

Interviewee: Jay Lucas  
Interviewer: Tina Bucuvalas  
Consultant: Kristin Sweeting  
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Transcriber: Kristin Sweeting

**Abstract:** Jay Lucas is originally from Clearwater and his family was not in the fishing business. Nevertheless, he started fishing when he was young—his first job was scrubbing party boats docked in Clearwater Beach. By the time he was 16, he was making rod and reel trips during the summer. After high school, he engaged in more serious fishing. In 1970 he started longline fishing for a man in Dunedin, and was able to buy a boat in 1971. He then worked for the Dunedin Fish Company. Next, Lucas worked out of Biloxi for a couple years, but became homesick. He then started running his own 51-foot commercial boat, longlining for grouper, snapper, and other bottom fish with two other crew.

Lucas pursues different types of fish depending on the season. Red grouper is available for 9 months, then June through August they move to deeper water for snowy grouper, tile fish, yellow edge, and other fish. The offshore fishermen can only harvest 5000 pounds per trip. In addition, Lucas stresses that the fishermen must abide by government regulations. Monitored by computer, they are quickly contacted and fined if they are not fishing 30-40 miles from shore. Lucas recognizes that fishing is still a dangerous occupation in many ways, despite new and helpful technology.

When his son was 8 years old, Lucas left fishing so that he could spend more time with him. He became an aquatic technician with various environmental companies that tried to keep inland ponds and waterways balanced and well-filtered. During that time, he and his family became seriously attached to baseball and he coached a very successful young team. Lucas decided to return to offshore fishing in 2011 due to his personal attachment to the water and fishing.

Lucas believes that some government restrictions have had a long-term beneficial effect of fish stocks. However, he recognizes the negative effects of run-off on fish and water quality. Overall, he is hopeful for the future of commercial fishing since the stocks are strong. But he would like the public to recognize that commercial fishermen are working hard, and that fish prices rise in large part due to the increasing cost of gas and other necessary supplies.

[00:00:00] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So could you say your name and where we are?

[00:00:02] **Jay Lucas:** My name is Jay Lucas and we are in Cortez, Florida.

[00:00:06] **Tina Bucuvalas:** and Jay, can you tell me a little bit about your family background, how they got to Cortez? I'm assuming they're...

[00:00:13] **Jay Lucas:** I don't live in Cortez. I'm from Clearwater originally.

[00:00:17] [ Tina asks Jay to repeat ]

[00:00:19] **Tina Bucuvalas:** could you tell me about your background and how you got here and whether your family was in the fishing business?

[00:00:26] **Jay Lucas:** No, my family was not in the fishing business. My dad was a sales for Nabisco. He worked for Nabisco for all of his life. I started fishing when I was pretty young. Scrubbing party boats down on Clearwater Beach for five bucks, 10 bucks a day. And, it just, You know, morphed into something, you know, every, every summer I would work a little bit more, and pretty soon they started letting me work the deck. And, that's pretty much how I got started. You know?

[00:00:56] [Production crew interjects]

[00:00:57] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So how did you get from scrubbing party boats to active fishing. And how did Cortez come into the picture?

[00:01:06] **Jay Lucas:** Started off when I was about 16, 17 years old making rod and reel trips on a boat with a couple of different guys there during the summer. And then when I got outta high school I started, you know, it started getting more serious where, you know, I would, you know, basically I was fishing all the time.

[00:01:28] **Jay Lucas:** And about 1979 they started long line fishing and I went to work for a guy from New Jersey up in Dunedin, Florida. He was running a long line boat. It's the very first one I ever worked on, and I worked for him for about a year. He taught me basically everything , you know, taught me how to, you know, how to fish, what to look for, you know, everything that, you know, that makes a decent captain.

[00:01:54] **Jay Lucas:** And, the very next year I ended up, he got a bigger boat and I got the boat that he was running.

[00:02:02] [ Production crew asks Jay to repeat because of technical difficulties.]

[00:02:06] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So could you talk about the kind of fishing you did with your own boat and then were you associated with any particular fish houses and did you change the kind of fishing?

[00:02:17] **Jay Lucas:** I worked out of Dunedin Fish Company. It was a, for a guy named Bruce Lee, who has since, he moved on to Tampa. He had a fish house over there for quite a few years.

[00:02:28] **Jay Lucas:** But, I worked for him for a couple years and then the guy that I was working for, they took the boats to Biloxi, Mississippi, and it was on my first time away from home. And I went over there and worked for him for a little while and basically I just got home sick. So I called the guy from the fish company and he found me another boat back here.

