

Dr. David McKee, Part Two

Interviewed by Jen Brown

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Corpus Christi, Texas

Transcribed by Alyssa Lucas

[Jen Brown]: All right, we are recording. This is November 1, 2022. This is Jen Brown. I'm with Dr. David McKee in Corpus Christi, Texas, and we are here to do a Baffin Bay oral history, and this is kind of a part two because we've already done an oral history with him, but, um, can we start off, if you want to tell me more about your background and early life?

[David McKee]: Yeah, Jen. Uh, I grew up in Sinton. I grew up with a BB gun in one hand and a fishing rod in another, giving Mother Nature holy hell (Brown laughs), raised by my mother and her parents, both of my grandparents being from the 1800s, so my uncles and my grandfather were—everything was based around seasons, hunting and fishing, and I always said that my uncles and grandfather walked on water. They just had such a big influence on me and what I ended up doing as a career. I spent much of my time in Port Aransas as a kid, Sinton being only thirty miles from the coast, I could literally smell the saltwater from Sinton and migrated to Port Aransas every chance I could get. I spent a lot of my time on the jetties and, actually, living on the jetties and on Horace Caldwell Pier fishing, had nothing but a sleeping bag, and I carried thirteen rods and reels with me at all times that I had made, and the diet was very set. For weeks on end, all the food I would eat would be premium saltine crackers, Spam, sardines, and Vienna sausages for weeks (Brown laughs), and they required no ice so, really, was a fishing nut, and I went to school, graduated from Sinton in 1965. I got my bachelor's degree from A&I which is now Texas A&M-Kingsville, degree in biology. I got a master's degree in marine biology at CCSU [Corpus Christi State University], which later became A&M-Corpus, which it currently is, and I got my doctorate from College Station, and before I had completed my [degree], it was all ABD, all but dissertation, I was hired out here to set up a mariculture program, and that still operates today after, gee, thirty years, I guess, close to that. I taught at Flour Bluff. My first job out of college was teaching at Flour Bluff, and I taught there five years, taught life science, and I taught in a program called Coordinated Vocational Academic Education and while I was at Flour Bluff, I got into off-road motorcycle racing, and lo and behold, I ended up opening a shop, left teaching to open a shop selling exotic off-road motorcycles, and I did that for five years. At that time, I was hired, after I closed the shop, I was hired by Texas Parks and Wildlife to work at the Rockport Marine Lab, and I was there four years, and I left there to go to the Upper Laguna Madre where I ran the field station for about a year and at that time, I decided to go back to school. I wanted to teach at college. I needed a doctorate, so I applied to Texas A&M and damn if they didn't accept me (Brown laughs) so here I am. Dad's going back to school, had two kids, you know, the cat, the two dogs, a boat, a four-wheel drive truck, and we'd take off, lease our house in Corpus, and move to College Station. I did my coursework up there, and we came back to Corpus, and I was able to do my research and shrimp mariculture out at the Barney Davis Power Plant and during that time of doing my research and finishing up the degree, I was hired

by CCSU to start that program, and I retired in 2013 after, actually, twenty-eight years teaching there at the university, mostly marine science courses, ichthyology, marine ecology, marine mammals, environmental science, blah, blah, blah. I taught thirteen different titles while I was there and most of them, I had at least one class in before. Some of them, I never had a course at all, so that'll keep you on your toes, keeping up with the crowd, trying to stay one lecture ahead of the crowd, but, anyway, it was a great period growing up and about 1970, I made my first trip to Baffin Bay. I spent time in the upper Laguna Madre not going as far as Baffin Bay, but I, with some friends, made one trip to Baffin Bay, and I was hooked. I was able to, a few years later to get into a partnership in a cabin at Baffin Bay called Hewitt South, and I still am a major partner in that cabin after forty something years, not using it as much as I used to, but all three of my children kind of grew up down there on the Twin Palm Island where the cabin is, last cabin on the right before you get to Baffin Bay is Twin Palms Island, so I spent a lot of time down there. Let me look here. I think the thing that attracted me most to Baffin Bay was the isolation. To get to Baffin Bay from Flour Bluff, say, it's about a twenty-five mile boat ride. You got Padre Island National Seashore on your east to your eastside, you got the King Ranch and Kenedy Ranches to the west or on the right side as you're going south, and you better take everything that you need down there because there's no Stripes down there. You can't say, "We're out of bread," or "We're out of ice." You better have it with you, or you've got a long, long boat ride back to get anything, and yes, gasoline and ice are the two major needs when you're down there. Almost everything else you can borrow or get by without but gas and ice, you've got to have it. The great fishing was the other thing aside from isolation. Even wading out from the cabin, you're in world class fishing, and so isolation and fishing was just absolutely a game changer for me because before that I fished all over Aransas River, all of the bays around here, surf fishing in Padre Island, of course fishing the piers and the jetties in Port Aransas, but, wow, Baffin Bay hooked me from the first trip down there.

[Brown]: Can you tell me more about that first trip?

[McKee]: First trip, I went with two guys that later became my partners. I became partners in the cabin with Gary Dukes and Mike O'Connor. Mike O'Connor is one that the building on campus is named for. He was one of my cabin partners, great guy, no longer with us. We went down, and they said, "You've got to have a spoon that's silver with green, chartreuse green on one side," It's called the Johnson Sprite or silver minnow, and we went down there, had no idea what was under the water. I just knew the water was really clear and looked good, but we went into an area called the Badlands and started throwing these spoons, and we started catching trout, and I just couldn't believe it, went back to the cabin and had a lunch, took a little nap, went back out, and did the same thing that afternoon, and I think it was that day they said, "You know, we're kind of looking for another partner," and I said, "I'm in," so I bought into the cabin at that time, and I think one of the things that stands out with me about Baffin or some of the characters that I've met down there, people always said when you had a—there were several invitational-only fishing tournaments that I went to, participated in, some of them for a number of years and just to give you an idea of how basic these tournaments were, in tongue and cheek, the prizes would be a pair of old, worn out waders would be first prize (Brown laughs), for say, biggest trout, an old lone star igloo, red lone star igloo cooler with no lid would

