

Reese Hunt

Interviewed by Jen Brown

July 25, 2022

Corpus Christi, Texas

Transcribed by Alyssa Lucas

[Jen Brown]: Okay, we are recording. This is Jen Brown. It is July 25, 2022. I'm in Corpus Christi, Texas, here at Coastal Grass here to talk to Reese Hunt about Baffin Bay for the Baffin Bay Oral History Project. Um, so to begin, do I have your permission to record?

[Reese Hunt]: Yes.

[Brown]: Okay, thanks (laughs). Um, since this is an oral history, let's start from the beginning. Can you tell me more about your background and early life?

[Hunt]: Okay, I was born in 1947. I started going to fish the Lagoon [Laguna Madre] when they still had a drawbridge for Corpus (phone rings).

[Brown]: Yeah, let's stop.

(pause in recording)

[Brown]: Okay, you were at—you were born in 1957 when they—

[Hunt]: —'47—

[Brown]: '47 when they still had the drawbridge.

[Hunt]: Yes, and my dad started taking me fishing somewhere between ten and twelve years of age. We had a boat, and we went fishing, and he had a fishing history for the Lagoon and then him and some guys built a house in the Laguna Madre at Marker 69-A, which back then was about halfway to Baffin, and we fished there, well, until now. I still fish the Lagoon.

[Brown]: So, how did your dad get into fishing?

[Hunt]: That's interesting. Um, he came from Mexia, Texas, raised on a farm, and the military brought him here to Corpus Christi. There was an uncle and some family, and that's how he got into the fishing. A lot of the guys from World War II, somebody in, of course, they're all passed away now, but they had a P. T. boat, and they used to go down the Intracoastal Canal and fish off of the P. T. boat, and my dad had—Harold Shockley, D. C. Smith, and my father, Jimmy Vineyard, I remember all of those guys that went down there and fished together for years and years until the national seashore [Padre Island National Seashore] took away our fishing cabin

and made it the national seashore.

[Brown]: Oh, because it was on the—

[Hunt]: Because the spoil bank ended up being in the boundary of the national seashore.

[Brown]: Hm, so then what? What did he do? Did you get a new cabin?

[Hunt]: Oh, they just kept fishing and doing things, and I was older, school and college and boats and things like that.

[Brown]: Oh, okay. Do you remember the first time you fished Baffin Bay?

[Hunt]: That would have been, oh gosh. I remember fishing it with David McKee, uh, at the year, was mid-seventies probably. I went there with my father and stuff, but for myself personally would have probably been around the early seventies.

[Brown]: Um-hm. Can you tell me more about what it was like to grow up here hunting and— did you hunt too and fishing and—

[Hunt]: —Oh, yes. Well, most of the hunting, a lot of the hunting was done in the Laredo area for the bigger deer and then in the Hill Country. Um, everything seemed to be more than plentiful compared to nowadays, especially the fish. It was nothing for us to go fishing and take for food, uh, cooking oil and potatoes, eggs and bacon. We caught all our fish and fried them and ate them. We would have work parties when I was in high school that one person would go out and fish and wade, while the other ones worked on the cabin, the pier, and things like that. That was normally Jimmy Vineyard, and he used, oh, topwater plugs and stuff back then. I think they were wooden and a few plastics and would work the sand bars that came off of the spoil islands and just wade around and fish. The water clarity back then ninety-nine percent of the time was clear and pretty, good grass, and nice sandy bottoms.

[Brown]: Um, so you grew up in Corpus?

[Hunt]: Yes.

[Brown]: Yeah.

[Hunt]: Graduated from Ray High School in '65 and then started working here after being a javelina (laughs), uh, Kingsville A&I, and then I had a boat and started fishing. I guess my first thirty-inch trout was caught in that place where you enter into the Tide Gauge Bar. In my—I had a Hydra-Sport boat back then, and I had fishing cabin on Twin Palms Island I shared with David McKee.

[Brown]: So how did you get into that?

[Hunt]: Um, from my dad and—anyway, I always had a boat, and so I enjoyed fishing, and he fished and then one of my bosses, I took him fishing and actually ended up buying his part of the fishing cabin from Gary Dukes who's passed away who I introduced to the Baffin area and the Lagoon, and he became quite the fisherman.

[Brown]: Well, what do you think makes Baffin Bay special?

[Hunt]: The remoteness. Back then when we started out, a big horsepower motor was thirty-five horse. There was not (laughs) battery starts. They were just engines. They had the distributors and plug wires and if you weren't a fairly good mechanic, you couldn't go too far. Most of the engines wouldn't start the next morning after a heavy dew because of the wetness and as the motors progressed and progressed then the boats, most of the boats we started out fishing were wooden boats. They weren't fiberglass, and I remember the innovation of the fiberglass boats coming into the market and how amazed they were at what they did and then the motors got bigger and bigger and now anybody can go buy a boat and jump in it and take off. If they don't run aground, they can run to Baffin Bay in less than thirty minutes, used to that was almost a three quarter of a day trip to get there.

[Brown]: Hm, so what does Baffin Bay mean to you?

