last few decades, and you mentioned things like the sunscreen ban being ineffective because somebody higher up on the food chain decided that they knew better, and that must be frustrating. What does it feel like as a Keys native seeing this resource decline a little bit?

WB: It's painful. I remember when there was a lot more coral cover, and the science can provide the data on that. From what we've been told, we're down to very little coral cover, and you notice that. You can see the dead branching corals, elkhorn coral, so on and so forth when you're snorkeling on it. I remember it as a kid, and I remember specific coral features that are broken and dead, and it's sad and it sucks. It really sucks when you have somebody in Tallahassee who, for some special interest, says this thing that you care about, the measures that you've taken to protect it, which are totally reasonable, we're going to regulate against that. It's not helping us. I feel like sometimes they don't understand how important it is to us down here, and how we're trying to do the right thing, and how it means - it's a personal thing for us. Fortunately, I think we have a good governor at this point who's recognized the importance of clean water and the health of this resource. So, we're hopeful that we can start to write a new chapter in those efforts, and I think we're going to.

ZM: Yes, that brings up a good point. You mentioned taking the kids out to Looe Key and showing them the reef. Are you hopeful that the reef will still be around when they're old enough to show it to their kids? Do you think that we're going to be able to move in the right direction?

WB: I do. I think it's extraordinary, some of the advancements that science has made. And guys like Dave Vaughn with the coral reef projects that he's been involved with, with getting certain types of species of coral to spawn in captivity, and the success of micro fragmenting. Now, the application of federal funds and grant money toward the iconic reefs program. There's science and money that are coming to bear on this issue, and that's great. And I think that we can see, if you do what science says and we can scale up the production and bring some energy and investment to this. I don't see any reason why we can't be successful at this. And I think, frankly, there's no option other than to succeed, because if we lose the coral reef and we lose the coral reefs around the world and we don't push back on the effects of climate change, we're going to experience massive problems at every level. I think it kind of needs to be an all hands on deck approach at this point, and I'm seeing that. And science has unlocked some very key mysteries that needed to be unlocked. So, I'm optimistic actually, that I think we're seeing the lowest point here and that with some substantive closures or regulations at key sites and some application of federal funding and science at others, that we can start to enviro-engineer and build back this very important coral reef. And I think we can write a playbook that can be replicated elsewhere in the world, which is even more important because we're not alone in the complexity of our

issues and the enormity of these issues. There are coral reef problems all around the world and we need to get to work on that right away, and we need to figure out the best playbook and the best way to scale up productions and do these things. And I think we're going to do that here in the Florida Keys first and we're going to be able to replicate it elsewhere.

ZM: Yes. And one question that I have written down that I meant to ask earlier, you were talking about sport fishing and that you actually throw a lot of, if not all of the fish that you catch back, and your goal is to throw them back so that they aren't injured. How do you do that?

WB: Very carefully. We certainly don't throw them. We have a campaign called Keep Them Wet. So, for instance, when a fish comes to the boat, I'll use a special landing net that has rubber coated mesh so, that it doesn't take the slime off of them. I'll remove the hook with a special de-hooker so, I don't have to touch the fish very much or any at all. And I think that we carefully revive the fish, not release them right away, but make sure that he gains a little bit of his strength back. And if we're going to photograph the fish, that one of the things that I do is I have my clients hold their breath and it's like if you're ready to release your breath, it's time for the fish to go back in the water. He's holding his breath too. And let's try to review the picture taking process and understand what kind of photo we want to get with the fish before we pull them out of the water. And when we do, we're to do it very quickly, very efficiently. We're going to get a great photo. We're going to get them back in the landing net, we're going to let him recover. We're going to move away from where we caught the fish so, that we're not having shark depredation, and we're going to be careful to release that fish with some energy back in his system and with minimal contact and do everything that we can to ensure that he's going to swim away and live another day. And I think we're doing that. And more importantly, we've adjusted kind of the expectations of our clients and guides. They're feeling empowered to say, "hey, look, do you really need a picture with that fish?" Or "hey, why don't we take a picture of you in the water with the tarpon and not try to pull this fish up to the boat? Let's try to get a different kind of photo that doesn't stress the fish's internal organs." For instance, I fished a bonefish tournament this fall, and I won most releases in that bonefish tournament with, I think, twenty-eight bonefish released over three days. I can say in three days of catching and releasing bonefish in a tournament, I did not touch, did not lay a finger on, a single bonefish. I was able to use my net and use a little PVC kind of sling that we were measuring the fish with, and I used to de-hooker. And not a single time in twenty-eight bonefish did I apply a single finger to any of those fish. And every one of them swam away with plenty of energy, and I suspect very few of them, if any, were killed later by sharks. Even in a tournament where time matters and your efficiency of catching these fish is kind of on the line because you want to catch as many as you can, as quickly as you can. We're still finding the time, to not just be uncareful about it, that we're going through all the appropriate measures to guarantee that even in a tournament with things on the line and you're trying to win, that you're still not going to forsake the health of that fish. You're going to do it in a responsible, mature, professional way, because these bone fish and these tarpon and these permit these fish down here that I catch and release, it's my livelihood. I want to guarantee that each one of those fish comes to the boat, my client has a great encounter and that that fish is, is going to be on the flat the next day or the next year to be another target for myself or another guide. It's important that we come together as a community and we have, through the Guides Association and entities like Bonefish Tarpon Trust, and the Blue Star Program at the Sanctuary. These are all things that are trying to elevate the professionalism of our captains and educate captains and anglers about the need for proper fish handling etiquette. Those kinds of