be second place (Brown laughs), so it was just, it was a lot of fun. You would meet people at a tournament that ranged from an active Bandito to a very renowned brain surgeon, just all in one group and what made that tick so well was the fact that every one of them loved to fish and what you did, where you came from didn't matter. It was about the moment and the moment was you're in Baffin, you're going to catch fish, and you're going to have one big time. Some of the names of people that were, I called him, the Baron of Baffin was Louis Peetz, and I've got some pictures over here of Louis Peetz. He was quite the character, fished down there from the sixties on until his death a few years ago. Paul Wimberly was another one that just [passed], it just wasn't right if you went down there and either one of those people were not there. Another real stand out was called the Church. It was a houseboat but because they were always down there on Sunday, they had on the up-level, they had a pulpit up there, and the thing was, they would say on Sunday mornings, they would go up on top of the houseboat and have a service, which probably meant they drank coffee with Irish whiskey in it, or they drank Bloody Marys or something. That was the service that morning (Brown laughs), but the Church was very much the center of the Redfish Wars back in the day when, what was the numbers were in the 1970s, early seventies, five hundred commercial fishermen were catching more redfish than almost one million anglers. They were doing that with their nets, so there was a big war, we're going to put redfish off the commercial list, take it off, and there was lots of cowboys and Indians kind of stuff going on at the time. There was a lot of retaliation from the commercial fisherman, and Church Number One was burnt to the ground, burnt to the water level, excuse me, because one of the owners of the Church, the houseboat had made some comments about the commercial fishermen and blah, blah, blah and the next day, the houseboat was burnt to the water line, so those were kind of fun things in a way, but it was change and all of a sudden, the commercial fishermen were out of the picture, and at a time when it was almost rare to catch a redfish. They were that scarce because of the illegal netting and after that, we were able to enjoy fishing without having to dodge trotlines. Trotlines were so bad on the west shore from Flour Bluff all the way down to Baffin that some of the boats would run a cutter up on the front of the boat to where they could cut those trotlines if they didn't see one, and they were going to run through it, and the trotlines were suspended from cane poles holding them up to where the hook was just barely under the surface of the water so if you were to run through one of those, you might just be hooked by a trotline going forty miles an hour, so cutters on the front of your boat were somewhat popular back in the days before the Redfish Wars when there were trotlines and nets everywhere. Uh, one of my favorite stories about the cabin and Baffin in general is where our cabin is on Twin Palms Island, interesting story, in the early sixties, I guess, through the sixties, the commander here at the Naval Air Station, which is a pretty high-profile business in the community, position to have. His brother was a real troublemaker in town. He was always getting arrested. He was a drunk, and it looked bad for the commander to have this out-of-control brother, so they moved him down to Twin Palms Island to live to get him out of the spotlight up here in Corpus, and they would take him water and food and stuff on occasion, every couple of weeks, and he raised rabbits down there and goats on the island where my cabin is. In fact, when I first got the cabin, we pulled up to the pier one weekend where we were going to stay, and a big rabbit jumped out on the beach up there and started hopping around, and my dog, a golden retriever, ran up and grabbed it, and the rabbit just went limp, and we thought, "Oh my goodness, the dog has killed

the rabbit,” and yelled at the dog, dog dropped the rabbit. The rabbit just stood up and shook itself off and hopped off (Brown laughs), so, undoubtedly, one of the survivors of the years when the bad brother lived there on the island. I mentioned the Banditos to brain surgeons. That’s kind of the makeup of the group that was down there in the day. Every boat that went by the cabin in the day on the Intracoastal [Waterway], you knew who it was. You recognized them. They saw you had your flag up. Everybody flew flags down there, and I think, for the most part still do so when Joe went by, you knew he was down there. You knew you were going to go later that day during happy hour and go down to his cabin and have a drink, and he would probably come by yours, but they knew you were there too and neither one of you, you knew so well that boat and where they were going to fish. They knew where you were going to fish, and nobody bothered anybody. There was that much water down there with so few people fishing, and I think when we talk about change, and I can come back to that, the biggest change I’ve seen down there over the years, the last fifty years that I’ve been, almost fifty years that I’ve been going down there, has been the numbers of boats that now go down there. To put that in perspective, one of the boat dealers in Corpus, probably the largest boat dealer said, “You know, back in the day, we would, once dove season opened, opens, and this opened right now, we wouldn’t sell another boat until after duck season was over, or it was very rare that we would sell any boats during the winter because people were hunting,” and he said, “Now, we sell as many boats in the winter as we do in the summer and most of those are new boat owners, first time they’ve bought a boat,” so therein, that shows how much change there has been and just in terms of boat traffic, people on the water, from knowing every boat that went by to now, it’s just a steady stream of people that have maybe only been to Baffin that day, that’s their first trip, and they know little about the perils and the dangers that exist within Baffin Bay because of the serpulid reefs down there which can take the lower unit off a boat if you hit one. Let’s see. One of the really memorable things down there are some of the storms that’ll come over Baffin, and Baffin is located about twenty-seven degrees north latitude and that, if you go out to Padre Island out on PINS, Padre Island National Seashore, that’s where two currents come together, one of them moving from the south to the north, another moving from the north to the south. They come together and one turns out and one turns in, and the one that turns in deposits a lot of large shells on the beach, and there’s a lot of weather associated with that and a lot of that weather that occurs in the Gulf because of these converging currents will actually carry across the barrier island, over the Lagoon [Laguna Madre], and over Baffin Bay, and there will be storms that will generate in the Gulf and move west, across the barrier island and the Lagoon, and it will blow and rain and thunder and lightning like you’ve never seen but if you go one mile or even a quarter mile north of Baffin or a quarter mile south of Baffin, it’ll be a bluebird day (Brown laughs). It’s just that little isolated area, twenty-seven degrees north, where these storms will move across, and I’ve had one very harrowing experience getting caught in one of those storms, but we’ll save that for another time.

[Brown]: Oh.

[McKee]: I could have died down there once because of a large stingray that I encountered down below Baffin. I’ve never had any reaction to anything except stinging scorpions and

