

*Interviewer:* Where do you live?

*Randall Keys:* I live in Madeira Beach, Florida.

*Interviewer:* What got you into fishing?

*Randall Keys:* I kind of grew up fishing. I used to come down here when I was six years old. My grandparents used to fish on the Johns Pass Bridge on weekend evenings, and I always thought it was great, because we could go down there and go fishing with them and stay up late at night, which, when you're six years old or seven years old, that's a pretty cool thing.

*Interviewer:* Did you have any fun memories from that time?

*Randall Keys:* Yes, of course. We used to spend a lot of time fishing down there. There were a lot of techniques they used that were a lot different than nowadays. They had a pole that I had always -- Because I didn't hear it right, I guess, and they said a Burma pole, which is like a Calcutta pole. It's a type of cane pole. He would lean over the bridge and make a figure-eight with either a minnow or a lure. A snook would hit it, and you would rear back and the snook would land on the road behind you, but there weren't that many cars coming by back then, and so you would run out there and get your fish and bring it in. It was called a Burma pole, but, being little, I said boomer pole, and so I always called it a boomer pole.

*Interviewer:* What kind of fish do you normally catch?

*Randall Keys:* For my own consumption, grouper and snapper and cobia and an occasional wahoo. I fish a lot of fishing tournaments right now, and many of them are kingfish tournaments and also white marlin and blue marlin release tournaments, but I like to catch the fish that I eat.

*Interviewer:* How much fun do you have while fishing?

*Randall Keys:* I enjoy it. It's something that is pretty inherent in the way I am. I also have a thirteen-year-old grandson that I have introduced to it, and he's probably a better fisherman than I am right now. He loves it too, and so it's quite enjoyable.

*Interviewer:* What was your biggest catch?

*Randall Keys:* My biggest catch was probably a -- Other than big sharks, which you don't really land. You bring them up enough to see them, and then you really want to let them go. It was probably a 350-pound blue marlin, which was also released.

*Interviewer:* Do you fish to feed your family?

*Randall Keys:* I do a lot of the cooking at my house, and we eat fish four to five nights a week. It's not always the same preparation. We will eat Spanish mackerel or we'll eat grouper or we'll eat hogfish. I do some scuba diving, too. I get some hogfish doing that.

*Interviewer:* What do you find when you scuba dive?

*Randall Keys:* It's a whole other world down there. I recommend it for anybody who hasn't ever done it. It's really, really impressive down there. There's a lot of life down there with fish. I primarily am a spear fisherman, but we've also done some diving down off of Venice, where we search for mako shark teeth down there. About a mile-and-a-half off the beach, there's an area they call the Boneyard off of Venice, which has a lot of paleontological artifacts, like bones from prehistoric manatees. You can find a lot of stuff like that down there.

*Interviewer:* What exactly is paleontological?

*Randall Keys:* Stuff from a long time ago, fossils. Like the megalodon teeth, they lived a way long time ago. I don't know exactly how long ago, but they are extinct.

*Interviewer:* Was fishing more enjoyable back when you were a kid or now?

*Randall Keys:* You enjoy a lot of things more when you're a kid than you do when you're an adult, but I don't know about the fishing itself being more enjoyable. The fish were more plentiful, I think, or maybe the fact that there weren't as many people here and the population was a lot smaller and so there were a lot less people fishing.

*Interviewer:* Would you consider fishing a hobby or something that most people should do for a living?

*Randall Keys:* A lot of my fishing, a lot of my life, it was considered a hobby, because -- It produced income for a little while, back before there was a division between the commercial and recreational fisheries. I used to produce some income fishing. Then I had to work a day job for a long time. Then, after I retired from my day job, I became a charter boat captain, and so like now I fish for a living, but it's not commercial fishing.

*Interviewer:* Where exactly do you fish around here?

*Randall Keys:* Where do I fish? I fish everywhere around here. I fish for kingfish right here in Tampa Bay, just right off the piers here, both the Gulf pier and the bay pier. I fish a lot of limestone bottom out off of Madeira Beach, in anywhere from twenty-five foot to 200 foot of water, which is out -- 200 foot is out there around seventy or eighty miles.

*Interviewer:* Where exactly do you catch the most fish?

