

Karen DeMaria: Okay, number twelve. Do you know why I wanted to talk to you? Do you understand what my research is about?

Grady Sullivan: All I heard is just a little bit about maybe that you guys are trying to find out what changes have occurred in the Keys...

KD: Basically, I have been hired to go up and down the Keys and talk to people who have spent a lot of time on the water and document what changes that they have observed and other things. Basically, just trying to see if there are trends, if areas are okay, when things started to happen. So, I am looking at time frames a lot. So, I have got a questionnaire I am going to go down and ask questions. We will just expand on it as we go along. If you have other things, you can just add it in at the time. Okay? First, I want to get some background information just to make sure that – I think that is another part of anytime we do a research paper. We want to make sure that you talk to a well-rounded group of people. You did not just focus on a certain kind of people. So, the first set of questions are background questions to go with that. How many years have you lived in the Keys?

GS: Since June 6, 1972, so that's twenty-one years.

KD: How do you know the exact date?

GS: Because I had to go to work as a roofer, and it was a real hot that day. [laughter] I'll never forget it as long as I live. I thought I'd die.

KD: [laughter]. You have been a full-time resident of the Keys for twenty-one years?

GS: Except for the nine months I lived in Australia, and six months I went back and visited my family in Oregon.

KD: Before moving down here, did you ever visit here? Come here as a visitor at all?

GS: No.

KD: So, it was just twenty-one years. How old are you?

GS: Thirty-nine.

KD: Really?

GS: Yes. [laughter]

KD: Gosh. You are younger than everyone else.

GS: But I still outwork all them guys that are thirty years old I work with now, so – [laughter]

KD: I am thirty. I was going to say forty-one or so because a lot of the guys that you used to

fish would seem to be right between thirty and forty-five.

GS: It was the hardest thirty-nine year. What can I say?

KD: Yes. [laughter] Did you graduate from high school?

GS: No.

KD: What grade did you go to?

GS: Actually, halfway through the ninth year.

KD: You are a commercial fisherman by occupation? What is your primary, tropical?

GS: I collect marine fish, yes.

KD: Is there anything else that you do?

GS: I dock crawfish. I spearfish, anything else that I can do to make a few dollars.

KD: Basically, things associated with diving.

GS: Right.

KD: Have you always done this for twenty-one years, this kind of commercial fishing work, or was there anything else that you did?

GS: All that, and when the weather would get bad and I couldn't find a boat, then I'd go to work as a carpenter or something like that. You need to learn another trade as well.

KD: Where is most of your water experience at, as far as these?

GS: I guess it'd be Pacific Light Dry Tortugas, I guess.

KD: Where is Pacific Light?

GS: It's like one this side of Fowey Rock. I used to dive up there on the other side of [inaudible] quite a bit. Before, we just came in from [inaudible].

KD: So, you pretty much go from Pacific Light to Tortugas?

GS: Well, not now since – but that's where I experienced – some in Miami, Fowey Rock and Bear Cut, places like that.

KD: Why did you stop going there?

GS: When they made it a monument.

KD: Now where is your range?

GS: I dive from Alligator Light. Tomorrow we'll be going to Tortugas though.

KD: Gulf side, oceanside, or both?

GS: Both. I also dove quite a bit up in the Gulf at dawn, so...

KD: Shipwrecks. So, that was timeless. Have you ever been a volunteer involved with the water, or are you a member of any organization such as (OFF, SMLA, FSEA?), advisory councils?

GS: Let's see, I was a member of Reef Relief, American Littoral Society, Audubon Society, OFF, SMLA, FSEA[inaudible]. I sometimes sit as an alternate for (Bill Parch?) on the advisory council.

KD: Yes. [laughter] [inaudible] at all. Are you still a member of OFF and FMLA?

GS: Not OFF.

KD: Not OFF.

GS: FMLA. I guess I'm a lifetime member. I don't pay dues since I spent so much time doing it.

KD: A lifetime member.

GS: They call me once in a while. O-F-F, I'm not a member anymore because I don't believe in the fish traps and different things that they've done to the crawfishing. I'm still a member of Audubon, American Littoral Society, and [inaudible]. I think we're...

KD: [laughter]. Do you still get their newsletters?

GS: Yes. I think I paid my last bill. I think I paid the bill.

KD: I think we are one of those lifetime members of Reef Relief or something.

GS: Alex Stone sends me everything. You just...

KD: Project Reef Keeper?

GS: Yes.

KD: You get his most recent thing on the live rocking stuff, that brochure.

GS: Yes, I did.