stingrays, and both of them, I think, could kill me if I had more venom in me, but I certainly learned that I do not want to have another stingray encounter. Another story that I recall very well was, I won't mention any names, but one boat was coming back from Baffin and a very strong north wind, they were doing probably forty miles an hour, running the west shore, little did they know that the anchor was bouncing around up on the bow and the anchor flipped out of the boat while they were doing maybe forty miles an hour, and the anchor set and when the boat hit the end of that rope, it turned that boat immediately the opposite direction, and both of the occupants went overboard where they spent a couple nights down there on the spoil island waiting on the Coast Guard to find them (Brown laughs), so watch those anchors when you're in rough water. If one of those comes out and hooks into the bottom, it's going to be a rude awakening. I'm just kind of jumping around here. I think I mentioned the number of boats on Baffin is being a big, big change. Another has been that of the degradation of the serpulid reefs in Baffin, and those reefs are geologically somewhere in the vicinity of, their last great formation, a creation of those reefs of which they're said to be about ten square miles of serpulid reefs in the bay. The peak of their establishment was about 3,000 to 3,500 years ago when those reefs formed, and it's a little marine worm, and they secrete, take calcium carbonate out of the water and form a shell which they live inside of. They're like our earthworms, the annelid worms are just a marine form, and they come out, stick their little heads out, little pinchers and all that and feed on plankton and the water. Well, apparently, those reefs have been in decline for many years, and since they're mostly non-living, there are a few living worms on those reefs, but they're not of the magnitude that they once were where those reefs were growing, growing, growing, so they've become rather chalky. If you step on one when you're wade fishing, you will just see kind of a white cloud come up in the water where that reef just, it's chalk, and it's very soft chalk and when you step on it or hit it with the lower end unit of an outboard motor, it just turns to powder, and it just goes into solution, so it's been a loss of a lot of the reefs, specifically the one in front of my cabin at Compuerta Pass. When I started fishing down there, that reef came up out of the water, off the bottom, two, two and a half feet tall, and just a continuous reef that went two hundred yards. Even twenty years ago that reef had been totally, just taken down by lower units, boats, the lower, the props hitting the reefs and so going from two feet above the bottom to just rubble on the bottom is what that reef is now. There's nothing left of the structure of that reef, and, of course, one of the real benefits of those reefs, are its great habitats. There are little organisms that live within the crevices and holes on the rock. There are things growing, different algae, they're growing on the rocks, and these are big fish holders, so the habitat that's Baffin is so famous for, the serpulid reefs are just not as abundant, I should say, as they once were. One of the things that really came about that changed things for a while, fortunately, it went away, was the brown tide that came in in 1990, and I'm sure the people you've talked to have all mentioned that one, but you could drop a lure over the side of the boat, and you couldn't see it once it went below about four inches of the surface of the water. The water was that turbid because of the density of these planktonic organisms in the water column, and that lasted about five years. I may be a little off on that but what caused that, we don't know, but it followed a very, very severe fish kill in 1989. The bloom started in the spring of 1990, so it's thought that all of the dead fish that had died in the freeze, put so much organic matter back in the water column, and that was food for fueling this planktonic bloom. But an interesting side note to that is, there was a marine

geologist over at UTMSI [University of Texas Marine Science Institute], and he did core samples in Baffin, and this was thirty, forty years ago and in the core samples that he would take in the sediments of Baffin Bay, he found a line in there that he said could only be the occurrence of a brown tide type event that would have caused that kind of sediment to be deposited on the bottom, and those numbers were like forty thousand years ago so if all of that holds, we can say that the brown tide has been around a long time, but, fortunately, we've not had any brown tide since that time. Another big change down there has been the increase in seagrass coverage, and those of us that have fished the upper Laguna, Baffin, know that we really like those sand spots, areas that are without any vegetation because so much of the abundance of critters is called the edge effect. Anywhere you've got a change in ecotones, moving from seagrass to bare bottom, right on the edge is where you'll find a big increase in the diversity of organisms and abundance of organisms so when you have a solid coverage of seagrass, you don't really have that edge effect, and I don't know that it's bad, but I know that that's something that has changed and even the composition of the grasses has changed from one species to another. One of the grasses that's very prevalent in the lower Laguna Madre has always been less abundant in the upper Laguna Madre but over time, the coverage of that other grass has moved north, so we've got two major types of seagrass vegetation in the Laguna Madre and in the past, we had primarily one, which was the shoal grass. Uh—

[Brown]: —Can we just go back a second, like—

[McKee]: —Sure—

[Brown]: —what did you do when the brown tide came in? Were you still fishing down there?

[McKee]: No, no. I mean, if you made a lot of noise, put on a loud cork and made a lot of noise, you could draw fish to the noise, but, really, vision was greatly impaired. People really just quit fishing. The guides would fish a little, but it was not pleasant to see, and your catches were really, really off so—

[Brown]: What did it look like?

[McKee]: It was the color of your coffee with the cream in it, about that color, maybe a little more brown and it was just terrible. It didn't kill any fish. It just kept sunlight, the sunlight was attenuated. In other words, in clear water, sun will shine all the way to the bottom, average depth of the upper Laguna Madre is three feet, average depth in the lower Laguna Madre is about a foot and a half and even in those shallow depths, with that much plankton in the water column, light was just not able to get to the bottom, so seagrasses were dying. It wasn't killing fish per se, but the entire food chain changed because of the, you know, lack of sunlight, a lot of less desirable types of plankton became more prominent, and, just, the whole system was out of balance, but it wasn't deadly to the fish per se, but bottom line was the ecosystem was terribly turned on end. I think one of the questions was, how do we get more youth involved in Baffin or just in marine conservation, and I have two answers for that. One of them, is join CCA, Coastal Conservation Association. They're really a leader in marine conservation from the word

go and have been. Another organization that I'm very involved in is called FlatsWorthy, and Chuck Naiser, that was his vision, was we've got a diverse group of users out there on the water, and they really need to have mutual respect for one another, so it's very important now more so than ever because of the increased numbers of people on the water, and a lot of boater education is needed. I've always said, when you buy a boat, you should know how to back it up, how to have everything ready at the boat ramp rather than (phone rings) knowing only at the boat ramp, that your batteries dead or forgetting to put the plug in your boat, all these kinds of basic things that people don't get at the dealership, and, again, we're looking at a lot of first-time boat buyers, and there are a lot of things to think about when you launch your boat and run your boat and the more people out there, the greater the chance is for something to go wrong and really ruin your day on the water so if we can manage golf courses, if we can manage baseball schedules, professional baseball schedules, we ought to be able to manage boat ramps and make sure that everybody that leaves has a good, safe day, a productive day fishing or whatever they're doing and make it back safely, but there are lots of people out there that don't know what they're doing. Drinking goes hand in hand with boating. You know, you buy baits, you buy beer, so enough said there, but lots of change on the water that I've seen over my period of fishing down there.

[Brown]: And talking about those younger generations and getting them to be stewards, you mentioned your kids grew up down there?

[McKee]: Um-hm.

[Brown]: And you taught them—

[McKee]: —Um-hm—

[Brown]: —how to fish?

[McKee]: Um-hm. Oh yeah, the kids just run around on the island with sticks and stabbing flounder and catching mullet, and I remember some of the greatest memories are being down there about this time of year and sometimes in the deep of winter where the noctiluca, it's a bioluminescing phytoplankton that produced the cold green light and being there in the water so still and these, it's like a cyalume stick, a very cold green light, didn't produce any heat, but it's a biochemical reaction that fireflies have and certain fishes, and it's very uncommon on land. It's very common in the water, to communicate, attract a mate, and all those kinds of things, so those periods of being down there when that bioluminescent plankton were blooming, and you could walk out on the pier and just the vibrations from you walking on the pier would cause these plankton to light up and a mullet would maybe swim when it felt the vibrations of you walking on the pier and all of the waves coming, the water waves coming off the side of the mullet would excite the plankton, and the fish would just be outlined in this cold green light, and everything in the wake of the fish would be lit up, and it's just very, very magical, mystical experience down there.

