

Interviewee: Mark Ibasfalean
Interviewer: Tina Bucuvalas
Consultant: Kristin Sweeting
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Transcriber: Kristin Sweeting

Abstract: Mark Ibasfalean was born in Cortez and spent 40 years working as commercial fisherman. He is now partially retired but still provides some maintenance at the Seafood Shack, a local restaurant/marina. He also does part-time fishing and crabbing, and has people who crab for him. He wants to keep the business going in case he decides to return. In addition, Ibasfalean maintains the boats for his wife's charter business.

The Ibasfalean family were Michigan farmers who moved to Ft. Lauderdale in the 1950s. They did not care for the area, so they came to Cortez, built a marina, and started taking care of local boats. After growing up around the marina, Mark, along with about 7 siblings and cousins, decided to become fishermen. At first, they made a lot of mistakes, but the other fishermen and distributors helped them. They began gill netting mullet, trout, and other fish when they were teenagers. Later they started crabbing, then got into purse seining for bait fish. Ibasfalean and his cousins also built several small boats, including a purse seiner that is still working today.

Ibasfalean notes that the fishermen don't catch fish unless a fish house wants them. The fish house managers always understand the dynamics of both available fish and the market—and they insist on high quality. They are calling the shots.

Although Ibasfalean loves fishing, he believes that as the years go by, their aging their bodies can't handle as much work. This occupation is for 20-year-olds—it is a back-breaking brutal business. At the same time, it's exciting: he feels on top of the world when he catches a load of fish. And he's seen amazing sights in the Gulf, such as whale sharks or thousands of octopus at once. Ibasfalean loves the life on the water, so he plans to stay as long as he can survive. But he believes that he's already succeeded.

[00:00:03] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My name is Mark Ibasfalean, and I was born here in Cortez and basically spent 40 years of my life as a commercial fisherman, and now I'm kind of like half retired. I'll actually be 59 here in a couple months and. I have a job here I'm maintenance here at a restaurant and Marina. I'm on the water exactly where I want to be and I enjoy it and I actually do part-time fishing and this is what I've always wanted to do and I'm, that's what I'm doing.

[00:00:38] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Can you tell me a little bit about the background of your family? Was your family in fishing before you, and where is your family from and how did you get to Cortez?

[00:00:47] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My family basically are farmers. They're Michigan farmers. They came down in the fifties. They actually came to Fort Lauderdale and they didn't like Fort Lauderdale, so they came over to this coast.

They found this area and they moved here. They decided to build a marina. They build a marina, which is actually right behind me. You can't hardly see it from here, but the kids, which is myself, my cousins, and we wanted to be commercial fishermen. That was our big thing, and we did it, and as a family project, we all, bout six or eight of us turned out to be fishermen.

[00:01:28] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Did you apprentice with other fishermen? How did you, how did you learn it if it wasn't in your family?

[00:01:33] **Mark Ibasfalean:** We, as we built the marina, you started taking care of other people's boats from Cortez. So we were constantly in contact with everybody in Cortez cuz we were taking care of their boats, lifting them.

And my one cousin. He decided, you know, Nick decided what, well, let's, let's do this. And so we just followed in line. All of us just started doing it and we made a lot of mistakes and there was fishermen that helped us along there. And, you know, the Bells were good to us. They, they bought our fish, helped us along.

We finally started finding our niche and we became gill netters and moved on from there.

[00:02:17] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So what kind of fish did you start out fishing and did you, I mean, how many different kinds of fishing did you do along the way?

[00:02:27] **Mark Ibasfalean:** When we started fishing, it was with the gill nets and we were mainly kids, teenagers, and we would catch mullet and back then you could actually catch trout and other fish.

Then we progressed into crabbing. We decided we wanted to be stone crabbers, so we started doing a little bit of crabbing on the side. Then we got into what's called purse seining, and that's strictly for bait fish and we spent the next 39 years bait fishing . And technically the boat we built in 1979 is out there purse seining right now.

[00:03:07] **Tina Bucuvalas:** What's the name of that boat and is it a wooden boat? And what kind of boat is it? And how did you learn how to do that? ,

[00:03:15] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My family. We build stuff. We didn't, half of 'em build houses. We were playing with boats from the marina, different kind of, we built several small boats and then we decided to build the purse seiner in which called the high roller, and it's a fiberglass boat.

It's, we first started with Detroit Diesels and immediately we went right into purse seining and we were busy in the first six months. We were actually working hard and it never stopped for 15, 20 years until we started wearing out.

