

Phil Blackmar

Interviewed by Jen Brown

July 27, 2022

Corpus Christi, Texas

Transcribed by Alyssa Lucas

**[Jen Brown]:** Okay, we are recording. It is July 27, 2022. This is Jen Brown, and I'm here with Phil Blackmar for the Baffin Bay Oral History Project. Um, so to begin, do I have your permission to record?

**[Phil Blackmar]:** You do, yes.

**[Brown]:** Okay, thanks.

**[Blackmar]:** Yeah.

**[Brown]:** So, since this is an oral history, can you tell me more about your background and early life?

**[Blackmar]:** (laughs) Well, I've lived—my dad was in the Navy, so we traveled around quite a bit. I've been in Corpus since 1973. I've been an avid fisherman since that time or before, started fishing the Baffin Bay area in about 1980, '81, something like that. Um, I have done several different things including, played on the PGA Tour (Professional Golfers' Association) and PGA Tour Champions. I've been an assistant women's golf coach at the university at TAMU-CC [Texas A&M-Corpus Christi]. My wife was the head coach. I'm a televised golf announcer for different, different networks, done some golf instruction, but fishing's always been my passion.

**[Brown]:** And how did you get into fishing?

**[Blackmar]:** My dad was an avid fisherman, and so as kids in southern California, we used to do a lot of bass fishing out there and then when we moved back here to Texas, we did a lot of saltwater fishing.

**[Brown]:** Can you tell me what the fishing was like back then?

**[Blackmar]:** In Baffin specifically or just kind of—

**[Brown]:** —or just everywhere, yeah.

**[Blackmar]:** (coughs) Well, fish were more plentiful, you know, if you go back into the seventies and early eighties, fishing—they were more plentiful. You could go pretty much anywhere and find some fish. There were not as many people on the water. Down south in Baffin, the water

clarity and quality was a little bit better, I think, but it still got crowded a little bit on weekends, but it was a little easier back then to find fish. That's the biggest thing.

**[Brown]:** And what sort of tackle did you use?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, starting back when I was in high school, we threw live shrimp quite a bit and also fished at the naval air station [NAS-CC] with silver spoon and some different lures and then I gradually progressed into just throwing lures only and by the time I got out of college, I was strictly, strictly a plugger, threw plugs and then in the mid-nineties, I got into fly fishing and have kind of done a combination of both since that time although right now I'm in a fly fishing phase where that's all I'm doing, but over the years, I've done quite a bit of both.

**[Brown]:** Can you talk about that progression of why you were interested in lure fishing and then fly fishing?

**[Blackmar]:** Um, well, it got to be a pain getting bait for number one, but it just seemed—the reason that I fished was because I was competitive. I was a professional golfer. Fishing to me was an extension of that competitiveness, and I didn't fish—I wasn't the kind of fisherman that would just go out and just sit around and sit, you know, troll or just sit. I didn't like bait fishing because it wasn't as proactive. I enjoyed the aspects of trying to learn where to fish, what time of year on what tides, what time of day, what to throw, the whole puzzle that is lure fishing, and trying to get to know the water and, to me, that was a counter approach to competitively, so when we went fishing, we started really early, and we fished till midafternoon nonstop. We didn't take a break. It was all just real hard-core fishing, and I just—that kind of fit my approach to other things and also fit my golf career.

**[Brown]:** And how did you get into golfing?

**[Blackmar]:** My dad was a very good player. He was—he won the All-Navy, and the Interservice one year. He was a really good player, won the Texas Left Hander six times, so he introduced me to golf when I was young, six or seven years old, played baseball a lot growing up also and then I gravitated just to golf because being an individual sport. I liked baseball, you could really on your team, or your team was reliant on you. In golf, it was only you, and I liked that, where it was just you, so not only did you share the glory if you did well, but it was also the burden of defeat was all yours if you didn't play well, and I enjoyed that responsibility in trying to fulfill those shoes, if you will, of playing an individual sport.

**[Brown]:** So, how did you go from just growing up and golfing and playing all these sports to getting into the PGA?

**[Blackmar]:** (laughs) Well, that's a long story. That was really luck. I played at a junior college for a year. I had been recruited to go to the University of Houston back when they were really, really good and then I switched the tables. I always wanted a good education, so I felt like I could get a better education at the University of Texas, and so I went there. I played golf there

for three years and was fairly successful. It was all Southwest Conference there, but I never had any aspirations to continue on (coughs), and I started working as an internal auditor at a bank the day after my last final and did that for a year and while I was there, my uncle was in the oil business, was doing particularly well at that time. Oil was going up at that time, not down, and he talked me into playing small tournaments, mini tournaments they're called in golf, and so I quit my job and started playing golf and went to the bank and borrowed some money to play on, and it just kind of progressed, and it took me a while to get out on tour, and so I had jobs. I drove a Coke truck one winter. I fixed golf clubs one winter. I did different things in the winter to make some money, and I didn't make it through to the tours so then I went to work at Padre Island Country Club as an assistant pro, and I used to—I had kind of a cool job where Tuesdays, Thursdays, I had to be in early but Wednesdays, Fridays, I didn't have to be in till ten o'clock, and so I used to go fish in the mornings and then show up for work at ten o'clock. I just changed clothes, take a shower, fished a lot out at the Mustang Island Park out there at the beach, did a lot of fishing out there, caught a lot of trout out there and then would come in and go to work out there and then, fortunately, while I was working, I tried to get through what they called the Q School. You had to get a qualified tournament they had, and I made it through Q School that year and have been on tour ever since.