[Hunt]: Oh (laughs), it's a great place to fish. I mean, for instance, I had a job where I sold equipment like to cabinet shops, and I got interested in selling the wooden boat builders Moneo nails, sandpaper, and sanders and saws and all the things you build a boat with, and that's when the Vannoys and the Majeks were building wooden boats for commercial fishermen and as I fished with my dad and his friends, I got to see all of this evolve over several, several years of the game warden game with the commercial fishing, the gillnets. At one time, on the way to Baffin to fish, there was so many trot lines that ran basically almost from the ditch all the way to the shoreline, a lot of the boats had bandanas on the bow, so if you didn't find the gate to get between the trot lines, the machete would cut the trot lines, so you wouldn't get hooked in it, and we literally had one fly over the top of the boat. We were all fortunate. It was quite an experience when you're going, I don't know, the boats back then, twenty, thirty miles an hour, and you see this flail of hooks come over the top of your head and everything (Brown laughs), grabbing, jumping, jerking but as far as fishing there, I think the big lure of Baffin was the big trout, the big trout, and so that's quite an experience to catch a thirty-inch trout, which I've done. I haven't done it on fly rod yet. Um, I don't know. Baffin became overrun with people, with the evolution of the fast boats, and the neat motors, and there was nothing special about it. If you could buy the boat, you could do the game. So many sacred areas and rocks and places, the worm rocks are very wonderful to fish around. Um, the different flags used to—it was clear water, and you could see the rocks. Calcuttas with black flags, the scariness of running your boat through the bay and hitting something, messing your lower unit up, punching a hole in your boat, all those things were available in your trip, so that was part of it. It's just a neat bay to fish. I mean, if you fish Corpus Bay, it seems like Corpus Bay, the water's bigger. It's a different shoreline area, where Baffin is a smaller shoreline, it seems

narrower, and, anyway, I guess most of this stuff is the farther away you go, the better the fishing's supposed to be, and it's a nice name everybody remembers, and I guess that's part of the big part. All of the Laguna Saluda, and there's three or four different tributaries to it, Alazan, all of those areas. There's a few lakes that are easy to get to. That's all part of Baffin Bay fishing.

[Brown]: Hm, can you talk about—so you mentioned the boats and the changes and more people starting to come. When did that happen?

[Hunt]: That would have been, oh, I guess the early eighties when that started, were everything got better and better with the electronics on the engines and some of my old buddies, I mean, we had Gale Motors and Evinrude and eventually Johnson, Mercuries, but the—I guess that would have been around the eighties when the boats—I'm pretty sure that was the eighties. The fuel injections that they ended up entering with the motors and now we've gone into the four cycle engines that are as good as automobiles and cars, so all of those things when you add them up, you have access to anything, where used to, it was three quarters of a day to get to Baffin and then you're going to spend the night there or you're going to come back, so it got like that. A lot of guys will go in the middle of the night, go in the day. I've made many, many trips at night to Baffin Bay in the dark. It's just a neat place to fish. Fishing there in the winter on some of the flats, I've caught over ten thirty-inch trout on plugs, not fly rod. Now, I'm a fly fisherman, and on a norther. I think Cliff Webb was there that time and caught fish on that norther, and I can't remember the date. It was just a fantastic time. I actually took a grass farmer from Bay City, Texas, there (both laugh) that we did all of that, so it's a neat place to fish. You know, then we ran up with a brown tide. We've had two or three of those, things change, places that we thought were sacred for wade fishing are runways for shallow water fast boats now. The tunnel-hull boats, I guess those were late eighties when they became popular on the market, turned guys lose in three feet to one foot of water that they can run anywhere safely, so they started running the shoulders of the bay. The really pristine wading areas became racetracks for shallow water boats, and it's still going on.

[Brown]: Hm. How many boats have you went through since—

[Hunt]: —Oh, goodness—

[Brown]: —you started?

[Hunt]: Um, a Vannoy, a whaler, a Hydro Sport, a Shallow Sport, and a Hell's Bay.

[Brown]: (laughs) Wow. Um, so when did you get into fly fishing?

[Hunt]: Thirty years ago.

[Brown]: What got you into it?

[Hunt]: Actually, it's real simple. Woody Thompson—Woody and I both grew up here, both our dads had houses in the Laguna Madre. I didn't mention earlier about what a wonderful place this used to be to duck hunt. There would be literally clouds, black clouds of ducks. Anyway, I got into it there, into duck hunting. What did you just ask? What was it?

[Brown]: Getting into fly fishing.

[Hunt]: Oh, Woody introduced me to, uh, Flip Pallot, Walker Cay's TV show, and I saw that show, and it got so easy to catch fish with a spinning rod. My wife got me into spinning rods from bait casters, and I had been sight casting for a long time that the new challenge would have to be the fly rod, so I got the fly rod. I went to Austin, Texas, and got the equipment for me and picked up some stuff for my buddies, and we all started that. I found a welder and had a polling platform put on my Shallow Sport boat and ordered a pole out of Florida, got some advice from Moonlighter and put it all together, and that's some of the most fun I ever had fly fishing and polling and then there's a place past Baffin that's called the Hole and the Gutter and the Summer House and Rocky Slough. All of those areas are unbelievable to fish in and when you just barely move through that, it increases your chances to catch fish so trout fishing, you kind of run into a school, and you clean up or for sight casting though and sight fishing, you got to see the fish before you ever cast, so the fly rod and the boats and all that evolved and eventually I bought a polling skiff, and it's just another way to catch a fish.