*Randall Keys:* A lot of that depends on the time of year. You will have schools of Spanish mackerel migrate down the coast, and you can go out, and you're only allowed to catch ten per person, but you go out and you catch your ten in twenty minutes to a half-hour, because they will be so plentiful.

Your king mackerel schools, they are kind of similar. The fish are a lot bigger. They will get to be up to fifty pounds, and you're only allowed to keep two of those, but you will go catch them and you can catch them in twenty minutes, if you're there at the right time. Other times, you can go out there, and if they're not biting or not around, you can fish all day long and not catch any.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever had any dangerous moments while you were fishing?

*Randall Keys:* There is always an inherent danger involved in any kind of sport on the water. Years and years ago, I used to commercial stone crab, and I would go out by myself. We had this thing called the pot hauler, which was a wheel and a boom, and you would hook the line on the crab trap, which was about seventy-five pounds of concrete, and you would put the line through the end of the boom, through an open-eye winch, and pull it down and hit the pot hauler,

and you would hit a button with your knee. That would bring the seventy-five-pound trap up to the top. You would lift it onto a table, open up the lid, take out the stone crabs, break off the claw, throw the crab back, rebait the trap, and put it back out.

I was out there doing it by myself. I was probably about thirty or thirty-five years old. Back then, you still think you're invincible. I hit that button with my knee, and the pin that held that boom in place had fallen out. The boom came around and cracked me in the head and knocked me down on the deck of the boat. I was out cold for fifteen minutes.

You're leaving the boat running while you're doing this, because you turn the boat in a circle while you're pulling those traps. That could have been real bad. It could have knocked me overboard, and I could have hit the propeller. Any number of things could have happened.

I had another friend who was out in a billfish tournament, and luckily this didn't happen to me. He caught a dolphinfish, a mahi-mahi, a big dorado. He caught it on a marlin lure, which had two 12/0 hooks in it. They are real erratic fish. Those and cobia are the wildest fish. You don't want those fish green coming in the boat, because they flop all over the place.

This one dolphin came in, and Daryl tried to step on its head and wound up putting a 12/0 hook right through the back of his Achilles tendon, all the way through. He was 120 miles offshore. That's when you learn a valuable lesson, that you never go offshore like that without a pair of bolt cutters on the boat, because they had to turn around and come back in, because there was no way to extract that hook without permanently damaging the guy.

There's an inherent danger in everything, and not just the fish. They can go bonkers when they come in the boat, but also you've got sharks, and they are not something you want to be very careless with. When wahoo hits the deck, they can slice your knee open with their teeth in a heartbeat. There's a lot of danger involved, both in commercial and recreational fishing.

*Interviewer:*

After hearing this, do you like to fish on the dock more or

on a boat?

*Randall Keys:*

I'm a boat person, pretty much. I like to be able to go where I can go. If you're on a dock, you're kind of set up with one spot, and you can make the best of it by chumming and trying to bring the fish to you. A dock is a nice structure. It will have sheepshead around it all the time and it will have pinfish around it. It will have snook and various other species there, but I kind of like being able to go to different spots, and I doesn't matter whether it's a - - Even a kayak can get you to different locations.

*Interviewer:*

How much has the ratio of the amount of fish dropped or increased from when you were younger to now?

*Randall Keys:*

When I was younger -- I think the population of fish has decreased. When I was real young, we used to go out for half a day and catch a bunch of fish. Now, granted, the size limit on those fish was a lot different than it is now. Back then, a grouper could be twelve inches long.

I went out one day and we caught -- I was thirteen years old. It was in 1963. We were never out of sight of the Don Caesar, which is that big hotel on St. Pete Beach, the big pink building. We caught thirty black grouper and one Spanish mackerel in a half a day, and there were six of us onboard plus the captain. Then, also, when I was a kid, we used to, at the old Johns Pass Bridge, the mullet would be so thick that you could walk across them.

We used to catch them with a snatch hook, which was a weighted three-pronged treble hook. You would take your pole and just cast it out into the school of mullet and just yank. You would catch one, or many times you would catch two. Very rarely did you get three, one on each prong, with a treble hook, and you could do that all day long.