things are where the real substance of our protections are. That's a very powerful thing when you can facilitate those engagements with fish and clients and do it in a professional, responsible way that ensures the future success of those species.

ZM: Yes, that's super interesting. Is this a relatively recent initiative and is it catching on or are a lot of organizations adopting it?

WB: Very much so. We're doing social media campaigns with the hashtag Keep them Wet. The captains down here are all, I think, just taking it upon themselves. It only takes one time when you are careless with the fish handling, and you release the fish, and he swims away, and you watch a shark eat him. That happens to me. It's happened a few times over the course of my life, and it's very painful, and it really sucks when the client sees that, but it's important he sees it, and that informs the expectations for future trips. It only took a couple of times for me to buy a net and to bring policies on my boat and inform my clients before we're actually catching the fish or at the point of taking a picture that, "hey, look, this is how it's going to go down, and these are the reasons why." Because I need these fish to swim around here, and I need to guarantee that they're going to be successful. I think there's just kind of an unspoken culture and etiquette in the flats fishing guide world here that you do right by the fishery first and then the ego or the catching of the fish kind of happens afterwards. And I feel that there's some leaders here that have really taken up that mantra and that's now part and parcel of our culture as fly fishermen, as shallow water sports fishermen, that if you're not catching or practicing proper catch and release techniques, then shame on you. I think there's some peer pressure that we're providing. When we see pictures on Instagram, there's quiet conversations that are having at the dock with those captains and, "hey, man, did you really need to photograph that fish this way or interact with it in this way?" Because we all depend on this fishery here, and we got to step it up and guarantee the survivability of these fish. So, I think we're all trying to be good ambassadors and leaders in the sport there. I think we're empowered to do the right thing. And beyond that, I'd say it's good business. When we explain these things to our clients, they buy in and then they feel proud that they did it the right way. I think it helps them fall in love with this, which means they're going to book more trips, they're going to come back more, and it's just a great business model, too.

ZM: Yes, definitely. Well, thanks for explaining that. This is kind of one of those rare bright spots and sometimes what is otherwise kind of a dark story, that's pretty cool. And so, related to this, I know that you have taken a really active role in conservation efforts yourself and outreach and things like that. Can you tell me a little bit about some of the other efforts that you're involved in? It could be with the Keys Sanctuary or anything else that you're kind of proud of.

WB: I think I've engaged it at almost every level, from working on Everglades Restoration with some folks, from captains of clean water and bull sugar and some Everglades Foundation, Teddy Roosevelt Conservation. I've kind of had engagements with lots of folks, with lawmakers in Tallahassee, with lawmakers in Washington on everglades issues. Recently we're in the sanctuary review process, so, we're doing outreach there. There are some closures that are put on the table, particularly with spawning sites that I've tried to find and build consensus for reasonable closures that make sense, not complete full closures, but targeted time specific closures that I think strike a balance. I've engaged with some films that I've made with my personal status, as a leader in the community to help younger guys rise up as leaders, to get them sponsorships with corporations that support conservation and support sustainability. So, I'm trying to foster the grassroots