[Brown]: What do you like about it?

[Hunt]: Oh, well, I guess you could say I'm a gadget guy (Brown laughs), and there's a lot of gadgets with fly fishing (both laugh). There's a lot of gadgets. The list is endless, so Cheryl and I waded many, many, many flats. That's my wife, Cheryl, and basically two lures and a bottle of water maybe and away you go, nothing else, and sometimes we would take the hook out to pull a hook out. Most of the time though we fished barbless hooks. We've done that for years, and we would just go walk around in the Hole or pole around and catch fish, and a lot of times we would never even touch a fish. Some of my buddies said I couldn't catch a fish on a Tony Accetta Pet, which I had to modify because the hooks break on them, so I modified those. I even made bucktails with my fly-tying gear and bend the barbs down on the hooks, and you just grab the spoon and flip it, and there goes your fish, you never even pull him out of the water and just keep on fishing. So, back when I fished with the guys at the 69A Cabin, pretty much we would have a forty-eight-quart igloo and fill about half full of fish, and it's like, "Well, we've caught enough fish, and we didn't fill the boat full of fish." You could do that easy. That's what all of the commercial fishermen did, but we just take what we wanted, take what we needed. We didn't do fish fries for the church. We just took enough fish for us and our families, and that was it, and so Cheryl and I were just like, well, why mess with all of this? We just have fun catching them, so that was our biggest thing is to see the fish, track the fish, catch a fish, and let it go.

[Brown]: Um-hm. Can you tell me more about the commercial fishing and, you know, you mentioned the trout lines, but—

[Hunt]: —Oh, yeah—

[Brown]: —what else was going on (both talking at once)?

[Hunt]: Oh, at one time, oh, gosh, they baited the trot lines at one time and then the game wardens or something—I'm not real up on it because I wasn't into it, so most of the things was hearsay, or you'd hear people talking around boat ramps, where you put your boats in and out, the fish market, but I think they used to bait them and then they used plastic. They ended up putting, I want to say, only Anders Leaves for lures. They did lots of different things on the trot lines and then eventually they got rid of all the trot lines and then the gillnets evolved, and that's when the guides were catching so many fish in the gillnets. Um, I knew three or four gill netters. They weren't the big boys, but they did it, and I knew the guys that did it, and they made them quite a bit of money. Some of the guys that fish the bay, Corpus Christi Bay, and they would only fish—they used a big mesh, and they normally catch the big trout and then they would run up and down with their ice chest on Ocean Drive and different restaurants and sell the pick of the bunch to the restaurants, and that's how they made their money. A lot of guys did that and then I think it was the Vannoys and another group, the big families, they got into it pretty heavy and basically, I have seen eighteen-foot skiff level, completely level, there's not any place to sit. All you can see in the whole boat's fish, and those would pull into the fish markets continuously and those guys knew what they were doing, they knew how to run their nets. At one time, they overtook our fishing cabin and used it as a base station to fish out of. They knew how to run the Lagoon. They knew how to run the boats. At one time it was so lucrative that terminal tackle became a wooden skiff with a motor on it. They could literally throw it away for the money that was in that boat, and that's why they took the risk, and I don't know if it was like cops and robbers. In the old days, it seemed to be glorified, some of the bandits, some of the cowboys, but the commercial fishermen, I guess, that was part of the mystique of doing all of that, and it was so far to run to Baffin Bay when there was so many fish in the Lagoon that it was more accessible, closer, quicker, faster, easier, and so the gillnets, they cleaned the Laguna out pretty well and eventually I would say that—I think Jimmy, Jimmy Atkins was one of the founders of the CCA [Coastal Conservation Association], which became—I'm sorry, the Gulf Coast CCA and then it became the CCA, so what was it again?

[Brown]: I was just asking about the commercial fishing.

[Hunt]: Oh.

[Brown]: Yeah.

[Hunt]: Yeah.

[Brown]: And what you—

[Hunt]: —It was a big thing to get to the fish market, to outrun the game wardens and naturally

a lot of them got caught. There was a lot of stories here and there, different things happened. They confiscated the boats and then go get another boat, another motor, more nets and away they'd go again, but all of that's gone now.

[Brown]: Did you witness any of that in Baffin at your cabin? You said they took it over one time?

[Hunt]: Oh, yeah, took it over one time—we could only go on the weekends. They used it during the week (laughs), and it's nothing to break into a cabin, so you can't really lock it up. It's just a little wooden plywood house, so, yeah, it was obvious. They drilled holes in the walls where they would lay on the bunks, so they could look up if they heard a boat and see what was coming, so they would leave or go and that went on for years. Yeah, that went on for quite a while.

[Brown]: Wow.

[Hunt]: So.