[00:02:51] **Jay Lucas:** So I came back to Florida and I started running my first broad fire, which incidentally is the same type of boat that I run now. [00:03:00]

[00:03:01] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And, what kind of boat is that and what kind of fishing are you doing?

[00:03:05] **Jay Lucas:** It's called a 51-foot broad fire. It's a stern cabin commercial fishing boat, and it's where cabins in the stern and the work area is right out in front of you there.

[00:03:16] **Jay Lucas:** And what I do is I long line for grouper, snapper, you know, all types of bottom fish.

[00:03:22] **Tina Bucuvalas:** How far out do you go? Oh, so that's offshore fishing. I don't know' if you, and if you could say that somehow and how, how far out do you go? How long do you go, how big is your crew?

[00:03:35] **Jay Lucas:** As far as distance out, we have to start, the government has a line that runs all up and down the coast.

[00:03:42] **Jay Lucas:** We have to be on the west side of that line. They have like different way points where the line goes from one point to the next point to the next point. We, that we have to be all the way to the west side of that. If we get to the east side of that, we're in trouble. You know, you get fined, you get

arrested, you know, all kinds of bad stuff will happen to you if you fish inside the line.

[00:04:03] **Jay Lucas:** So, basically it's just you stay west of that line and, it usually starts probably, right around in between 30 and 40 miles. We have to be at least 30 to 40 miles off the coast.

[00:04:18] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. And could you talk about how long you stay out to do this kind of offshore fishing and also how your location is monitored? I think that's what you may have been talking about,

[00:04:29] **Jay Lucas:** Correct. We are monitored by the government. There's a guy that sits in a room and watches a computer and waits for somebody to fish on the inside of that line. If you get inside of the line, the next thing you know, your owner gets a call, the helicopter will be over top of you, and that's when the trouble starts.

[00:04:49] **Jay Lucas:** As far as time away from the dock, we are usually out anywhere from, it varies depending on how much, like right now we're on a limit. We can only catch 5,000 pounds of red grouper. So most of the time, you know, it's a week to 10 days. You know, normally it would be two weeks. We're gone for two weeks at a time there.

[00:05:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So, and so, could you talk about whether that limit is an annual limit or a monthly limit, and then when you're done with your grouper or catch, do you go on to fish other, other, kinds?

[00:05:27] **Jay Lucas:** The red grouper is a, is pretty much seasonal for us. It's about nine months out of the year. But June, July and August, we move out to the deeper water.

[00:05:39] **Jay Lucas:** You know, like most of the time we fish in between 120 and 170 feet for the red grouper, June, July and August, we move out to about 600 to a thousand feet for yellow edge, snowy groupers, tile fish, stuff like that. It gives the red grouper a little bit of a break.

[00:06:03] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Do you have different limits on all of those then?

[00:06:05] **Jay Lucas:** Not right now, we don't. She's set up limits for us at 5,000 pounds because the government in all their wisdom, has decided that they're gonna take a certain amount of fish from us for stock assessment and

give it to the recreational people. So now, we're on trip limits. We can only catch 5,000 pounds of red grouper.

[00:06:30] **Jay Lucas:** If we go to the deep water, it's 5,000 pounds of deep water grouper. Basically, we're on a 5,000 pound limit to try to make, she's got a lot of boats, and to be fair, she divys it up, you know, to every single boat there. So we're trying to make it last for the whole year.

[00:06:50] [ Jay is asked to repeat for clarity ]

[00:06:53] **Jay Lucas:** My boss, Karen Bell, she, she basically doles out the, IFQs to each and every boat. She's got six or seven long line boats and she's got some rod and reel boats where she has to give them some too.

[00:07:07] **Jay Lucas:** So basically we're all on a 5,000 pound trip limit, and if we do that at 5,000 pounds, she's figured it out to where we'll be able to maintain and keep fishing for the whole year. We don't normally make what we would make, but it's a steady income coming in. Like certain times a year you'll, you'll have a good trip and you know you're on the fish so you get right back out and stay on the fish. You can't do that now. You know, you got 5,000 pounds a month to catch and that's it. So you have to wait until it's your time to go then you can leave.

[00:07:46] **Kristin Sweeting:** Sorry, can I follow up on that? So can you explain what an IFQ is? And with the 5,000 pound trip limit, how many days are you out usually?

[00:07:55] **Jay Lucas:** An IFQ is we have to pay as fishermen, the IFQ , sorry, .  
[00:08:00] The IFQ is we have to pay as fisherman, it's a certain amount of money to catch the fish now. So like right now she charges us 75 per, 75 cents a pound. So whatever we catch, 75% or 75 cents comes out of that, that pot right there and goes back to her so she can pay the IFQs, that she has either leased or bought. She, you buy 'em from the, from the different purveyors for the government. I'm kind of trying to.

