

*Interviewer:* What is your name?

*Brian Ward:* Brian Ward.

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

*Brian Ward:* I have been fishing just about all my life. I came to Florida in 1955, and I have lived here on the beaches since then.

*Interviewer:* What is your profession?

*Brian Ward:* I was in the supermarket business. I worked for Publix for forty-eight years.

*Interviewer:* So you are a recreational fisherman?

*Brian Ward:* I am a recreational fisherman, and I also had a commercial license. When I worked for Publix, I was a fish buyer. I was in charge of their seafood.

*Interviewer:* Do you fish inshore or offshore or do you spear?

*Brian Ward:* I basically fish offshore and target grouper and snapper and fish like that.

*Interviewer:* What has changed since you started fishing in the Tampa Bay area?

*Brian Ward:* The water has gotten dirtier. The water used to be like the Keys. The Keys are dirty now, relatively speaking, compared to what it used to be. I can remember, in the late 1950s, that you could see the bottom in Johns Pass, just about all the time, unless it was a storm. You could see bottom in twenty-five or thirty feet of water out there all the time. It was like the Keys is now. It was nice.

*Interviewer:* Has fishing gotten better or has it gotten worse since you started fishing? Have you seen a decrease in population of a certain fish?

*Brian Ward:* Yes, there has definitely been a decrease in the population of fish and the reefs that I used to dive when I was like fifteen or sixteen years old -- I had a little fourteen-foot boat, and you could just go out in twenty feet of water and see the reefs. The reefs were alive then. The reefs are all dead now.

*Interviewer:* Today, what do you usually catch on a daily basis?

*Brian Ward:* Grunts and grouper.

*Interviewer:* When you say you see a decrease, what specific species do you see a decrease in?

*Brian Ward:* The grouper have definitely decreased. The snapper are probably about the same, the mangrove snappers. They seem to be about the same. Amberjack, there is not near as many amberjack, which is really an offshore fish around the wrecks. They used to be just covered up with amberjack.

Of course, the grouper, since they have changed the goliath grouper laws, the goliath grouper that are on the wrecks, there is not near as many snapper and grouper that are on the wrecks as what there used to be, because the goliath grouper were protected, and those things eat everything in the world. They are constantly eating. They eat all the lobsters and they eat everything.

*Interviewer:* How is fishing different in Florida compared to other states?

*Brian Ward:* Other states, like California, and I fished in California when I was -- I was spearfishing on a dive team, and we would go around. In California, they have one hole and one fish, and that fish will live in that hole until somebody catches him, and then another fish will come and live in that hole. There is more fish, numbers of fish, that seem to be -- I dove in Watch Hill, up in the Connecticut area, off of Long Island Sound, and there are plenty of fish. They have a fish out there called tautog. Of course, this was twenty years ago, and there seemed to be more fish there than there was in Florida at that time. There seemed to be no end to the fish.

*Interviewer:* What inspired you to start fishing?

*Brian Ward:* I just like to fish. I can remember when I was five years old and fishing in the sewer. I just enjoy fishing.

*Interviewer:* What is the best part about fishing here in Tampa Bay?

*Brian Ward:* I remember the first day I came to Florida. We came down here in 1955, and we stayed on St. Pete Beach. I went out to the Blind Pass Jetty, and I threw a spinner bait out there. On my first cast, I caught a Spanish mackerel. I thought, wow, I am going to like this place. The water was clear and the baitfish were everywhere. It was just great.

*Interviewer:* Do you have any interesting and cool stories that have happened in your fishing experiences?

*Brian Ward:* Every time I go fishing is a new adventure.

*Interviewer:* Which one is your favorite one?

*Brian Ward:* There are so many of them. I can remember seeing a whale shark out there in about fifty feet of water. You could cruise up alongside him, and this thing was like thirty or forty feet long, and the water was just so clear, and it just looked like something out of a National Geographic movie. That was one of my more memorable experiences.

*Interviewer:* If you catch a slot limit fish, do you throw it back or do you keep it?

*Brian Ward:* No, I put it back.

*Interviewer:* So you catch and release?

*Brian Ward:* Certainly.

*Interviewer:* Do you fish with anybody else, like friends and family?

*Brian Ward:* My family fishes with me. My daughter is a big fisherman.

