

**HALI JAMA:** Do you mind just starting off by introducing yourself?

**SUBJECT 1:** My name is John Doe.

**HALI JAMA:** All right.

**SUBJECT 1:** You might be with the DNR, so--

**HALI JAMA:** No, no.

**SUBJECT 1:** My name is John Doe. Go ahead.

**HALI JAMA:** Are you from this area?

**SUBJECT 1:** Milwaukee.

**HALI JAMA:** Milwaukee?

**SUBJECT 1:** Yeah.

**HALI JAMA:** So what made you-- what brought you to Madison to fish? Is it just the environment?

**SUBJECT 1:** The fish.

**HALI JAMA:** Fish. I see.

**SUBJECT 1:** Madison is a good place to fish. Plentiful, there's different places you can fish out here.

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** We were interested in learning more about the diverse communities across Wisconsin and their relationships to fishing. So we went to talk to some anglers fishing in Lake Monona here in Madison.

**SUBJECT 1:** Oh, the crappie and the walleye--

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** So here in Madison, we have four lakes that draw people to boat and fish. And the Monona Terrace is an event center that's right on Lake Monona. It's right on a bike path. So when I take the bike path, I see people fishing there all the time. So we went there to talk to some people.

**HALI JAMA:** I remember thinking I should have brought gloves. It was a little chilly that day, a little bit windy but nothing too crazy. But I just remember a row of like men just fishing. And I was really not expecting anybody, because I was like, it's kind of late, it's a weekday, and it's a little cold. But I guess that's the best time to fish when it's a little more chilly. But yeah, there was a row of men. And we were kind of nervous, but we went up, and we asked them a couple of questions. And they were all really friendly.

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** I was nervous too. It was our first like real field trip for the podcast, like real time going out and talking them.

**SUBJECT 1:** Go ahead.

**HALI JAMA:** All right, John. How long have you been fishing?

**SUBJECT 1:** Oh, about 15 years.

**HALI JAMA:** 15 years. So how did you get into fishing? Is that like a family tradition?

**SUBJECT 1:** Well, change. And I went with a friend of mine. He, told me I should try it. I wasn't really interested.

**HALI JAMA:** How come?

**SUBJECT 1:** But I tried it, and I liked it. Being a guy from the inner city area, it wasn't appealing to me for whatever reason. I never tried it. But then once I tried it, and I began to catch, it got different. So the next year, I went out, and I brought a boat. It's the love of it, the challenge, to being outdoors, the peace that comes with it.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** Do you fish in Milwaukee then?

**SUBJECT 1:** Ah, yeah. Yeah. But you got Lake Michigan, and that's bigger than this. So it's so much water inland. You don't know where the fish is, you actually have to find fish. Most people that fish are in Lake Michigan in Milwaukee. They got big boats, big yachts. And they're out there.

**HALI JAMA:** Could you talk about fishing in the Black community? Just like--

**SUBJECT 1:** Always. Me and my fishing buddies, we basically be having fun with our sails, but we'd be hitting on to the other guys and people in the community. That's how fishing is. Everybody's not going to do it. I got tangled up. This is the down side. This is the downside to when you tango in your own.

**HALI JAMA:** So it wasn't just John Doe who had traveled from Milwaukee to fish in Madison. All five of the people we had talked to had done the same thing. We met cousins La'Mont and George. And we asked them why they came to Madison to fish.

**SUBJECT 2:** So and here is nice because you got different lakes. So you got Monona, you got Mendota, you got Stoughton, you got a lot of lakes. You got Lodi, the Wisconsin River. But it's-- like you said, it's relaxation.

**SUBJECT 1:** You make friends with the other people who fish or you just all do your own thing?

**SUBJECT 3:** Definitely got to make friends when you're out fishing, because that's what we're lacking right now. We can't agree to disagree right now. So I think with fishermen's, regardless of what party you belong to or who you vote for, that doesn't matter with fishermen's, or what race you are. Once we got to strike up a conversation, we'll get into somewhere to talk about something and wind up, we have more in common than we do with each other, with our fishing experiences.

**HALI JAMA:** Ideally, right?

**SUBJECT 3:** Ideally. Yeah. He's my cousin, you want to interview him?

**HALI JAMA:** Yeah.

**SUBJECT 3:** He's a retired police officer.

**BONNIE** Have anything to add to the questions that we asked?

**WILLISON:**

**SUBJECT 2:** No. But there's a lot-- I'm in a fish club. So we're a Black fish club. We went only Midwest Crappie Hunters. I'm not from Milwaukee. But so I-- we did a fish camp. We're doing one for the winter. And then we did one this summer in McGovern park in Milwaukee for the kids.