[00:08:34] [ Production team interjects ]

[00:08:36] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So, let me ask you this and then maybe you can rephrase it in a more understandable way.

[00:08:40] **Jay Lucas:** It's kind of like,

[00:08:41] **Tina Bucuvalas:** does the government give her a give her...

[00:08:43] **Jay Lucas:** the government's the one that instituted the IFQ program. Okay, they thought that it was gonna make fishing better. Basically it had nothing to do with making fishing better.

[00:08:53] **Jay Lucas:** All it does is put money into other people's pockets that have nothing to do with commercial fishing. It's [00:09:00] like the stock market, you know, like I know a guy that lives in North Carolina that owns thousands and thousands of IFQs and basically he's just a money man for some guy that runs a fish house down here, you know, and there's a lot of people like that, that, you know, they don't, they don't even know what a fishing boat looks like, most of them.

[00:09:21] **Jay Lucas:** But if the IFQ makes some money every year because the price keeps going up.

[00:09:30] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay.

[00:09:32] **Kristin Sweeting:** And how many days are you out for your 5,000 trip limit usually?

[00:09:35] **Jay Lucas:** We're out anywhere from maybe seven to 10 days. Now when you're out there besides catching them, how do you, what do you, I mean, what do you do to them to keep them. so that they're, I mean, I don't know if you process them in some way or freeze them or what, before you bring them back.

[00:09:57] **Jay Lucas:** What we do is we blow the whole fish hole full of ice, uh, you know, 20, 30,000 pounds of ice. And then when we have these huge boxes and they have bin boards that, and they're kind of angled, well, we put a bed of ice down there in the bottom and we stack 'em all belly. Back and forth, back and forth, and fill in with the little fish, ice.

[00:10:21] **Jay Lucas:** Make another layer, ice, another layer, ice, and you just keep coming up higher and higher and higher. Once you get to the top, then you make sure that you keep your cap on the top and it keeps those fish stiff as a board and they look really good when they go off the boat.

[00:10:38] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Could you talk a little bit about your crew? How many people, are they very experienced? Is it difficult to get them?

[00:10:40] I have, right now I have two guys. Both of 'em are pretty young. One of them's 18, the other one's 20. And, they've been fishing probably for, probably two or three years.

[00:11:00] **Jay Lucas:** One of 'em started when he was 16. The other, you know, started probably about a year, year and a half ago. And, both of 'em are really good kids. They're real hard workers. And, sometimes we take a third guy, it just depends. But we'll take 'em to, you know, cut bait, make gear, stuff like that. Just stuff the guys don't want to do.

[00:11:26] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Is it hard to get crew for that kind of a, a long voyage? Because I know a lot of young people may not want to be away.

[00:11:35] **Jay Lucas:** It is hard to get crew that, you know, the being away from home is hard. You know, being away from their phone is hard. Most young kids, you know, if they don't have their phone, you know, they'll think the world's coming to an end.

[00:11:53] **Jay Lucas:** The work ethic it, it's hard with the younger people because a lot of younger people aren't used to this type of work, you know, so it takes a special type of person to come out there and do it. It's not for everybody.

[00:12:01] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Just as a side thing, are you also, besides the captain, are you also the cook?

[00:12:18] **Jay Lucas:** As a matter of fact, I'm, I'm a pretty good cook too.

[00:12:25] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And what do you feed them?

[00:12:27] **[Production crew interjects]**

[00:12:53] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And then if you could tell us some of your recipes. Not the secrets, but, you know, so, you know, the question was, are you actually, are you a cook as well as the captain?

[00:12:63] **[Production related comment]**

[00:13:10] **Jay Lucas:** Not only am I the captain, I am the cook too. And, I'm a pretty darn good cook.

[00:13:20] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And what kind of things do you make?

[00:13:28] **Jay Lucas:** A lot of times, we, I buy my meats from a place out in Arcadia and it's all antibiotic free. Like we'll have filet mignon twice a trip. A lot of times we'll cook a Turkey, baby back ribs. Homemade beef stroganoff, homemade lasagna. You know, we make a lot of stuff that you would have at home. A lot of times they ask me to cook fish, but uh, you know, I do everything I can to get out of it with that hot grease sloshing back and forth.

[00:13:57] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So maybe be easier to, if you have crew, just to, you know, put the menu, you know, and it'll be filet mignon twice a week,

[00:14:04] **Jay Lucas:** Yeah, that's right.

