

*Interviewer:* What is your name?

*Chad Haggert:* My name is Captain Chad Haggert.

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

*Chad Haggert:* I have been fishing probably since I was three years old.

*Interviewer:* Who taught you how to fish?

*Chad Haggert:* It would have been my father and my grandfather that taught me how to fish.

*Interviewer:* Were they fishers too?

*Chad Haggert:* My father and my grandfather were both fishermen, and so that would make me a third-generation fisherman, right out of Clearwater.

*Interviewer:* What was the first fish you caught with your grandfather?

*Chad Haggert:* The first fish I caught, I believe, would have been in a lake, and it was a bluegill or a sunfish, I think.

*Interviewer:* Could you describe those fish?

*Chad Haggert:* The description of a bluegill or a sunfish is a small pan fish, probably about a pound. It's a freshwater fish.

*Interviewer:* Were you very happy when you first caught it?

*Chad Haggert:* Of course I was. I was very happy when I first caught it.

*Interviewer:* So fishing was a hobby before an occupation?

*Chad Haggert:* Yes, fishing was a hobby for me, starting that young. It was an occupation at that time for my father and my grandfather, but, for me, it started off as a hobby in my young days.

*Interviewer:* What was one of the most exciting things you have caught?

*Chad Haggert:* The most exciting thing I've caught would probably be a nine-and-a-half-foot hammerhead shark that was about 286 pounds.

*Interviewer:* Where did you first start fishing?

*Chad Haggert:* I first started fishing a little lake in Largo. That's where I caught my first fish, and also off the docks in Clearwater Marina.

*Interviewer:* So in Tampa Bay at that time, what was the water like compared to now?

*Chad Haggert:* The water quality? That would have been forty years ago, and so it was, of course, a little better than it is now, less populated. It was cleaner water.

*Interviewer:* Cleaner like pollution or just trash?

*Chad Haggert:* Well, the description of cleaner I think would be just, if you've got more population, there is, of course, more people around, and that's going to affect the water quality. Snorkeling along the beach now, you can always find bottles and cans, and that just has to do with more people and less people aware or caring about how they treat the environment.

*Interviewer:* Has the fish size changed at all?

*Chad Haggert:* Fish size, I would think, with the regulations and stuff they have now, it's probably coming back. For a while there, they were getting smaller, but, with the regulations and stuff they have now, I have seen a drastic increase in not only size, but quantity of the fish that are around.

*Interviewer:* So you catch a larger amount of fish?

*Chad Haggert:* Depending on what species you're fishing for, some of them have been rebuilt. The stocks have been rebuilt pretty good, and we're catching more than when I was younger.

*Interviewer:* Are you a charter fisherman?

*Chad Haggert:* Yes, my business is what they refer to as a partyboat, which is part of the charter for-hire industry.

*Interviewer:* What do you do on a partyboat?

*Chad Haggert:* Our partyboat fishing, we take groups of people out, different parties. We differ from the smaller charter boats, who might take one group of six people. You and your family might want to go and you would have the entire boat for yourself. A partyboat would be possibly you and your family and several other families or individuals. We take out different parties.

*Interviewer:* How do you attract customers?

*Chad Haggert:* Our customer attraction comes from catching a lot of fish, hopefully. We do have some advertisement and whatnot out there, and also a lot of our attraction is word-of-mouth business. If you and your family go out and you have a good time, you tell your friends, and then hopefully they will come out when they want to go fishing.

*Interviewer:* Where do you do the party fishing?

*Chad Haggert:* Our partyboats dock at Clearwater Municipal Marina on Clearwater Beach.

*Interviewer:* Do you advertise your services on television or like in a newspaper?

*Chad Haggert:* We do not have any advertisement on television. I have had newspaper ads. Most of our advertisement is on our website and, most recently, with me coming into the new age, Facebook and Twitter now.

*Interviewer:* What is your average rate for people who come to fish? Is it daily?