[Brown]: Well, that kind of gets me to a question, what does Baffin Bay mean to you?

[McKee]: Baffin means the most wonderful—well, let me think. What does it mean to me? It means isolation. It means a five-star accommodations down there, which means it's very sparse, but it's like camping, five-star camping out. You've got everything you need, and you're so far away from any civilization. There's nobody, there's no development on Padre Island to the east, there's no development on the ranch to the west. At night, you can see the individual towns because of the city lights. You can see Bishop. You can see Riviera. You can see Kingsville, and every night down there is like the night before Christmas. You can hardly sleep because you know in the morning, you're going to have that fresh air, cold air in the morning at daylight hitting your face as you're racing towards a spot that you know is going to hold some redfish and trout, and I get goose bumps as I talk about it and think about it because I can still smell, feel, taste every trip that I ever made down there. It's just such a special place. Now, we don't own our cabins down there. We only lease the spot where the cabin is so if the General Land Office decided to end the cabin program, and you may have a hundred thousand dollars invested in your cabin that you've had to build board at a time, that you've got to haul twenty-five miles by boat. If they decide to take it away, end the cabin program, you just leave your investment down there. We pay a yearly fee per square foot to have the right to be down there, but we do not own those cabins, and, anyway—

[Brown]: —Hm—

[McKee]: —that's what it means to me.

[Brown]: You know, you mentioned some of the changes, the decline of the reefs, the more people, um, what other changes have you seen over time?

[McKee]: Well, more cabins or not more cabins because those are set by number by the state, more active users of those that do have cabins. That's obviously a change. Back when I bought into a cabin, well, let me tell the cabin story. This will put it in perspective. If you go down and find a spot where the state says, "This spot is bare. There's nothing there on this spoil island, but you can build a cabin there if you could buy a permit," and it may cost you thirty thousand dollars just to buy the right to build a cabin there, and some of the structures down there probably have two hundred thousand, two hundred and fifty thousand in the cabin, I mean, air conditioning, you name it. It's all down there, radio dishes. Ours is very spartan, very plain, and we've kept it that way intentionally and what I'm leading up to is, when our cabin was purchased in the late sixties, it was purchased by my two previous partners, Gary Dukes and Mike O'Connor, who saw somebody up at the pier of this cabin and pulled up there in their boat and asked if they could buy that cabin. They just liked where it was and what it looked like, and they said, "Everything's for sale, come on up," so they walked up to the cabin, and it was owned by some commercial fishermen. They lived down there, and they netted, and they trotlined, and they would go back and forth to Flour Bluff. Well, they bought the cabin on the spot for two hundred dollars. Gary said they each had five twenties, and they both became equal partners at that time, and that's just almost unheard of now, that you buy a cabin for—a

permit for a few hundred dollars, much less a permit and a cabin ready to go for two hundred dollars, but that's the history on ours, and we've intentionally left it pretty, pretty basic down there.

[Brown]: What about in terms of the fishery, water, crabs, shrimp, that sort of thing?

[McKee]: I think things have pretty much stayed the same over time. I think things occur a little bit later than they used to because of the climate change, but I think the shrimping is probably, I don't keep up with that as much, but I know Ernie Butler, who should be interviewed, used to routinely go all the way from Flour Bluff to Baffin Bay to shrimp for white shrimp and big white shrimp, big, big, big ones. The tide runners which was something that used to occur very, very routinely, consistently in the Land Cut, I'm not sure that is occurring anymore, and that was where gulf trout, speckled trout out of the gulf, would come through the east cut at Port Mansfield and then work north up the Lower Laguna Madre into the Land Cut, and I don't think those tide runner moves occur like they used to or if they do, we don't hear much about it, but it was a very specialized, consistent fishery back in the seventies and eighties, and I guess even then to, yeah, through the nineties. I think the crabs are okay. I don't see many crab pots down there, but I think the fishery, you know, the fishery is really pretty resilient. I think if we maintained decent water quality down there, things will stay basically the same. Scott Murray and his group with Sutton and all the others have just done such a good job as citizen scientists in monitoring a lot of the water quality down there and certainly Dr. Wetz has assembled all of that data, and I think as long as water quality issues are addressed and remain within the range of, well, how would I say that, remain in a healthy state, things are going to crank along just as they always have. More people on the water, it's tougher to find a spot that hasn't had a boat already run across it that day, but I think the fishery in general is good. The black drum have become a godsend, I think, in terms of allowing people to catch fish relatively easy if they can find them, maybe easier than catching a spotted seatrout or red drum or flounder. The black drum are down there, and they're in very large numbers. One of my previous friends who ran the Upper Laguna Madre ecosystem for years always said that everybody that comes to the Laguna Madre should have to take back at least five black drum because they're so plentiful down there. They're very good table fare, and they're abundant and pretty easy to find, so I think that's been an added plus to the fishery in the Upper Laguna. Black drum, I forget what the numbers are, how they rank but of all seven Texas bay systems, black drum are most prevalent in the upper Laguna Madre. In fact, in Baffin Bay, like ninety percent of all the black drum caught on the Texas Coast come out of Baffin Bay, and Alazan Bay has always been known as a big spawning area for black drum and based on the abundance of black drum and the sport catches and commercial catches, I don't think that number's changed at all. One of the old stories of black drum in Baffin Bay would be to go down into Alazan Bay at night during the spawning season of black drum, and the black drum would have their bodies halfway out of the water, and they would be drumming with that rapid increase and decrease of air pressure in the air bladder. They make this deep, deep drumming sound during the mating season, the males do, and stories, written stories of where you could be in a boat, tied up next to one and the resonance of these drum all around you drumming would, the vibrations would be carried through the hole of the boat, and it would sound almost like a base drum inside the boat when

these fish were all around you half submerged, the rest of their bodies out of the water, and I've never experienced that, but I said on my bucket list, "I want to go down in the night during the spawning season in Alazan Bay and get an earful of that, drumming males as they do their thing in Mother Nature."

[Brown]: Hm. So, um, can you talk about, like, the tackle you've used down there, if it's changed over time, your lures, that sort of thing?