movement and empower other guides and get them to buy into this ethos of sustainability. And I found some real success there, and I found success with the corporate level, with getting companies to support conservation and see the need for it. Costa del Mar is a huge supporter of that - Orvis, Hell's Bay, Beavertail Skiffs. All these marine manufacturers - Patagonia, Twelve Weight clothing company. These are all people that support these reasonable conservation measures. When industry and dollars can kind of move in that direction, that's moving the needle. When we can get guides to buy in, that's moving the needle. When we can do specific targeted closures or specific projects that are reasonable and make sense and have the ability to yield huge dividends for us later down the road, that makes sense. And then recently with the Coronavirus Pandemic, we've seen the absence of cruise ships here in Key West, I think we should monitor the water quality. I was involved with the committee that put referendum on the ballot here in Key West to limit the size and capacity of these mega-cruise ships because of the negative environmental, cultural and health safety issues with Key West. It's again pointing back to that balance that the community needs to achieve with finding the right amount of tourism, with the ability to support that tourism from the natural environment to our health, safety, infrastructure, so on and so forth. We were successful with our referendum, very successful. We won the vote by a pretty large margin. So, we're again demonstrating to the leaders that like, "hey, this is where the public is at on this and this is what we want and we want to achieve that balance. Here's the reasonable approach." We're not saying no to all cruise tourism, but it has to be in keeping with striving towards that balance that we're trying to find here. It needs to be the right kind of tourism that doesn't degrade or diminish our resources, but contributes positively towards the economy, towards the culture, and towards the long term history or future for the fishery and for the environment. So, those are all areas that I've engaged and tried to be impactful. And, looking forward, I think that there's ways that we can use habitat mitigation and habitat engineering and bio-engineering. Whether it's with coral micro-fragmenting, outplanting of loggerhead sponges, which are critical to the benthic habitat. Sea fans, including artificial reefs or other measures like that. Where we're going and being hands on with actively engaging with the environment and creating favorable habitat. If we're asking captains to give up portions of the reef that they fish or have historically fished because it's important, then where are they going to go and can we find a creative solution to that with projects very careful and very precise artificial habitat or artificial reefing projects. And I think the future - there's more work to be done there with engaging on those kinds of hands on approaches to just say, "oh, let's create a marine protected area and close it permanently and never open it up and hope it gets better." Sure, that's one approach. But to what ends, with what consequences does that come with? There's a huge political pressure there. So, I think there's other ways for us to kind of solve this problem with getting a little more hands on. And I see artificial reefing as a huge potential source for us to be impactful in that effort. So, that's what we're going to continue to do those things and I'm very proud of trying to do what I can and I certainly want my kids to see it better than I saw it or leave it better than you found it, right? That's the philosophy there.

ZM: Yes, talk about another bright spot. There's recently a study done by the National Coral Reef Monitoring Program that showed a vast majority of Florida residents did some kind of activity, whether it was beach cleanups or even just donating money to environmental organizations or other kind of volunteer work, showed that a majority of Florida residents participated in something like that. Is that something that you're seeing as well? People that actually live in Florida full time are really taking it upon themselves to be good stewards of the environment?

WB: Very much so. And this upcoming weekend, we're going to have our annual Guides Association Get Trashed event which is when everybody goes out and has a concerted effort on Sunday to clean up some portion of Bay bottom or area that they are - some marine debris. I think we try to clean up after ourselves and be proactive about that. I would point to last year we had a wonderful opportunity to partner with the Ocean Conservancy. And the Ocean Conservancy was the environmental partner for the Super Bowl host committee. Last year it was in Miami, and they signed on with the Ocean Conservancy to kind of do something positive for South Florida and to showcase the Super Bowl and the NFL's commitment to environmental stewardship. They enlisted Ocean Conservancy and Ocean Conservancy called me and we got the Guides Association involved and we went out and did a great cleanup with some veterans that we were fortunate enough to meet and have help us with that effort. We got thousands and thousands of pounds of marine debris cleaned up. We got the spotlight of the Super Bowl. What could be bigger than that, right? I think here the state of Florida, Miami is hosting the Super Bowl, the NFL is committed and through those partnerships we kind of got a chance to showcase who we are as Floridians. We care about this stuff. And I couldn't think of a bigger, better platform to have than the Super Bowl and the partners that we had. And that was a really successful event that we were able to pull off last year. So, again, I'm proud of that. And when you bring people involved and they see it, they just start picking up trash every day. And I think that's when you adjust the kind of regular habits of people, that's a big deal. Another one would be Costa del Mar, in being a champion for environmental stewardship, has initiated this kick plastic campaign. The challenge was to eliminate the use of single use plastic bottles on the boat. And I can say that I'm in my third season now of never bringing a single plastic bottle on my boat. I use refillable aluminum cans and containers and there's some really great ones. Yeti makes these fabulous products that you can just reuse. You refill the water and when you explain it to clients, they see the value in it, they buy in. And there's two companies, Yeti and Costa [del Mar] that are supporting this kick plastic. I think once I started to change up my daily routine and eliminate plastic, I've been able to do that successfully for going on my third year now. And I'm not using single use plastic bottles. That's a good thing. And I see other guides following that same model and now it's a social media thing and the brands are getting involved and that's how we change the world a little bit, is by getting people to buy in in that way. And I'm very lucky to have the support of companies like Costa or Yeti, and others, that have helped us to find solutions there. I think that's fabulous.