[Brown]: Um, the other thing I wanted to ask about is you mentioned the brown tide and the water clarity, but can you talk more about the changes you've seen to the bay over time?

[Hunt]: Just the dirtiness, but the rocks, they don't seem to be as big and tall as they used to be, but they've been ran over so many times, it's ridiculous, and kind of, it's like it became to be, to me, overcrowded, and when I started sight fishing, there's some places that guys sight fish, and I got a couple three spots, but normally you get run over, so I started fishing in other areas that were more remote than Baffin used to be, just to get away from those areas and then that's where all the guides go, that's where all the people want to go, that's the famous Baffin Bay, so, I mean, when I met my wife, we've been married over thirty years now, that's the first place I took her, was the Baffin Bay (laughs), and she caught her twenty-eight inch trout. She was a happy little gal. She was as happy as she could be, and we fished that for several years together and one of the things like I was talking about was, well I think it's Kleberg Point now, it used to have another name, that we used to wade fish and fish around there and then, I don't know. A lot of the areas that we used to wade on sand now have muck on them, and it's like I don't want to go walking in muck and mud, and so then the water clarity is not the way it used to be for me, so I'm sure there's some diehards that still do it and everything, but it just got to be—most of the guides that are going would cut around the point. I don't know, they come down Compuerta Pass and then they come pass the Twin Palms Island and shoot around the corner, and those were some great flats that are gone now. I mean, it's a racetrack through there and then on the opposite side of the bay, on the west shoreline of Penascal and all the big rocks and stuff in there, well, you might ought to be careful. You might get ran over by a shallower boat, and they all run down the edge of the shoreline, so nobody runs in the middle, the waves, the roughness, the whatever, and it's not as cool as it is, and one thing, I guess that, you know, the commercial fishermen took fish, but sometimes—Chris Thompson and I played with some numbers, and we were astounded at the amount of fish that guides take out on the water, so

somewhere way back down the line, eighties, maybe early nineties, there was a tax bill that came out, and they took away the advantage of owning a boat and writing it off against the company so when this happened, people started hiring guides, which are one hundred percent write off and, boom, all of a sudden you have all these guys that want to be guides and the first few guides were really great guys and then it just multiplied and multiplied and multiplied, and there's guides everywhere. They'll get on a school of fish, and they'll work that school between several people and then I don't know if it disappears, it goes away, or they can't find it, but some of the great—Billy Sheka, Baffin Bay was unbelievable trout fisherman, and you said Cliff and Doug Bird, all of those guys, but that all kind of—maybe it went away with age because we're all older but then you got all these new younger guys, and things just don't seem to be the same, so there's less traffic where I go, and the way I fish now, so that's one of the reasons that—sight casting is different though. In Baffin, there's places to do it there, but there's other waters that are easier to do it in.

[Brown]: What did—do you remember the brown tides and those changes (both talking at once)?

[Hunt]: Yes, oh yes.

[Brown]: What was that like?

[Hunt]: My favorite color became orange. I have no idea. I tied orange flies, Clouser with orange deer and some feathers. Anyway, I caught a lot of fish in the brown tide fly fishing and plug fishing, but, yeah, it turned out pretty good for me. Who knows—I read so many different things here and there about it. I think they said a couple biologist brought it down from the East Coast, which was kind of a joke, but they were up there, and they've had the brown tide up there too, so these guys were working down here, but it's an algae bloom and, of course, now that the King Ranch got into the big farming area, and there's a little creek you pass over south of Riviera, there's a little bridge there and to me because they used to make several trips to the Valley all the time, it was where it kind of started and if you follow it and follow it and follow it, I don't know if the fertilizer influx—I know they say it doesn't and then there's so many variables, there's so many cattle now, there's so much farming now, a lot more people now and as we populate, I think we pollute, all of us, to some extent or another, so it just grows and grows, and it's been gone now for a long time (knocks), and knock on wood, hope it stays that way for a while. We've had the red tide, the brown tide, big freezes, bad freezes. The fish seem to always be able to come back, but it's just something you have to deal with. It actually was so thick that it would build up inside the outward motors and cause them to overheat and have massive heating problems. Other things came from that. I know I took several motors apart and literally scraped the stuff out of the water jackets, cleaned the heads, and put the motors back together and away we went. Um, there was some chemical stuff that was supposed to work. One of my best buddies was a marine mechanic, and so we did a lot of stuff on that, but, yeah, it was really hard on the inside of the motors, and I didn't really believe it until I took a few of them apart and found the calcification on the inside from the brown tide, and, of course, those heating problems went away when the tide went away so.

[Brown]: What were the freezes like?