[00:03:51] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And, so, so how does this work exactly? So, so you go out, with the boat and then you, do you have a particular distributor or processor that you sell to, and then are prices arranged ahead of time or is it the market price at the time you bring in the fish or what?

[00:04:13] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Everything that happens out there when you're fishing, the fish house knows about it before you even leave the dock. They tell you if you can go, they tell you, you know, no, you're not going anywhere. You have to get the ice from 'em. You have to get the fuel from 'em. So you're, you're pretty much locked into whatever the fish house tells you to do. You can't, you can't, anywhere on the coast. You can't just go out and catch fish, unless they want 'em.

And so they'll tell you, we need bait, we need crabs, mullet, Jack's, grouper, and any type of fishing, the fish house knows exactly what's going on all the time. They, you can't stab in the dark in the fishing industry cuz you have to be, you know, the, the fish have to be quality, the crabs have to be quality and the fish house has to be able to take care of all that ,with the freezers so you don't want to overload a fish house if it's not ready.

[00:05:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** That's really interesting. I knew there were, I knew fish houses usually had certain numbers of fishermen or certain fishermen that worked with them. But I didn't realize that they were calling the shots as much as, as you're telling me. That's interesting. Wow. So what happens if you bring in a catch and it's not all up to quality. What happens?

[00:05:35] **Mark Ibasfalean:** The, it's, there's been catches brought in over the years where the fish house were not prepared. Everybody basically caught hell for it, you know, cuz they were not, when the cell phones finally came out that took care of that problem. So the cell phones did a lot for the fishing industry. So we're, now that don't happen, but years ago it used to happen.

[00:06:01] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And when you went out fishing, did, how long did you stay out?

[00:06:06] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My family started in the bays [00:06:00] here. My, me and my cousins and whoever was involved, we stayed in the bays. We tried some grouper fishing, we were not happy. We didn't like that. That's, I'm not, I'm not an offshore person. So, we went, stayed with the crabbing and the inshore fishing. We are not, none of us like it offshore .

[00:06:32] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So basically you went out for day trips, you were back at night?

[00:06:36] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah, basically.

[00:06:37] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay.

[Edited - Production comment]

[00:06:53] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah, it is pretty interesting how I, I bet that grouper, that grouper fishing, you can have it. It's, it's tough.

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[00:07:04] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. So, when you go out fishing, how long do you stay out for or, anyway, could you and, and could you put that in the answer

[00:07:17] **Mark Ibasfalean:** When we're fishing, we can do several things, but we usually are almost, I'm not gonna say nine to five, but we're pretty close to nine to five if you're bait fishing them fish have to be to the dock as fast as

possible because they have to be frozen that night. So you're really rushing to catch 'em and race 'em back in.

So you leave, by the time you get ice and everything, you're out of there by about 8:30, 9, and you better be coming back to the dock by five or six cuz you have to get the fish off the boat and froze. And they have to be perfect. Crabbing is the same way. Now crabbing actually has a law. If you are out there past dark, it's illegal.

So you can't be crabbing in the dark. So them have to be brought in and they have to be cooked. So all this process is like time sensitive of hurrying all day long. That's why fishermen, you see 'em out there and you think, well, they're just doing a lot of riding. They're in a hurry. Cuz if they can't find the catch by three, four o'clock, they, they're really probably gonna give up on it.

[00:08:25] **Tina Bucuvalas:** That's interesting. So, so the crabs are cooked in the, of course, in the

[00:08:30] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah, they are, yeah.

[00:08:31] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Onshore.

[00:08:32] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Well, the crabbing, the crabbing part of all this. You, you get out there, you catch your crabs. You get 'em back here, you have to cook 'em immediately.

That's, that's the law there too. You have to cook 'em. You don't wanna ice crabs cuz then they'll stick to the shell. So you gotta be careful of, you don't want 'em hot, but you don't want 'em ice cold either or you can't work with 'em anymore. So we have to get 'em, same thing, time sensitive. Get 'em back to the dock, cool, and boiled and took care of like that. So every, everything, even lobster. Lobster has the same kind of time sensitivity thing, you know, unless you're doing live lobster, which is no big deal.

[00:09:16] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Did it? Did you do, did people do lobstering around here? I never heard of that , I heard it off the Atlantic coast, but not here.

[00:09:25] **Mark Ibasfalean:** I lobster fished for one day . That was my big lobster. Never caught anything. We, we went to the keys, never caught anything doing that. We stone crab, we don't even bother with it, believe it or not, off Tampa Bay and South, there are one or two lobsters around. It's not worth it.

[00:09:52] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Now, do you have, children that would go into any of this business? I know you've talked about this, but if you could talk about it for..