KD: March, April, whatever it was. I just finished reading that. True. It is so funny. Tell me about your fishery experience. What do you do? Pretend you do not know me. Tell me about how you fish. What do you do?

GS: Well, basically what we do is we go and use hand nets. I used to use a fence net, but I haven't used the fence net for over a year now. So, we collect marine specimens for wholesale, retail, or we collect for SeaWorld or Miami Seaquarium. As a matter of fact, we got nine SeaWorld by now. Actually, Eric, he does that, but I help him.

KD: Right. You do all size fishes or...

GS: Yes. Fishes from the minimum size limit to the upper size limit, and then if we have to go over that or other fish that are banned or protected, then we get Special Activities Permits from Ed Erby.

KD: You are doing work with SOSA?

GS: Yes. We collect plants, mollusks, just everything, everything that has to go in an aquarium, you know, and of course, the dreaded live rocks, which I have to admit, I only do that because everybody else has to. So, I have to be...

KD: Being competitive. Now you say pretty much you fish all over the place, gulf side, oceanside. What determines where you are fishing?

GS: The weather.

KD: The weather?

GS: Actually, what's special is the need for which order?

KD: In the targets?

GS: Yes.

KD: Right.

GS: As far as whether it's Gulf or Atlantic, mostly it's the weather that turns out. just roll nasty out in the front. Then you just go out back and work [inaudible].

KD: You said you used to use a fence net. That is like a barrier net?

GS: Right.

KD: That is what I understood. Because I have seen you use it when I have been with you and used this stuff. This is the question, does your gear have a bycatch?

GS: About four fish a year.

KD: Four fish a year?

GS: Yes. Unwanted bycatch like sometimes the groupers go through them. Sometimes barracudas go through. They're stuck. If anything gets caught that you don't want, all you do is you take your hand and pull out and turn it loose. About four this year, I think.

KD: Four this year, that is pretty good. Compared to today's fishing, to catch the same amount of fish now that you do in the past, does it take you more time, less time, or the same amount of time? From now until ten years ago, 1983, were you taking more time or less time?

GS: In the marine life fisheries, it takes the same amount of time though. As a matter of fact, some of the fish has even really increased, like rock beauties, the *Holacanthus tricolor*. There's a lot more of them now than there were five years ago. Don't ask me why. Angelfish are increasing for some reason. We don't know why. It could be just a trend there too. But as far as spearfishing and hook and line fishing for grouper, there were days you go out and never – I went for a year and never seen a grouper.

KD: What time was that?

GS: Let's say about three years ago. Now, it's amazing. There are groupers everywhere, small ones. They're not real big anymore. But they're between 1 and 7 pounds. Then every once in a while, if you go on a wreck, then you get some 12-pounders, 15-pounders, but nothing like the 20- or 30- pounds we used to see, say in [19]83, [19]84, [19]85.

KD: So, basically you are saying that you are seeing more groupers now than you did three years ago, but they are smaller.

GS: I've seen more groupers now than I did a year ago. It's like magic. They're all sitting there –

KD: Do you have any reason why you think that is happening?

GS: YEs, the fish trap ban in South Atlantic.

KD: Also, you said, I guess, that the grouper is smaller now, than they were, ten or fifteen years ago.

GS: Yes.

KD: You had a lot more larger ones then?

GS: Yes, we did.

KD: Snappers and stuff.

GS: Mangroves are pretty much about the same. They're everywhere. The bigger ones come and go. Except in deep water, mutton snappers are a lot thinner than they used to be, and they're smaller. Hogfish are smaller. So, there's a lot in there, but the big ones are all gone.

KD: What about the mangroves and the shallows?

GS: They're all small, but there's zillions of them.

KD: Has that always been the case?

GS: Just from my experience, yes. Usually, around the mangroves. They never seem to get real big. Every once in a while you get a one- or two-pounder, but they're all small. But they've always been zillions and zillions.

KD: Right. Because you have been here, what, twenty-one years, as far as fish or all fish, is there anything that you have noticed different about fish in general that have occurred in the last twenty years? Whether it has been an increase in size or population or a decrease in the size what you have just mentioned about the rock beauty, and the angelfish, and the rivers? Let me give you a list here you can look at. That's back and front, double columns. This list of different ds of fish that I could think of sort of see if anything sparks your memory.

GS: Yellowtails seem to be smaller. Cuberas were about the same. Schoolmaster lanes, hogfish are smaller. Dog snapper's about the same. You see them when they come out of the hole.

KD: Are these all gradual changes?

GS: Yes, it seems to be. Actually, some of them, all of a sudden, they were there. Then they were gone. It was 1985 or something like that. There just seemed to be a decrease in all fish for some reason, and on the –

KD: Bluefish or trout? Everything.