*Chad Haggert:* We try to run every day, yes. Our boat is scheduled to run every day except for Christmas and Thanksgiving. I'm too busy eating turkey on those days to worry about fishing, but we run every day of the year, as long as the weather is nice and we get the correct amount of people to pay for our expenses on the boat.

*Interviewer:* How do you get the bait for the fish that you catch?

*Chad Haggert:* We buy the bait from a local fish market, our bait supplier.

*Interviewer:* What about when you began doing the charter fishing until

today? How has that changed?

*Chad Haggert:*

From the start of the business, for one, there's a lot more rules and regulations on now than there was then. There has been a lot of different changes in fuel price. Of course, we've had to raise our prices to accommodate with the inflation and our raised costs. Bait is more expensive and fuel is more expensive, but the main change, I would think, would have to be the different regulations and stuff that they have on us now that weren't in place before.

*Interviewer:*

Your charter business, is it your business or do you run for somebody else?

*Chad Haggert:*

Our business started in 1967, and it was owned by two individuals. My father started for the company in 1971, and he became a captain and a business partner in the late 1970s. Eventually, in the early 1990s, he bought his two partners out to have it our family's business. I started off as a deckhand and worked my way up to captain, and now I've become vice president of the family-owned business.

*Interviewer:*

Are there specific species that the people who go on your boats want to catch?

*Chad Haggert:*

The specific species that we catch that are mostly targeted are what we call a gray snapper. If you look for it in a book, it's called a white grunt. We also catch black sea bass and a couple of different species of porgies. The most sought-after fish, of course, is going to be your grouper, red and gag grouper, and we also catch some mangrove snapper, hogfish, and a variety of other pan fish, king mackerel, and Spanish mackerel. It's a wide variety of fish.

*Interviewer:*

Do the fish go back to the families who catch them or do they go to you?

*Chad Haggert:*

The fish that are caught, if they meet the size requirements and they're in-season, they go to the person that caught them. We offer a filleting service. They can take the fish home whole if they want or have them filleted and take the fillets home, but they belong to the people that catch them.

*Interviewer:*

Do you cook the fish on the boat?

*Chad Haggert:* No, we don't cook the fish on the boat, but they can take them home to cook them after they get in. We will fillet them once we get back to the dock.

*Interviewer:* What type of habitat offers the most promising fishing, like estuaries or saltwater?

*Chad Haggert:* The habitat we look for, we don't fish real close to shore, and so the estuaries and stuff wouldn't be where we target. Of course, they provide shelter for the small fish when they're born, but we fish anywhere from about three miles to eighty miles offshore, and so what we look for there is rock bottom with coral and different structure that attracts the baitfish.

Of course, behind the baitfish come the larger fish, and so we're looking for any kind of rock outcroppings or potholes. Edges of sandbars, where the sand meets the rock is very good. You get the baitfish over the sand and right there, with the edge of that, is a very good place to fish.

*Interviewer:* On a scale of one to ten, how much do you like fishing?

*Chad Haggert:* On a scale of one to ten and how much I like fishing, a twelve.

*Interviewer:* You like it a lot?

*Chad Haggert:* I like it a lot.

*Interviewer:* Can you describe an average day with your clients?

*Chad Haggert:* A description of an average day, we run a couple of different trips. One of the trips leaves at eight in the morning and comes back at noon. It's a four-hour trip. We have a trip from one in the afternoon until five, and our all-day trip is from nine in the morning until five, and so the customers usually arrive thirty minutes prior to the depart time.

We travel anywhere from forty-five minutes to an hour-and-a-half or two hours out into the Gulf, depending on what trip and how far we're going. We allow the people to fish for a couple of hours on our four-hour trip, and they

get up to about five or six hours on our eight-hour trip, depending where we go.

We help them with baiting the hooks and taking the fish off. Hopefully they're catching a lot of fish and they're happy. Then we bring them back to the dock and offer a filleting service, and we hope to see them again next time.