[00:10:03] **Mark Ibasfalean:** I have two kids that they, they fished and crabbed with us, but it's a hard life and it's, you can have really bad months where the, the paychecks do not come in.

And they're looking at everything at a, you know, I gotta have a steady supply of money. And nowadays that's how you have to, so they pretty much got jobs, the, the fishing and the crabbing. I spent my life learning how to go without, in these time periods when you don't catch nothing. And it is a hard thing to do nowadays, you know, if you have a steady supply of paycheck coming, it's hard and fishing can shut down for any reason at any time. We have dozens of reasons why fishing can stop for a month or two at a time, so, oh yeah.

[00:10:58] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Do you see a problem these days with getting younger people into any of the fishing or crabbing businesses?

[00:11:08] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Nowadays, there are more lucrative businesses out there for younger people. Crabbing and fishing is hard and they not, well, no, I'm getting at, they have to actually go out there and realize this is too hard.

So then they go do something else. But yeah, it's hard to get any younger bunch to take over some of these business. And there's some in Cortez, we've got lucky there's a few younger guys that step up to the plate, but in general, no. People are, it's, it's too hard to make money that way and it's old fashioned and they don't want to talk about old fashioned way. So..

[00:11:47] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah. Something I've noticed is that people tend to be in fishing and a lot of other jobs too, because they have some kind of personal attachment. They, there's something about it that draws them. Why are you, why were you drawn to fishing? Do you have some kind of personal attachment to it. And if you could talk about that.

[00:12:14] **Mark Ibasfalean:** When, when I was growing up, I, you know, I, I grew up on the water, so I got to watch fishermen go by and I just loved it. I said, I'm gonna just keep doing this. And at the time people were like, you need to get a job. And I'm like, this is a job. And they just would not accept it. And we, we, to this day, we love it.

It's just our bodies won't take it anymore than we're, we're wearing out trying to do that. But it is, it is an exciting job. There is, people will never see some of the excitement you see while you're out there fishing every day or stuff like that, but I, I want to go out there every day. But I'm getting wore out.

[00:13:01] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Do you, do you continue to recreational fish? Just be because you want, wanna be on the water or, or, but you, you're by the water anyway, anyway. Are you getting your water fix some other way. Or you feel that you need to?

[Edited - Production comment]

[00:13:21] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Water fix. Yeah. Yeah. I was in the water for four hours this morning.

I get my water fix. I had to work under one of the docks. I'm glad it's warmer cuz that water was cold two months ago.

[Edited - Production comment]

[00:14:19] Now I am working at a place that I work on the docks. I, my wife's has a charter business. I have to keep all them boats going and I'm on the water my entire, every day I'm on the water. I don't do as much fishing. I off and on. I do some off, which makes me a part-timer, which is what we hated our whole lives as part-time fishermen.

That's exactly what I turned into, but oh, I, would call this, yeah, my water fix is this place cuz I am here daily, every day and at night too. And that's, that's what I love about it. I, you know, I want to keep this going. I do part-time crab and I have people that crab for me and I wanna make sure I keep that in case one day I decide to do it again.

Although I probably , I probably would be hurting too much to do it.

[00:15:20] **Tina Bucuvalas:** I'm sure you have many memories, but is there one memory of, a best time out on the water, that stands out for you or one of the best times, I mean, that really sort of encapsulates, you know, what it, what it, how good it felt for you to be out there.

[00:15:44] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My situation out here, anytime we catch fish, it's, it's like you're on top of the world. You are like in control when you catch fish. There's been a lot of times where just the catch itself is more exciting than doing

anything else. You, you got this load of fish, you're coming to the dock and, but I've seen things out here.

I've seen, I've seen whale sharks come up to the boat. It is the freakiest thing I've ever seen in my, and they chew on the boat. Because they're chewing the barnacles and the like, whatever's on the side of the water line, and this thing was almost 30 feet long chewing on the boat. I'm sitting there looking down at 'em, and it's just like calm as can be.

And to see these kind of animals, huge animals, I've seen a lot of, I've seen giant sharks. I've seen, like I say, the huge whale shark. I've seen octopus, thousands of octopus at the same time, you know, I've seen a lot of wild stuff. That's excitement to me.

[00:16:52] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Sounds pretty great.

[00:16:53] **Mark Ibasfalean:** It is.

[00:16:57] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So, over, it seems like there's been a lot of problems, in the last couple decades, you know, with the Gulf coming from many directions.

[00:17:10] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yes.

[00:17:12] **Tina Bucuvalas:** I'm want, you know, there's been things like the BP spill, the Tidy Point spill (the Piney Point Spill) .