GS: Everything. I would find fish traps full of fifty or seventy-five tropical fish and then a couple dead big fish. Where the fish traps were, then the fish all thinned out. I mean, King mackerel, Spanish mackerel, ceros, they really got slammed.

CK: Why?

GS: I'm going to say it's because of the nets. First time I'd ever seen power rollers was when I was in Miami. There was a million pounds of mackerel rotted in Miami River because they couldn't sell them.

KD: Do you think they are coming back?

GS: Yes, they are. I'm actually seeing schools of five and six of them now, instead of one here, one there. A lot of little ones, , like a foot-and-a-half long. The tuna stuff, I didn't know a whole lot about, like the Bonito, I guess it'll be a little [inaudible]. That's a Bonito. They tend to be doing okay.

KD: They have the fish list for everybody.

GS: I tell you, the average act really got slammed.

KD: By whom? Or by what?

GS: I'm going to say, commercial fisherman, because they used to be there. I mean, they were everywhere. All of a sudden, people realized you could smoke them. They're good. There was a market for them. Then they just –

KD: So, that is more in relation to a market being created.

GS: Being created for them.

KD: Right. I heard a person made a comment to me once about the grouper. How, I do not know, it was thirty years ago or so that the grouper was not really a main targeted fish because there was not really a market for it. Then a market was created or developed.

GS: I don't know about thirty years ago, but when I came here, everybody was after grouper.

KD: Yes. This is a real old-timer, seventy-year-old person. So, I am trying to figure out if that was the case. I can always ask Ed Little, Mr. stats man.

GS: Ladyfish, snook, permit, bonefish. Bonefish is really gone, and permit. They're nothing like they used to be in the flats.

KD: Also Big Pine, Key West, or all over.

GS: Everywhere. You could go off any place, say, ten years ago, twelve years ago, you could see permit on the flats, and bonefish. I don't know how the guys still make a living now actually. Tunas, they're okay, except for the charter fisherman keep freaking killing them for no reason.

KD: They say they do not do that, but then you read in the paper.

GS: Look in the newspaper. Go to Captain Hooks. You see five barracuda hanging up there for no reason. That's like every fisherman. We say we don't hurt nothing, and they say they don't hurt – we all hurt something. You know that. Lemon sharks, they took a slamming from the shark fishermen, from the nets and the long lines. They're just now starting to come back a little bit.

KD: When did you, time frame, you said that the these were hit hard? Was that late [19]80s, you think, or early [19]80s, middle [19]80s?

GS: No, the late [19]80s, I think. The big schools of big parrotfish, aren't here anymore.

KD: The big blues?

GS: Just all kinds, big rainbows, big blue parrotfish.

KD: Are there big red parrotfish?

GS: Those would be the rainbow parrotfish.

KD: Rainbows?

GS: Yes.

KD: A lady, the other day, asked me about that. She said that she had seen something she had never seen before. Because usually you see huge parrotfish, and they are blue. She goes, "I saw one, and it was reddish pink."

GS: They're reddish pink. It's got a green beak. So, it's a rainbow parrot.

KD: That was a normal thing.

GS: Yes. [laughter] When I first came here, I used to go out, and they were everywhere, big giant ones. Now, I'm starting to see a few more now, in the last year or so. I don't know how fast they grow.

KD: That would be interesting to know, yes. What about jewfish? Are you seeing more or less?

GS: I'm seeing a lot of jewfish now.

KD: What size?

GS: Mostly small ones. But every once in a while, I see 100, 200 pounds. But most of them are all between, say, 10 to 50 pounds. I'm seeing lots of them inshore, like in channels and on flats and places like that. But until the ban was in there, they never had a chance. There was –

KD: That is good. That means that it is working.

GS: A lot of that inshore stuff with divers, any diver, "Oh, it's a jewfish. Let's spear them."  
[laughter]

KD: Does not take much skill really.

GS: No.

KD: It is right there.

GS: Any nitwit can shoot a jewfish. [laughter] I did it for a long time. [laughter] So, anybody can do it.

KD: Almost like anybody can shoot a hog snapper too. They sort of pose for you. "Oh, you want to shoot me? Here you go." [laughter]

GS: The red drum and stuff like that, I don't know much about.

KD: What about the Nassau group, are you seeing some throughout the [inaudible]?

GS: Yep. Seeing more Nassau. Seems like every month, there's more and more of them.

KD: Is that the fish that used to be here fairly a lot, or is it just...

GS: No, there were never real a lot of them. But all of a sudden, there weren't any. Because they're like anything else. They come swim right up here like a red grouper. You can steer them easy.