*Interviewer:* Do you go every day or only on the weekends?

*Chad Haggert:* No, our schedule is every day. There is a couple of different factors that go into whether we go out, weather being one of them, and then we also have to have enough fares, enough people on the boat, enough revenue to cover our expenses for the day. Of course, if we go out with not enough money to cover expenses, we lose money. If we do that too often, I wouldn't be here talking to you about my business.

*Interviewer:* In your opinion, what is the best season to go fishing?

*Chad Haggert:* The best season to go fishing, that would vary. If I had to pick my favorite month to fish, where I think the fishing is the best, it would be November. The fish tend to really get fired up with that first temperature change in the water. The water gets very warm over the summer. We start usually getting cold fronts that make their way down this far south in October, and so, after a few cold fronts and the water temperature drops ten to fifteen degrees, it tends to get the fish really moving.

That would be probably my favorite month to fish, followed by March, April, and May, for the same reasons. The water is cold all winter long. Then as it starts to warm, when it gets to that temperature, between sixty-eight and seventy-five degrees, is usually when the fishing is the best.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever experienced a red tide?

*Chad Haggert:* Yes, and red tide, unfortunately, is a common occurrence in this area, and we've been through several of them, some of them very mild that don't last long and some that I have seen kill mass quantities of fish.

*Interviewer:* What kinds of problems have you encountered when

fishing over the years?

*Chad Haggert:*

Problems that we've encountered, you just mentioned one of them. Red tide can be very difficult to overcome. We had a bad one about eight or nine years ago that killed a lot of fish, and we would take people out. We would let them know in advance, of course, what we were dealing with. Sometimes, taking twenty or thirty people out and fishing all day, we would come back in with fifteen fish. It did have a devastating effect.

Other problems are weather. Of course, that's something that you have to deal with on a daily basis. If it gets too rough, it's not safe to go out and we don't take them, but those are probably the two biggest problems.

*Interviewer:*

What type of fish do your clients fish for?

*Chad Haggert:*

Types of fish that we go for, like I was stating earlier, are white grunts and sea bass and a few different species of porgies. Those are the main fish. They're a pan fish, smaller, and they're up to about two pounds. During the spring and fall, we catch king mackerel and Spanish mackerel. Some of those can be up to twenty-five or thirty pounds. All year, we target red and gag grouper, which are the top fish that everybody looks for, as well as mangrove snapper and hogfish.

*Interviewer:*

Do you wear a certain attire to go fishing?

*Chad Haggert:*

The attire, I have a very casual uniform for my crew, shorts or jeans, and they have a shirt that has our company logo on it. It informs the people that they are part of the crew. It says "crew" right on the front pocket. If they have any problems or questions, they know who to come for.

*Interviewer:*

What is the most common fish that you catch?

*Chad Haggert:*

The most common fish that we catch on our trips are the smaller pan fish, the white grunt, sea bass, porgies, followed next by the red and gag grouper, followed then by the kingfish and Spanish mackerel and then the mangrove snapper and hogfish. That would probably be the order of consistency of what we catch.

*Interviewer:* How have fish sizes changed over the years?

*Chad Haggert:* Fish sizes have had a couple of different changes since I've been in the business. When I first started, in my younger days, before I was actually working on the boat and just fishing, eight or nine or ten years old, the grouper size limit at that time was twelve inches. Now, to give you an idea, we have a twenty-inch size limit on red grouper and a twenty-two-inch size limit on gag grouper. Over the years, the last thirty or forty years, that's been the change in size limits.

*Interviewer:* What type of equipment do you use to catch fish?

*Chad Haggert:* The equipment that we use on the boat is a five-and-a-half-foot solid glass fishing rod. It's equipped with either a Penn 65 fishing reel or, on our long trips, a Penn 4/0 Senator reel, spooled with anywhere from fifty to eighty-pound test, depending on the time of year and the type of fish we're catching. We use a four-ounce sinker and a 5/0 Eagle Claw circle hook.

