

*Interviewer:* What is your name?

*Patti Bucan:* My name is Patti Bucan.

*Interviewer:* How long have you been fishing for?

*Patti Bucan:* I would say since I was probably about two. I grew up in Wisconsin, and we were right on the river, and my dad was an avid fisherman. He did all kinds of competitive fishing, and he did the fly-casting with a target weight. He would go with like a quarter-ounce or a half-ounce, and there would be a little float out in the water, and they would fly-cast out and drop that little weight into the middle of that circular floating buoy. He took me fishing everywhere, and so I started fishing when I was probably about that high.

*Interviewer:* So your dad taught you fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* Yes, and my brother is an avid fisherman. My whole family is.

*Interviewer:* So you have a whole family of fishers?

*Patti Bucan:* Yes, and my mom.

*Interviewer:* What is your best catch?

*Patti Bucan:* The first time I went out on a dive after being certified, and so that would have been like 1976, my boyfriend and a guy I worked with were up on the top of the boat, and they got me all put in my gear and everything first.

I flipped over the side, and I had a pole spear. It's not a trigger-activated gun, but it's just a long spear with like a big rubber-band on it. I went down, and I saw this huge fish. We were in thirty feet of water on an artificial reef in Dunedin. I went down there, and I saw this huge fish, and I came up to the surface, and I said, there's this huge grouper down there, and they said, well, get it. They probably thought it was like five pounds or something.

I said, okay, and I went down and I took the pole spear, and I speared him. I came back up, and he was just under thirty pounds, which is amazing. I have never, since then, seen that big of a fish in thirty feet of water on an artificial reef.

I said, okay, I got it, and I thought that's the way it was going to be for the rest of my life in the Gulf of Mexico, and that's just about the biggest fish I've ever gotten in my life. A thirty-pound grouper is huge.

*Interviewer:*

What kind of fish do you catch?

*Patti Bucan:*

Well, we do all kinds, because we do freshwater, too. We still go back to Wisconsin and fish there, but I like to bottom fish. I like to get the groupers. I occasionally get a hogfish. They're usually hard to catch on a hook-and-line, because they're a coral-eating-type of a fish, but you can spear them.

The older we get, the more conservative we are. A red grouper, I won't spear, because they're not very smart. They don't run away from you. They stop and they look at you, but a black grouper will take off. They will run. If they will run, then I will chase them. If they don't run, I am not going after them, and hogfish are the same way, but we like to troll also. We like to troll a lot for the big kingfish, and we've gotten wahoo.

We did get a nice sailfish one time, and we tried to resuscitate him. We fought him for a long time, and we tried to resuscitate him, and he wouldn't come back. We kept him and we shared him with all of the people at the lodge.

*Interviewer:*

Was fishing a hobby before it was your job?

*Patti Bucan:*

It's never been a job for me. I have always loved it, and I really, really like being out there in the Gulf, whether we're on the boat or whether we're underwater. It's just beautiful. Some people, when they dive, they have had trouble with it feeling claustrophobic. To me, it's more like being in a wide-open prairie where there is unlimited places to go. That's one of my problems, is I get a little far away from the boat sometimes, but it's like you're going in a big forest or a big field and you just keep going and going and going and looking at different things all the time.

I always liked fishing, like I said, in freshwater when I was a kid. Then when I moved to Florida when I was twenty-five years old, the first thing I did was take up scuba-diving.

*Interviewer:* What is one of the most exciting stories you have had since you started fishing in Tampa Bay?

*Patti Bucan:* I was competing for the women's Florida free-diving championship, and a girlfriend and I, it was our second day. The first day, we did horrible. We didn't get anything. It was towards the afternoon of the second day, and we said, we are not going in there empty-handed. Now, this is back in the days when goliath grouper, called jewfish at the time, when they were legal to get. They weren't legal in the tournament, and so they wouldn't have counted, but we were in about twenty-five feet of water out of Bayport, and there was a huge goliath grouper down there.

They had a special gun that was made specifically for a big fish like that, and I'm talking like 300 pounds. This girl and I said, okay, we're going to go down there and we're going to get this huge fish.