KD: Red groupers just sit there, and they will watch you.

GS: I actually, to be honest with you, I can't shoot red grouper anymore. It's a real big one.

KD: I only shot one in my entire time. I am sort of upset because here is this fish staring at me, and I am going to shoot him. But it was good for dinner.

GS: Sea turtles, all the sea turtles are coming back. I see lots of them. Other than that, I don't –

KD: Do you ever notice anything odd or any strange things out on the water or in the water, different?

GS: Yes. It's all green now, green and shitty.

KD: We will get to that. But I mean with the fish, any weird fish or anything? A school of fish that was sawfishes or anything that you would be different?

GS: Sawfish, I don't see many of them. I haven't seen a sawfish in freaking several years. I used to see them all the time.

KD: All throughout or any particular area?

GS: The big ones were always offshore and in the channels. The smaller ones were in the flats and...

KD: Really? I would never have thought of a sawfish being in the flats.

GS: Yes, the little ones, up in the flats because they eat moss.

KD: How big would be a little one?

GS: I got one about 18 inches long.

KD: That big. He was cute.

GS: Yes. He's still in SeaWorld too, I think.

KD: That is the perfect aquarium size.

GS: Yes. Well, he's not that small anymore. They grow real fast. From this size to about 4-foot, they grow in a couple of years.

KD: They are like the mullets.

GS: Yes. Then they grow slow after they get big.

KD: The jewfish do the same thing. Do they not?

GS: I think so.

KD: They kind of gorge out when they are young and stuff. When they hit a certain age, they just get better, but they do not really...

GS: They're like little kids.

KD: [laughter]. There you go. Okay, let me check on this here. Have you noticed a movement of fish from one location to another? Basically, have you noticed an area that used to have a bunch of fish and now it does not have any fish? Or an area that...

GS: Yes, Dry Tortugas.

KD: What about Dry Tortugas?

GS: That was odd. On the south side and Tortugas banks used to have lots of grouper. There was grouper everywhere. At certain times of the year, you can go there. There are blacks everywhere. Then it's like all of a sudden, about [19]83, [19]84, they just disappeared. I attribute it to fish traps. We go down there. I remember one trip, Don and I and (Davide Fair?). Three of us shot 3,000 pounds in the same amount of time. One fish trap boat with two people got 30,000 pounds on it. Looks good, we use our own imagination.

KD: Have you noticed any fish behavior in relation to gear?

GS: All the fish at Looe Key will come up and eat cheese out your hand, I noticed that.

KD: Really? Yuck.

GS: All these charter boats just take fish food out, fish food sticks, and everybody comes. You go out into a place where they're doing that, and the fish swim right up to you.

KD: Very easily trained.

GS: Yes.

KD: Have you ever observed any fish kills?

GS: A couple of real cold winters and...

KD: In the shallow waters pretty much?

GS: The last one I did it there was 1979. Fish food was dying for no reason, out on the reef. I think they attributed to a toxin being spilled or something like that. But it was all up and down the reef. You'd find...

KD: Where?

GS: Well, I was in Islamorada then, there were yellowtail dead everywhere. A lot of it say [inaudible]. You'll find angelfish, queen angelfish and blackcaps swimming tail down like this, halfway between the service and the bottom, all just rotted away. A lot of people say Graysby groupers and strawberries were dying. You just find them laying on the bottom deck. The yellowtail, I think, took it worse than anything. Maybe that's because there's more of them or something.

KD: You think it was a toxic spill or some sort?

GS: They attributed it to the four barrels of toxaphene, is what it was called. They found floating out by Pickles Reef. But I think it was something way more than that. I think the government covered it up, personally.

KD: Now how long did it take to the for that area to pick back up again?

GS: Oh, it wasn't the same for several years after that when I moved away. I moved down to Islamorada. I mean, Islamorada, for a long time, didn't have hardly any angelfish, rockies, nothing. They all had to come down here. Just in the last couple of years that they've been starting to find more and more of those up there.

KD: I have to remember when asking people up there, when I get up that way.

GS: (Caine Nemar?), he'll remember that.

KD: Yes. He is on my list to talk to, him and Henry.

GS: For sure they'll tell you that the fish up there have always been good, and the fish down here have been bad.

KD: [laughter] What do you notice about the change in fish behavior in relation to weather?

GS: As far as changing?

KD: Do they act any different?

GS: Oh, yes. If you're going to go fish, if you've got a fishhook and line, the weather has a lot to do. I don't fishhook and line much, so I'm not...

KD: I am just trying to see what you have seen.