**HALI JAMA:** So immediately, we wanted to hear more about the Midwest Crappie Hunters.

**BONNIE** Is it just learn to fish?

**WILLISON:**

**SUBJECT 2:** Teaching the kids how to tie hooks, how to fish, how to fillet, so we teach them. Just this year-- Yeah, look-- our website is [midwestcrappiehunters](http://midwestcrappiehunters.com).

**HALI JAMA:** Could you say that again? In this episode, we learned to fish in Milwaukee and talk to the club president, Darrian Perry, about teaching kids on Milwaukee's north side to fish.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HALI JAMA:** From Wisconsin Sea Grant, I'm Hali.

**BONNIE** And I'm Bonnie.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** And you're listening to *The Water We Swim In--* Stories About the Great Lakes and the People Working Towards Equity.

**BONNIE** Wisconsin Sea Grant is based at UW Madison, which occupies the traditional land of the Ho-Chunk people. The stories on this podcast span the area we now know as Wisconsin, where the lands and waters are cared for by the 12 native nations that call Wisconsin home.

**WILLISON:**

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HALI JAMA:** Darrian Perry most often goes fishing at night.

**DARRIAN** I think crappie has become a favorite fish of mine as well, because it works with my schedule, my work schedule.

**PERRY:** I work all during the day, and then so when I'm done working 6:00 in the evening, 7:00, that's a perfect time to get the boat ready and go out to go fishing. So we'll fish from 7:00 to 8:00 at night until the wee hours of the morning. And that's predominantly when we catch all of our crappies is at night.

**HALI JAMA:** For a typical night of fishing, Darrian might drive out to Pewaukee Lake 30 minutes or so West of Milwaukee. The east side of the lake has a really nice beach lined with ice cream shops and restaurants.

**DARRIAN** When we're out there fishing, when the sun is setting, it's getting dark, looking at all the buildings and the different places that's lit up and just being out there, it's a really, really beautiful scenery. Even the houses surrounded in the lake. Everybody has a manicure grass. They have nice rocks or different landscape and features. And it's just-- it's a really beautiful humbling place to be--

**PERRY:**

**BONNIE** So as we said before, Darrian Perry is the president of Midwest Crappie Hunters.

**WILLISON:**

**DARRIAN** Midwest Crappie Hunters is a nonprofit organization that we created back in 2019. And it was created by avid  
**PERRY:** fishermen. And we established this club to go after fishing clinics for the kids.

**HALI JAMA:** What is now an organization was once just a couple of people that had--

**DARRIAN** Gotten together, men and women, we go to fishing at different destinations. And just over the years of  
**PERRY:** organizing fishing trips and even events, barbecues, and different things of that nature, we always kept in touch. So we decided to turn that into an actual organization.

**HALI JAMA:** They had a great time fishing and wanted others to experience it with them.

**DARRIAN** There's a need to help the kids in our city. They give them something to do. And fishing is always something  
**PERRY:** that's been very therapeutic for kids. My parents, uncle, and my grandpa, different family members always took me fishing. And I was hooked on it immediately as a kid. So when I was able to drive on my own and instead of going to Great America and doing things that typical teenagers and young adults would do, I was always headed to the bank to go fishing. So it's something that's always stuck with me for my entire life.

**BONNIE** So when you first heard Midwest Crappie Hunters, did you know what that club would be about? Like did you  
**WILLISON:** know what crappies were?

**HALI JAMA:** I didn't really know what crappies were or crappie hunters were. I kind of assumed it must have been like maybe deer hunting or some type of other hunting group.

**BONNIE** I guess I knew-- I just knew they were a fish. But Midwest Crappie Hunters does sound kind of intense.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** Yeah. So what is a crappie anyway?

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**DARRIAN** You have black crappies, you have white crappies, you have yellow crappies. They have a sheen to them that's  
**PERRY:** almost like a bluish, greenish color. The black crappie, it'd be a darker crappie, and then it's have the specks throughout the body. The fans are beautiful. Everything about the fish is just really beautiful. They are a wide fish, but they're more of a flat pan fish, but they're a big-- you can get them as big as a dinner plate, as a frying pan. I mean, they come really big.

A typical crappie you're going to catch on an average day, it's going to range between 7 inches and 12 inches. I would say the biggest crappie that I caught was 17 inches, which was out of Beaver now. And a lot of people leave Wisconsin to go to other states to catch crappies that size. And we have one right here at home. So they have a really soft mouth, so you have to be careful when you're bringing that fish in. Like a bass, you can just kind of hoist it and just real fast, reel it in. With a crappie, you have to take your time, because their mouth is almost like tissue.