[Production crew interjects]

[00:14:15] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And, and you work all year round basically?

[00:14:18] **Jay Lucas:** Yes. We try to work all year round. That's what the, the 5,000 pound trip limit is right now. She's trying to keep enough fish to where everybody can, you know, come and go there all year round.

[00:14:35] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So can you say, you're out there for so long, then how long you're on shore?

[00:14:43] **Jay Lucas:** We're usually, we're usually out there for, you know, 10 days to possible, two weeks. It just depends. Weather conditions and stuff like that. And then when we get home, you know, we're usually on the beach for probably a week to 10 days.

[00:14:55] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So you work all year around, but I imagine there are, you have a significant downtime due to rains and upcoming weather in Florida?

[00:15:03] **Jay Lucas:** Not necessarily. I mean, when it comes to storms, usually when we're out there, we stay, unless it just gets too bad, we'll watch the weather.

[00:15:18] **Jay Lucas:** I usually look at it like anything over 15 foot. If it's gonna be 15 foot or higher, it's usually someplace that we don't need to be.

[00:15:25] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Were there any times when you were offshore that it was particularly frightening or bad that you remember?

[00:15:33] **Jay Lucas:** When I was young, I got caught in, a couple of them there. I was in, both of them were in the Gulf of Mexico, but I mean, one of 'em was a, a low pressure that came out of the Yucatan Peninsula. I think it was like 1986. It was a tropical storm by the time it got to us and I was way offshore and by the time I found out that it was coming, you know, it was too late. You know, it hit us about midway home there and I don't know, we probably ran. We kept the bow into it the whole time, you know, until it passed by, but it was pretty close to 20, 25 foot seas.

[00:16:18] **Jay Lucas:** The boat was coming out and the bottom was falling out of the, you know, just slam, slam, slam. So that was, that was pretty much the only time I really, you know, I've been pretty scared. I'll never put myself in that position again.

[00:16:35] **Kristin Sweeting:** Can I, building on that, can you share with us a memory about maybe one of the most joyous times you've had fishing?

[00:16:45] **Jay Lucas:** Probably one of the most joyous times I had fishing. It was 1988. I was running a shark boat outta Madeira Beach and my wife called me on the, or actually not my wife, a friend of mine called me and told me my wife had just had a baby and it was my son.

[Production crew asks Jay to repeat]

[00:17:28] **Jay Lucas:** One of the most joyous memories I ever had was back in 1988, I was running a shark boat outta Madeira Beach and my friend had called me on the single side band radio and told me that my wife had just given birth to my son.

[00:17:50] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Do you also have a personal attachment to being on the water or fishing? Is it something that, is it just a job to you or is it something that means a lot more than that?

[00:18:03] **Jay Lucas:** No, I, I love being offshore. I worked for, I got out of the fishing business back in 1994 with no idea what I was gonna do. And I wound up looking through the newspaper back then, that's what they put the ads in the newspaper.

[00:18:22] **Jay Lucas:** And I seen an ad that said, aquatic technician. So I said, water that sounds like me. So I called, I went down, I interviewed, came back, interviewed again. They brought me back one more time for the final interview and they hired me. And, I have a pretty good skillset when it comes to fixing

stuff. So basically what it was was a lake management company and I was very good with fixing stuff.

[00:18:50] **Jay Lucas:** So within a year they made me a service manager and they moved me down to Sarasota. That's how I wound up down this way. And, I worked for that company for another couple of years and then I moved on to another company. It was a new up and coming company there called Lake Masters. Which has since been bought up by a big corporation.

[00:19:13] **Jay Lucas:** And, I basically, I worked in that company as a technician for a couple years as a manager, and then I had, probably half of, from my, my territory was from, Fort Myers all the way up to probably Pasco County. So I did a lot of traveling with, excuse me, I did a lot of traveling with them. And, basically it was an, it was an environmental company.

[00:19:48] **Jay Lucas:** We, we took care of lakes, ponds, waterways. We, we planted plants, we stocked fish. They put me through school, got me all my licenses and everything, and I worked for them, probably 15 years. And, about 11 years ago, I just told my wife, I said that, I don't want to do this anymore. You know, I was making good money.

[00:20:15] **Jay Lucas:** I had a company vehicle, 401k, you know, health benefits, all kinds of benefits. And I just told her, I said, I want to go back and go fishing before I get too old and die. So, I gave my two weeks notice. They paid me for six months hoping that I would come back. And, I ended up going to work for some guy over in Texas. He had a boat that he was just, he just bought up in Panama City. So, he paid for me to go up there and wait for the boat to get ready. And I ran that for probably six to eight months till he decided he was gonna bring the boat back to Texas and they were gonna do one of those reality shows.