I couldn't pull back on the band to load this gun, and so the captain of the boat loaded the gun. He said, don't touch the trigger, because it's a hair trigger. As soon as you touch it, that shaft is going to go.

I went over the top of that goliath grouper, and I aimed up on him, and I hit him right in the head. It's attached with a cable. The fish will go, but you hang on to that gun, and it was their prize gun, and so I couldn't let go.

All of a sudden, that thing started moving. I thought I stoned him at first, because he didn't move after I hit him. The grouper started going real slow, and he was going into a big cave, because, in Bayport, it's full of big, rocky ledges and stuff, and he was going right into this big hole.

I said, I'm going in that hole with him. I have to hang on to this gun, which is attached to him with a cable. He got to the end of the cable, and he was heading into this place, and you're free-diving. You don't have air. You can't go up.

I was scared. I was really, really scared. He got to the end of the line and the shaft pulled right out of his head. It hadn't even penetrated the bone. It came right out, and so I said, I will never, ever shoot a big fish like that again in my entire life, and I never have.

*Interviewer:* What is the best fishing spot you have?

*Patti Bucan:* At this point in my life, I love Key West. I love fishing and diving Key West, because, if you go in one direction, you're out in the Gulf of Mexico. If you go in the other direction, you're out in the Atlantic Ocean.

All we have anymore is an eighteen-foot boat, and we can go to 500 feet of water and troll. Then, as we come in, we fish in shallower water. Then we can dive in a hundred feet of water. By the time of the end of the day comes, we're snorkeling in fifteen feet of water. That's my favorite, because, no matter what the weather is, I can either be in the calm waters of the Gulf or we can be out fishing the coral reefs out in the Atlantic.

*Interviewer:* How often do you go?

*Patti Bucan:* We go and we stay a month. This time, we're going to go for five weeks straight. We go once a year, but we stay for a long period of time.

*Interviewer:* What is the most common fish you catch?

*Patti Bucan:* Everybody gets grunts, silver snappers I think they call them, but they're a grunt. Everybody catches them, and they are excellent eating. They are very, very good. No matter where you go, you can always get grunts, it seems, and they're really good to eat.

*Interviewer:* How has fishing changed in Tampa Bay from when you started fishing to fishing in Tampa Bay today?

*Patti Bucan:* A lot, a tremendous amount, and I think, with the advent of all of the electronics. When I first started, people had primarily just a recorder, and they would say that you go 296 degrees out of Clearwater and you head that way. When your recorder says that you're in fifty-six to sixty feet of water, we called it the Ledge a Minute area, and it's just ledge, ledge, ledge. You run your recorder, and you just dive what your recorder would say.

Now, with having GPS, you get your spot and, every day you want to go, you can go back to the same spot, and you fish a spot out. We have a spot in Key West that we love,

and, for the longest time, we just would try and find it by where this marker was. Now, you can be put within ten feet of your spot, and so it's too easy to find a good fishing spot.

*Interviewer:* Do you like it today fishing or back then?

*Patti Bucan:* Back then, in fifty feet of water, you would get twenty-pound groupers fairly often. Now, to find a spot like that is pretty unusual.

*Interviewer:* Over the years, have the fish sizes changed?

*Patti Bucan:* Yes, I would say they definitely have changed. When they go out to the Middle Grounds, they will get some huge fish, but it used to be every time you would go out. People didn't go out as far as they do now, because they have to go out farther and farther to get those big fish.

It used to be you would always go out to sixty feet. In fifty to sixty feet of water, you were ensured that you were going to get some really nice, big fish. They used to get grouper off of the Belleair Causeway. Right off the mainland, they were getting grouper. You don't find that anymore, and they're smaller, I think.

I think we're overfished. They are trying to prevent that from happening, by putting so many limits and restrictions on people, and I think there still is quite an argument between the limitations for a person like me and the restrictions I have versus restrictions that a commercial person has. It goes according to how many they've already captured and how much poundage they've got, and so it's a tricky business.

*Interviewer:* When you've been fishing, have you seen big changes in pollution and noticed anything going on weird with the fish that's been different over the years?