So if you pull it too hard, you just lose the fish. But they're very unique fish. And there's not another one like it.

[LAUGHS]

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**BONNIE** This is a weird question, but how would you describe the personality of a crappie?

**WILLISON:**

**DARRIAN** Oh. That is not a weird question. Because crappies are-- crappies are very picky fish. With like a bluegill, you can  
**PERRY:** throw anything out there, and a bluegill, it will take that bait. A crappie, I've literally seen a crappy bite something and spit it back out. They're just such a picky fish. Yeah, you just have to know where they're at. And they're very sneaky too, so you can be fish and straight down, and your line will be moving to the side so slow that with the naked eye, you can barely tell that it's moving. And you pull up on it, and there's a huge fish on there.

I mean, there's such-- I mean, you can get them as big as 16, 17 inches. And you won't even know that they're missing with your line, because they're such a good finesse fish. They can really get that bait off of there without you knowing. So they're just a really fun fish. Crappies are just extremely fun. And to me, they are the bass-- the best tasting fish that there is in our inland lakes.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HALI JAMA:** With his experience with fishing, Darrian wanted to teach kids all about it. The Midwest Crappie Hunters began to host--

**DARRIAN** Free educational kid's fishing clinics every year to teach the kids, the youth of the benefits surrounding our ponds  
**PERRY:** and lakes and rivers. We host our fishing clinics at McGovern Park. We work with the fish hatchery to stock the pond, so there's fish available for the kids to catch. And then we have periods throughout the fishing clinic, where we teach kids how to start from tying the hook all the way to after you catch your fish, how to fillet, and properly eat the fish.

**BONNIE** They also go over safety tips and protocols for fishing.

**WILLISON:**

**DARRIAN** We cover a lot within our clinics. And also, we find that there is a lot of adults that are learning in these kid's  
**PERRY:** fishing clinics as well.

**BONNIE** So Darrian is obviously pretty well traveled in Wisconsin. He told us about taking fishing trips up north and to a  
**WILLISON:** lot of other lakes and rivers throughout the state. And we even talked about his trips to the lake that I grew up on in South Central Wisconsin, Lake Koshkonong. But in terms of fishing in his hometown of Milwaukee, it's kind of limited.

**DARRIAN** We have Lake Michigan, but we don't have the inner lakes, like how you have Beaver down Fox Lake and all  
**PERRY:** these different lakes that are throughout Wisconsin. And I think that having kids introduced to these different lakes, these different areas of Wisconsin, I think it will give them a vision of what we have to offer and kind of think outside the box. And that's really the purpose. When a lot of the kids that come to these fishing clinics have never held a fishing pole, and now over these last couple of years, we actually have parents that are contacting us, asking us when we're going to host more clinics.

And when you're dealing with the inner city youth, there is limitations on vehicles and just being able to get out to some of these farther places. Typically, it seems like that's kind of the issue is the transportation, getting out to Montello or Princeton, Wisconsin or Baraboo or some of these places that just have just gorgeous Wisconsin land that you can see and great fishing. So I think that is probably one of the biggest issues.

**HALI JAMA:** Although fishing can just be a fun hobby, Darrian also emphasizes how fishing can help with mental health.

**DARRIAN PERRY:** So not only is it giving the kids something to do and taking the tablets out of their hands, but it also creates family time, which I think is really important for families to bond. You're at a restaurant, the whole family is-- everybody's looking at their phone. And so we're just trying to give back kind of to the older ways, where you spend quality family time. And then also to just-- I think the therapeutic side of it is really important too, because we live in a day and age where there's a lot of anxiety and just mental health challenges that I think that the water is like a medicine-free type of therapeutic way to help out individuals who do suffer for different type of mental challenges.

**HALI JAMA:** Fishing doesn't just benefit kids though. Fishing has made a difference for adults that Darrian knows as well.

**DARRIAN PERRY:** And I personally know people that suffer from like bipolar, anxiety, stuff of that nature. And when they're around the water, it's a night and day difference. They feel like that they-- especially-- and it depends. Some people don't like the boat, some people love the boat. I love the boat. I'm a big time boat fisherman. I started off from the bank. But once I got on a boat for the first time, which was-- I was 17, 18 years old. I was hooked ever since. And I've had four boats throughout my lifetime. And so when you're-- so my saying is, when I'm out on the water, all my stressful issues is on land.