*Interviewer:* You told us that you caught a hammerhead shark. How did you catch it?

*Chad Haggert:* The hammerhead shark that I caught, we saw him swimming around the boat and we rigged up a bigger rod with a wire leader and hook and actually used a whole fish for bait. He was following the fish that the customers were reeling in, and so we knew that he was hungry. Then we rigged up a rod and a bait and fed it out to him, and he ate it as soon as it went in the water.

*Interviewer:* What did you do to it?

*Chad Haggert:* That one, we brought in and harvested the fish. We cut the jaws out of it and cut the meat up and split it up to the customers that were on there.

*Interviewer:* What type of clients do you take out? Is it kids or grownups?

*Chad Haggert:* Our clientele ranges. We have families, of course, local families and people that come down from up north to visit the area, and so a wide variety of people from all over the



country. The Tampa area is also a destination for a lot of Europeans. We get a lot of European families over here in the fall.

The Tampa area has a lot of conventions, and so we might get some businessmen or something. The companies come in for gatherings, and we do private charters. A lot of companies will actually hold their meetings on our boat, charter the boat just for their clients, and so we have a wide range of clientele that we cater to.

*Interviewer:*

What happens when your company and another company meet in the same spot, like you want to fish in the same spot?

*Chad Haggert:*

If there is another boat coming after my spot, we generally fire the cannons and sink them right where they're at. No, I'm just kidding. That happens often. There is a lot of the fishing spots out there that are known by a lot of different captains, and you just use your common sense. Safety is the main thing, and so you're not going to want to pull up to try and run somebody off. There is plenty of places to fish out there. If somebody is on your spot, you hope it's not your, quote, secret spot, and you hope they're not catching all the fish off of it, but you generally just move over to the next spot that you have.

*Interviewer:*

Has anything bad happened since you started your company?

*Chad Haggert:*

Fortunately, we have been pretty good. We haven't had any major issues. Of course, engine problems and stuff happens. That goes with anything, where we've had engine breakdowns and whatnot. Rough days, you've always got to take the most caution you can, but we have had people that have been knocked off balance by waves and fallen down and twisted an ankle, but, luckily, knock on wood, we've had a pretty event-free business.

*Interviewer:*

What changes have you noticed in the marine environment between when you began guiding and the present day?

*Chad Haggert:*

Changes in the marine environment, I know most of it starts in closer to shore. They have protected the seabed, grass beds and whatnot, a little more, I think, by restricting

certain fish gear and whatnot. The same with offshore, with restricting areas where they can put their commercial longlines and stuff that can be detrimental to the bottom if it's put in a certain area. That just helps the coral and stuff keep from getting damaged.

Inshore, with the grass beds and whatnot, by eliminating any kind of net fishing or motorized vehicles, boats, from going up in there, it gives the grass beds a chance to grow more, which is where most of the smaller fish are hatched and start their lives out, and so those are probably the biggest ones for the environment there that I have seen.

*Interviewer:*

What do you think about illegal fishing?

*Chad Haggert:*

My thoughts on illegal fishing is, if they are caught, they should be punished to the full extent of the law. With anything, it's going to happen, whether they're keeping fish that are short of the size limit or keeping over the bag limit or fish out of seasons. They put the rules into effect for a reason, to protect and grow the fish population, and so, if they are doing the illegal fishing -- It's tough, with as many miles of coastline as we have in Florida, to police it the way it needs to be. We don't have the resources, but the law enforcement does their best. When they catch the people, they should be punished to what the law says.

*Interviewer:*

What happened that you started fishing?

*Chad Haggert:*

What started me on fishing? It was, of course, my family heritage of it. Like I said, I'm a third-generation fisherman, right out of Clearwater. My grandfather actually started his commercial fishing career on the Great Lakes in Michigan. They commercial fished for perch and salmon and walleye, and he moved down to Clearwater in the early 1950s and began a fishing business there, and it's been in our family since then.