**[Brown]:** And as you're golfing, you were also fishing the entire time?

**[Blackmar]:** Uh, yes (coughs). I was fishing all the time here. I was fishing on the road. I took a fishing pole with me. I'm known as being one of the better fishermen on tour. There's a lot of really good fishermen on tour. Fishing is a very popular—it's a popular sport for golfers. I think it's a great way to get away because when you're playing on tour, you're always on display in front of people and when you're fishing, you can get out and get away, yet you can still take a competitive approach, as I mentioned earlier, to the sport, so I enjoyed that and on tour there's a lot of great fishing, and I even fished at Augusta where they have the Masters. I fished there on the par-3 course, caught some bass there. That's a picture, it's around here somewhere. Um, where'd it go? Up the top up there, that's my dad behind me. He caddied for me the first Masters I played in, fishing on the par-3 course up there (Brown laughs).

**[Brown]:** Wow.

**[Blackmar]:** And they had at Doral, which is in South Florida and Miami. They used to have a fishing contest that ran from Tuesday through Saturday. Whoever caught the large bass, got their room paid for, for the year after that week, and I won that five times. I won it on a fly actually at one time.

**[Brown]:** Hm.

**[Blackmar]:** On a white deceiver too. So, yeah, I've always been very passionate about fishing. I've fished in the Keys. I've done some river fishing for trout, not a lot, a little bit, most of it, bass and saltwater.

**[Brown]:** Um, so where are your favorite places to golf and to fish?

**[Blackmar]:** Huh, golf is hands down, would be Scotland or Ireland. I love it over there. The people are great, and the game itself is different over there. You don't really have that style of golf course and playability here in the United States. We just don't have the soil and the conditions to have that type of grass and to have all sand like that, so it's very unique. I enjoy links golf, and fishing, you know, I enjoy Corpus Christi quite a bit. It's nice here because we don't have any tides to speak of, we have very small tides. If you go over to the East Coast, you get a three to five foot tide, and it can be dangerous, it can be hard to get in real shallow because I like being able to see what I'm throwing at for the most part and when the water moves that much, you either run out of water, or you get too much water, you know, very quickly as the tides change and move, but if I—any place else, I've enjoyed the Keys. It's pretty fun to fish there, the Bahamas, I've fished there a little bit. It's fun, bonefish, permit. I've never caught a tarpon sight fishing. I've caught a couple small ones in lakes. I caught one down in Puerto Rico. I've caught a few down there, but, yeah, probably that would be my next bet. I enjoyed fishing in the Gulf with a fly rod too. I catch cobia in the fall on the fly rod.

**[Brown]:** Oh, nice.

**[Blackmar]:** Yeah.

**[Brown]:** Um, so you talked about your progression to artificial lures. How did you go from there to fly fishing?

**[Blackmar]:** (coughs) Well, Loomis made golf shafts for a while. They got into making golf shafts back in the early nineties and if you used their golf shaft, they would give you credit towards any of the fishing equipment that they made or to go on trips with them to different places, and I tried their shaft. I really liked their shaft. I ended up winning the Houston opening using one of their shafts, and so I had a buddy that got into fly fishing, that we had a fall trip. I had a few guys from tour, would come down, and we had a cabin that we bought—at that time, we were borrowing a cabin, and we'd go fish for a week down in the Lagoon [Laguna Madre], and he brought a fly rod, and I made fun of him and laughed at him, and, you know, he wasn't a very good caster either, which made it easier to make fun of him (Brown laughs) but after that, I thought, you know, I had some credit. I thought, "Well, I mean, just get a rod and try it," so I got me a fly rod, and I decided that if I was going to do it, I needed to learn to cast first because, I guess, I saw a lot of people trying to fly fish, but they weren't very good casters, and that looked kind of miserable, so I devoted myself to trying to learn how to cast decently and got to where I could, and, all of a sudden, it just became something I really enjoyed, the challenge I really enjoyed and then lately I've gotten into just really refining my casting skills. A fellow, Larry Allen, who competes, he's on the board of the American Casting Association, and he competes internationally fly casting and casting both. He's getting ready, getting right now, training for the world championships in Norway, which is in September. Um, he has this place down in Port Mansfield, down there where he spends half the year. He's been kind enough to help me to try to refine my skills to get even better, so I like to tell people in golf, if you're a

scratch player, that you're a really, really good player. If you play professionally, you're what's called, is a plus handy cap. If you're an amateur, you're a negative handy cap, and I like to say I'm a negative one or two trying to be a plus one or two, and he's helping me quite a bit. He's changed my stroke quite a bit.

**[Brown]:** Hm. How would you compare the skills you need for golfing compared to fly fishing?

**[Blackmar]:** It's very similar. It requires a lot of patience. There's a lot of timing involved in both. The golf swing is a little more dynamic than throwing a fly rod. There's more things moving, more rotation. If you get into maxing out for distance, fly rods, some of the competitive distance stuff, it becomes more dynamic, but the main things are in golf, even though today's science seems to make it more complicated, there's really only a few fundamentals, and the rest of it is style and then it comes down to timing and sequence, getting the right sequence, and fly fishing's the same way. There's only a few mechanics to it that you really need to know, a few fundamentals. The rest of it is style. There's different ways to throw it, but it comes down into sequence and timing and rhythm and so in that way, it's very, very similar.