*Patti Bucan:* Well, no, I don't think we see it so much here yet. I am certainly glad that they're not drilling for oil on our coast, and I think, unfortunately, inevitably, that's going to happen, because money talks, but we haven't had some of the disastrous spills that they've had in some other areas, and I think that would be bad.

We have red tide problems on occasion, and people forget that pretty fast. You will have it really bad for a while, where you can't go without your eyes smarting or you see dead fish all over the beach and it smells bad. Then, a month after it's over, people forget.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever witnessed red tide while it's starting?

*Patti Bucan:* Yes, and the first time I ever experienced it, I went down to the beach and I could not understand why I kept coughing. Every time I would go down to the beach, I was coughing. It didn't show up yet, but my lungs could feel it. You can imagine, if you can feel it, how those fish that are getting their oxygen out of the water, how they're feeling.

*Interviewer:* What is your favorite type of weather to go fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* Flat and calm and about ninety degrees, where the water is about eighty-eight degrees. When you flip over the side and you don't even feel the temperature change, that's my opinion. No wetsuits and no extra weight, because you have that wetsuit on, and so you have to have this huge, twenty-pound thing of weights around your waist. I like being able to be up in the boat and have a line out there and not worry about the waves making your bait go off in a different direction.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever been out where it's been stormy and you've had a bad experience with fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* We've been out there when we've had the waterspouts, and we've gotten pretty close, closer than I wanted to get. I saw a video on YouTube not too long ago where the guy was kind of trying to get as close as he could with his boat and how many people reacted in saying how that was crazy. I was with somebody like that one time, and he wanted to kind of follow it, and that's not very smart.

*Interviewer:* Did you learn by yourself to fish or your family taught you, but did you kind of expand more than they did?

*Patti Bucan:* Every time you go out with a different person, they have different techniques. They use different hooks and they use different line and they use different weights. There were three of us girls that went out with one guy all the time, and he was a really avid fisherman. That's all he ever wanted

to do, and he also was an engineer, and so he studied it quite a bit.

A good anchor is an invaluable asset. You anchor right either on the spot or according to how the current is moving, as to where you want your bait to sit on the spot. Certain fish, you know that like grouper will hang right underneath the ledge. They want to be sheltered. Other fish are free swimming, and they will hang out in front. He taught us a lot about how to -- It's hard to cast a grouper, but he taught us how to do that, so we could get it exactly to the rock that he knew was there, because he came over at a certain place and anchored so it would be right. You learn a lot by every different person you go out with.

*Interviewer:*

When you were out fishing, did you ever catch any fish bigger than that one grouper?

*Patti Bucan:*

We have gotten a lot of sharks. We bring them up and then we cut the line, and so we haven't brought them into the boat. The sailfish was big. On an opening day of a tournament, and we weren't in the tournament, but the tournament started at seven o'clock. At ten minutes to seven, we were out there on a kingfish area, and we got a forty-nine-pound kingfish. The winner of the tournament I think was forty-six or something.

As they were coming out the pass to go to their tournament, they were watching us bring in a what would have won the tournament fish. A forty-nine-pounder is a really nice kingfish.

*Interviewer:*

When you caught the kingfish, what was your reaction, especially when you saw that the forty-seven-pounder won it?

*Patti Bucan:*

They fight. They fight really hard. All of the boats do come out in the same direction, and so, of course, they're all hoping that they're going to get them that are that big, because they run in schools.

*Interviewer:*

What type of fishing equipment do you prefer to use?

*Patti Bucan:*

I like the bottom rigs, the ones where you just drop it down and then you actually hand-hold it. I am not as enamored with trolling, because you're not actively doing it. When

you put a live bait out behind your boat, it swims, and you just wait to hear the reel making its noise, and so I kind of like to have it in my hand.

*Interviewer:* How often do you go fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* As often as possible. This year, we stayed in Wisconsin into January, and so we ice fished there.

*Interviewer:* Do you mostly go on fishing trips for a long time, like the five weeks, for example, that you go to Key West and then take a little break?

*Patti Bucan:* No, primarily we just go out for the day and then come back in.

*Interviewer:* What kind of problems have you encountered when fishing over the years?