It's the excitement of never knowing what's going to bite your hook when you put it in the water. We have the luxury, in this area, of having several different species of fish to catch. You never know what kind is going to bite your hook or how big it's going to be. As soon as you try to guess that, by putting your bait in the water and thinking you're going to catch one fish, something will surprise you,

and that's the fun of it.

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

*Chad Haggert:* My favorite spot to fish, I could give you, but I would have to destroy the film. I don't want to give away my secret spots. It's the rock-croppings out there. They have an area off the west coast of Florida here called the Florida Middle Grounds. It's approximately sixty-five miles west of Clearwater here. It's conformed of a lot of large breaks and limestone rock structures with coral and stuff growing on it. There are several different species of fish, some of them very large, and it would have to be, in my opinion, one of my favorite spots to fish in the Gulf.

*Interviewer:* What is the best fish you have caught there in that spot?

*Chad Haggert:* The Florida Middle Grounds, we catch several different species. We have caught gag grouper up to sixty pounds and amberjacks up to a hundred pounds and red snapper in the fifteen to twenty-pound range and mangrove snapper in the ten-pound range. There is a lot of different species out there and a lot of nice fish that you can get in that area.

*Interviewer:* Is there a lot of pollution in that spot?

*Chad Haggert:* No, the pollution in that spot, I mean it's far offshore. It gets fished, but I think most of the people that fish in the Gulf and do this on a daily basis, or even a monthly basis, try to take care of the area. They bring their litter back to the dock and dispose of it properly, and so, no, I haven't noticed much of that out there in my years of fishing.

*Interviewer:* Has pollution ever changed the way you fish?

*Chad Haggert:* No, pollution, like I was saying -- On our boats, we definitely practice the proper protocol for the disposal of the trash. We bring it back to the dock, and pollution has never been a hamper to our business. We don't get it around here. The biggest thing that affected us would have been the BP oil spill, hazardous pollution. Luckily, we didn't get the effects of it down here, but just the news coverage of that oil spill hurt our business that year some.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a favorite fish to catch or a favorite fish, in

general, that you like the most?

*Chad Haggert:* My favorite fish to catch, and it's kind of cliché with what I do here, would be the gag grouper. It's a hard-fighting fish. It digs for the bottom when you hook it. It's good to eat, and so I would have to say that.

*Interviewer:* What is the best bait to use when you catch a gag grouper?

*Chad Haggert:* The best bait to use is the bait that the fish is going to eat. I have caught them on everything from a little piece of squid up to a pinfish that was close to a pound. We've caught them on several different baits.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a favorite reel-and-rod setup that you use?

*Chad Haggert:* A favorite rod-and-reel setup, I mean it would depend on the type of fish you're going for. If you're talking about my favorite fish, the gag grouper, you want pretty stout tackle. I usually use a solid glass fishing rod and the Penn 4/0 that I was talking about earlier. You want to have something with some backbone. If you hook a big one, the first thing they do is dive for the rocks, and so you want to have fishing gear with the backbone to turn the fish's head and get him coming toward you.

*Interviewer:* As a charter company, do you have any competitive issues with any other companies?

*Chad Haggert:* Other companies that we compete with, we do have another partyboat that is right next to us in the marina. We call ourselves friendly competitors. Of course, we all want to make money, but we don't get into anything cutthroat. We both offer nice fishing boats for the people. We both target the same fish, and so just kind of keep our boats up the best we can and keep a friendly crew and try and catch as many fish as we can and let the customer decide what boat they want to go on.

*Interviewer:* Do you have a best day that you've ever gone fishing, the most fish that you have ever caught at once?

*Chad Haggert:* My best day fishing, if you're looking at me personally, I limited out on all of my grouper and snapper. If you look at a boat, years ago, in the 1980s, they had a five-grouper

bag limit per person, and we've had trips out there with fifty people that we have caught our limit, up to about 3,000 or 3,500 pounds of grouper on one trip, and so that's pretty awesome.

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