**[Brown]:** Hm, that's interesting. Um so, you're a family man too, so you're also, I don't know how old your kids are (Blackmar coughs), but, um, can you talk about having a family and teaching your kids to fish and that sort of thing?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, all my kids grew up fishing. I have two older daughters and then two sons and everybody fished, and the girls, my oldest daughter's a swimmer, and my youngest daughter's a volleyball player, and while they'll still fish a little bit, they didn't really take to it like they boys did, and the boys did quite a bit. My oldest son just loved it until he got to be fourteen and then he kind of gravitated more towards surfing, skateboarding, he felt fishing was too easy because we always caught fish (Brown laughs), so it's come back to haunt him a little bit now that he's a father. Um, and then my youngest son was very competitive, was a really good baseball player, was the 5A player of the year at Carrol back in 2010. They won state. He went on and was drafted. He played minor league baseball for six years, was a pitcher. He has since quit, got his degree at A&M-CC and then he has recently just graduated the fire department program, so he's a fireman, paramedic fireman, and he still loves to fish, and he likes to fish competitively. He likes to fish tournaments, and that kind of stuff, so he's very, very competitive fisherman and really, really good. They both are, and they both throw a fly rod good, but they mostly throw either a plugging rod or a spinning rod.

**[Brown]:** Do you have a family competition going for biggest fish and—

**[Blackmar]:** (coughs) No, but we normally will have a five or ten dollar bet (Brown laughs) on who, most fish or biggest fish when we fish, and the three of us will—all we do is sight fish for the most part, and so we'll rotate. I have a little small platform on the front of my boat. Two of us will fish off the platform, and one of them will stand on the center console and when somebody catches a fish, if they're on the platform, they got to rotate back to the center

console and as I've gotten a little bit older, I could always see fish pretty good but now my youngest son sees fish way better than I do, and my older son sees them a little bit better than I do, so it puts me at a disadvantage (both laugh). It's a proud disadvantage, if you will.

**[Brown]:** Yeah. Um, so let's shift to Baffin Bay a little bit. Why do you think, or what makes Baffin Bay special?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, for the longest time it was the quality of the fishery, the size of fish and the number of large trout. The size of trout and the number of large trout that came out of Baffin Bay were pretty much legendary on the Texas coast, and the state record for the past probably forty years have come somewhere from the Laguna Madre, and Mike Blackwood who I know, still fishing at eighty-one years old, still fishing, saw him a couple weeks ago, he had the state record for about twenty years and a little over twenty years, and it was broken by—and he caught that fish in Baffin and then it was broken by a fish caught in Baffin and then ultimately it was broken by a guy who caught a fish down in Port Mansfield, which is still in the Lagoon, so that's the biggest part. The next part is that the shallowness of the water and the water's—the structure in Baffin Bay, you have the rocks with the worm castings, but they're rocks. They're hard as can be, so you had structure you could center on particularly in the spring with the rocks. A lot of depth changes in shallower water that allowed you to fish from shallow. Most of the other bays as you head north in Texas, you have maybe some coastal features but then it just goes out into just a mundane kind of nothing in the bay or maybe some oysters reefs, you know, that sort of thing, and Baffin's very, very different in that regard and also because it was so remote for a long time. It took a while for all the people to really get down there before technology and boat motors and that sort of thing. You get where people wanted to go that far to go fishing at that expense, and so the remoteness allowed you to do some sight fishing for trout that you really couldn't find anywhere else on the Texas coast, and I think some of those features, that uniqueness, and the chance to catch a fish for a lifetime really drew a lot of people to the area and made it really famous.

**[Brown]:** What does the place mean to you?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, I've got some great memories, yeah, I was—for a while there, I was really hooked on trying to catch a big trout and that was my primary focus in my fishing, and I was fortunate enough to do—I got pretty good, and I had a job that when I got home, I could fish during the week. I didn't have to wait for weekends, which was a nice plus, and we were pretty serious about it. We would go down in the middle of the night a lot of times. We'd launch a boat at twelve, one, two o'clock in the morning. This is before GPS (coughs), so we would run off compass settings, and you had the Intracoastal. You could run over the Q Beams down the Intracoastal [Waterway]. One you got to Baffin, there was a series of markers that went into Baffin but once you got past the first three, you couldn't see the next one with the Q Beams, so we'd just run off the compass to get to where you could see the next one and get to where you could see the next one and then we would run to a particular—we had one area we liked to fish more than the others, and we would run to a particular marker, number fourteen, and then we'd run on a 330 compass setting until we could see the shoreline with the Q Beam, and we

hit the shoreline, turned left, go down the shoreline until we ran past a duck blind, and we saw the old broken down pier, and that's where we would stop and idle out a little bit, get out there, and wade on a 140 compass setting, so that put you right where you wanted to be on this point, the East Kleberg Point that had these rocks and then there was one particular area that I liked to fish more than any other, and we would take broken backs and mark them black with a marker so when you had a little bit of moon, you would have a really good silhouette, and we caught a lot of really big trout in the middle of the night down there during that—and at eight o'clock, all the boats would start showing up, and we would leave and go around the corner right there into Alazan Bay, which comes right off of Baffin Bay, and we'd go back in there, which back then didn't get a whole lot of pressure. We had some great trips back there too. So, my dad and I did a lot of that together and then as my boys got a little older, we did a little bit, so it's been just a tremendous source of memories and experience for me and my family.