[00:17:19] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Oh yeah, yeah.

[00:17:20] **Tina Bucuvalas:** It's endless. Could you talk about some of the problems and impacts they've had on water quality, and the fish populations and the fishing industry, and, and if anything has personally affected you.

[00:17:37] **Mark Ibasfalean:** All right. When, when I first started fishing, we actually had red tide and stuff like that. We never thought much about it cuz it didn't do a lot of damage. Lately, red Tide has severe damage when it comes through. We've had spills in Tampa Bay. I mean, that's been going on for years, spill here in Manatee County, but things now seem to be getting to hit a lot harder simply because we're, we're in a situation where, these things that are happening, they can't really be fixed cuz there's nowhere to put things, you know, you've got, you've got reservoirs full of reclaimed water or whatever, and I, I mean, I'm not blaming them.

You're just nowhere to put this stuff and eventually everything gets washed into the Gulf or the Atlantic or in the rivers or bays, you can't stop it. It's, and I, I understand the problems. It, it is having an effect, but I mean, it's not like we can take this stuff and take it to another planet. It's here and we gotta deal with it, and that that's causing problems.

There's nothing, and Florida is a place that everybody wants to be. I don't blame anybody for wanting to come to Florida. It's the most fantastic place, in the world, but you pay the price in the long run. So everybody has to, I and I, I understand everything that we do to try to fix these problems, but it seems like they just keep stacking up.

And these spills, they're not gonna stop. We can try to stop 'em, but they're, they, you're gonna have one way down south and one up North. There's, there's so much going on. I don't see how you can stop it all. You can try and try to protect everything, but, I, I'm, if you're trying to say, am I hopeful of the future, I'm always hopeful, but we have issues.

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[00:20:52] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So there've been a lot of environmental changes over the years in the Gulf that have come from a variety of sources such as, you know, the BP oils spill, the tidy points spill. Increasing numbers of red tide incidents, maybe water warming, possibly, you know, over time.

[00:21:11] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yep.

[00:21:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** You know, a bit, and this has all affected the Gulf. Could you please comment on what you see as particular issues, especially in this area? As well as generally and how things may have affected you both, particularly and generally.

[00:21:29] **Mark Ibasfalean:** We, when I, you know, over the years I've seen a lot of red tide issues. Now, years ago, we didn't seem to have as many problems with red tide as we do today. Today is just it, it takes a huge toll on the fishing. It just wipes 'em out. And then we've had issues with spills. I mean, anywhere from, you know, 2010. There's been before that, I mean, the Gandy Bridge, I mean Gandy, Alafia River.

I'm sorry. You've had endless issues and not that it's, you can blame people. It happens, you dump 20 inches of water on something, it's gonna flood out and it's going to end up in the bays and the rivers and the Gulf and the Atlantic. And

the trouble we have is we have all these issues, we're trying to figure out how to but I don't, you know what I mean? It's gonna keep happening. And not that it's everybody's, you know, their fault or anything like that. There's certain things you can't stop. And as this state fills up, and I, you know, I love this state and I'm happy that everybody else loves it too. We're gonna keep having these issues.

Yes, we keep working on trying to figure out how to solve all this stuff, but I'm afraid you're just gonna see more. But I'm not blaming anybody for it. It's just this is the way it works, and I've seen this area alone get 20 inches of rain in three days right here behind me. And it makes a mess. It just floods everything into the Gulf.

And I don't know, I know everybody's trying to find ways in different ways and I, I hope it works. So...

[00:23:18] **Tina Bucuvalas:** You mentioned earlier when we were talking that you were, had been involved with O.F.F., and that's, if you could mention what that stands for. It's the Organization of Florida Fish, you know, and if you could talk about, What they have done over the years and what you did when you were with them and how it might have affected Florida and this area particularly.

[00:23:41] **Mark Ibasfalean:** I was with the, Organized Fisherman of Florida, the O F F, I was with him. Blue Fulford signed me up when I was 17, I think, and I was with 'em for till they kind of disbanded. It was like 15 years, somewhere around there. And we would go all over. We had all these, I mean, we had coastal cleanups, we had all these different things going on, and it, it worked.

We were working with other groups too, and then the net ban came along and we spent most of our time fighting the net ban. And you know, you're, when you're doing all these wonderful things and then you spend all your time fighting something, it kind of, it turns into a different kind of thing and that's the trouble.

It, it went from helping the state with all these different things we did, to having to fight battles. And it gets old when you're fighting battles, you get tired really quick. And yeah, there was a lot of good things that the O.F.F. did for so many places all over the state, but, you know, never, never, the fighting never ended.