[McKee]: Yeah, tackle. Uh, back in the day when the early fishermen discovered the Upper Laguna Madre and the numbers of fish that could be caught and the sizes of the trout. Redfish and trout became a target in the 1940s by a group of guys that later formed a fishing club that still operates, that still is in existence, of which I happen to be a member, called the Ananias Fishing Club, and these guys would fish down there right after World War II with nothing really other than spoons, gold spoons. Still, for redfish, that's a go to. If you're going to catch redfish, your best bet is to throw gold spoons. Over time, a lot of different baits have been developed, but I've always said and as a collector of fishing tackle, there's nothing new in fishing tackle. It's been somebody, sometime, has already thought of what you're putting on the market right now. Maybe they were too early or whatever, but very sophisticated tackle used now. I mean, just a little bait casting reel, just the reel can cost you three hundred and fifty, four hundred dollars. A graphite rod can cost you three hundred dollars, so depending on how top shelf you want to go, you can get into it for much, much less, but the sophistication of tackle, lures with the scented lures now, the fish bites, the holographics that are applied to the outside, the external surface of lures is very, very eye catching, catches a lot of lights, puts off a lot of color. Those have been game changes. The soft plastic baits, back in the day in the forties, you were probably, right at the transition of using hand carved wooden lures to now after World War II, we finally go plastic so a lot of those lures that were hand carved and made of wood were now available. You could now make a mold of that bait and now pour it in plastic so there were six companies that operated in Corpus that made lures from the 1930s until about 1970, and these Corpus companies sold these lures to all five Gulf states and all the way up the Atlantic Coast to the Carolinas, so I'm here to propose that a lot of the reason we as anglers fish in saltwater with artificials today is because of those six companies that started in Corpus Christi and had salesmen on the road twenty-four, seven during the 1950s and sixties selling Corpus Christi lures to all five Gulf states and all the way up to North Carolina, South Carolina. I mentioned the Ananias Fishing Club. It was started in 1946. It was strictly a Laguna Madre fishing club. In fact, I mean, people did fish other places, but it was all based around fishing Baffin and when I got in, somebody had to die before a spot opened up, and Dick McCracken died at ninety-seven years of age, and I got in (laughs) because of his death. We don't have that requirement any longer. Somebody doesn't have to die to get in, but it's damn hard to get in (Brown laughs), so these old guys forged the way down there, and, you know, the rest is history. Newspaper articles would start showing pictures of fish that were caught in Baffin Bay back in the fifties and sixties, and it was just unbelievable, the size of the fish, the size of the trout, the numbers of redfish that would number hundred, a school come around you, and they would go between your legs, and they would, you know, just nuts, so slowly the word got out that, hey, there's some great fishing to be had, but you got a heck of a long boat ride to get

down there and once you get down there, you've got to avoid all these serpulid rocks that can literally rip the bottom of your boat open or tear the motor off the back of your boat so between the distance and the perils that awaited you in Baffin, it was very slow to occur where people would start going down and at first and really until the 1980s, all the boats were deep draft, meaning they would take maybe two feet of water just for your boat to float in and to get up on plane, you may take three feet of water to get up, and, remember, the average depth of the upper Laguna Madre is only about three feet, so you had to park out, anchor your boat out in deep water and then walk in, wade, walk in to the shallower water where you wanted to fish. Well, now, with the shallow draft boats, the tunnel boats, that boat will float in maybe eight inches of water and will get up in just about the same amount of water, so people can go now because of the equipment in water much, much, much shallower than what we used to have to walk into back in the day, as we had big deep draft, twenty-foot boats and, I mean, you hop off the side, and you may have to wade in a quarter mile just to get in to where you wanted to fish. Now with the shallow draft boats, you just pull right up to where you want to fish and put down your power pole or whatever you've got to get out of the boat and start wading so—

[Brown]: Yeah. Oh, one of the things I also wanted to ask you, um, you talk about some of the freezes in your book—

[McKee]: —Um-hm—

[Brown]: —*Fishes of the Laguna Madre*. Can you tell me more about that and what you, um, observed down there?

[McKee]: Yeah, one of my mentors was Dr. Henry Hildebrand, and he really started the marine biology program at UCC, later CCSU, now, A&M-Corpus. He started that program in 1957, and I had a class with Dr. Hildebrand. He was very famous as far as a marine biologist on the lower Texas Coast. He was the guru, the godfather, and what was the original question (both talking at once)?

[Brown]: The freezes.

[McKee]: The freezes, so Henry had compiled a lot of information during his career on freezes and had published the information, and it went back into the little that was known. Back in the day, stuff may get reported, or it may not. It just happened to be if a journalist happened to be out there and see a freeze or salinity kill or whatever, but he talked about these back into the 1800s and following. So he had a great interest in freezes, and he was the man. There's a picture of him over here on the wall, very interesting guy. Henry, if I may, man of few words, no BS whatsoever. It's just—he would walk in. He had a little spiral notebook in his hand, and he started firing questions at you. He didn't want to know how you're doing. He didn't want to talk about the weather. He wanted to get right down to it, and Henry was famous for just coming to your office and if you had somebody in your office when he got there, he just walked right on in and sit down. He wouldn't knock or anything (Brown laughs), and he'd sit there impatiently, and this happened more than once with me, and it happened with Wes Tunnell, we talked

about it, just sit there and kind of drum his fingers waiting on you to end this meeting, so he could ask you questions (Brown laughs), but Henry was, how would I say, he was the guy that you would see on campus, and you would think he was the custodian who would clean the building. He didn't look professorial, and he would wear the most outlandish clothes. I don't think he had, in the 1990s, I don't think he had any clothes that were newer than about 1960, and he would wear, I mean, it would be a polka dot shirt with stripe pants, and it would be a belt that was way too long, and the belt, it would be hanging down and just disheveled. His hair was always messed up, but he was a walking encyclopedia. He knew a lot about everything, but he was very short tempered and if you really wanted to push his hot button, you could bring up the topic of Parks and Wildlife trying to regulate the commercial fishery because he was a man for the watermen. Anybody that made their living working on the water, he was all about them and protecting them, and he thought Texas Parks and Wildlife was a joke. They were trying to put his people out of business, and Henry was a lobbyist for the commercial fishing industry in the latter part of his career. He would go to Austin and go before the Commission and tell them, you know, these people were needed out there, that all the data that Parks and Wildlife had come up with was bogus and just leave the watermen alone, so he was not popular at all with the scientific community even though he was a scientist, because he sided with the commercial fishermen who were considered to be bad. They were catching way too many fish, which they were but if you really wanted to get Henry upset, just mention Parks and Wildlife, and you could just see the veins in his neck just get big, and he kind of turned red in the face, if you really wanted to get a rise out of him. But he and I went down after the '83 freeze to investigate this, what we knew was one hell of a fish kill, and we spent the day down in the Laguna Madre and remember, this is a guy that had written about and compiled historical information on previous fish kills all the way back into the 1800s. Even though one or two or three years may only have one sentence. It just said, "This was bad," or something, so we went all the way to the Land Cut, we went all through Baffin, and we were just blown away with the extent of the kills especially on very large trout, and we ended up down in the Land Cut which is where the kill was at least most evident, but we think it was the most deadly because of not only the freeze kill but a lot of the fish in the Land Cut were only stunned and laying on the bottom and then when the barges would come through, they would roll in the mud and suffocate and so forth. So, we took some pictures and, in fact, in my Texas Laguna Madre book, I tell a lot about those different freezes, but that one was really an eye opener, and I don't think we've had one at this point that would come close to being what that 1983 freeze was like. But, surprisingly, after freezes, and it's been reported that within five years, pretty much the fishery will return to pre-freeze levels, and Henry gave a lot of examples, back into, the 1951 freeze was a really bad one. The 1955 freeze was a really bad one. The 1947 freeze was a really bad one, the year that I was born but, in all cases, looking at Parks and Wildlife records, catches would be very low or nonexistent at first and by five years out, the fishery had pretty much returned to pre-freeze levels, and we see that today, I think. When you look at when we have a kill, by five years if not maybe even a little earlier, the resiliency of those fish and their ability to spawn, they're back to pre-freeze levels by about five years out.