**[Brown]:** Can you tell me some of these fish stories or what your most memorable experience has been down in Baffin?

**[Blackmar]:** (laughs) I've got—wouldn't have enough time to cover them all. Um, one pretty funny one, I caught two trout. We caught a box of trout in December of 1988. Um, you know, we had a freeze in '83 and then it took three years for the quality of the bigger fish to really show up, for the fish to get that big again till about '85 or—it took till about '86 when we started catching fish twenty-eight inches or over. In '88, I had a particularly good year. I caught six trout over thirty-two inches, thirty-one and a half, thirty-two inches, and two of them—we caught some fish in December, they were feeding them mullets, so they were particularly heavy, and we filled up a cooler with trout. They were twenty-seven inches and over. I caught two of them and one weighed ten seven, one weighed ten fifteen and had those mounted, and we got back and started cleaning those, and I'm like, "Why did we keep all this fish? What are we thinking?" And so, that for me was the turning point where we started letting fish go. We let the big fish go. We would keep some small fish to eat and that was it, and I had a boat rule. You couldn't keep a trout over twenty-five inches unless you gut-hooked it, and it was going to die or if it was a trophy, and you wanted to mount it, fine. And so, a friend of mine, Ed Fiori, came down and another friend from San Antonio, and we went down in the dark to fish in Baffin at East Kleberg Point, and a big thunderstorm came up between there and Bird Island, so no one could get down there, so we were down by ourselves and by eight o'clock, we hadn't caught any fish, and I just told them, "Look, we got to wait another half hour. Ed, you go stand on that rock over there. John, go over there. If they don't show up in the next half hour then we'll go back into Alazan, do something different," and then Ed's sitting down on that rock, and you hear him say, "They're here," and he's standing on that rock. He could see these big trout swimming in out of the bay up on that point, and we caught—I estimated we caught forty to forty-five trout and over twenty-five inches that day, that morning, and out of all the fish we kept, we only kept five fish total, and Debby, Ed's wife, they were staying out on the island at a hotel—not a hotel, at a condo, and we went out that night to meet them for dinner, and Debby was hot. She was mad. She loved to eat fish, and she was like, "We all come down here to catch fish. Ed catches fish, you won't let him keep it. We don't have any fish to take back. He kept five

fish total between three of you. What are we going to do?” And she was hot. She chewed me out pretty good, and I said, “Debby, this is my boat. It’s my rules. Ed has a boat, and if he wants to go down there and catch fish, he’s more than welcome to,” so that was pretty—her reaction and stuff to that day was, oh, I’ll always remember that, but that was a great day of fishing for sure, but we had a lot of experiences. I know my dad and I were running one night before GPS. We left East Kleberg Point, and we weren’t finding any, you know, it’s about four in the morning, and I said, “Well, let’s go fish, we’ll fish Cathead,” which is about five miles back the other way, so I’m leaving an area full of rocks, going to another area, shallow, full of rocks, and it’s dark, and there’s no markers. There’s nothing. It’s just darkness, and I think I know the compass setting to get in the general area, but I don’t know how far it is, and my dad’s like, “Well, how are you going to get there?” I said, “I think I can feel it,” so here we go. We’re running across the middle of Baffin. Of course, we’ve got our running lights on and all of a sudden, we get pulled over by the game warden. He stops us. They’ve got their guns out thinking we’re running drugs or commercial fishermen running nets or something, and we got—there’s six rods in the rod holder or eight rods or something in the rod holders. “Well, what are you doing?” We’re wet from wading, and we got all these rods standing up. “Well, what’s it look like? We’re fishing” (Brown laughs). “Well, we just don’t see many people down here running this time of night” (laughs). “Well, we’re going fishing.” “Where y’all going?” “Well, we’re going over to Cathead.” “How are you going to get there?” “Well, you know, just running on a compass setting, kind of feel it unless we hit something but, hopefully, we won’t hit something before we get there,” and “Okay, good luck to y’all,” so their reaction to seeing us, it was pretty funny (Brown laughs). Not many people did that back then, so, yeah, we had a lot of fun down there.

**[Brown]:** Did you ever run into any problems running at night?

**[Blackmar]:** No, we were very fortunate. We took a lot of care when it was light. We tried to take notice of any sort of features that we needed to pay attention to when we’re running in the dark, tried to get a feel for the amount of time or this, that, and the other, and when you don’t have a GPS, it’s like driving in your car running a GPS. You can go to the same place if you’re in an unfamiliar area, plug in an address, and you got to the same place three days in a row. The fourth day, turn off your GPS and see if you can get there and so often you don’t pay any attention, you have no idea. “Well, I don’t know where to go” because you don’t, you just basically mentally go to sleep. You just follow what your GPS says. Well, the same thing goes for navigating on the water. I think when you don’t have that to rely on, your senses are on much more alert, you pay attention a whole lot more, and you are capable of doing a little bit more, I think, and not to say you can’t make mistakes and things can happen, but you’re just more alert, and you can kind of figure things out a lot of times.

**[Brown]:** Hm, that’s interesting. You mentioned the ‘83 freeze, can you talk more about the changes that you’ve noticed to Baffin over time?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, it has to do more with water quality than anything else than certainly the pressure, the number of fishermen on the water and the number of fish too certainly (coughs)

has changed, but the water quality changed the bay more than anything else. The '83 freeze was really bad. It was much like the freeze of—was it 2020 that we had?