*Interviewer:* Are you a part of any fishing teams or like you said you were part of a dive team?

*Brian Ward:* We had a spearfishing team and a dive team, and we competed for four or five years together, and we went to all of the national tournaments, and we had a good time there, but not anymore. I just take the family now.

*Interviewer:* Do you collaborate with any scientific organizations?

*Brian Ward:* No, I don't.

*Interviewer:* Do you take place in any tournaments or do you just fish for fun?

*Brian Ward:* I just fish for fun. I don't do the tournament thing anymore.

*Interviewer:* How has pollution affected your fishing?

*Brian Ward:* I am not sure why the reefs all died, but there was reefs in thirty feet of water off of Clearwater that were just live and crackling and had plenty of fish, when the water was clear. Now, the reefs are all dead. I don't know why they died. I don't know if red tide killed them and they never came back, but they're covered up with silt, and they're dead. You go out there and it's all dead. There is not even any baitfish on them.

*Interviewer:* What are your views about poachers?

*Brian Ward:* Poachers, let me tell you about poachers. There is a million fishing days, somebody told me one time, in Florida every day. If everybody just keeps one fish illegally, that's a million fish a day. That's just in one boat, and there is usually two or three people in the boat. Poaching is a big issue. When I was running the seafood departments for the company I worked for, they had a grouper limit, a size limit on grouper, of twelve inches. At that time, we were into whole fish, selling whole fish, in our cases.

We would import fish from Mexico, because of the volume of fish we needed. Anyway, the marine patrol would come in the stores and say that we had a complaint that you're selling short fish. Well, they would measure the fish, and the fish had to be twelve inches long, and the fish was like twelve-and-a-quarter. That fish is legal, and the marine patrol officer would leave.

Two hours later, the marine patrol officer would come back and say we had another report on this fish. It was the same fish. Then he would leave. I went down, and I talked to the head of the marine patrol in Tampa. I said, why do you send an officer to the same store to investigate the same fish three times in one day? It seems like a waste of time and effort, to me.

That person said, well, if a citizen calls Tallahassee and

says they've got an illegal fish there in this supermarket, then I've got to send an officer. I said, even though you know it's the same store and the same fish? She said, they're going to ask me if I sent an officer, and I've got say, yes, I did.

It seems that there isn't any common sense in, yes, we've already investigated that. That one officer was tied up basically all day just running back and forth looking at the same fish, and the marine patrol has got a big job. There is only like three or four marine patrol officers to patrol the whole coast from here to Sarasota, and they can't be everywhere at one time. All a poacher has to do is say I saw a mullet boat catching mullet, and he will come Clearwater Pass, and everybody will be looking for the mullet boat, because they have to send an officer. It makes no sense to me, but that's the way it is. Poachers are a big issue, and they take a lot of fish.

*Interviewer:* What are your favorite baits to use when fishing in different seasons?

*Brian Ward:* I use cut bait. Cut bait seems to be as good as anything else.

*Interviewer:* Have you come across any difficulties from set guidelines or restrictions today compared to when you first started fishing?

*Brian Ward:* Yes, it used to be that you didn't have any limits, which was kind of a crazy thing. Of course, there was plenty of fish, and it was sort of like the buffalo. You never thought you would kill them all, but they have got size limits today, and they have limits on fish. You can only catch two grouper, and that's about it. Fishing isn't nearly as exciting as it used to be, but it is what it is.

*Interviewer:* Do you have any hobbies besides fishing?

*Brian Ward:* I've got race cars and airplanes.

*Interviewer:* Have you found anything that you thought was very interesting?

*Brian Ward:* Yes, I've caught just about every kind of fish. Once you've caught all of these fish, it's just sort of the same thing over

and over again, and there's not as many fish to catch today as there used to be.

*Interviewer:* Would you get more excited to go out fishing when you were younger than you do now?

*Brian Ward:* Oh, yes. I can remember filling the boat to the gunnels with fish, where you would have to take the seats out and put them in the cabin. Then you would sit on the windshield and everybody would jump up in the air to get the boat -- We would get that many fish, it used to be. We would fill the whole boat up, to where we couldn't carry any more fish and we would head on in. It was amazing.

*Interviewer:* What would you do with all of those fish that you caught?

