

*Interviewer:* What is your name?

*Mike Colby:* Mike Colby.

*Interviewer:* What kind of fishing do you do?

*Mike Colby:* I am a charter for-hire captain in Clearwater, Florida, and I fish offshore. All of our trips are in state waters and federal waters of the Gulf of Mexico. We've got a forty-foot Stapleton charter boat, and we take out passengers, up to six, for a four-hour, six-hour, eight-hour, or ten-hour Gulf of Mexico fishing trip. I have been doing it full-time since 1992 and part-time from 1980 to 1992.

*Interviewer:* Do you like what you do?

*Mike Colby:* Yes, and, actually, I don't really enjoy fishing that much. What I enjoy is watching other people fish. At my age, I've caught my fish. I have had fun fishing. What really excites me is taking recreational anglers fishing and watching them catch a fish. That just pleases me to no end, and that's the beauty of the job, is watching other people have fun catching fish.

*Interviewer:* What has been your most memorable experience on one of your fishing trips?

*Mike Colby:* I don't think you want to ask that. In the charter business, there is a lot of memorable experiences, but I think probably when I was running a fishing trip, and it was probably about seventeen years ago, and I had a schoolteacher onboard that taught school at the old St. Petersburg Junior College.

She and I had the most wonderful time talking together, and, after that, she inspired me to go sign up and teach at SPJC, and so I became, at nighttime, an adjunct instructor in environmental sciences at St. Pete Junior College. That was pretty memorable. She kind of motivated me to get into teaching, and so, for four or five years, I taught school at night, as an adjunct, at SPJC, which is now SBC, but that was cool. That was a fun trip. She was a nice lady and a good customer, and she inspired me to go out and do some teaching.

*Interviewer:* Did you like to teach?

*Mike Colby:* Yes, it was great. I loved it. It's great when you're a student and then a teacher, because you see both sides of the desk, so to speak, but it was great. Teaching was wonderful. I would do it again if I had the opportunity.

*Interviewer:* What kind of fish do you catch out in the bay?

*Mike Colby:* We don't bay fish, but, in the Gulf, we catch king mackerel, Spanish mackerel, red grouper, gag grouper, amberjack, mangrove snapper, Key West gray snapper, sea bass, and triggerfish. We catch all the reef fishes and all the sport fishes, which have been very popular here in this county for a hundred years. Those have been real popular fish to catch.

*Interviewer:* What is your favorite fish to catch?

*Mike Colby:* My favorite fish is flounder, but we don't catch too many flounder offshore. I personally, if I'm fishing, I like to catch a flounder, but I think some of the most fun fishing is sport fishing for the mackerels, the king mackerel and Spanish mackerel. We use light tackle and they peel a lot of line out and they're fun. You can see them zinging around, and that's a lot of fun for folks.

A lot of folks like to grouper fish, because they like that hard tug, but, for me, sport fishing, when we troll, when we sport troll, when the boat is moving and we're dragging baits behind the boat, that's a lot of fun, especially when the fish strikes when he hits and you hear the line peeling off the reel. Everybody is excited and reaching for the fishing rod. That's fun, to watch people. That's why I like to watch people catch fish. It's to watch them get all nervous and excited.

*Interviewer:* Have you competed in any tournaments?

*Mike Colby:* I was in a king mackerel tournament twelve or fifteen years ago, but I don't tournament fish much. It's really mostly for the private angler, I think, or guys that are set up with real fast boats to tournament fish. I would do it again, with the opportunity, but the person who is entering the tournament has to charter my boat, and they have to pay for that, and then they've got to pay the fee to get into the tournament, and so it gets kind of expensive. You won't

see too many charter operators that are charter for-hire doing tournaments. There is a lot of other fishermen that are set up for that kind of fishing much better than I am. I have kind of a slow boat, and you need a fast boat.

*Interviewer:* What is one of your scariest experiences? Have you ever had any?