[00:21:07] **Jay Lucas:** They called it Big Fish Texas. And I was like, no, no, I'm, I'm not doing that. So, uh, thanks. That's how I wound up down here working for Karen Bell.

[00:21:12] **Tina Bucuvalas:** And that kind of leads to a lot of other questions. And now I remember other things you were talking about the other day that were really interesting. We were talking about environmental issues that you ran into in the lake. So let me just sort of, you know, the sort of big thing is I wanna get your perspective on how the Gulf used to be. How it is now, what are current environmental issues, but also what are, if you could talk about some of the environmental issues and how they might, how they were solved when you

were working with those lake management people, cause some of that was really quite interesting about what was happening there.

[00:22:00] **Jay Lucas:** A lot of the environmental issues when it comes to the gulf is runoff. Runoff is huge. When I worked for the Lake Company, one of the good things we did, and it started back in the, probably the, you know, the mid-nineties is, we started all these lakes that, were dug, were dug with, what they call a littoral shelf.

[00:22:26] **Jay Lucas:** It's basically, you have the lake and then it comes up where it's only like a foot, foot and a half deep, and they put plants in there. And what the plants do is they filter out all the nutrients and stuff. Because, basically the, that's what the, the lakes are, they're just filter ponds and the plants will, you know, will soak up all the nutrients before they get out and they start running out into the rivers and stuff like that.

[00:22:53] **Jay Lucas:** It just makes for a cleaner runoff.

[00:22:56] Right. So you planted the plants in order to, to prevent,

[00:22:59] I, I didn't plant the plants. We had crews and stuff for that, but I would monitor 'em. I would go back and check, you know, on the, you know, how the plants were doing after they were plant, basically you'd have to count the plants.

[00:23:11] **Jay Lucas:** I did some of that. They called it monitoring. I had a whole crew of technicians that would go inside the plants and any invasive weeds, uh, cattails Brazilian peppers, stuff like that. They would kill it. And then basically it would be just all plants. It would look really.

[00:23:31] **Kristin Sweeting:** So they were all native.

[00:23:33] **Jay Lucas:** They were all, it just depended. There was a lot of different types of plants, aquatic plants that they use. Picker weed, arrowhead Bull Rush, canna, those are usually the, the most popular ones right there with the put on the littoral shelves. And then when you get in the, on the water, you know, they'll use like fragrant water lilies and stuff like that.

[00:23:59] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Now, have you ever run, did you ever run into a lake that was having a lot of problems? Like, I know there were enormous problems..

[00:24:11] **Jay Lucas:** Every lake has a lot of problems. We live in a swamp. That's what Florida is. These aren't lakes, they're retention ponds. They catch all the, the dog crap, the fertilizer, everything that comes off the road runs into those pond. And that's why it's so important to have that filter system out there, you know, to, to soak up all that stuff before it gets into the, you know, to the waterways there. But another thing, is they, they had to be controlled with a chemical because they're so shallow. Every pond has like, what they call, it's a transitional zone for the first, I think it's like, six to eight feet.

[00:24:51] **Jay Lucas:** The, the palm will slope off real slight, and then it'll drop off after that. The reason they do that is in case a child ever stumbles into the water where you got time to get him before he, you know, he gets down there, it's a safety zone that they put. But what that does is because the water's only that deep, it heats up and with all the fertilizer and everything else that runs right around that little ring, it gets hot and then the algae just explodes right around the pond. That's why you see the guys with the carts running around or spraying from the boat, you know, it kills all that algae, you know, and that's where a lot of your submersed weeds will start too, cuz it's the most fertile part of the lake.

[Production crew interjects]

[00:25:39] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So what about the Gulf? You had experiences out there going back from when you were young and then you were away for some years. Could you talk about how it was earlier in your life and, and what you're finding now if there's been any changes?

[00:26:00] **Jay Lucas:** When, when I left fishing back in 1994, I believe it was. It was, it was hard to catch a fish.

[00:26:08] **Jay Lucas:** It was getting to the point where there was so many boats. I mean, there was hundreds and hundreds of boats, from here all the way to Brownsville, Texas. I mean, you probably had 300 boats and, what the government did, they actually did something good. They, they had a, what they call a limited entry program where they go back and they take all your catch history and they find out you know, who had seven years of catch history. And what they did was they issued, permits, they're called, Pence long line endorsements, and I think there's only 62 of them. So, there's only 62 people that can, you know, that can long line in the Gulf of Mexico that can do what we do. They've got, they have reef permits also that they issued, but the, the long line endorsements, that's where, that's where most of the big money comes from there.