[Brown]: How would you describe, um, those fish kills and when you went down there on that trip?

[McKee]: Oh, my goodness, on both the west shore and the east shore of Baffin Bay would be just lines of huge trout. I was expecting to find a forty-inch trout, which is kind of the mythical, do we have them, maybe, maybe not, but with the numbers of dead trout there, I thought if there is a world record trout to be found, it's going to be right here today, and the fish were stacked and, in some cases, two-feet high for as far as you could see, and I would imagine the extent of that kill went for twenty-four miles, the entire length of the Land Cut were like that on both shores, huge trout, up to eleven, twelve pounds, stacked up, layer after layer after layer so looking for that elusive forty-inch trout was not easy because you had to kick over four, five fish just to see what was underneath those, but I never found any trout over thirty-three inches, but again, you know, there was just so many of them, you could only walk so far and daylight was running out. We were burning daylight real fast, and we had, from there, we had probably forty-five, fifty miles to go back, to get back to Flour Bluff, that we just ended it short, but both of us said when we finished that trip in observing the extent of that kill in the Land Cut, both of us said almost simultaneously, "I would not have believed there were this many trout in the entire Laguna Madre," than what we were seeing just in the Land Cut. It was an eyeopener, and that was about ten days after the freeze, and it, depending on how fast the water warms up, a lot of those fish, it's just too cold for bacterial action, so they won't start gassing up and floating sometimes for ten days after a freeze, you'll still see fish rising to the top that were on the bottom because now, a little bit warmer temperatures allowed the bacterial action to occur. They'll gas up and start floating, so one of the problems, and I think they've addressed that or confirmed it, was that this last freeze we had in '21, I think Parks and Wildlife started their counts too early, meaning that water temperature was still so cold all the fish were not floating that were dead on the bottom, and I think they ended their survey a little too early too, so in any case, they started a little early and ended a little early, but we know it was a bad freeze, but I had predicted this '21 freeze to be worse than it was, but it doesn't appear that it was.

[Brown]: Hm. One of the things else I wanted to ask you about, was you talked about the Redfish Wars and CCA. I mean, what were your experiences with that and why did you get involved in the conservation?

[McKee]: Well, I was a member of CCA. In fact, I was with Parks and Wildlife when I became a member of CCA, and that was kind of ironic because at the time CCA was just, you know, CCA, what are they? You know, never heard of them, and I was working with Parks and Wildlife, and CCA and Parks and Wildlife were out on two ends of the spectrum. Parks and Wildlife was like, "Who are these people, and they're offering a dollar a tag for return tags, and that's kind of our end of things. Who are these CCA guys?" So, I had to go to my regional director and tell him, "Yeah, I'm employed here by Parks and Wildlife, but I'm a member of CCA," and they were like, "Oh, you're kind of part of the enemy there." Well, they weren't the enemy at all. They were just a new group that had a lot of thinking outside the box and all things ended up being two very compatible groups. In fact, I say CCA wouldn't have nearly its effectiveness without Parks and Wildlife, and I think Parks and Wildlife would say the same thing, that we needed CCA to come in and start educating people, getting them prepped to take advantage of all the good fishing that Texas has available, and CCA came in and said, "Well, to make everybody's," this

was in the early eighties, “to make everybody’s fishing experience more productive, we need fish hatcheries,” so CCA came in and funded the first marine fish hatchery out here at Flour Bluff, so it’s been a long but very productive relationship between the fish managers, which is CCA and the conservation group, I mean, Parks and Wildlife to fish managers to CCA, the conservation group, and the two just fit like a glove on a hand. And FlatsWorthy is going to be of the same degree of effectiveness, doing things that Parks and Wildlife does not do, that needs to be done. They welcome groups that can come in and take some of the pressure off of the fishery and make people more prone to catch and release and all of these kinds of things.

[Brown]: Hm, when—back in the seventies when the Redfish Wars were going on, I mean, were you—did you have any fallout from that? You said it got a little ugly at times.

[McKee]: Yeah, yeah, not really because the real problems arose when some of the people, the recreational people, would get very vocal and get right in the face of some of these commercial fishermen. They were going to suffer some retaliation. They did not put up with this stuff, and they were very basic. I mean, they would sink your boat, or they would burn your houseboat down or burn your cabin down if you made any statements or ever confronted them, so I knew that to be the case, and I kept my mouth shut. I didn’t want my cabin burned down, but we worked behind the scenes and that was in getting laws enacted without being a big loudmouth, but the only times we ever had any trouble down in Baffin, once, we had one weekend, we had our barbecue pit which weighed probably three hundred pounds, stolen at the cabin. That same weekend there were other barbecue pits on Twin Palms Island stolen, and we thought, twenty-five miles down there to steal barbecue pits, and you could, I mean, the work involved and how little they could get for them, it was like, God, these guys, they deserve every penny they get for hauling these very heavy barbecue pits back to land and then selling them for next to nothing. We were broken into one time, and we don’t know who it was, but they took a chainsaw and cut through the side of the cabin, just cut a big hole inside the cabin, and lived in there for at least a week, maybe two weeks, didn’t cause any damage, they ate the little bit of canned food that we had down there. We had whiskey and vodka, things like that, and they consumed all that, but they didn’t tear things up, but that, I don’t think, it could have been out of necessity, but I doubt it because who carries a chainsaw with them (both laugh), so I think they just, up to no good, yeah.

[Brown]: Do you have any fish stories about Baffin?

[McKee]: Oh, yeah, I do. I once won a tournament down there, and I knew I had it won. It was an invitational. It was the one I told you about that, where the first prize might be an old pair of thirty-year-old waders that had holes in them. We went to start the boat and get back to the weigh-in, and the boat wouldn’t start, and we got back thirty minutes late. Of course, I couldn’t weigh my fish in, but I had won the tournament many times over with my poundage of fish. In fact, that day, I’ll tell this story in complete. You can cut it if you want. There was a spot down there. I didn’t name it, but I caught so many redfish down there that they called it McKee’s Cove and any time you go in there, you’re going to catch fish and when I say anytime, eighty percent of the time, eighty percent whole, and that day, got in there, and nothing was going on.