*Mike Colby:* Yes, I have. I was raised on partyboats. I started working the large boats before I became a charter captain. I was a headboat operator, the eighty or ninety-foot boats, where you carry fifty or sixty different people. There's been nothing like life-threatening scary, but, if you spend enough time on the water, you're going to have an event of some kind. It's expected.

After thirty-three years of running offshore fishing boats, you are going to run into an event that will -- As we like to say in the business, I wasn't really scared, but I became very cautious about what we were doing. You can have bad weather events or you can have health events on the boat, a passenger who is not feeling well, for a various number of reasons.

You can have some minor breakdowns that aren't scary. They just kind of interrupt your trip while you're down in the engine room trying to figure out what went wrong, and so I wouldn't say I've had any real scary events, but events where you have to realize that you've got to start acting like you know what you're doing.

*Interviewer:* What kind of fishing supplies do you use?

*Mike Colby:* On our charter boat, we rig up our customers for sport trolling and bottom reef fishing, and those are two completely different kinds of tackle. On the sport trolling, we'll have faster reels, reels that have six or seven-to-one gear ratios. When you turn the handle, you're winding in the fish really quickly, because, many times, a sport fish, like say a large twenty or twenty-five-pound kingfish, will just strip your string right off the reel and you've got to start getting it back in.

Bottom fishing, you go down to a 2.8 to a 3.1 gear ratio, and that's much slower, because you don't necessarily need to get the fish back in fast. We have all different kinds of

fishing reels for whether we're bottom fishing or whether we're sport trolling and the boat is moving. We have different rods too, different length rods and different action rods. They're different weights and different line weights and different weight sizes and different hook sizes.

You rig up for all different kinds of fishing, which requires me to carry a whole bunch of fishing rods on the boat. We have fifteen or sixteen different fishing rods that are on the boat right now, depending upon what we want to do.

*Interviewer:* What fish would be a challenge to try to reel in?

*Mike Colby:* Amberjack. You notice how fast I answered that? Amberjack is one of the toughest, strongest, headstrong fish you will ever catch, and we catch them bottom fishing when the boat is anchored and we're reef fishing, and they are a handful. As we say, it will make you cry for your mother. They are tough.

*Interviewer:* Do you ever catch a fish and bring it to your house and eat it?

*Mike Colby:* Yes, I've done that many times. That's one of the pleasures of catching your own fish, is you get to eat them. I think that's one of the things that I like about taking other people fishing, is knowing they're going to go home and their family is going to have a great seafood dinner that night, as fresh as you can get it. Yes, there is a lot of pleasure in harvesting that fish and handling it properly and cleaning it properly, all the way to your table, knowing that I had some small part in letting the family have a great seafood dinner.

*Interviewer:* You take students out and they go fishing and you said that's your favorite part?

*Mike Colby:* Yes, customers. I have had students too, but customers.

*Interviewer:* Do they usually just take the fish home?

*Mike Colby:* Yes, and occasionally a group will be traveling, let's say from Pennsylvania or something, and they say, well, we don't have any place to eat the fish. I say, well, I will take the fish, but I want to leave you with enough, because you can go to one of our beach restaurants and they will cook

your catch.

That's one of the nice parts of it for the tourists that visit Florida. While they're in a hotel, they don't have any place to cook them, and they're going to fly home in a couple of days, and so we direct them to one of our beach restaurants. All you've got to do is bring in your clean fish and they will cook them for you and serve them to you right there in the restaurant.

What I do with the fish that they don't want is, of course, I will eat some, but we have agencies and care folks in Pinellas County, like food pantries and other places, that will gladly accept the fish donations, because then they will give them away to other less fortunate people. We do that quite a bit, especially when the marina has a multi-boat event, where let's say a company comes to Clearwater and says we have forty-people and we want to put them all on your charter boats.

Forty people, we get about seven or eight charter boats, and they all come back and they're just going to walk away from the fish, and so we call some of these local area providers that come in with a truck and pick up the fish and donate them to other less-fortunate folks that would like to have a seafood dinner, but maybe can't afford to go fishing or buy their own boat or something like that.