[00:27:09] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So, today is the condition of the Gulf much better in terms of fish stock. And what about also water quality issues?

[00:27:09] **Jay Lucas:** The fish stock is a lot better, than back in the nineties with the reduction in boats. You know, when you go from, you know, two to 300 boats down to 60 something, it made a big difference in the fish stock. The fish stock went way up, you know, and it's been maintaining ever since. As far as water quality, I really haven't noticed offshore you don't notice a lot of difference in the water quality. Once you get past a certain depth, the water just stays crystal blue, you know, unless there's a huge storm. And then the sand will stir it up. You know, the suspended solids will come to the surface and then they'll settle back down.

[00:28:00] **Jay Lucas:** But for the most part the only water quality issues I've seen was there's been more, more and more red tide outbreaks, you know, from the time that I got out of it, you know, to the time, you know, to where I started fishing again.

[00:28:22] **Tina Bucuvalas:** To what do you attribute Red tide outbreaks?

[00:28:27] **Jay Lucas:** Runoff.

[Production crew interjects]

[00:28:37] **Jay Lucas:** I attribute red tide outbreaks to, in my opinion, to run off, fertilizer. You know, all the stuff that basically runs out of the, you know, the, the rivers and stuff like that. From the sugar cane fields is another big one.

[00:28:59] **Tina Bucuvalas:** So, could you talk about whether Red Tide is something that's seen that far offshore as well as inshore?

[00:29:10] **Jay Lucas:** I have not seen Red Tide offshore. The, the only time I've ever, I, that's, that's, I take that back. The only time I ever did see it. It was either the first or the second year that, that I came back probably about 10 years ago.

[00:29:31] **Jay Lucas:** And, there was, we had a big, huge bloom up to the north and, we were up probably off of Bayport and, I don't know, maybe 30 miles offshore, 40 miles offshore and we did see fish floating. And it was hard to catch a fish up there for a long time, you know, a couple of years, you know, people struggled going up there after that big, after that big die off.

[00:30:04] **Tina Bucuvalas:** What do you see as the, how do you feel about the future of, of, life for commercial fishermen?

[00:30:18] **Jay Lucas:** As far as the future life for commercial fishermen? I have to be hopeful. I mean the stock's good. There's plenty of fish out there, but every time that you get comfortable the government decides that they're gonna take something else from you.

[00:30:39] **Jay Lucas:** So it's basically, you know, it's a, it's a year by year thing, you know, we just have to keep our fingers crossed and hopefully they leave us alone.

[00:30:59] **Kristin Sweeting:** I feel like this might, might come in handy, but can you specify, when you say the stocks good, which specific stocks, you're referring to?

[00:31:08] **Jay Lucas:** So I have you this all over again?

[00:31:12] **Kristin Sweeting:** No, no, no. Just say the stocks X, Y, Z.

[00:31:16] **Jay Lucas:** The stock for the red grouper is really good right now. We've had some of the best years we've had here in, you know, last year. This year it's been, it's been a really good year this year, and it was a good year last year, the year before that is the figures that they're working off of, and that's the year that covid hit.

[00:31:36] **Jay Lucas:** And we didn't catch all the fish that year because the restaurants were closed and basically they put us on hold for about two months,

[00:31:45] **Tina Bucuvalas:** You know, I don't think that's something we've talked about probably as, as much as, as we should. No, I mean, you know, were, were there any other,

[00:31:52] **Jay Lucas:** I'm just gonna get mad if we talk about this, so

[00:31:54] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Well, no, no, no I'm just asking are, were there any other changes but that, that you saw that were due to Covid?

[00:32:01] **Jay Lucas:** No, that was the main one right there. I mean, as, excuse me. As far as any other changes from Covid, I didn't see, you know, a lot of different changes other than the fact that, you know, they, they deemed that the stock was, you know, less than what it should have been.

[00:32:20] **Jay Lucas:** But then again, we, we didn't fish for two months.

[Production crew interjects]

[00:33:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Is there anything in particular, other than what we've talked about that you would like people to know about commercial fishing?

[00:33:29] **Jay Lucas:** Just that the commercial fishermen are out there and they're working hard to bring, you know, the people to fish and they look at the prices. But, you know, the prices are high right now, but everything keeps going up for us too. You know, our fuel's going up, our ice, our bait, you know, our tackle, everything that we use is going up. So when they go to the grocery store and they see those high prices, you know, it's because we pay more to get them the fish.

[Interjections by the production team]

[00:34:28] **Jay Lucas:** The only thing I was a little sketchy on is the IFQ thing there.