The schools of fish were even there when I was in high school. I was working for a cabinet maker part-time. On Saturday mornings, we would go out to Venetian Isles and Shore Acres and even on St. Pete Beach, on Three-Palms Point. These were all places that had been dredged probably ten years prior. They didn't have any houses on them yet. Now they're smack full. You can't even find a vacant lot there, but I was building cabinets in the houses

that were being built there then.

I would get there and I would try and take a nap before the boss got there, because I had had a rough Friday night, and the mullet would be jumping so much outside in the canals that you couldn't even sleep.

*Interviewer:* Have you ever caught any real strange fish that you didn't know what they were?

*Randall Keys:* You will catch a lot of fish that you don't recognize. I've got a *Peterson's Field Guide* at home, which is a pretty authoritative book on the fishes of the Gulf and South Atlantic. We were out there not this past year, but the year before, during red snapper season, and we caught this snapper that looked identical to a red snapper, except it had a yellow eye. I had to come in and look it up in the book, and it turned out that it was a silk snapper, which I had never caught one before, but they all live together. Obviously they're not as prolific as the red snapper, because we caught one, and we caught a lot of red snapper.

Strange fish, there is innumerable strange fish that we catch. There is batfish and there is anglerfish. There is all kinds of weird fish that you pull up and you go, holy cow, what is that, but you can always find out what it is.

*Interviewer:* Is there anything that you want to share with us?

*Randall Keys:* I was talking with the boss a little while ago about how the public input doesn't seem to be taken seriously in the way the fishery is managed nowadays. I am not real fond of the way things are managed. I also didn't like the way they divided the fishery back when I was much younger. When I was younger, I could go out on a Friday or Saturday and catch some grouper, come back in and feed the family, give the neighbors a bunch and we could sell the rest and pay for our gas.

We're not allowed to do that, because you're either a recreational fisherman or you're a commercial fisherman. Basically, I saw it as a -- Originally, I think it was set up more by the IRS than anybody else, because, in the fish houses, a lot of cash money changed hands, and Uncle Sam never saw any of it, but I think they wound up using NOAA as a way to get a handle on all of that.

Then NOAA saw it as an advantageous tool to be able to split up user groups, and I think they're trying to do the same thing with -- Currently, they're thinking about Amendment 40, which is going to take a charter boat operation and Joe Recreational Angler with his own boat and split up the fishery between those people, which is another move to more or less divide and conquer.

*Interviewer:*

When people fish, I hear a lot that when you're reeling in the fish is one of the most fun parts. What fish do you think puts up the biggest challenge?

*Randall Keys:*

A blue marlin is undoubtedly the fastest and one of the strongest fish in the sea. It's really impressive, and there is no doubt when there is one on the line. Sharks are great, too. They're heavy duty. They can get huge. They can go fast and they can really put up a good fight. You're not only fighting the fish, but you're fighting it with a rod and reel.

The rod acts as a lever, and the reel is basically a tool just to kind of use that lever to your advantage to get the fish closer to the boat. A blue marlin is really an amazing fish. It's something I wish more people got a chance to catch, or even just to experience it being on the line.

*Interviewer:*

What kind of fishing pole do you use?

*Randall Keys:*

I probably have close to 200. When I tournament kingfish, I use a rod that's suited for a certain pound test line. It's usually fifteen to thirty-pound test line. It's got what they call a fast taper. It's real strong on the lower part of the rod, and the upper part is real thin and sensitive, because, with those rods, you will be fishing live bait.

You kind of want to know. You will sit there and watch your rod tips. You want to see when those baits get nervous, because, when they get nervous, there's a reason. Either a dolphin is behind them or a kingfish is behind them or a white marlin is behind them.

Various other things. When you're trolling artificial lures, you want a rod that's stiffer. When you're bottom fishing and dropping your bait down to the bottom and waiting for a fish to bite it, you want a different action and a different

thickness of rod, depending on the size line you're using.

*Interviewer:*

How many fishing rods do you break in a year?

*Randall Keys:*

By breaking, snapping them, very few. Maybe one, but wear and tear on the eyes and guides and reel seats and tips coming off and also, when you've got that many rods, you've got some laying around and they occasionally get knocked over. If you've got a thirteen-year-old grandson, like I do, somebody might step on one of the eyes and stuff like that, and so you go through a few, but not more than a dozen that way, but, as far as breaking one, maybe one a year.

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