It's down the, I'll just say between Penascal Point and Rocky Slough, I'll leave it at that. So, nothing was going on, so I had to urgently relieve myself and as I was doing that, crouched down, I saw this big school of redfish come by in front of me and while still (Brown laughs), trousers down, I cast and hooked a redfish. I caught that one. I made thirteen casts from that position and caught twelve, and I think we could only take five into the tournament or something. That was back before any, I forgot what the limits would have been back then, if any. That was in the late seventies probably. Anyway, that was a pretty memorable story, and I won it, but I didn't win it, but I caught them all while crouched (Brown laughs). And another one was, there were two tournaments down there, the Louis Peetz Baffin Bay Memorial, and that was always held on Memorial Day, and there would be twenty boats, maybe, invitational only, and it was truly brain surgeons to Banditos, I mean, an array of people you would not meet elsewhere. The other one was the liquor and poker tournament that ran about ten years down there, and that was invitational only and just characters, you know, speaking of another character I want to tell you about, back in the eighties, we had a real economic crunch in this country, I mean, things just went to hell in a handbasket, and a lot of the guys that fished down there were in the oil business and so forth and all that they would get in the mailbox was bad news, and they would start staying down there and just coming to land, just kind of like hiding from it all, from reality, and there was this one character, I won't mention any names. I don't think he's any longer living, but he had inherited a very well, very old, and prosperous construction company in the area, and he just couldn't stay away from Baffin. Baffin has got that attraction to where you got to get down there, and it's all about fishing, it's all about hopping from cabin to cabin and happy hours and fishing all day long and all kinds of stuff. He couldn't get enough of that, and he slowly, slowly, slowly let the business just deteriorate. He wasn't taking care of it like he should. He was staying at Baffin all the time. All of a sudden, he was not down there, and we really wanted to know where this individual had gone and one day, I get a phone call from somebody and said, "I found him. He is selling Mexican dresses off the side of the highway, down near McAllen." He'd gone from having this huge construction company, had thrown it away. He was so down and out that he was selling Mexican dresses on the side of the highway, and it's one of those sad cases of how if you let Baffin get away from you, it would capture you and totally ruin your life. It was so much fun being down there. We had a party one night down there, a part of a tournament. Again, no names are going to be mentioned (Brown laughs), but at the Church, Church Number Two, first night, it was wild and crazy at the Church, people were all about, the tournament was on, everybody's drinking, having a good time, and one of the, well, I'll tell who it was. Paul Wimberly, I mentioned his name before, very, very dear friend and just a very staple part of my memories of Baffin Bay. He left, and nobody could figure where he'd gone. His boat was gone. There were probably twenty boats tied up to this houseboat, music's cranking, beer's going, you know, everything, and he's gone. Well, the party went on, probably ran over to another cabin to get some ice, whatever, kind of forgot about him. Almost, it must have been around ten o'clock when all of a sudden somebody said, "What's that sound?" and it was music playing off out in the background. The cabin, the houseboat was lit up, and lights would be covering the area around it, but you couldn't see outside. Well, as the music got a little bit louder and started coming into view, it was Paul Wimberly's boat, and he had run all the way into King's Inn and picked up a mariachi band at night with no spotlight and brought them down to the party (Brown laughs). Well, it

took him an hour and a half in the dark to get there, coming back it was dark and when they pulled up, only two of them were playing. One had a guitar. The other had a trumpet, and the others were in the floor of the boat going, "Where in the hell is he taking us?" and they finally saw there was a party. They were in their black uniforms with the hats and everything, and they come in, and they play for about an hour at the houseboat and then Paul, by this time, one o'clock, two o'clock in the morning, they load up in the boat and off they go in the dark back from Baffin all the way back into, you know, the King's Inn—

[Brown]: —Hm—

[McKee]: —area over there where the boat ramp is, so that was real memorable, having the mariachi band show up down there (Brown laughs), and I don't know. I've had a really, really long and great relationship with Baffin Bay, the entire Upper Laguna Madre, and a lot of that goes back to I worked professionally on the Laguna Madre and Baffin because of being with Parks and Wildlife and being the team leader that was in charge of that, all the way through to being a, really a lifelong angler down there and a cabin owner for over forty years. It's just a very special place, but it was a well-kept secret for a long time and then by the 1990s, it had been discovered and here we are today with lots and lots of people with their destination being, "Let's go to Baffin. That's where the big trout are."

[Brown]: One final question, um, you talked a little bit about this with the water quality, but what do you think success looks like in terms of current efforts to restore Baffin?

[McKee]: Well, I think that's going to be a long battle, but I think now that Mike [Wetz] and the group have determined where the problems are coming from, the effluent coming down from some of the creeks, and certainly the septic systems along the bay. I think now that those have been identified, there can be a lot done, but I think it's still going to take time to see those changes. I think back in the day, none of the reefs were marked. They should have been marked, but the old way of thinking back when that, a lot of people thought, "This is my bay, and I don't want anybody coming down here and any newcomers. I don't want to show them where the reefs are. Let them tear the bottom of their boat up, off, out or let them damage their lower unit," or something like that, so I think, honestly, to save the reefs, I think we really need to mark those, so people will know where not to run because they're being degraded at such a fast extent. I think probably a lot of the new regulations on new construction along Baffin are going to have to address a lot of the issues that come from leaky septic systems that are all leaching down into the bay and causing water quality problems, but we've got to start on it and Baffin Bay was very little studied ever. There were a couple of big studies back in the sixties, but they just kind of told what's down there and till Scott Murray and Mike Wetz and Sutton, that group got involved down there doing some of the necessary work, we really didn't know where the problems were coming from. We can't do anything about brown tides. Fortunately, red tides tend to stay in the Gulf but numbers of boaters, we can't do anything about that, but we can certainly educate the boaters, let them know where the reefs are, make sure when they get to the boat ramp that the motor's going to start before you leave, put it in the water, make sure the drain plug is in there, just basic stuff, and don't run too close to the