[00:24:50] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Did, did it have any, particular impact in Cortez?

[00:24:57] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Cortez had a pretty big branch organization of the O.F.F. Lot of members, lot of volunteers. I mean, the F.I.S.H. Festivals, which, you know, they were pushing 30,000 people in a weekend. It was, it was big. And O.F.F. was always behind pushing all this stuff, making it all, and the money always went to the right places.

It, it wasn't squandered, it was always going to organizations for whatever cleanups or whatever we were doing. And yeah, it did a lot of good for the towns it was in. And, but that's, that's history now.

[00:25:36] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Could you talk about the net ban a little bit and what impact or how that might have changed fishing in Cortez and elsewhere.

[00:25:45] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Fishing in this area. All right, at any one time there's a hundred fishermen, maybe 120 in this area, which is Manatee County, Sarasota, and Palmetto. At the time of the net ban we had about, oh, thousands of fishermen, but they weren't from here. So we had a lot of fishermen from out of the state that was, and they were using gill nets.

So we had a problem just before 95 where we had so many people. And what nobody realized was most of the people were not even from the area. But they got counted as being in the area. So places like here and other places, they took the brunt of all the problems with netting. They got blamed for everything.

And there was only a hundred of them, you know, and they took the blame for thousands of them. And we fought the net ban here, we, we battled it out and, you know, you're, you can look at your, you're, you're up against a wall of just bureaucracy and money, just pure money up against you. So it was a battle you kind of knew you were in trouble with, cuz.

But we were, we were fighting an issue of net fishing, which I could go in forever about the different types of nets for different types of fish, but it was all lumped into one big, you know, catch everything with one net and it didn't, didn't work like that, but that's what they thought. When the net ban went through, what nobody realized is everybody immediately went to the next level, which was cast netting. So all of a sudden, everybody that was doing gill netting, that even weren't even from the area, switched to cast nets. So now you've had thousands of people cast netting and you didn't change anything. You just threw thousands of people in a cast netting, and they did really good because the fish were not prepared for that kind of, they didn't know what a cast net was, so they understood what a gill net was.

They see a gill net and they run, they see a cast net, and they just stare at it. They have no idea what it is. So the change was eliminating these grandfathered people that had been in it all their lives that just gave up. But the new generation of young, they, they went right and they were, you know, I got nothing against anybody.

They were charter fishermen. They were sport fish. Every kind of fishermen was out there cast netting. And they could get their license in a year, and they were, the second year you had 10,000 fishermen out there, mullet fishing with cast nets.

[00:28:43] **Tina Bucuvalas:** That's interesting. I've never heard that perspective before, but that's really interesting.

[00:28:48] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah, it was, it was something. It's, I mean, at any time of year when you get the big seasonal thing, you can have 300 boats sitting right here hitting each other cuz they're all like fish going into each other. Because that's where you're, you're trying to get to the middle. Oh yeah. It's crazy.

[00:29:05] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah. So, do you see many, do you see any, do you, well, ultimately this question gets into whether or not you believe there's climate change. You know, whether you think temperatures are rising. Is partially what's affecting the temperature of the water or if sea levels are rising and, and if that's having any effect, currently. In Florida or specifically in this area? Could you please comment on that? Or give us your opinion?

[00:29:46] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My, my view of everything that's going on, climate change, the whole nine yards.

I always have a view that if this planet wanted to spit us out anytime it wants to, it doesn't need climate change to spit us out. We, if you watch the Weather Channel, there's constantly, this volcano's about to blow and just, you know, there's always an incident of, and I understand that that can happen.

I've lived in a, my house since 1982 and I'm basically one foot in the water all the time. That's how close I am to the canal. I haven't noticed water changes here. Now granted, I've never had to leave. I mean, my water, my house has never had water in it, and it was built in 1970 and it is literally only two or three feet from the water's edge and this area I see erosion.

I see erosion continually. I don't necessarily say it's cuz the water's rising. Now, as for climate change in general there's always gonna be some kind of change going on. We are affecting some of it, no doubt about it. You can't deny that we affect the climate.[00:28:00] We affect the land. We're doing a big effect on the land.

So yes, we do affect the climate. Whether two degrees is gonna be an issue in 10 years, that's, who knows. But I will keep an open mind to anything I hear. I don't like to hear that it's a trillion dollar industry, but other than that, I, I can see changes that we, cause no doubt about it. We do cause changes.

[00:31:37] **Tina Bucuvalas:** But you haven't seen any immediate changes like it that, for instance, in a fish population that might be attributed potentially to, to climate change and..