**[Brown]:** '21.

**[Blackmar]:** '21. Um, but it lasted—the effects lasted a lot longer. I mean, there were no fish to speak of in the bay in '84. It was a really cold freeze, and it just devastated, and the number of fish that we saw down there on the banks and stuff, big trout, big redfish, was just devastating and then the fishery came back and then we had another one in '89, and that was a really bad one also and with '89, it killed all these fish and then early in the spring, we had a lot of heavy rains, and the farmers had fertilized in the spring, you know, to get their crops going. There was still, I think, all this material, you know, from the dying fish, the dead fish in the water, probably a lot of stuff left over from that, and I think it killed a lot of the zooplankton or whatever they're called, phytoplankton and all the smaller organisms, and the brown tides started that year. That was when the brown tides started and where Baffin used to always have this gorgeous water and when wind blew, it would get muddy but if it wasn't too windy, the water was this beautiful sandy green. You could see the rocks under the surface of the water, you could see the drop offs, you could see the potholes. It was beautiful. With the brown tide hit, then for the next five years, you couldn't see six inches in the water. It was a nasty brown look, and it totally changed fishing for me. I went from fishing for trout—I didn't like to just blind cast at the water. I wanted to see structure, something to keep me excited so with that, I went shallow running. I started strictly red fishing after that, so I started fishing in a foot of water or less, so I could see redfish easier, a tint of red or maybe a tip of a tail or whatever it might be, and so I really got away from trout fishing as a result of that one and that brown tide was really bad for five years and then it would—it started coming and going. You'd have one year where it would be free of brown tide and the next year it would be back. You'd have zones with brown tide, and so the water quality really has changed quite a bit, and it's still not normal down there. You have a lot of good water, but it's not what it was, and a lot of the seagrass suffered because of the lack of sunlight, so a lot of areas that had great seagrass every year, didn't. Even this year, I haven't been down there in a couple months, but the south shoreline of Baffin didn't have any grass. That whole shoreline, it comes out, you know, a couple three hundred yards, it comes out and then it drops off. It goes from shallow to four then to six feet of water and that drop off out there is a little gut that runs along, really good sight fishing and good fishing. It runs the entire south shoreline all the way back in, fifteen miles back in there. It curves around and stuff, and I went three hundred yards into the bay looking up there, and I turned around and left because there was no grass at all and when there's no grass, if there's any breeze at all, it just turns to mud, and so that's been, I think, a big change that I've seen and then in addition to this, there's been so many people.

**[Brown]:** Um, you mentioned the fishery and not as many fish or not as many big fish?

**[Blackmar]:** Um-hm.

**[Brown]:** Can you talk about that?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, I think that the combination of the freeze (coughs), and, you know, we had a lot of great fishing come back after the freezes, and a lot of big trout have been caught after the freezes and big redfish too, particularly back in the back at certain times of the year. The biggest redfish I ever caught was what I consider part of Baffin, Alazan Bay, and the other couple fingers back in the back that go back there. I consider that all part of Alazan Bay, which is really part of the Laguna Madre. I caught a forty-seven incher back there, a sight cast, not on a fly, plugging rod but in shallow water. It's pretty cool. The number of fish—of course, you had back in the seventies, there was a lot of gillnetting that went on, and they—I was talking to a fellow last night that used to commercially fish. He didn't gillnet, but he commercially fished for redfish and drum, and he said that the stuff the gillnetters were bringing out of the bay down there was just unbelievable. They'd seen boats that were trying to get so many fish back and then they started eradicating the nets, I think it was in the mid to late seventies, and by the early eighties, they'd gotten rid of most of the nets. You still find one every now and then, but it was pretty much gone, and so the eighties was, until the freeze in '83, late seventies, eighties was a great time and then from about '86 or '87 until the freeze of '89 was a great time and then in the nineties, there was a really good stretch there, in the late nineties, where there was a lot of really good—like, Scott Murray probably told you a little bit about that. Since then, I only fished Baffin in the winter now and because—the other thing is that all the spots, you didn't have GPS, and so you buy a NOAA chart that had the rocks on it, and you tried to plot them, and you find it, and you tried to triangulate, you know, looking for windmills and stuff on the bank and here we are. You would time it off of a certain marker, so I'm trying to find it. You could have a depth finder and maybe find it on your depth finder if you wanted to, so that changed with GPSs and then Google Earth changed it even more. There are no secrets anymore (Brown laughs). There are no secrets, and so the spots we had that we had worked really hard to figure out how to get to in the morning early, how to find them, which spots to fish, which times of year, they're not secrets anymore. Now, you go down, and you get covered up with people, so that's changed quite a bit also.

**[Brown]:** Did you ever have any run ins with commercial fishers?

**[Blackmar]:** No, I've had more with guides than I have with commercial fishermen.

**[Brown]:** Oh, yeah?

**[Blackmar]:** Yeah.

**[Brown]:** Tell me about that.

**[Blackmar]:** Well, the guides, I think some of them kind of treat the water as if it's their own and not, you know, recreational fishermen as well, and I understand they're trying to make a living, but, at times, they can get a little carried away and certainly recreational fishermen can be pretty stupid and do things as well, but I've had a couple instances where we're wading at East Kleberg Point, three of us out there, two of my buddies, or me and a buddy, we're no more

than fifty yards apart at the most, so a hundred and fifty feet, which isn't very much, and a guide drifted and came right in between us (Brown laughs), which I thought was pretty rude. I had another deal down in the Hole where this particular guy that was known for doing this sort of thing, we were on a big school of redfish in the north end of the Hole, and we'd fished them that weekend, and we were down there on Monday. I had a friend in from out of town, and we're just making a long drift, just kind of drifting our way up to where the school was, and we caught a couple on our way up there. It's a beautiful morning and here he comes and goes in and does a circle around him behind him one time and then another time to herd him, like rodeo them and then he comes back, and he gets all his guys out and lines them up to wait for him to come by, and I'm like, "How stupid is that?" And certain things ensued after that, even had one out in the Gulf last year, I think it was. Me and a friend went out. We had two different boats out there, and we were sitting on a wreck. There were no other boats around on this wreck that we were on, and we were trying to see if we could catch snapper on a fly rod, trying to see if we could get them up enough to catch them on a fly rod, and I'm just blind casting. I've got a ten weight, I think a nine weight that I'm using and a pretty heavy fly with a 6/0 hook on it and here comes this boat idling up, and there was two of us, actually, there were three of us, three boats, all friends sitting here, and here comes—they were spread out about, you know, a couple hundred feet apart, you know, on this thing, and we just got our trolling motors on anchors, so we're not going anywhere. We're not drifting, we're just sitting in one spot, and here comes this boat idling up, and I'm watching them, I'm standing there on the boat, on the front of the boat, and we can't believe what this guy's doing, and he keeps coming, and he keeps coming, and when he got about seventy or eighty feet away, I cast my fly into the bow of his boat (Brown laughs). There was two of them on the boat. Luckily, my fly didn't stick to anything. That would have been awkward, and they looked at me, and I said, "You know, if I can throw my fly in your boat, you think maybe you're too close?" (both laugh). One of the guys was pretty embarrassed said, "Yeah," and they turned around and left so (both talking at once)—