shoreline. If you see waders, stay way out away from them, try to put distance, if you're going to stop and fish, distance between you and that boat, don't pull up right next to them, and just basic things that a lot of fishermen don't know when they are new to the boating. It'd be the same thing with me if I went to Alaska to do some kind of salmon fishing. I don't know a darn thing about it, but I'd sure want to know. I want somebody to tell me what I need to know, and there are groups out there now that are capable of doing that, but I think that's where, I think, success is going to come in. The biggest amount of success is education, I think, on how fragile the resource is, realizing that it's pretty resilient if we just don't screw it up too bad, and have everybody be cognizant of all the other people on the water, even though they may have interests a lot different from yours. We may have, God forbid, wave runners down there. We do see a few day sailors, the sailboarders down there, but what's crazy in the boating world now is the price of boats. I saw one, just an eighteen footer, basic, absolute basic rig, is running about sixty thousand dollars and, you know, when I bought my first a house, and it was a nice house, great hardwood floors, fireplace, all that, twenty-six thousand dollars (Brown laughs), so it's very, very expensive to get in, but there seem to be enough people out there that can swing a loan, and lo and behold, there are lots of very expensive boats running around out there, and some of the boats now, will run well over a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for a fishing boat, and one of, at least, is probably more that will run ninety miles an hour. One of the real problems, I guess I call it a problem, it's a reality, that's primarily the fishing tournaments and almost any given weekend at Port Aransas or out at Marker 37, there's going to be at least one during the warm months, at least one if not more in Port Aransas. You may have three or four tournaments going on in the same weekend and if we're talking about the inshore, the bay tournaments, it's very competitive. Getting there first is real key if you're going to get down to Baffin Bay, and you want the fastest boat possible, so you can get down there before anybody else has run through the area and cast to new water rather than water that's already had a boat run through it and of course, those are very expensive, but there are lots of people that are in the position to have those kind of moneys with that kind of expendable income available to them, and it's very dangerous. So, yeah, I think one area that we see some problems in, and it's not been addressed or have tried to address it but is at Bird Island Basin, you've got so many of your sailboarders there, and you've got a boat ramp there, and the encounters between boaters and sailboarders, I once had a friend that hit a sailboarder that he didn't see that had capsized his sailboard, and he saw him right at the last minute and turned, but he was already like right here and fortunately it didn't hurt the guy, but, again, it's these encounters between the different users of the water that are in conflict with one another, and that's a real issue at Bird Island Basin, is the fast boats and oftentimes those boats have got ZZ Top cranking on their stereo and these booming speakers, and they're going along sucking down a six pack, and they're not seeing all these things that could potentially be a problem, another boat coming right at them or a sailboarder and all you can see is the head of the guy because he just turned his sailboard over, and it's very dangerous out there, and of course, we do now have laws about drinking and being in a boat. It used to be, you know, the name of the game was, "Let's get in the boat and just get blown out of our minds on whatever," and, fortunately, finally, we have some regulation and enforcement that, you better not be caught drunk, driving a boat, you can suffer the same consequences as you would in a car.

[Brown]: Um-hm.

[McKee]: A lot of boater education is needed, and I know I'm rambling here (Brown laughs), but I cover a lot of topics on my favorite topic which is Baffin.

[Brown]: Well, I'm out of questions. What did we miss?

[McKee]: Well, let me see if I've got anything else here. Jenni Pollack, did you interview her?

[Brown]: Um, I did. We haven't talked about the worm—

[McKee]: —Yeah—

[Brown]: —the reefs yet.

[McKee]: Oh, she's new to Baffin, but I know she's going to have a student that's going to be focusing on the serpulid reefs, and I have long been very, very interested in the serpulid reefs. I once had, let me see, there are two names to this one spot, and I'm not going to give you the local colloquialism of this, what it has been called, but it's now called East Kleberg Point, and I once had a friend where two of us were wade fishing there, and this is up inside Baffin, past the Tide Gauge Bar, and we were fishing, and this friend, I will call him Charles, called him Charles because that's what his name was (Brown laughs), he went one way, and I went to another. He got over into the serpulid reefs, rock reefs there at East Kleberg Point, and I didn't see any of this. I didn't know it till we got back to the boat because we're busy casting and catching fish, I guess, so he got into the rocks, and you can't see them, but you feel, and it's kind of like being in the fog. You kind of lose touch of where you are and where you came from and direction and all that. We got in kind of several steps into these rocks, and he said, "It felt like they almost grew up behind me because I turned around, I thought I was going, just backing out of there the same way that I'd gone in," but he must have got turned around or something. He was surrounded by these rocks, and they're very treacherous. Have you seen what one looks like?

[Brown]: No.

[McKee]: I'll bring you one. Well, dag gummit, I guess I've moved my rocks. Well, they're about this big around, and, anyway, he got in there, and it's like walking on bowling balls. You've got to go down between some and some you're going to be up on, and you can't see, and you're trying to get out of it, and he stepped off in a hole in the rocks, just a gap between some of the rocks and fell over backwards, he went down in about mid-thigh and fell over backwards. He is laying there with just inches of water over his face, and he can't get up, and he thought he was going to drown there with his leg trapped laying back and water over his face, and he couldn't break over and get back into a sitting position, so he had, fortunately, kept him from drowning, he was able to get his fishing rod behind him and push and push to where he could finally sit up. He said, "I almost drowned in about two inches of water," over his face and kind of like the story about the anchor popping out of the boat, this story of almost drowning in these rock

reefs just shows some of the dangers that are involved when you get out on the water, not to mention a boat that doesn't see you, that's going seventy miles an hour because they're drunk. It can be very dangerous, so that's one other story that I thought of. Oh, one thing I will mention is that, doesn't have anything to do with Baffin, but it has everything to do with Baffin, and that's that my entire fishing tackle collection is going to a museum in Port Aransas that I'm very happy about, and I started collecting when I was twelve, I'm seventy-five now, I've amassed a ton of stuff over time, and I'm going to be able to put all of this on permanent display over at the preserve at the Farley Boat Works in Port Aransas, and I saw Jen's eyes light up before when I say preserve as in preserve history over there, and they're giving me a whole lot of space, I think somewhere in the vicinity of four thousand square feet to fill up with fishing tackle and when they told me, it was kind of like, "Can you do this?" I said, "No problem, I can cover that up," and I can still keep my shop kind of like it is where I'm not going to lose the ambience of fishing tackle everywhere you look, so looking really forward to doing the curation of that exhibit over there, and I say it has everything to do with Baffin because so much of the fishing tackle that I've got probably has, at one time or another, been down at Baffin Bay, and a lot of the lures that I've got, which I have about eighty cases of lures, all of Corpus Christi produced, six companies. All of these plugs were very popular in the Laguna Madre over time and especially when the pioneers that formed the Ananias Fishing Club started fishing down there, so I'm just really, really happy about that, and my wife is very happy (Brown laughs) that all this stuff is going to finally go because I've been accused of invading more and more of her territory all the time with my expanding tackle collection.

[Brown]: Well, that seems like a good place to stop.

[McKee]: Yeah.

[Brown]: All right, thank you.

[McKee]: Yeah.

(end of recording)