[00:31:51] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Well, my personal opinion of what I've seen around here now, like I say, I've seen lots of erosion. I mean, this, this place is nothing but erosion. They continually re nourish the beach. We have to , we, we got no choice if we don't, it's gonna go right through the island.

As for the water rising, I can't see it in this area. I'm not, I have no idea what's happening anywhere else. I just know this area hasn't seen it. But as for the fish, they change anyways. I can go talk to the people that were fishing in 1938. And they'll tell you, all of a sudden, all the fish disappeared.

They don't even know why. They just disappeared. They changed migratory patterns. A lot of the fish are migratory mackeral, kings, pompano. Mullet can, if a, if a hurricane comes too early in the year. The mullet think they're spawning ahead of time and they, it just messes 'em all up. So you lose the mullet year because they, they lose track cuz of a hurricane.

I, they tagged a shark, a great white about three weeks ago, and they follow it around the state. And it came into the Gulf. They said, well, that's too warm. Why is it in the Gulf? But it traveled 40 some hundred miles and turned around and went back. You know, so it, it's, it's a traveler. So my personal opinion is, as it is for these migratory fish, they come and go as they please.

And if they think the water temperature's one, mackeral, if they think the water temperature's one degree too hot, they, we go by, they, they travel by temperature. And if it's, I think it's 70, 71. Once you've passed that, they're gone. All of them, millions and millions of them, they hit that other temperature and they've disappeared.

They stay with, so do sword fish, and they stay with the temperature. If your water temperature goes up, they're not gonna be here. They, they move on.

[00:33:57] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Interesting. Interesting. Right.

[00:34:01] **Mark Ibasfalean:** They do, they, they, some years they will not show up.

[Edited- productions comments]

[00:34:40] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So what do you think the future is in terms of different kinds of fishing industries in this area?

[00:34:50] **Mark Ibasfalean:** I look around and I see. All kinds of things going on. I know the three basic things in this area are, crabs, bait and grouper. You know, they go offshore for that, but that's, and shrimping actually around here. Them of the three they, to me, haven't changed much in my whole lifetime. The, the, the numbers have never really, they fluctuate, but they've never really changed.

So I do see a future in all of them. As for other things, I. I don't know much about the numbers. I, every now and again, I'll, I'll read about the numbers of up north in Alaska and places like that, but these three basic things that this area was based on, pretty much stay the same. The numbers don't change that much.

[00:35:45] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Let me ask you. I, you know, I can't remember what the cause was I think there was a cold, I don't know what, a cold snap or something, but a couple years ago there were like no stone crabs. What, what, what was the cause of that?

[00:35:59] **Mark Ibasfalean:** When I, okay. Stone crabbing is a funny business. One year, if it gets too cold, they bury, they'll bury this deep and they won't come out.

If it gets in the summer, they bury. They just don't care. They bury for months. They come out when it's rough and miserable, and when you don't wanna be out there, that's when they come out to eat. One year we were out there, we started in October 15th and we started catching octopus at about nine miles.

And by the time we got to probably November, about a month and a half later, the octopus were on the beach and they would get in the traps and eat every crab

in the, I mean, they annihilated the crabs. Those that didn't bury up or get away, they got destroyed. I mean, we're talking, they got to the scallops too.

They wiped out the scallops down south. Twice I've seen this happen. I mean, octopus, where you were catching 3000 pounds of octopus instead of crabs. No crabs, just octopus. They're the most notorious animal on the planet and they're, they'll destroy everything in their path. And we've had that happen.

We've had a couple cold snaps that have, they didn't kill 'em, they just buried. That's where they, they bury down, they stay. We've had red tide that killed them, wiped them, it was bad. It just wiped them out. That was the first time I've ever seen, this was about six years ago. First time I ever seen, Stone Crab die from that.

And yeah, octopus are the worst. Oh my gosh.

[00:37:44] **Tina Bucuvalas:** They're really smart.

[00:37:45] **Mark Ibasfalean:** They're mean. Oh, they're mean.

[00:37:50] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Oh, okay. Do you guys have any other questions or anything?

[00:37:53] **Kristin Sweeting:** I do.

[00:37:54] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay.

[00:37:55] **Kristin Sweeting:** I wanted to kinda touch back on the red tide a little bit and talk a little bit more about water quality. So some scientists believe that the it's not necessarily that the water temperature is going up, but that the water temperature isn't cold enough during the winter, which is why Red Tide has been so bad over the last couple of years because when it gets colder.

[00:38:28] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yes.

[00:38:28] **Kristin Sweeting:** Red tide...

[00:38:28] **Mark Ibasfalean:** kills it

[00:38:28] **Kristin Sweeting:** dormant.