**[Brown]:** —Wow—

**[Blackmar]:** —that could have been interesting (both laugh).

**[Brown]:** Wow, that's nice.

**[Blackmar]:** It's not Baffin, but it's the same idea.

**[Brown]:** Huh, yeah, so fishing pressure, GPS, and what about changes—have you noticed any changes to the crabs and shrimp and that sort of thing over time?

**[Blackmar]:** Yeah, the shrimp, I mean, I don't fish as much as I used to, but I talk to guys still, and we used to have, particularly the crabs I'm not sure. The shrimp in particular, there used to be a great shrimp run in the fall that we fished and after we'd have a big cold front, a good cold front would come through, and it would lower the water level, and the shrimp would start heading out, and you had about a four to six week period there where you could fish the—

under the birds, the birds would be working over the schools of shrimp, whatever you call them, coming out, and we came up with a pattern where that if you fished after the front, but when you still had a little bit of north wind, we caught bigger fish. We caught nice fish under the birds, up to eight or nine pounds, I mean, nice trout and then once the wind died, slacked off, or came back out of the southeast, the size of fish got a lot smaller, and we did that a number of years. I mean, that was kind of one of our fall kind of deals we looked forward to, and we don't see the birds working anymore, and I'm not down there enough now anymore to know if they might work a little bit on occasion, but I've talked to different people and asked them, and I have not found anyone yet that says, "Yeah, the birds are still working down there," so I think the number of shrimp and what not are significantly less than what they might have been at one time. As for crabs, I don't really know. Yeah, the redfish are full of the little small crabs that they use. As far as the blue crabs, I'm not—I don't have any idea.

**[Brown]:** Hm. Has your fishing tackle, the types of lures you used, or the types of flies you've used changed over time (Blackmar laughs)?

**[Blackmar]:** I'm a little sick in that regard. I've got a box I gave my boys and a box out in the garage about the same size that I've probably got at least a thousand or more lures in that one and the other one. I mean, I'm just kind of—I like lures. I like messing with lures, different colors. The thing about trout are that they can be very color specific at times. After the '83 freeze, my dad and I were fishing in the surf, and we were catching a lot of really nice trout in the surf up at Mustang Island, and we had a particular Mirrolure that we're using that was a custom order. It was a pink head with a yellow body and a gold flash, and there's a very similar—there's an orange head on the market, and there's a red head one on the market with the same body, but we stood right next to people with that pink head. They had the red or the orange, which you could buy over the counter, and we would out fish them, ten to one with that lure in the Surf and so because of that, I've always carried a lot of different—if I find a lure that I like, I will have it in a lot of different colors patterns because at times it seems the trout will be very color specific, redfish, not as much. Redfish, I like to tie different things just messing around to throw a fly rod at, just piddling around, but if I had to catch a redfish, you just throw a chartreuse and white Clouser and if you make a good cast, you'll catch it. Um, particularly in the Lagoon, if you go up further north where they're really, really spooky because they get so much boat traffic. I used to have a little, kind of, miniature imitation tarpon fly that I tied with the feathers splayed on the back in a black and white pattern that they really liked, but I enjoyed messing around with different flies for the redfish because I'm just not as, I like to say, mad at the fishing. While I like to catch them, and I'll keep a couple to eat, but I don't freeze them, and I don't give them away. It's just more fun—how you catch them than what you catch, so I like to tie a little floating flies, little mullets, and that sort of thing, and watch them try to come up and try to eat them on top, which they miss it a lot. They'll make a bow wake when they come up, and that wake will push the fly forward, and they'll miss it a lot of times, but it's fun to watch them hit it.

**[Brown]:** Um-hm. Cool. Um, you know, when we talked last night, you thought in terms of Baffin and the Laguna Madre as like one entity for fishing. Can you tell me about that?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, I think it's—you have an entrance from the Gulf at Port Aransas, and you don't have another entrance until you get to Port Mansfield and, to me, that makes that whole estuary, that whole Laguna Madre all the way to Port Mansfield all one particular big unit, and Baffin Bay just comes off the Lagoon right there. It's a shallow water base. It's just eight feet deep at its deepest. You've got Yarborough Pass. That bay there is six feet deep, so people differentiate that as not being part of the Lagoon, why would you differentiate Baffin Bay? The salinity, you know, Baffin is one of only, I believe, four hyper-saline bay systems in the world, I think. Salinities in the summer, I think, can get upwards to, is it a hundred parts per—I think a hundred parts per thousand, however they measure. If the Gulf is thirty-three, and they can get up to a hundred in that vicinity, and Baffin's all part of that, so, to me, when you look at how the water flows, no influx from the Gulf of Mexico, the influences on that entire stretch of water, Baffin is part of that, so I just consider it part of the Laguna Madre.

**[Brown]:** Um-hm, you know, one of the things going on now are current efforts to restore and conserve the bay. Can you talk about what you would think success is, how you would define success in those efforts?