I feel like the water is kind of a safe haven and just to kind of get away. But I think that just being around the water, even if you're not fishing, if you're reading a book, if you're having a picnic, if you're playing volleyball, whatever you're doing, if the water is right there is going to put you in a different mind state. I think just being by the water so not necessarily having a fish but just being around the water will help with any kind of mental issues that is going on, I think is very important.

**HALI JAMA:** With fishing, you can imagine it would be an individual sport. But it's actually one of the best ways to feel a sense of community and make friends.

**DARRIAN PERRY:** You meet so many different people, and you just become one big network. I mean, everybody is-- I haven't met a mad person that was fishing. I mean, everybody is such a great spirit, a good mood. And a lot of people I've met that are really good friends to me right now, I've met on the fishing bank.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** So Darrian invited us to come out to a fishing clinic, and we were super excited. After the break, Hali goes on her first fishing trip, and we meet the Midwest Crappie Hunters in person.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**BONNIE WILLISON:** So let's talk about the fishing trip.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HALI JAMA:** We drove about an hour and a half maybe to Milwaukee. And when we showed up, we got a bit lost because like, it was kind of a hidden lake almost.

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** Yeah, we approached this park. And we're like, is there a lake in there? [LAUGHS] From McGovern Park.

**HALI JAMA:** We couldn't tell. There's like a building in front of it. But yeah, we-- right away, we approached the place, and there were little signs that said like fishing clinic for free or kid's fishing clinic for free, I believe. And there are little kids running around everywhere with little fishing poles. And some of them were like little fake ones that they had to like practice. And yeah, Darrian like greeted us right away and showed us around.

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** Inside this park building, there were some stations.

**SUBJECT 4:** Hello, there. How are you doing? We're going to show you how to catch that fish and not let him get away. All right. You got to have a secured knot first to start up. Here, I'm going to show you a simple knot that I use all the time--

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** Each station teaches the kids--

**DARRIAN  
PERRY:** Something different about fishing. And then when they complete all of the stations, they'll get a certificate of completion. And then once they complete it, they go outside of that building, and then we have artificial fish set up outside as a game, and then we teach them how to cast. And the goal is try to take the plastic piece that's on the tip of the pole and connect it with the plastic fish that's out on the grass, and then connect it and reel it in and dragging it back. And we teach them that way. And then once we feel that they're comfortable enough to cast, to be safe with it, then we take them out by the water.

And then we continue to show them how to properly cast using a hook and how to properly bait your lines and just how to stay away from the edge of the landing, so you're not in close to the water. And we just fully go through with them. And then once they catch their fish, if it's big enough, we do a fish demonstration on how to fillet. So we'll go back to a table, and then the kids stand around, and then we show them how to fillet. And then we actually-- all the way through until the fish is consumed. So we batter it up, we'll fry it, we'll do everything. And so they can get the full experience.

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** So we went through the stations.

**HALI JAMA:** Yeah, I remember the first station, there was a woman. And she taught us about different life jackets and which one we'll specifically wear. And yeah, that was interesting. I didn't know there were all these different kind of varieties of life jackets, but there are. And then after that, we learned how to tie the-- tie a knot. It was actually quite a challenge.

**BONNIE  
WILLISON:** Tie a knot that will keep the fish on the hook--

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**BONNIE** Yeah. Kind of complicated.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** It was for sure. After that, we learned about all the different kinds of fish that are out there and even the ones that aren't.

**SUBJECT 5:** Good luck today. I hope you catch your big one out there.

**BONNIE** Thanks, me too.

**WILLISON:**

**SUBJECT 5:** And the next station--

**BONNIE** So yeah, then we went outside, and the instructors were helping the kids.

**WILLISON:**

**SUBJECT 6:** Pull me in. Uh-huh. Keep your eye on that bobber. Oh, there you go. Pull it in. Pull it in. Pull it in. Pull it in. Did you all-- did you miss him? [LAUGHS] Yeah, it looked like he might have missed it. All right. Let's throw him back out there.

**SUBJECT 7:** I know they're trying to hide, but these red ones, blue ones, I just been putting them on the hook for the kids.

**HALI JAMA:** Wait, are these alive too?

**SUBJECT 7:** Yeah, all of them alive.

**BONNIE** And then finally, we got a chance to try fishing.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** How are you feeling? Ready to fish?

**BONNIE** I'm ready to finally fish. I've watched so many people catch them at this point.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** I know. I feel like at this point we're experts.

**BONNIE** So first, like putting on the worm and then casting out into this pond with everyone else trying to avoid smacking someone with your hook.