*Brian Ward:* We would sell them.

*Interviewer:* How much would they go for? What would you do with that?

*Brian Ward:* Twenty-cents a pound, but twenty-cents a pound was -- Gasoline wasn't but twenty-cents a gallon. Now, fish go for two-dollars a pound and gasoline is two-dollars a gallon, and so it kept up with the fish. I remember I bought a bigger boat one time, and it had diesel engines in it, and diesel fuel was twenty-cents a gallon. We would stop and fish grunts for fifteen or twenty minutes and catch a hundred pounds of grunts, and that was a hundred gallons of fuel, because they were like twenty-cents a pound. Each grunt was a gallon of fuel, basically, but I did have a permit to do that.

*Interviewer:* When you were fishing, you had a lot of fun when you were fishing? It was more of a hobby?

*Brian Ward:* It was sort of a hobby, yes. It was a hobby, and it was just fun. Then, of course, you only go fishing when the weather is nice, and so it made it -- I didn't have to go fishing to earn a living, and so it was great. I only went fishing when the weather was nice and calm, and it was fun. It was really a fun thing.

*Interviewer:* How did you first start getting into wanting to fish?

*Brian Ward:* How did I get into fishing? My dad used to go fishing, and

we used to go bass fishing up in Michigan. Then, when I came down here, I bought a boat and had a little fourteen-foot boat with a fifteen-horse engine on it, and I would go out here and dive right off the beach, and it was clear. This water here was clear. It was full of grass, and it was beautiful. You could go trout fishing in the flat out there and catch a couple of trout for dinner, and it was fun.

*Interviewer:* Have you had any dangerous situations when you were out fishing?

*Brian Ward:* Oh, yes. Being a spear fisherman, we have had issues with sharks. I learned one thing about sharks. Don't be swimming in the evening when the sharks come in.

*Interviewer:* Has anything particular happened with sharks?

*Brian Ward:* Well, commercial shark fishermen, being I was in that industry, I could understand. What they did is they had a problem with grouper boats catching too many grouper here about ten or fifteen years ago. Maybe it's been twenty now. Being in the supermarket industry, I decided in my particular company that sharks was a good source of protein, and it was cheap.

We started buying sharks, and we set up a specification for them. The sharks came in logs. You would cut the head and the tail off, and we only accepted sharks that were I think five feet long. Then they would skin them, cut the red off, and we would sell it. At that time, the sharks were like a dollar a pound retail, and so it was a really good, cheap source of protein for the customers, and we sold a lot of sharks.

Well, the commercial fishermen redid their line boats with longlines to catch sharks, and the shark business blossomed, and we were selling sharks. All the supermarkets were selling shark meat, and then, all of a sudden, the recreational people said, hey, we're not catching any sharks anymore, and so then the government shut down the shark fishermen who had mortgaged their house to re-rig their boats, and now, four or five years later, they cut off the sharks.

Now you don't hardly catch any sharks anymore, which was kind of a bad deal for the commercial fishermen, but

the recreational people shut that down. It was kind of hard on the commercial fishermen. I was kind of for the commercial fishermen, because that's their way of making a living.

*Interviewer:*

What is the biggest fish you have ever pulled in or caught by yourself?

*Brian Ward:*

I speared a 550-pound goliath grouper one time off of Cape Canaveral. I was free-diving at the time, and I went down on one of the buoys and I shot this thing with a line gun, and it had a reel on it. I had about eighty or ninety feet of line on the reel, and the thing started towing me away from my boat. I said, well, he's towing me toward the gantries at Cape Canaveral, and so I guess this is good.

He must have towed me about two or three miles, and finally I got the thing up to the top. I couldn't even see my boat anymore. Some guy came by in a boat, and he says, do you need some help? I said, well, yes. I said, do you see a boat tied up to the buoy out there? He looked and he said, yes, about three or four or five miles away. I said, that's my boat. If you could take me over there, I would appreciate it. That was an exciting thing.

As it turned out, the guy was Ray Lamp, and he was from St. Petersburg, and he was in the same club that I was in. It was kind of a unique situation, but that was one of my more exciting things, and it really didn't worry me, because I was relatively fit, and I could swim good, and I figured I could swim to shore if I had to. It was kind of exciting.

- - -