**[Blackmar]:** Well, I think they're making a lot of headway. I think, number one, I like the idea of the trout regulations. Where they are right now, we only keep three trout. I like that, and I like the size, seventeen to twenty-three, I like that. Um, oh, I like that—there's so many guides on the water. If a guide pays for his license, if he wants to keep fish, that's fine, but I don't think a guide should be able to give his clients any fish. I think that should be clamped down upon a little bit, not let them give away any fish. If they want to keep them and take them home, fine. I think that water quality is huge. I think that it would be great if we could come up with some fertilizers. You can't tell them they can't farm on the King and Kenedy Ranches, but all those nutrients from their farming efforts, if it rains heavily, which it does here, all those are washed out into the bay, and there's no flush down in the Lagoon just because we don't have any entrance to the Gulf of Mexico. We don't have any rivers coming in, flushing things out. There's no flush, and so that comes in there and stays unless you get a hurricane or something comes to flush it out, and it'd be great if they could come up with maybe a fertilizer that is ingested by the plants as a spray thing, maybe you have to spray it on from either planes or with machines that spray it on the plants themselves that would dissolve into the plants themselves and not the soil, and that the plants would consume them, and so that they couldn't be washed off. I think that's something if they can come up with technology to do that sort of thing would be great, just to try to keep man's influence of different chemicals out of the bay would be tremendous and then whatever happens with the water quality after that would be nature's effects and not ours, so we just limit man's impact on the environment in that sense. There's always going to be a lot of people fishing there. You can't—I'm not in favor of making it a no fish zone. I think it's a place there for people to enjoy, education processes maybe, maybe have a law. You know, they tried some boat rules in different areas, but I think it would be great to ban running a boat, running your outboard up on plane inside of a quarter mile on the shoreline, which is only four hundred yards. You can't run your motor inside four hundred yards of the shoreline. Keeping people off the shorelines would be great because the tunnel boats

these days, you know, you can run them in two inches of water, and I run a tunnel boat, but I don't run the shorelines. That's because that's where the fish work on the shorelines, they work all that. Just stay off of it, stay a little ways out and if it's a little rough out there because the wind's blowing twenty, then maybe you should have bought a boat with a keel if you don't like that and don't run over the flats looking for fish so if we can somehow get people to stay off the flats and off the shorelines, that would really help a lot. That would be huge. So, water quality as far as the farming and education with boating, I think would be a couple things I'd really like to see.

**[Brown]:** Do you have people running over you if you're fishing the Flats?

**[Blackmar]:** I've gotten to where I almost, where I don't enjoy going down there as much anymore. The price of gas is so high this year, it's not as crowded as it's been, but, yeah, and that's the thing. You can't hide anymore. I used to have spots. If I could get two or three shots with a fly rod at fish that are really shallow with their backs out of the water, I'm happy. I don't need to catch twenty fish. I don't even want a school of fish. I like individual fish, but I know there was a time last year in the spring, I was so tired of getting run over, I said, "Well, I'm just going to go up behind Tar Paper Island," which is southwest of Yarborough. "I'm going to go up in there on the sand grass line where nobody runs, nobody goes over in there. I know there won't be as many fish, but I might could find a big trout up there on the sand I could see or maybe find a couple redfish." So I got in there pretty early, and I'm in there about seven thirty, and I'm just drifting around and had six boats run over me by nine o'clock up there, and I'm just like, "This is just—" I go down there, and I'm like, I get mad. I'm like "What's the—why come down here and get mad," so I've actually started fishing the beach a lot more because at least they're not going to run over you on the beach. The problem is the beach is tough. We had a pattern in the winter. We caught a lot of really nice trout in the winter, but I've not figured it out yet, the summer. I've not done any good at all this summer.

**[Brown]:** Well, it's been so windy too.

**[Blackmar]:** It has been, but we've had some decent days, and I'm about—from my last four or five trips, it's been a little—so you asked colors and flies. I've started tying all these different kinds of flies, rattling mullet, and different types of flies, and I think I need to go through a plug and rod a little bit to see if I can catch something because maybe I'm not successful with my type of flies or fly fishing's a little tougher, maybe I could catch some fish on a plug and rod. I don't know, but I've been pretty hardcore fly fishing so far.

**[Brown]:** Yeah, well, you mentioned teaching your kids how to fish and your sons fishing but how do you think we can get younger generations to want to be stewards of Baffin Bay?

**[Blackmar]:** Education, you got to start with the parents, you know, have to want to be stewards to educate the kids, otherwise any sort of process like that would fall on schools, and I think it's great if the university or even in high school, if you had a program that taught fishing or, you know, the ecology and stuff, an ecology class, an environmental class of some sort,

some sort of environmental science or something that included fishing, a section on fishing and how to do that, protect the environment when you do it. At the end of the day, your best impact is going to come from parents taking their kids fishing and if they want to protect the environment themselves, and I think that takes time. I think the older generation that kept everything they caught is mostly dying off, and the next generation, which is my generation, is there to where we use to keep everything we caught but then we changed and started doing this and started paying more attention and once we're gone, and you're into the next generation, I think it's going to gradually get better, but I think it takes time. It's just something you can't change overnight.

**[Brown]:** Um-hm. Well, those are all the specific questions I have but do you have any more fish stories you want to tell me?