ZM: Yes, definitely. I'm really glad that there's an emphasis on getting rid of single use plastic and I'm glad that people are buying into it on the boat. That's really good to hear. I'm actually wondering a while ago we talked about some storms and natural disasters coming into Florida. I've talked to a couple of older residents, and there's this bit of almost like folklore that's going around. They're saying that every time that there's a natural disaster and people's homes are damaged or destroyed, you have the older fishermen or longtime Florida residents move out, and then you have wealthy like snowbirds come in and buy up all the property. There's been a slow but steady demographic change. Have you noticed anything like that?

WB: Possibly. I don't know. I'm not in the real estate business, but I think that there's probably some truth to that. I don't know if the storms are doing it or just the cost of living and the price of real estate and the desire for the generations that are going into retirement or have retired at this point. Living up north during the cold winter, if you have the resources, it's not as much fun as spending your winter down here in beautiful South Florida, diving on the reef and catching fish.

So, I can't blame them. The real estate market has never gone down in Key West. So, sure are wealthy, second homeowners moving in? Probably. But I still think that there's a culture that's alive and well here in the Keys and will continue to be. But I don't know. It is concerning to me. I certainly don't want people to feel like they're being displaced or pushed out, but I don't know how much I can do about that either. And we're talking about big forces, the real estate market. It's way beyond my ability to affect or control. I can tell you one thing, I own a piece of property in the Keys, and I'm not selling it anytime soon.

ZM: Okay, let's see. Okay, here's one for you. Why should people care about Florida's Reef? Like, why should they get rid of single use plastics? And why should they volunteer their time? Why does it matter?

WB: You can make up any reason you want. It's good business, or the economics, or it makes you feel good, or whatever you want to say. But I just summarize it as this environmentalism or achieving this balance is nothing short of an existential threat that we, as a species, as humans, as society, are going to face. It is undeniable that this resource, indeed all of the environment in the planet, is changing. And if we don't figure this out, the very success of our species, of our future kids, their kids, depend on us getting it right. If it makes you feel good, great. If it saves you money, great. If it's good business, great. But at the end of the day, there's just an existential property here that we have to get this right. We don't have any other choice.

ZM: Yes, there's that philosophy major. Existentialism. That's some deep stuff.

WB: Well, existentialism to the listeners out there is like, this is your existence. If you don't get this right, if this changes and species collapse, habitats and ecosystems collapse, we're going to see mass migrations of people, we're going to see war and conflict, food shortages, water problems, you name it. And we're already starting to experience that. When you talk to my friends in the Navy who tell me, "hey, look, what we're looking at is we're planning for the impacts of climate change to affect national security policy, and this is what the Navy and the armed forces are planning for." What more evidence do you need than that? If we're thinking about future aircraft carrier build orders, and we're doing so, with our eyes on the effects of climate change, that is a big deal. This is something we need to get right. Everybody needs to recognize that and do their part. And it's up to us to change our ways and our habits and try to involve business and industry to help us get there. If we don't, then the likely outcome is going to be war and conflict. so, that's existential for you. That's how your daily life, twenty, thirty years from now, as nations compete for resources that are diminishing, that's how it's going to affect all of us if we don't do something about it now.

ZM: Yes. So, just to kind of reflect a little bit, if you could pinpoint what is the biggest change over time that you've noticed on Florida's reef system? This could be corals, it could be fish, it could be water quality, people's attitudes. If you had to pick one, what was the biggest change?

WB: Well, it's coral cover, right. Where there were coral heads when I was a kid. There's no longer coral. There's just dead rubble. That's the most visually, as a filmmaker, a photographer in my own right, if I were to capture it with one image, it would be a side by side. Here's a coral head twenty years ago, and here it is, currently dead and destroyed. That's in your face. That's the most obvious. Very hard to see nutrients overloading, or the presence of nutrients in our water.