[00:38:29] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah, it goes dormant.

[00:38:30] **Kristin Sweeting:** What are your thoughts on that?

[00:38:34] **Mark Ibasfalean:** I got a guy that I talk to every day. You guys might talk to him one day, Scott Moore, and he'll tell you like it is. There's a combination of things happen to make red tide really take off, and he thinks, you know, fresh water's one, a lot of runoff fresh water, the bacteria takes off with it. He says it's like boiling a soup.

That's what he said. He's like making soup. He said that's what Red Tide does if it gets cold enough it can buy you a lot of time, maybe buy you a couple years, but we didn't have two big years of cold, so we had a bad year. We didn't get it here. They got it offshore, real bad red tide, but we didn't get it right here in Cortez.

[Edited - people passing by, production conversation]

[00:39:35] **Kristin Sweeting:** Are there, are there any other experiences with water quality that you've run across, that you'd like to touch?

[00:39:45] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah, I'll try to touch on it. I mean, we are actually in class action suits as we talk against companies from 12 years ago on water quality issues. We're not even supposed to talk about it, but it doesn't really matter after 12 years, who cares? It goes to court. It does this and it's, it is all about water quality and spilling of different, I won't even mention their names, but, it's happened most of my lifetime, and I'm not even gonna mention the counties or the, but anything from pumps running backwards in the sewer systems and pumping it overboard to different acids going into the water.

It's, it happens and I'm, I'm not saying it, you did it deliberately or this, it just happens and you know, you're up against companies that have thousands and thousands of employees and a bunch of crabbers and fishermen. So it's, it's, yeah. We're, we're actually dealing with a lot of it continually. But we can't, you know, we haven't got time.

We're not, we're, we're like farmers. We go out and do our thing. We don't know nothing about legalities and bureaucracy and any of that. We just try to do what work we do. So we gotta find somebody else to do it for us. But yeah, we're, we're, it does affect things. I've seen it personally, but most of the stuff I've seen comes back.

Fish are not totally stupid. They will run from something that isn't right. They'll take off and, but they'll come back if it cleans up. And we've had many issues where things cleaned up and they came right back. So it's, it does happen.

[00:41:37] **Kristin Sweeting:** So I guess, when, when I asked the question, it was more like that. Like what have you personally seen? Water quality effect wise?

[00:41:50] **Mark Ibasfalean:** I, I've seen more dead fish than I want to even talk of. I mean, I just, I've seen grouper dead. I've seen, and there was reasons for it. You point the finger. I've seen a wipe out. It has affected the mullet. I've seen mullets so thick. You can walk on em.

Four months before they were ready to do the spawning, it just wiped out the entire, and mainly, a lot of times from here south. Although St. Pete gets it a lot, so I've seen enough damage in my lifetime. Yeah, a lot of damage and, you know, sometimes it was natural, what you'd call red tide natural in respects, even though it's feeds off a lot of different things, and sometimes it was an issue from something on land that you could directly point your finger at, but I'm shocked at how many times these fish have come back in these areas.

So I've seen Snook, even here, I've seen 'em dead as far as you can see, and then like this year, they're, they're everywhere. We're hip deep in Snook right now, so yes, I, I do believe if you clean up and get it back, things will come back rather quickly.

[00:43:14] **Kristin Sweeting:** Kind of going on a different route, what experiences did you have growing up here fishing that you're sad that your grandchildren might not experience?

[00:43:25] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah. I, I've seen so many changes around here. It's, it's, I, I will try to keep it together long enough for my grandkids to fish and even part-time fish, but the licensing and everything to be part of that is almost impossible now. I mean, you, you go through a lot.

[Edited - production comments, repeats question due to boat.]

[00:44:13] **Kristin Sweeting:** So what experience did you have here fishing that you're sad that your grandchildren may not experience?

[00:44:20] **Mark Ibasfalean:** My, I'm gonna try my best to make sure that my grandkids can fish. Commercially fishing might not be as easy as the sounds

anymore. It's, it's just too much and too much of licensing and all these different things and legalities to get if they want to grab a fishing pole and go out there, I'll go with 'em and do that.

And, you know, cuz I, I think the fish are always gonna be here. We're, they're gonna out live us. They're gonna, they're gonna be here when we are not. So I don't have a problem with that, the fishing will always be good. But to be a commercial fisherman, I don't see it cuz it's, it's a lot just to maintain right now.

And commercial fishermen are as bad as truckers right now. They're getting hit hard on so many different prices that they can't keep up with. Fuel being the main one, it's, it's eating 'em alive and I don't, I'll try, I'll try to have something together for 'em.