[Hunt]: Uh, I guess the first—the one when I caught all of the big trout, the thirty-inch trout, it was just real, real cold. It was in the low thirties, and it was drizzling and, believe it or not, Gary Dukes actually told me where to go, and we went to Hell's Half Acre wade fishing in the cold, out of my cabin there on Twin Palms, and we caught a lot of beautiful fish, a lot of gorgeous fish. Out of all those fish, I did not keep one. I returned all of them, so I guess David McKee gets the credit for that, the catch and release programs that he pushed and worked on so hard and, I don't know, I had my one trout, and that's enough. The rest—now, I eat trout, but not the big ones, so I wouldn't do that. Uh, I guess David and I got on my shallow sport, so that was the early eighties freeze, I think in '83 maybe, that we went through Baffin a little bit then shot down the Cut and went into the Cut, and David got to where we would only slow the boat down and stop when he saw a fish that was over thirty inches, so I don't know. We spent a whole day running around, counting fish. I know he's got records on some of that and then this last little freeze we had, it was unbelievable. This time I didn't see as many trout, lots of redfish and drum and tons of turtles, and I don't know. I've seen turtles in the Surf, I've never seen them in the Lagoon, and some of the guys I fished with, "Oh, yeah, they're there all the time." Well, they must be because we found dozens of turtles after this last freeze.

[Brown]: And you were just fishing down there, the one in 2021 (both talking at once)?

[Hunt]: Um-hm, yeah, we went down there to fish after the freeze, see the damage. I've got some pictures where it's just acres of fish laying there dead. It's really sad.

[Brown]: Hm. That's crazy.

[Hunt]: There's a reason they say for that—in the eighties freeze that the tugboats, and that's what the Intracoastal canal is for, it takes fuel and gravel to the Valley. That's our biggest main fuel source in the barges, and so the big props stir the water up, causes the fish to get colder or die. This time they thought that the fish were in the bottom of the ditch which is deepest water and as the boats go through, they would stir the silt up because we have a lot more silt now than we've ever had before. There's places like P. T.'s Pole that I fished barefooted on sand and grass and the last time I went there, I think it was about six or eight inches deep in muck, so the causeway, the growth of all the stuff, I don't know if it really caused it, but the causeway, I call it dam, and I think we should be like South Padre and have a water exchange with the bridge, but we don't, and I think that's part of the slow death of the Laguna Madre, but it's just not the way it was when I was young, and there are days that are really nice with pretty clear water. They're few and far between, but I just went to the Hole last week, and it was horrible. It was absolutely horrible, and I've been down there on windy days before, and it wasn't that bad, and the Hole's where the—I've noticed places that I went there forty, forty-five years ago. They're not there anymore. They're gone. It's all—you can't get out of the boat. You'll sink up to your knees, so I don't know if this is a natural evolution or if it's something that happens over time.

[Brown]: What about (phone rings)—oh, I can stop that.

(pause in recording)

[Brown]: Okay, we're back. Um, where were we? Um, I was going to ask you, have you noticed any changes to the crabs or the shrimp over time?

[Hunt]: Well, no, I haven't. Um, I still see them. I know they're there. No, I really can't answer that one. I don't fish with bait or shrimp, and I haven't in a long time. I love to eat shrimp. I go to the bait stands and buy fresh shrimp, head them, and eat them (both laugh). I've taken them to the cabin for people to fish with and then tried to serve them to them in the evening, and they wouldn't eat them because they said, "They're not eating shrimp, they're fishing shrimp," and so I would have myself a feast, and I would get all—that's my favorite food by the way except for lobster and shrimp, and so I would eat all the shrimp myself (both laugh). But yes, I never got into being a croaker soaker. The bait was a neat deal there for a while, while my children were growing up, taken lots of kids fishing over the years, and we fished with lots of shrimp. I think they're still fine. I know there's a lot of boats around, there's a lot of shrimp to eat around, so I'm pretty sure that seems to be okay, I guess, which would indicate maybe about the muck and stuff, I don't know.

[Brown]: Um, what is your most memorable experience in Baffin Bay?

[Hunt]: Oh, wow. There's too many. One of them is to sit on the porch and watch the sun go down. That is unbelievable, unbelievable thing for me. I'm big on sunsets. I like sunrises also. I guess my biggest deal was in that one winter when I caught those ten trout, that was one super memorable day. Another one was I was in the Hole, and it was three, four o'clock in the afternoon, and I was on a Shallow Sport, and I don't know what was going on, but we were there for over an hour, right on the edge to leave and fish (phone rings)—

[Brown]: I'll stop it.

(pause in recording)

[Brown]: Um, you were saying you were down in the Hole, um, telling a story?

[Hunt]: Oh, and I had my first fly rod, and it was fish after fish after fish. They were all redfish, and they were all on a mission, and they were all going right past the boat at literally—I was sitting on the boat with my fly rod in my lap, and I had a redfish swim between my legs. My wife was on the bow of the boat, and she caught fish until she got tired, and at one point I had the fly rod, holding it in two hands, raised above my head, raised my knee, and I was going to break it in half (laughs) over my knee. I never caught a fish that day. It was a horrible, terrible experience, but I don't give up very easy, so it would be different now (Brown laughs), but, yes, my little Sage rod, I was going to break it in two pieces and before I did, I realized I paid too much for it (both laugh). Anyway, that was a memorable time. Another time, we were in the