So, water quality or other things like that, you don't really see that. Right. Seagrass is something you can kind of see, or mangrove habitat destruction. You can kind of see it, but it is really in your face. When you're out on the reef and you're looking at stuff and you knew what it was, and now you see it dead, that's striking and impactful.

ZM: Yes. And, looking back, I know you mentioned that you had a couple of other ideas of how you wanted to make a living. You mentioned potentially going to law school and you had other options, but something just kind of kept calling you back to the water. Looking back on everything, if you had to do it over again, are you happy with where you are now?

WB: Very, yes. I have a beautiful wife and two wonderful kids, and we're out on the water, and we love it. We live and breathe it, and we might not make as much money as we could otherwise if I would have chosen differently. I recently had a good conversation with one of my clients, who's a very prominent person in the investment banking world, and we were arguing with each other because he makes a lot more money than I do, and he was pointing out that my office was a lot better than his office was. We were having this argument of who had the better job. And I think at the end of it, he makes a lot of money and has a high pressure job and it's cool in its own right. But I think we settled on I had the better job. That's kind of reassuring, when you hear it from some of these guys who are totally successful that they kind of envy and are a bit jealous of my career. I certainly don't take it for granted. I love what I do. I love that my kids are involved in it and that my wife appreciates it and supports what we all do down here. And I wouldn't change it at all, not one single thing.

ZM: And do you feel like you're making a difference? It seems like you're putting a lot of energy out there and you're really involved. Does it feel like you're getting anywhere? Are you moving that needle?

WB: I hope so. But look, we're in the middle of the game, right? And it's not really helpful to be looking at the scoreboard. Time will tell and history will be the judge of that. But I'm locked in and there's still innings to play or the game clock still got time on it. I got to just focus on the here and now and keep running the ball down the field. And history will be the judge of that, and the game will be up. At some point, I may step away from it or whatever, and I hope to have won, to have made an impact in a positive way for everybody and for the environment. But at the moment, I'm not going to indulge myself in that. I'm just going to kind of keep grinding and keep running plays and keep driving the ball down the field.

ZM: Cool. Well, I think that's about it for the questions I had for you. Is there anything that you think we missed or anything that you want to go into a little bit more?

WB: No, I think it was very comprehensive, Zach, and I appreciate your time and the thoughtfulness of the questions there. I hope that this little interview, it can be for the record and it can be helpful to our common goal and interest of making it better than we found it.

ZM: Yes, I think it's definitely going to be a big help. And I've really enjoyed talking with you. I should ask, you mentioned that you're a photographer and you make videos as well. Are there any photos or video goes that maybe you wouldn't mind sharing?

WB: Sure. Why don't you go to my website, www.worldangling.com, and you'll be able to see my filmography. It's in the videos section there. It's fairly extensive. I've won a couple of awards for some filmmaking that I've done in the past. Everything from promotional kind of hype videos, excitement videos to heartfelt conservation pieces are all there. And there's some great photography and stuff that I've worked on and partnered with other guides and photographers over the years to do stuff with. So, there's a big resource for you or for anybody else that's out there that they want to see what it's like, maybe they've done it, maybe they haven't done it. Just check it out and get a sense of what it is that we've been talking about for the last hour and a half. You can find a lot of that at worldangling.com. And that's my website. Zach, feel free to go have a look and see if you see anything you like. If you want to add to that, just grab it. Or if you need more, let me know.

ZM: Okay. And would you mind if I link out to your website as well from...

WB: That'd be great. And if you want to grab photos off of there, feel free and you can sign any release and I'll get that signed release over to you. And then you can follow on our Instagram page too, and you'll see huge amounts of photos and stuff there.

ZM: Nice. Okay. Yes, I think that would be really cool. I'm trying to narrow down what we're including in the story map, but I think providing these extra resources for people would be awesome, especially what you've got. I think that people would be really interested in it and it's just kind of like a natural next step for people after exploring the story map, to want to learn a little bit more. Cool.

WB: Yes, absolutely. It's cool. I put a lot of time into the website and whatnot, so, you'll find it enjoyable, I think, to read through and to scroll through and watch some of the videos.

ZM: Yes, definitely. Well, Will, thank you so, much for sitting down with me. I know this has been a long interview. I really appreciate your time and all the work that you've been doing, and its really great stuff.

WB: Thanks, Zach, and I appreciate your time too. So, good luck. And if you need anything else, just let me know.