[00:34:28] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Yeah, I think we answered it.

[00:34:31] **Jay Lucas:** While, the IFQs, I mean that's, that's one of the things there that when the, when the government did that, they instituted the IFQ program and basically it led a lot of people into the fishing industry that really had nothing to do with fishing. I mean, there is still a lot of people that have, you know, like that own fish houses and boats that do have shares, but there's a lot of shares that have went from different people that decide they're gonna get out of the business they sell their shares to somebody else, and next thing you know, they're all over the place. So, a lot of the people that I know too, that fished for years and years and years, you know, that were captains because they didn't own the boats, they never got any shares. So basically they're just down to, you know, to running boats and, you know, making money for other people.

[00:35:30] **Jay Lucas:** A shame, it is a shame. I mean, I was out of the business for, I dunno, what was it, 16, 17 years, you know, however long it was. There was a lot of people that stuck with it and they got absolutely nothing for it.

[00:35:49] **Kristin Sweeting:** And what was your, what was your reason for originally leaving?

[00:35:54] **Jay Lucas:** My son, he turned probably six years old and I wanted to stay home and try to be a better dad, you know, than, than my dad was.

[00:36:04] **Jay Lucas:** And spend more time with him. And, and that's what I did. And we, we turned out to be a baseball family.

[00:36:12] **Kristin Sweeting:** That's admirable though. Yeah, one of the questions I had, adding onto that, being offshore do you see, I don't know that much, but I'm imagining like weather sneaks up quicker, or not really?

[00:36:36] **Jay Lucas:** The only time it really, the only time weather ever sneaks up on us is like, if you have squalls that are, you know, in the area, you, you try to, you know, to dodge 'em, but you can't, they'll find you, if, if there's a big storm coming or something like that basically you hear it on the weather, we get weather alerts all the time.

[00:37:01] **Jay Lucas:** So, you know, it's, it's basically if, if there's a huge front coming and you know you're gonna have, 40, 50 mile an hour winds for, you know, a day or two, three, whatever, you go home. If you know, if you know that it's just gonna be one day, a lot of times you'll stay and try to tough it out, you know?

[00:37:20] **Jay Lucas:** But as far as weather sneaking up on you, about the only time it ever does that is during like rain squalls, you know, you'll get a pretty 30, 40 mile an hour wind, but it'll only last for an hour or so.

[Production team interjects]

[00:37:52] **Kristin Sweeting:** Have you seen, have you seen the water getting warmer or current changing? I know it would be harder from offshore, but any evidence of sea level rise? I'm more curious about the currents and the water temperature, but I'm gonna throw all of it in there at one time.

[00:38:17] **Jay Lucas:** I have not seen any difference in water temperature. Basically, we don't really do a lot of temperature stuff with bottom long line. The collegiate guys, the guys that fish on the surface are the ones that really monitor the, you know, the water temperature real good.

[00:38:39] **Jay Lucas:** One of the things that we look for as far as water temperature is, you know, usually when the water hits, you know, around 74, 75 degrees in the wintertime, that's when the, you usually get the fish to start biting real good. So, we'll, we'll, like you'll go summer and the fishing will slow down

a lot. And then when the winter starts coming and you start getting your cold fronts, the water will get colder and colder and colder. The fish will start rowing up and that's, you know, once the temperature hits, probably anywhere from 73 to 75 degrees, you know, we usually do pretty well.

[Production team interjects]

[00:40:15] **Tina Bucuvalas:** You know, could you talk about how dangerous an occupation this is? I mean, for instance, I know when I hear guys from Tarpon Springs talking like they all know a boat where everyone, you know, the boat capsized and everyone died, you know, from, I think it went down to Central America. Do you have a sense that this is a relatively dangerous occupation, and do you think it's more so than most occupations?

[00:40:44] **Jay Lucas:** It, commercial fishing is a, a very dangerous occupation. If you go out there and you're safe. Right, right now there's so many more things that we had, you know, while, while I was young. I mean, when I was young, basically we had, four life jackets on the boat and that was it. Now we have an e-purb which will give our location. We have AIS on the VHF that gives our location. We have, uh, you know, portable life rafts that inflate, you know, we have, satellite phones, we have satellite weather. We have all kinds of stuff now that we didn't have back in those days there. So, it's gotten a lot safer, but it still is one of the most dangerous occupations in the world.

[00:41:34] **Jay Lucas:** I've sword fished and tuna fished for a couple of years. It's a lot different than the, the bottom long lining. Basically you, you set your line on the surface and it suspends it below the water about a hundred feet. And you know, you have like, we used to use a hundred, 125 foot liters on up, you know, after that.