*Interviewer:* When you go fishing by yourself, what do you usually do with the fish?

*Mike Colby:* I never go fishing by myself. I used to, but, when I did, of course I would take the fish home for us, whatever we needed, but, whenever I'm fishing in my boat, it's usually with a customer, with somebody who is paying for the charter and wants to take that fish home.

*Interviewer:* Has anything changed since when you fished on your own to now?

*Mike Colby:* You mean like has the fishery changed? It has. I am glad you asked that, because one of the historical perspectives that you kids should have is that -- Have you ever heard of the old saying that things change, but they really don't seem like they've changed? The more they change, the more things stay the same?

Forty, fifty, and sixty years ago, in Pinellas County here, fishing was catch is as catch can. People recreationally fished anytime they wanted to and there were no limits on fishing. There weren't size limits and there weren't bag limits, and people generally just wandered out with a fishing pole and caught fish just whenever the mood struck them.

Now, you fast-forward to the year 2014, and, sixty years ago, there was less than 100,000 people living in Pinellas County. In 2014, we now have close to a million people living in Pinellas County, and so it's easy to do the math.

When you have that many people, there is a great demand for recreational fishing. There is a great demand for the fishery resource, for the fish, and, having that great of a demand means more people are fishing and more people are catching a lot of fish, and so some rules had to be put in place. Some management of the fish had to be put in place so we can ensure that there would be plenty of fish for everybody to catch.

On top of that, with all of those people moving in here, the environmental resources were stressed. I mean we started destroying mangroves and seagrass beds started disappearing. Construction was built. Whenever you get a lot of people moving into an area, you're going to have an impact on your environmental resources, and that's common sense.

Along with that kind of impact, fishery resources started to suffer, and so what we've done is we had some very bright individuals, back in the 1970s and 1980s, that realized that unless we start conserving and properly managing these fish that we're not going to have any left, because there's a whole bunch of us that want to catch a lot of fish.

You had biologists and you had environmental scientists and you had ecologists and you had fishery experts in fisheries science and aquatic biologists who all got together and said this is what we need to do to make sure that future generations of people have something to catch, can go out and have that experience of catching something.

It was a great evolution that occurred over the last thirty

and forty years here that brought the recreational fishing participant, the person who likes to recreational fish, into the knowledge that they can help do this. They can help collect data on what they catch and they can volunteer to do clean-ups around certain areas, so we don't pollute the waters.

In fact, there were organizations where people could volunteer and go plant seagrasses, where the seagrasses had diminished in upper Tampa Bay and middle and lower Tampa Bay.

It was a great evolution, is what I like to call it, in how people began to see themselves not just as participating in a recreational fishery, but becoming responsible for the fishery, and that's where we want to be. We want to have people that don't just see themselves as a recreational fisherman, but see themselves as being responsible for maintaining the health and the sustainability and the welfare of those fish.

*Interviewer:*

Is there anything interesting that you would like to talk about?

*Mike Colby:*

Part of what I just said interests me a lot, and that's how you get guys like you that obviously are showing an interest in the historical aspects of fishing around here and what fishing means to people that either live here or travel here.

I think that if there's any message that I can leave all of you with, it's keep moving in that direction and remember that we're all stakeholders. We all have a part in this.

We all play a role in helping fisheries stay healthy so that we're all guaranteed that we can enjoy that fishing in the future, and I think it's great that you guys from the Farragut Academy are interested in this, and I think setups like you have now, where you bring people in and talk and you get a perspective of the fishery -- You get people's ideas of what recreational fishing and commercial fishing is, for that matter.

As you know, commercial fishermen provide seafood for us to eat. You go to a restaurant or go to a seafood retailer and buy fish to take home, and so it's good that we have

you all interested in these things, because it leads you down the road of being interested in our resources, in our wetland resources and our deepwater habitat resources. I am really, really pleased to see you folks take an interest in it.

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