Hole, and we were wading, and there was a famous fisherman, Louis Peetz, and we had started at five poles on the shallow sport polling, and we had got, hm, almost a 201 Channel, which is miles, and we saw this girl in a pink bathing suit. Anyway, she was hollering at us and screaming at us, and I thought I had done something wrong, and I was not that close to her, but I could hear her, and anyway, my wife hears better than I did, and she jumped in the water and went over there to meet Patty and by the time that I got the boat kind of anchored and started that way, Cheryl had caught her a twenty-eight inch redfish. She's holding it up in the air so then I went back to get the camera. Anyway, we stood there with Patty and caught fish for, I don't know, I think it was a three-limit fish, and she had fifteen fish on her stringer (both laugh), and we were letting them go, and she was catching them, and so I said, "Where are you going to go from here?" And she said, "Well, you see those boats?" I said, "Those boats?" And she goes, "Yeah." They were way over there, almost back to the normal entrance to the Hole, and I said, "Well, you want me to take you back over there?" And she, "Oh, that will be nice," so we took her back over to the boat, and there was a bunch of guys there. There were three boats of fishermen, and that's when I really got to meet Louis because we waited there about forty-five minutes, and he came walking back up, and that's when I met Louis, and the next morning we took him fishing on my boat, and these redfish were laying everywhere in the flats. We're in ankle deep water, and you would put your lure in front of them and just shake it and stand still and shake it and shake it and shake it and shake it and all then all of a sudden they would either explode and leave, or they would grab the lure, and you would catch a fish, and we did that until the sun got up pretty high and then that was about the end of that trip, but, yeah, I'll never forget that day and that afternoon because I'd never done anything like that before and so (phone rings)—

(pause in recording)

[Brown]: Okay, we're back. Um, yeah, other good fish stories you want to share?

[Hunt]: I did my biggest one (both laugh). The redfish is not the big fish stories, I guess. They're pretty easy. They're pretty sweet, but they're a lot of fun. To me the fun is to see the game and then go for it, so the trout don't play that as well, but we're exploring some new areas now, and I've been working on it, and we found quite a few lunkers with the fly rods, but we've got a lot of honing to do on catching the bigger trout in the real shallow water, so we've been working on that quite a bit.

[Brown]: Um, some of the questions that we're asking everyone is, what do you think success looks like in terms of current efforts to restore Baffin Bay?

[Hunt]: How are they trying to restore it?

[Brown]: Well, there's various, um, work. They've been getting a lot of grants lately. There's this whole initiative between the Harte Research Institute and the Estuary Program to—it's called Bringing Baffin Back, but they're working on like the wastewater treatment—

[Hunt]: —Oh, some of that—

[Brown]: —and some of the other—

[Hunt]: —I don't know. It will never be what it was because the worms don't grow anymore, and that's what made Baffin Bay, Baffin Bay or at least to me because it was probably fed by Great River, and the little worm rocks that grew up. By the way, we have plenty of those that they used to come real close to the surface. Most of that stuff doesn't do that. The ones I know of, they've been walked on, they've been run into, but I don't think they're regrowing. They seem like to me—I've never found one or seen one with a worm in it, so as far as that goes, the runoff and the pollution is all still there. Of course, we flood Nueces with freshwater. Baffin only gets runoff water. I don't know how that affects the Baffin Bay Area. I would think if you could do boating lanes, maybe start—there's an organization called FlatsWorthy, that's working really good out of Rockport to try to help people learn a little boat etiquette. It's a complicated thing. I think that every person that gets a new boat ought to have somebody show him how to run the boat, how to navigate the boat in the Lagoon. I've talked to many people that have got in the boat and left a boat ramp wide open. They see water, they're going to go, and they aground and throw people out of the boat, people get hurt. They wreck boats. They don't have an idea there's a channel there. They don't know what markers are. There's so many people that buy boats, and they just take off, and there's a lot to it. I've talked to some of the dealerships. They don't have time to go and let someone teach a person what they're getting ready to get into, so they've got their life jackets and their whistle and their fire extinguisher, and that's about as far as it goes. There's lots of pamphlets. I think those end up in the trash can or under the seat or in the glove box. There's a lot of safety rules and dos and don'ts. I know they're starting to work on the boating while intoxicated type stuff, so it'll be a long process. There's just a lot, a lot of people. We used to go down and maybe see a barge and maybe see five or six boats and now you can go down and you can see five or six barges in a day. You can see (laughs) boat after boat after boat after boat where sometimes there wouldn't be any boats. So over the years, it's a lot of population, a lot of adds to it. I don't know. So many of the things, the cabins and the floaters. I think those guides are doing everything they can with their sewage and the compositing toilets and the trash pick-ups, um, they're all working on that, but you still got, I mean, used to you may have twenty boats and now you may have two hundred in the same area, so I don't know—and then the Riviera area, all the houses in that area that are growing and building and there again, there's your population coming along, so I don't know if you could ever restore what was there at one time. I don't know. I know, it's kind of like, uh, you're making me sad (both laugh).