GS: As far as when I fish, they don't seem to change during the weather. If the water is murky, they get away from us a lot easier.

KD: Yes. I have been learning about how to fish, talking to a lot of the old-timers.

GS: I don't have the patience, the bow with the hook and line. Are you crazy?

KD: I used to.

GS: I'd jump in the water and spear them.

KD: I grew up a fisherman. My most hated thing was trolling for Kingfish because that was boring.

GS: It never used to be boring when you could catch them all the time.

KD: When we were fishing, yes. I have never fished down here except for Islamorada. I take that back. I went fishing once with Murray. We went out to the reef, Blue Key. Everyone else was catching yellowtail, and I kept catching jack. After the third jack, I just said, "I am not doing this anymore." I just put the pole down. It was like, you know the minute it hits that hook. God damn it, I got a jack. [laughter] I do not have to see it. I know.

GS: You know exactly what it is.

KD: I hate those. Do you know any locations of any spawning aggregate? Past or present.

GS: Okay, there's a spawning aggregation of mutton snapper on the west side of American

Shoal, between Maryland Shoal, American Shoal. I've run into that spawning aggregation twice.

KD: Presently still around?

GS: I haven't been there in a while, but last year, it was there. Another spawning aggregate of mutton this down off (Riley?) We all know about that. I always had my logbook.

KD: You have that stuff written down on the logbook?

GS: It would be a year ago in August. I've never seen a school of black angelfish, large adult black angel, swim by me, between Looe Key and American Shoal, about half-way. There must have been two thousand of them. That, I've never seen before in my entire life, ever. They came. They were all swimming to the west. It was just like, say for instance, amberjack, you know how they go in school? Well, this is the way they were doing it. It was unbelievable. I looked up, and they were as high as I could see. I was in 40 feet of water. They were up near the surface all the way to the bottom. It was just like a big black mass. It scared the hell out of me because it came out from right behind. I didn't know what it was.

KD: Looks like a huge cloud. [laughter]

GS: I was amazed. I have never seen that ever. They were swimming fast. They weren't just swimming slow, but they were all going together, all in a straight line. There was like this big school of them.

KD: So, they are heading offshore?

GS: Towards Key West.

KD: Towards Key West, going West. That is right. Towards American Shoal, I guess. That is pretty neat.

GS: It was there to [inaudible].

KD: That was August [19]92?

GS: Yes.

KD: You mentioned a logbook. What kind of information do you have in your logbook?

GS: Oh, a lot of what I catch at what day.

KD: Fish catch.

GS: I'm not real good as far as being real accurate anymore, but I try and write down what I catch and what fish.

KD: What about water visibilities or temperatures or items like that? Do you have that written down too?

GS: Yes, I do. I got a lot of what the wind was, what the visibility was, different things like that. But it's gotten worse and worse and worse since about twelve years ago, thirteen years ago, I guess, it was. It started to get greener. It was always green in the summer. Then it started getting green in the winter. Then a lot of seagrasses started coming up, say on the east sides of the channels, from Big Pine and stuff like that. A wooden bridge fishing camp, they never had problems with seagrass until – see, he said it was eleven years ago. It's been about two years. That's about thirteen years ago.

KD: That is when he started having problems?

GS: Started having problem with seagrass. His boat base stinks.

KD: Yes. I remember being up through there when you were [inaudible].

GS: It was back then. It was like ten, eleven years, he said it started to have them. Everybody's got to put weed gates up there and stuff.

KD: How far back does your logs go? Your logbooks, you think.

GS: I'd have to look. I don't remember.

KD: Can you guess as far as year?

GS: I've got one that goes back to [19]83, I guess. If I can find it. I want to go to [19]83 to [19]89, if I can find it.

KD: The reason I ask is that I am trying to identify people who also might have written information so that if the scientist or somebody – the other part of this is gathering names of people who might be helpful for other items. Scientists want to do a project on something. He says, "I need to know people who might have some information about fish or about water clarity." Then I know who to direct them to that, and if I see a trend or something, then I might come back and say, "Grady, can I look through your logbook here? Sit down, look through it and see any things I can catch." So, that is...

GS: Well, you're welcome. That was the most thorough one I got. The one I have now, it just has basic catches for the day. Then there are gaps where all I have is just numbers where I dove that day, but not what I caught.

KD: Right. If I look through it, I will be looking for the trends and stuff like that. [19]83 to [19]89 probably will be the best ones because that was when things were going on. I'll just make a note next time. I have got another month.

GS: See, what happened was we lost two boxes coming back from Australia. I have a feeling

that might have been one of the boxes.

KD: Any other spawning?

[end of transcript]