**[Blackmar]:** (laughs) Oh, you know, I've been hooked a whole bunch of times (Brown laughs). My boys like to make fun of me, how many times I've stuck a hook in my hand or my arm or whatever. The biggest trout I almost caught—I have a story about my dad, it wasn't in Baffin, but he never caught a double-digit trout. He caught a lot of twenty-eight, twenty-nine, thirty inch trout, but he never caught one that weighed ten pounds, and he was wading out front of the Oso one winter on the bay side, and he's in the Navy, so he knows knots pretty well, and he always prided himself on the bowline that he would tie, a knot he would tie into his stringer, and he's fishing out there, and he had about a twenty-five inch trout on his rod, and we had marks on our rods, inch marks, so we kept a twenty-five, a twenty-eight, and a thirty-two inch mark, and he caught this trout he estimated to be about thirty-four inches long. It was the biggest thing he'd ever seen, and it made the twenty-five inch he had on the, dwarfed it into nothing, and he's got it on the stringer, and he's fishing, and there's another guy wading out there, and the guy says, "Hey, is that your stringer out there?" He looks, and there's a ball from his stringer. It's about a hundred yards away, and his stringers still tied to him, and the knot had come undone (Brown laughs), and he called me that night, and I swore he was in tears. I thought he was going to cry. It was awful, but a lot of things started for us back there. I had Fiori, who played on a tour. I mentioned him earlier. We started this game in the Land Cut, which we did in Baffin as well some where we would throw a chrome torpedo. It's a topwater lure with a propeller on the back, and there's a certain way you can work it where if you go pop-pop-pop-pop. You don't stop, you keep it going, and it seems to really attract trout. That sound attracts them, and they'll come up, and we caught a lot of big trout on it too but just trout in general, but they miss it a lot because it's on top, and so we started what we called this back hole game where you might throw over there, and you get a hit, and you miss it, and I've got mine in right now, and I'll say, "Well, I'll get him for you," and I'll throw it back in behind you and throw it right there and catch that fish that you just missed (Brown laughs), and that sort of back hole sort of thing I had—Bill Rogers who was a player a year on the PGA tour in '82, I think it was when the British opened. He's down there with us. I fished with him and Bruce Liezke and myself on the boat. We're back in Alazan around the corner. We'd fished East Kleberg Point earlier that morning and only caught a few, and we went around the corner, and we're drifting a shallow flat out there, throwing brokenbacks and just we're fishing in eighteen inches of water (coughs), just blind casting, and he had a big swirl, and he missed it, and the

boat's drifting, and I said, "I'm going to get it, Bill," so we're being very polite, let him reel it in and throw again, but he threw a hundred feet past his fish, and I'm sitting there watching, and I'm watching, and the boat's going to get to that fish before his lure is going to get to that fish, and I'm just like—finally, I couldn't stand it, so I just flipped it over, flipped mine over there, and, boom, the fish hit it immediately and caught it. It was a twenty-eight inch trout, and he was so mad (Brown laughs). He was so mad. I stole his fish, and I'm like, "What, your fish was not going to be anywhere near—" The boat was going to spook it before he could have caught it, so we've had a lot of great times down there, that sort of thing for sure and then my boys, my boys were down there. We had one time, we had just built a floating cabin that we had down there, and my oldest son, he was twelve, and he wanted to go to the cabin for his birthday, and so we went down there, and we fished that day and spent that night and actually, went down late that afternoon. We fished the next morning. We were supposed to come back that afternoon. Both my sons and then a friend of theirs, so I had two twelve year olds and an eight year old (coughs), and that evening when we got there I said, "Here, you guys take the boat, and you can go over there and go fishing," two twelve year olds and an eight year old (Brown laughs). "I'm going to sit here in the cabin," so they went over there so then the next morning we went fishing, and I turned them loose out on this flat, and I just kind of fished around the boat, sitting, letting them go by themselves, see what they could do, and they came back with three limits of redbfish. Each had their own limit of redbfish, which was pretty cool, being that age, and we got back to the cabin, and they're like, "We don't want to go home (laughs)," so I called up my wife and I said, "We got—our boats not starting. I think we need to stay here another night, you know, see if we can get it working, see if we can get it to start," so we ended up spending the night down there. They had a great time, so we've had a lot of enjoyable times down there.

**[Brown]:** Yeah, neat.

**[Blackmar]:** Yeah, it's a great place for family and friends. I met Doug Bird who was one of the fathers of lure fishing, pioneering the Texas coast, so it was me and my dad, and another guy were hiding under the pier at East Kleberg Point, and a thunderstorm came up morning, and we'd finally had enough (coughs) with lighting and stuff, so we jumped in the boat and ran back to one of the cabins back at Twin Palms, and they were there, and Doug was there, and he saw us get out of the boat, and he looked at us, and Doug's originally from Canada, and he looks at us, and he's about five foot eight or nine, and, "No wonder you guys are wading that spot," because I'm six foot seven and my dad was six four, and he goes, "Now I understand." It made sense, and he says, "No matter early I go, I can never get to that beach you guys—to that spot when you guys go fishing." I said, "Yeah, I know. We go pretty early (laughs)," and Doug was a guide, so we became really good friends. Unfortunately, Doug passed away here recently, but he was known as a pioneer of Baffin Bay in that area, one of the first ones to use a trolling motor down there, and strictly no bait, strictly a plugging fisherman, kind of one of the pioneers down there.

**[Brown]:** Hm. Well, is there anything else you want to tell me about Baffin or fishing or your life? What did I miss?

**[Blackmar]:** No, you got most of it. I think that as far as relating to fishing, I think it's a great sport. It's a great source of family time, quality time that you can spend together. I do hope in the future that we become a little better stewards. It's going to be crowded, hope that people start operating their boats with a little more courtesy and intelligence about what they're doing because the fish habits have changed dramatically down there and stay off the flats as far as running a little bit, the shallow water, don't run the flats so much, don't go looking for fish that way and then the water quality, I really hope that the farming and stuff get to a point to where it doesn't influence the water and get the water back to where it is consistently year in, year out, you know, the water's a lot better. That would be my hopes.

**[Brown]:** Seems like a good place to stop.

**[Blackmar]:** Yeah (laughs).

**[Brown]:** Thank you (laughs).

**[Blackmar]:** You're welcome.

(end of recording)