[Brown]: Well—

[Hunt]: I like the fond memories, and, yes, I've been out there in some very troubling times and at night. I almost ran into a barge one night, and that was quite eventful. I don't boat at night anymore (laughs). I alleviated that problem real quick, but it was the way he had the barge tied and then he shined his lights in our eyes, so we were blinded. We were going down the side of it, but we didn't know we had another barge on the side of the barge, but it was half-way back,

and I guess he turned the light off just before we hit it, and I was able to navigate and make a sharp, sharp, sharp left turn, boom, and we missed it. I mean, we were within literally hitting distance of that giant barge and—and our little light against his light, you could forget it and then just before we hit it, he turned his light off and then we were able to see his barge on the side. It had no lights on it because it's supposed to have a little light on the front, and it had a light on the tag barge, but it was on the big barge. That's why I was going around the side of it so anyway.

[Brown]: Hm.

[Hunt]: But yeah, I don't like to remember that one (both laugh).

[Brown]: Scary. Um, how do you think we can get younger generations to want to be stewards of Baffin Bay?

[Hunt]: Oh, um, I know there's a tremendous amount of children programs going on. Um, you know, the way we did it was my dad taught me and all his buddies, and those guys packed it in and packed it out. We took our stuff, and we did our—we had our fun and did everything, and there's a lot of people that just aren't that way anymore, and I don't know. I know that kids love to fish. It's excitement. It's fun, but I would say through the learning processes and some of the things they put on, um, but it's just, you know, I don't fish the same way I used to, I guess because the bay did change, and so I didn't change with it, I guess, or I decided I would change and do something else. So yes, for me, I've seen so many crazy things I couldn't understand that people got so mad, and they wanted to kill you and run over you with their boat, and it had to be over a thousand yards away from this guy. I couldn't even see his eyes or his hair or his hat, and we went down and went into one of my spots, and this guy went nuts crazy, running over us with his boat, so I don't know how you get people out of that. I don't know how you can be fishing and have a boat pull up within a hundred yards of you or closer and start fishing and wanting to talk to you. I guess it's kind of a private thing that's not private. I don't know, how do you handle the public (both laugh)? I mean, stewards, I can see that, but I think the state's done what they can, and the game wardens have done what they can, but there's just a lot of reckless people out there too.

[Brown]: Well, those are all the questions that I have, but do you want to add anything or tell me some more, uh, stories?

[Hunt]: (laughs) Oh, I should have been more prepared for this. I didn't make a list or anything. I just—so many great years down there with, I guess, my father's generation and some of the people that introduced him to it and then me to it and then on down the line, but things aren't that way anymore, so I don't know. It's a fun neat place to be. I know some of the great experiences is when David got a grant with Bo and, oh shoot, Pablo Cochar. That was some of the most fun. I had two boys, ten and twelve or so, and they were running tests on Baffin to try to work on a fish count and something like that, and we got to where we're all going down there at the same times together and cooking food and making air kites and fishing and doing

things together and helping each other with the boats and different things, so that was a lot of fun, working on the cabin and building it and taking care of it. That was a lot of fun to that. Of course, now a days, with the new super boats you can run out, fish, and turn right around and come back and stay at home and turn around and go do it the next day, and so that's the part of where the boats and then they sell boats to any and everybody with no instruction. There is something that would—I don't know about the younger people, but the older people could probably use more stewarding than the younger ones, and so (both laugh)—for instance, there was a time I had some black clouds in my life, and I didn't go fishing for quite a while. I had taken a Mercury 150 and basically it was probably in over a hundred pieces or more, and I didn't go fishing for quite a few years and one of my buddies from Houston called me, and we put the motor together, and we went down there, and we went fishing, and I think I just lost my story, with Jerry, thinking about Jerry. I don't know, that was memorable. I just lost my story (laughs). Where was I?

[Brown]: Putting the motor together—

[Hunt]: —Oh, yeah—

[Brown]: —before you went fishing.

[Hunt]: I was going somewhere with that, but I think I just lost it. Yeah, I did (laughs).

[Brown]: That's okay (laughs).

[Hunt]: That was a memorable story though. Oh, gosh.

[Brown]: We can come back to it if you want.

[Hunt]: Uh, okay.

[Brown]: Um, what else?

[Hunt]: I don't know. We—my two boys and their friends, they were all little kids, and I had my boat, and we were sliding into the pier, and the shaft that goes to the gear case broke in two pieces. It was a factory defect, so it was pretty chilly, and we were in deep water. It was over my head, and here I had these four little kids and myself, so I had my Shallow Sport, and I had a rope, and skivvied down and got in the water and started swimming and pulling the boat and pulling the boat and swimming and swimming and swimming and finally I got to where my toes could touch and then I started pulling the boat and eventually we got the boat up and then walked it up the spoil islands until we got back to the pier and tied it all up, and so, you know, how are we going to get these kids home on time (laughs)? Because it was Sunday afternoon, and so I think I had a red shirt, and I got a red shirt, and I walked across the island. I walked out to the end of a pier, and every boat that came by would wave this red shirt and eventually a really nice guy came by. I don't think he ever told me his name, but he assessed the situation,