*Patti Bucan:* Weather that comes up, which is usually your fault, but weather that comes up and you don't expect it. Equipment that goes out, equipment failure. We always have a kicker motor on our boat, no matter what, or we even have a kicker that we just lay in the front, in case the main motor goes out that we can get in. We haven't been captured by that too badly, but we have come in awfully slow, on occasion.

One time, we were sleeping overnight, and I was sleeping in the cabin. I must have been snoring. I had my mouth open. The weather kicked up really bad, and a huge wave came over the front of the boat and went right in through the hatch and right into my mouth. It filled up our whole cabin with water. We stayed out, but we were soaking wet the rest of the night and frozen. There are just things that come up unexpectedly that you're not prepared for.

One of the worst things probably that I ever did was my husband and I were diving in 135 feet of water out of like Tarpon, and it was a gorgeous area. My air in my tank -- Women, usually their air lasts longer than men. My husband said, I'm out of air and I'm going to go up. I said, that's okay, I'm going to stay down here.

I never had looked at my tank and my gauges to see how much air I had, and so he was already about maybe sixty

feet up when I'm underneath the ledge, and I'm just poking around. I'm not fishing or anything. I told him that I was just going to stay there, because you should always stay with your buddy, which we don't always do.

I was just poking around. All of a sudden, I took a breath and there wasn't any air coming into my mouth, and we were in 135 feet of water. I looked at my gauge, and I was so stupid. I should realize that if there is no air coming in that I'm running out of air, but I couldn't believe that I was running out of air.

I started going up, and, as you go up, your air compresses, the deeper you are. As you go up, you get a couple of breaths. I was panicking. I was fairly calm, but I was panicking. He was taking his good-natured time coming up, and so, luckily, I caught him, I guess at about fifty feet or something like that.

He gave me his regulator, and he had plenty of air, but, by the time I got to the surface, I felt so compressed. We had wetsuits on too, which also pushes you. I took that regulator out of my mouth, and it was like I couldn't get enough air in my lungs. It was close. It wasn't a good deal.

*Interviewer:*

What is the best time of year to go fishing?

*Patti Bucan:*

Well, when it's colder, the fish are in shallower, and so that's nice, that you don't have to go out so far. You can slow troll for grouper in twenty or twenty-five feet of water if there's a hard bottom. You can get some nice grouper, but you aren't going to do that in the summertime, and so that's nice. On the other hand, I like it when it's warm.

*Interviewer:*

How has the red tide affected you and your business?

*Patti Bucan:*

Since we don't have a business and we're not commercial people or anything, it hasn't. We are really happy just going out. Like I said, the older we get, I am not trying to get anything more than dinner.

*Interviewer:*

Have you measured a red tide before?

*Patti Bucan:*

No.

*Interviewer:* Why do you like to fish?

*Patti Bucan:* It's a challenge. It's fun. I love eating fish. Every time I go to a restaurant, all I eat is seafood, and so it's my favorite food. It's a great thing to do with other people. I like competition. I always like to be competitive, and I'm in the women's dive club, and so we're always competing against each other, but it's a good-natured type of competition.

*Interviewer:* Why did you start fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* I think to eat. Our family probably ate fish three times a week. I am guessing that's why they were so adamant about it.

*Interviewer:* Did someone in your family introduce you to fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* Yes, and it was definitely my dad. I loved going out fishing with my dad. They used to fish on Lake Michigan when I was in college, and so I would get care packages just about every week, when they would go out and get salmon or chinook or whatever, and that's what I subsisted on in college. That got me through.

*Interviewer:* What is your favorite reel and rod setup?

*Patti Bucan:* I have a favorite. It's a grouper rod, but it's not quite as stiff as some of the grouper rods. It's got a little bit more flexibility. When you catch a fish, you really feel it.

*Interviewer:* What is your opinion of illegal fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* I am not in favor of all of the laws that they have passed recently, but I think everybody should stay within the law. There is reasons that they've passed those laws, and you just have to do it.

*Interviewer:* Why aren't you in favor of the laws that they have passed recently?

*Patti Bucan:* I think some of them are a little bit too stringent and not really backed up by scientific reasons. I haven't gone to them recently, but I did go to quite a few of the hearings that they would have. The commercial people and the recreational fishermen make a lot of excellent arguments

for not changing the laws so immediately.