[00:41:59] **Jay Lucas:** And basically it'll float all night and then you pick it up in the morning. That's, I did that for probably two years and a lot of that, there's a lot of traveling involved. You know, you have to basically follow the fish. So it was from, you know, up there in Massachusetts all the way over to Texas, you know, back and forth every year.

[00:42:22] **Jay Lucas:** And, I did it for a couple years but it's, you know, there was just way too much travel and I wasn't home. You know, I was probably gone eight, nine months out of the year.

[00:42:36] **Tina Bucuvalas:** What were the, was it different? Okay, so you used the long lines in everything. Was it more physically strenuous than other kinds of fishing?

[00:42:45] **Jay Lucas:** No, not really. I mean, as far as, no, it wasn't more physically strenuous. The hardest, the hardest thing that I think that we've ever done physically strenuous was shark fishing.

[00:42:59] **Jay Lucas:** You know, we're, that was, you know, that it was bottom fishing also, but it lasted a couple years and then, you know, the government stepped in and, you know, we were only allowed a certain amount of sharks after that, and it wasn't worth doing it anymore because it, the meat price just wasn't that much.

[00:43:22] **Kristin Sweeting:** Okay. So, importance of buying local seafood.

[00:43:29] **Jay Lucas:** It's very important to buy local seafood. It, you know, it, it controls a lot of jobs here, especially in this area right here. You've got two fish houses right here that, you know, employ quite a few people. And, the more local seafood that you buy, you know, the better off that, you know, the community will be in the long run. That way you don't have to import all your seafood from different countries.

[00:44:01] **Jay Lucas:** Karen Bell would probably be the person to talk to about the, you know, the more importance of buying local seafood.

[00:44:10] **Kristin Sweeting:** We've got Karen's perspective on it also. Okay. I think I'm, I'm good. Oh, anything else you wanted to share about yourself as a person? No, not really. Okay.

[00:44:24] **Tina Bucuvalas:** You mentioned baseball.

[00:44:26] **Jay Lucas:** Yeah. It's what I did when, when I got out of fishing, for the time that I was on land. I coached the travel baseball team and, most of the players on there were really, really, when they all graduated from high school, I think we had four or five first round draft picks. And, now a lot of those kids, you know, they'll come back and they'll play at the trop(icana) and you know, they'll, you know, we'll go see 'em and stuff, you know, they'll leave tickets for my wife and I.

[00:44:57] **Tina Bucuvalas:** How did you get, did you train those kids to be draft pick?

[00:45:01] **Jay Lucas:** I was a good baseball player and I was a better manager. One of the things that I did was, when we had our first team, we would go and we would play these teams and you would have, it would be like a horrible team, but there would be that one kid.

[00:45:20] **Jay Lucas:** You can see how frustrated he was. So I would wait till the game was over. I'd go around, talk to his parents and say, we're putting together a team next year, you know, so and so, and they'd say, yeah, we're in. I did that. I think we got like five or six kids out of Florida. And then, We did a lot of AAU. And with AAU you're allowed to have, three kids from a bordering state.

[00:45:47] **Jay Lucas:** So I got with this guy up in, East Cobb, Georgia that had some really good players and he would bring his players down and we would put our team together. And, you know, we, I think, we just about every tournament you could think of. We were beating teams that were probably like a year older than our kids.

[00:46:14] **Jay Lucas:** And you know, I watched the kids and they got better and better and better. And you know, by, like I said, by the time they were all in high school, it was, you know.

[00:46:24] **Tina Bucuvalas:** What about your son?

[00:46:26] **Jay Lucas:** He was a really good player. He had, he had, ligament replacement. They call it Tommy John's surgery. And, it pretty much shot his arm after that.

[00:46:37] **Jay Lucas:** There, he played, played in the Junior College World Series. He won a state championship with Venice. He was their MVP for their very first ever state title. He played in the College World Series, or he didn't play in the World Series. He had, that's when he had the, the arm problems there. But he was with Kent State to get them to the College World Series and after that he, he got outta baseball after that.

[00:47:07] **Jay Lucas:** It was just too much pain for him, you know? He just didn't want to go through the surgeries anymore.

[00:47:11] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Is he go going to go into commercial fishing or No?

[00:47:17] **Jay Lucas:** No, he's, he's a logistics agent. That's what he does now.

[00:47:21] **Tina Bucuvalas:** Okay. Does he like to fish as a hobby?

[00:47:24] **Jay Lucas:** He loves to fish. Loves to fish, loves to golf.