and I said, “Would you please take these kids in?” and “No, no, I’m going to tow you in,” so he came around the island and picked us up, and he towed us all the way back, and I delivered all the kids to their house, but that was quite an experience that we had down there. They didn’t have Sea Tow then. I think that’s what they call it, the ones that tow you in so. Another experience with that same Evinrude motor, Cheryl and I were in the Hole, and the motor overheated, and so we’re in the Hole, and we’re in shallow water, and we push the boat, literally, we had to push it. It would spin up and take off and within less than two to three minutes, the motor would overheat, so we pushed the boat all the way from the 201 Channel to Roloff’s, pushed it a step at a time, pushed it and when we got to Roloff’s in the deep water, actually we thought, “Oh, yeah, our problems are over,” but the motor still overheated all the way back to the cabin, and that was quite a trip. Cheryl was—she never said a word about it. It’s something we just had to do to be able to get home, and now it’s a lot easier. You have insurance that’ll pay to come pick you up and pull you out, and it’s a different group of people that, I don’t know if they really treasure the outdoors as a treasure. It’s more like the freeway, just to use and somebody else is supposed to clean it up and pick it up like they do our highways, so I guess it gets down to your stewardship, but that’s a complicated one.

[Brown]: How did you—when you were taking your sons out to fish, did you teach them to fly fish and catch and release?

[Hunt]: I have no idea what happened, but neither one of them fishes now. One of my sons fished for quite a while that—neither one of them cared about fly fishing. No, they all fished with rods and reels, but Allen has never cared about fishing, and Reese did for a while and now he’s into something else, and actually that’s the reason I’ve sold out of my cabin, is neither one of my kids cared about it. That was one of the big reasons that I sold my cabin down there.

[Brown]: Um, well, do you have anything else you want to add?

[Hunt]: I’m sure I will (both laugh).

[Brown]: Well, just know you can call me often (both talking at once).

[Hunt]: Five minutes after you leave I will.

[Brown]: After I pack everything up.

[Hunt]: Right, no, Jen. Thank you very much.

[Brown]: Okay.

[Hunt]: It was a pleasure.

[Brown]: Thanks.

[Hunt]: I hope it helps somebody someday.

[Brown]: Hopefully

[Hunt]: All right.

(pause in recording)

[Brown]: Okay, we're back for a slightly second part (both laugh) because Reese remembered something, so this is an addendum to his oral history.

[Hunt]: Oh, okay, we were talking about how to make Baffin Bay better, and one of the things was the mystique of the bay with the rocks and everything in it, and so as you had to learn it on your own, took forever, and a lot of tough experiences with the rocks and the Baffin and the shallow waters. So, I was fishing one time, and I had a black period there for a while, and I couldn't go, and so I didn't remember if you went on the right or the left of where I was, so I was with Cheryl, and we were on a date fishing. I said, "You know, I don't know if you go to the right or to the left of the Calcutta" and back then the rocks were marked with long Calcutta poles with black flags on them, and so I said, "No, let's just sit here for a minute," and so we're sitting there and we're plugging, and all of a sudden, here comes a boat, and this is one of the things that's messed everything up, and here comes this guy in a boat, (crashing noises), and he hits the rocks, smash, bang, boom. "Cheryl, we go on that side of the flag," and so I would've idled across, but I knew that sooner or later a boat was going to come and show me the way, and that guy was okay, but he destroyed a lot of stuff, I'm sure, and we went on our way fishing, so one of the things that happened after the Calcuttas, Gary Dukes introduced me to my first handheld GPS unit, so they came out with GPS units, so now all of a sudden all of the guides have GPS, and they go around, and they pull up all the Calcuttas, or they just happen to all fall over at the same time, so now there's no Calcuttas because all of the rocks and the hazards are marked in their GPS units, so now we go forward maybe ten years, and I got a GPS, and I'm looking at it and all the rocks are marked on a map, so now all I have to do is just go wherever I want to go when I want to go. It's like holy smokes and then a younger generation, you brought that up earlier, so I have a customer that's a super guy, and he's forty-five years younger than I am, so that would be younger generation. He's actually gone and bought from fishing guides, tracks to load into his GPS to show him where to go. He's had guides take him in his boat to make tracks, yes, and he's bought these special programs he's told me about that I have no use for so the information is so easy to access and get, so there's going to be more and more and more traffic because as we had to go and learn, it took us longer, slower, easier, and now a reckless group can come in there with hundred thousand dollar boat and do what maybe took four or five years to find that fishing hole, yeah, so it's another thing where the technology may not be the best thing for the bay because anybody can buy a GPS unit and the rocks are marked in it. Oh, let's not forget Google Earth, which I'm using to find lakes (both laugh), and the satellite imagery is unbelievable now, so there we go.

[Brown]: So, there's no mystique anymore?

[Hunt]: Not really. When you think about it, that's what I meant about the outboard motors. If you weren't a mechanic, you didn't go very far because your motor wouldn't bring you back, and so, yeah, we learned a lot of stuff with those old motors and stuff. We're now—they're just like automobiles. They're really nice. I have one. I have a little seventy Yamaha (laughs). Every time I get in and hit the key it's like (engine noises). It's just like my car. This is awesome in a way, I know. All right?

[Brown]: Okay. Is that it?

[Hunt]: Thank you.

[Brown]: Okay, thanks.

(end of recording)