Now you've got, for instance, like the goliath grouper and how many of them there are and how they can wipe out a ledge of nice game fish. Now they're trying to figure out, okay, so we made getting goliath illegal and now what are we going to do? Now we're going to have tags or we're going to give people so many permits a year, so that we can get rid of some of these huge fish that are on these reefs. I mean they make mistakes, too.

*Interviewer:* Do you wear a certain attire whenever you go out fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* As little as possible. If it's super warm, I like the fact that you can just go in a bathing suit. If it's gets cold, I end up wearing a farmer-john. I end up wearing a full wetsuit jacket and then another wetsuit jacket on top of that with a hood, but you're like the Pillsbury doughboy. You're trying to get off the boat and you can hardly move. Your arms are sticking out, and it's like Christmas story where the little kid is in his -- You can't move, and so I would much rather wear as little as possible, not that you want to hear that coming from a sixty-three-year-old lady, but still.

*Interviewer:* What's the oddest thing you have ever caught out fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* One of the first times I ever went, I came from Wisconsin and I went to visit somebody in Naples, Florida. I went out on a half-day charter, one of those big old boats with a ton of people in there.

Every single fish I caught was so strange, but I got a pufferfish. I brought him up on a hook. I got an angelfish. Down there, you're almost into the Keys, and so you get a lot more tropicals. I took a picture of every fish I caught, because it was so bizarre from what I had been used to up north.

*Interviewer:* What was the weirdest thing that you caught that day, in your opinion, the rarest thing?

*Patti Bucan:* A batfish. They look like a bat. They walk on the ground, and their fins are like this, and they kind of jump on the bottom. They are really weird.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a favorite spot to go fishing?

*Patti Bucan:* Yes, in about thirty-five feet of water, and so not very far out, about five or six miles offshore of Clearwater. We live on the water, and we would be out to that spot in about thirty minutes. That's so nice. If you want to go out and fish for a little bit and take a dive and come back in, you're back in by one o'clock in the afternoon, and so I really like that.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a preferred friend or somebody to fish with? If you do, where do you like to fish when them the most?

*Patti Bucan:* My darling husband is my partner, and we have been diving together since 1986. We didn't know each other, but we were both certified in 1976. We stay together. I never used to stay together when I was more competitive. We would go down the line together and then one would go this way and one would go that way.

You're always supposed to stay together with your buddy, but we would be in totally different directions, and then eventually we would see each other back up on top, but we stay together all the time. I am very comfortable. I'm very confident in his knowledge and his skills and he is with me, and so that makes a real comfortable partner.

As far as fishing, we love to fish, hook-and-line and trolling all of it. We love to lobster. We like to stone crab. I like to get lionfish now that they're an invasive species that you are encouraged to get. The year before, I got stuck by one, and that's an experience. That's nasty. They really hurt.

*Interviewer:* What's the most competitive fishing competition you've ever been in, if you've ever been in one?

*Patti Bucan:* I think I got fourth place overall one year for -- The West Coast Council is a group of divers, all the different clubs in this area, and they would have five dives a year. Now I think they have three or four, but they would have a series of tournaments, and they would be held at different locations. One of them would be right down here in Fort De Soto. Then they had them up as far as Bayport, Tarpon Springs, Clearwater.

You would go out and you would get the biggest of each category. You would bring them in and weigh them. The

guys would compete and the women would compete right with the guys. The winners of it, the top five winners, would have a trip that was very inexpensive paid over to the other coast, to fish and dive over there, and so that was what I really wanted. I really wanted to do well in those so that I could get over to the other coast and just fish for like a three or four-day weekend, and so those are the ones that I used to do quite a bit.

*Interviewer:*

Where is the strangest place you have ever fished?

*Patti Bucan:*

I don't know. I've had some strange places I dove, just because it was different. I did some drift diving on Cozumel, and they have huge, huge fish that will eat out of your hand, because they are so used to people, as you drift by, but you're drifting fast, and so you can't stop. You cannot hold yourself on the bottom. They come right with you, and you will have bait in your hand. You hold it out, and they come and just suck it out of your hand, and that's really a neat experience.

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