**WILLISON:**

**HALI JAMA:** I think you got smacked at some point, right? Or close enough?

**BONNIE** I almost did, yeah.

**WILLISON:**

[LAUGHS]

**BONNIE** How would you describe what it was like to fish?

**WILLISON:**



**HALI JAMA:** There's a lot of patience within fishing, because you really-- you can't really do anything. It's mostly about like luck, I guess. So you just kind of have to wait and wait for a fish to come to you and try different spots. And there's not really a specific technique is what I kind of learned, I mean--

**SUBJECT 6:** Just keep your eye on that bobber. You start to go down, that's when you go-- [INAUDIBLE].

**SUBJECT 8:** I got one!

**SUBJECT 6:** There you go. He got one. Got it, guppy?

[INTERPOSING VOICES]

**SUBJECT 9:** All right.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** Yeah. There were people catching fish, and so there was a lot of excitement in the air. And we asked Darrian about his favorite moments that he remembers.

**SUBJECT 6:** I would say the funny moments is when a kid is when they have a fish, and it comes up, and it's like the size of a \$0.50 piece or something, like just the smallest fish ever, but they're so excited. And so I think that's probably some of the funnier moments. The kids are ecstatic, they're bringing in a fish, and then they get it up, and then it's like, what is it? And then we also-- we have a first place prize for the boy, and we have a first place prize for the girls. So we do a cash prize or we give away fishing equipment and stuff like that, whoever catches the biggest fish.

So we make it somewhat competitive and fun. And then we also-- then we just give away like back to school stuff backpacks and have different things made up for the kids and stuff like that. It's all fun for them. I mean, from the games that is leading up to the actual fish. And a lot of the adults and the kids have a great time casting in the grass, trying to get the fake fish. And so it's all fun for them. The entire event is a lot of laughs, and you can see the seriousness in the kids and the passion that they have for that fish, and like they love it. And I don't see cell phones and tablets.

I don't see anything out when we're doing our events. Like everybody's looking at what's going on, who's going what, who's catching what. So yeah.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** So we were seeing a few people catch fish. The one kid next to us got like eight fish in a row

**HALI JAMA:** At least.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** Like he just kept reeling them in. I was casting out. And I could tell that fish were like biting, because the bobber is going down, but they weren't getting caught on my hook. That's been a real challenge for me. But finally, I had some luck.

**HALI JAMA:** Oh. Oh, my god. Bring it in!

**BONNIE WILLISON:** I got one! OK. It looks like it just cut on his lip. So I'm really sad that you didn't get a fish on your first ever fishing trip. But do you think fishing is something that you would want to try again?

**HALI JAMA:** Yeah. I really do. I mean, my friend loves fishing, and he's always invited me. But I was like, I don't know. But now, I'm not really as hesitant. I'm actually like-- maybe I'll try it this summer.

[MUSIC PLAYING]

**HALI JAMA:** These clinics are a great opportunity not just for education but also for some downtime and meeting people who enjoy the same hobby as you do.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** So with the Midwest Crappie Hunters, what's the process for becoming a club member? Like do people just show up?

**HALI JAMA:** You can become a member on their website. There is a one time \$25 fee, but they often waive that. They also have merchandise like shirts and sweatshirts that you can order and support them. Going forward, Darrian told us about their vision.

**DARRIAN PERRY:** So our vision moving forward, given that COVID is going to get better and everything is going to get lifted, we would like to continue to host these fishing clinics, but we would-- instead of twice a year, we would like to maybe double that, at least four times a year or even more. We will also like to work with schools, especially like MPS. For instance, like gym is a great curriculum to have with schools. But I think that having like a sportsman's class, an outdoor class, or something to show this kids to the same thing about fishing and hunting and just the outdoors.

And then we also-- where we want to work with not just like having like just a kid's fishing clinic, I mean, we want to work with veterans, we want to work with-- have like mental awareness months for fishing, and just different things that we would like to incorporate, and not so much just target the kids. Because even though that is very important, because they are our future, there are still a lot of adults that can benefit from this as well.

**BONNIE WILLISON:** You can find Midwest Crappie Hunters at [midwestcrappiehunters.com](http://midwestcrappiehunters.com).

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**BONNIE WILLISON:** *The Water We Swim In* is produced by Bonnie Willison and Hali Jama. Please subscribe, rate, and review, and share this podcast with a friend. You can find Wisconsin Sea Grant at [seagrant.wisc.edu](http://seagrant.wisc.edu). You can find the Wisconsin Water Resources Institute at [wri.wisc.edu](http://wri.wisc.edu). Thanks for tuning in. We'll see you next time.

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