[00:45:26] **Kristin Sweeting:** So there's a lot of misconceptions that go along with the commercial fishing industry. What would you say is the top one that you would like to clear up for the public.

[00:45:41] **Mark Ibasfalean:** A commercial fisherman is a farmer on the water. Sometimes they're hard to talk to because that's, farmers are hard to talk to. They're, they're, they want to do their thing. They want to catch their, they don't want to, they're not gonna bother any, they don't want to be bothered. The problem that I see that a misconception around here is we've turned ourselves into almost a Disney world setting, literally around here.

Everything is, is, I mean, granted, tourism makes the state money. It's is what keeps the state going, and the misconception is that people look at fishermen. I mean, if they would look at 'em like nostalgic, that would be great, but they don't. And like in Cortez, it's nostalgic at the restaurants near the fish houses, but when they see a fisherman fishing, commercial fishermen, they get bent outta shape.

And a fisherman is staying within the laws staying, you know, cuz they know, you know, I mean a lot of these things that we used to fish, are actually felonies now. You know, they're like, oh my gosh, how can you turn a fishing violation into a felony? You know? It's the weirdest thing I've ever seen. And so fishermen have to really, they're really on a tight rope when they're out there fishing.

They gotta be very careful and they got quality control things if, and I got nothing against, you have to have Sheriffs, Marine Patrol, you have Coast guard, you have to have 'em, all, they have to constantly be out there. But as a

commercial fisherman, you're constantly, is that quality enough? Or you don't have enough ice, or whatever they decide, you know, you better hope they don't have a bad day when they're coming up to you.

But there is a misconception that people, they see it as nostalgic in one sense, but when they see 'em out on the water fishing, they get mad. And I, I don't understand why because they're going through more hoops than anybody else to do that. It's not, it's not just go out there and free for all it. And they're not running out there with a case of beer getting drunk to do it.

They are doing it under a huge amount of guidelines and it's just, but the people don't see that. So that's where it is.

[00:48:03] **Kristin Sweeting:** I'm gonna steal your last question. Is there anything else you think that we should know? Another story or...

[00:48:14] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Hey, I don't know

[00:48:15] **Kristin Sweeting:** something important.

[00:48:17] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Well, I, I wanna say what we talked about, when I was a little kid, well, 12 years old, I was fishing at 12. My family, you know, we had little, we built boats, our, and we just built little plywood boats and went out fishing and we could sell our fish right here.

And when I pull up to the, there would be everybody selling their fish. We got, we're looking back in the seventies now. Everybody was selling fish. They were, they were sport boats and just regular people with fishing poles would come sell their fish and nobody had a problem, ever. [00:44:00] Anybody could go sell.

Well, all of a sudden there was a law that said you have to be a commercial fisherman to sell a fish, and it went downhill from there. It just one, just battle after another. My personal opinion is they should have just left it alone cuz they, your fishing would be the same, the same amount of fish would be caught.

The fish house would, would be getting all they want, you know, cuz people would, oh, I'll sell my fish. You know, just regular people. But I remember that as a, as a kid selling fish waiting in line behind anybody. And now it's you, you have to be this and you have to follow this. And I, I almost wish I could see that again, but I, I know that ain't gonna happen. Yep.

[00:49:51] **Kristin Sweeting:** Anything else?

[00:49:54] **Production crew:** A lot of great answers.

[00:49:56] **Kristin Sweeting:** It's been wonderful. Thank you so much.

[00:49:57] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Not a problem. Yeah, just my view, you know.

[00:50:01] **Kristin Sweeting:** Thank, thank you very much.

[00:50:02] **Mark Ibasfalean:** You know, there's, I was telling you about it, how many books they wrote in about Cortez now, I mean, what, five seven? I don't know how many books.

[00:50:11] **Kristin Sweeting:** Oh, yeah. Anything that wasn't included in those, now is your time to say it.

[00:50:14] **Mark Ibasfalean:** Yeah. The books are based on whoever wrote the books and I know every one of 'em that wrote the books and it's about their lives and their stories, you know, and their family. And there's a lot of powerful families that are still here, still around.

My family isn't that powerful. We're not a powerful fishing family but they, everybody wrote a book and it's their view of what history is. And mine is, yeah, mine's not gonna be the same as theirs cuz theirs is a totally different view based on their family. That's the way it works anymore. You know, I, I, I, I love it here, so I'm, I'm gonna, I'm gonna stay as long as I can just make it, survive. Oh yeah.

[00:51:06] **Kristin Sweeting:** Thank you. [51:59]