

Tim Daniels: No. I had a qualified captain that crawfished. I'd go kingfishing, or I'd go do vice versa, whatever. I took the boat that I needed to use.

Karen DeMaria: Now, have we got nets?

TD: Nets, yes.

KDM: What kind of fishing? You are also a pilot, are you not?

TD: Yes. I spot king fishing mackerel in the wintertime.

KDM: How long have you been a pilot?

TD: I mean, ten or twelve years, twelve years probably.

KDM: When you are piloting, you are doing, I guess, the mackerel and kingfishing now, where is that located, the park or the area? Are you out in the ocean mainly or in the Bay?

TD: No. We're out in the bay. It's mostly from Naples to Dry Tortugas and up here to Florida Bay, that coastline, the edge.

KDM: The edge?

TD: Yes.

KDM: Park edge?

TD: Yes. From the national park all the way to Dry Tortugas and north as far as Naples. But sometimes we're 40 miles offshore, too. We'll catch kingfish at 60, 70, 80-foot of water off that. We used to, before all the restrictions, I worked as far as Cape Canaveral.

KDM: Well, it is flying time. [laughter]

TD: Oh, yes, I used to. But now, I went from thirty-five boats to ten boats. The restrictions have reduced us to that point. Only the few that stuck. Now the industry is so cut down. The quota is so small and all that stuff.

KDM: When did the regulations really get hard for you? You said you went from thirty-five to ten boats.

TD: The first bad regulation that really got us was when they closed down the kingfish in state waters.

KDM: What year is that?

TD: Now that I can't tell you.

KDM: [inaudible]

TD: When the state of Florida closed down the kingfish inside state waters, it really put us in trouble. It's the net fishery now, the big nets, the rotary. That was the first real major blow that we had at that point.

KDM: Let me backtrack a little bit. How old are you?

TD: Forty-nine.

KDM: How long have you lived here in the Keys?

TD: Since 1955.

KDM: Always in the Marathon area?

TD: Always.

KDM: Where were you born? Everybody has been here.

TD: I was born in Fort Myers, but I was raised at Everglades in Chokoloskee. That's where I was raised.

KDM: The reason I asked is because Brian, who is (Brian Lapointe?), said hello. I talked to him last night. But he let me borrow a tape that you gave him went you got to Brown. I watched that tape about three times. [inaudible] He was such a character.

Male Speaker: What's happening?

TD: Not much.

MS: You're very busy.

TD: Yes. Where's all that sweat from?

KDM: [laughter]

MS: I'm working on my [inaudible].

KDM: Did you graduate from high school?

TD: Yes, in Marathon.

KDM: Did you ever go take any college courses?

TD: Yes. I got a professor's degree.

KDM: Professor's degree?

TD: Yes, in fishing.

KDM: Oh, yes. [laughter] That is true with all the experience. Now, you told me where you would net fish and everything. Lobster traps, I know you had a lot of – where do you put your lobster traps at? What areas?

TD: I work on both sides. 90 percent of my areas are in the Bay, and 10 percent may be in the channel. I go down sometimes as far as Key West, but not all the time. I do fish off the shoal sometimes. But the bulk of it is up there in Florida Bay. Now, I want to clear up what's Florida Bay. Florida Bay to the scientists is just inside the park. The farther Bay to us is from the park line down to North Harbor Key.

KDM: That is Florida Bay.

TD: That's what we call the Bay.

KDM: I have a map that I drew up that I used for identifying the areas where people fish. I was talking to Karl Lessard, and he advised me that as far as you all were concerned, Florida Bay was in (Harbor Light Key?). So, I changed my line to represent that. [laughter]

TD: You draw a circle from East Cape, Middle Cape over there, and if you just took a circle, just wrung it around a North Harbor Key. Inside, that's what we call Florida Bay. There's been a lot of confusion in the past over a lot of these issues.

KDM: Oh, yes. Well, that is where I think I am going to, hopefully, try to clear up a little bit. What I am trying to pinpoint a lot right now since I am writing the report for it, is the changes in Florida Bay. Everything that you hear everyone is saying, all the stuff [inaudible], and all the changes in Florida Bay. I am trying to pinpoint information on when it happened when it started happening, what happened, and what are the differences that are occurring. So, I know, there have been a lot of problems with the traps, lobster traps. Talked to a lot of the guys about that.

TD: What are the main problems?

KDM: Well, things are growing on the traps and destroying the traps. What I want to ask you is, what are you pulling – when you pull your traps, what have you seen that is different and growing on the traps?

TD: Barnacle.

KDM: When did that start happening?

TD: The worst of it, this big jump, just when all of a sudden, bang, it was just astronomical. It

was in 1988. I believe that's the season it was. They said it made no difference. When they turned, that water loose up in the back of Key Largo. Do you know the year I'm talking about? That's the year it was. They said it made no difference to us down here, that water didn't come in here. But they made a bad mistake. I don't know how it got here, but that fresh water came into that Bay and changed our whole crawfish years. It's one of the best crawfish years we've had in a long time. That fresh water was moving that fish in and out, what ways most of us do not know. The barnacles came in and consumed us. They did come and get them, but they consumed us. We were destroyed. But over the years, I remember, in the [19]70s, when we'd fish down off of Harbor Key, there was a 3- or 4-mile strip there of a line we knew not to go past that. We'd get barnacles. We stayed east of it, we would. That line slowly moved right on up until it took anywhere. We fish out there now, with the exception of right up against Bullard's, right up in this south end of the Bay. On the east side, we'd get barnacles. But barnacles, see, I don't have any kind of educational background. Everything I say is speculation and things I've seen. We always knew that if we fished in a sandy type bottom or a barren type place, we got barnacles. If you fished in a hard grass place where there's a lot of grass and a good dark bottom, we didn't get a lot of barnacles. Well, it's my impression that the reason for the barnacles getting so bad on us up in here now is because those places that grass used to be, it's died off. Now, it's a sandy or slough-type place with very little vegetation on it. So, therefore, I think we've always felt, or I do, that these barnacles would multiply there and can. But you put them in that grass patch, and they don't multiply well. I don't know the reasons for it. But I know it's – use a piece of bait to catch a fish, it works. That's what we've seen and observed. So, as this Bay died off and got slicker and slicker bottom, the more barnacles on that slick bottom eat you up.

KDM: What about worms?

TD: Same thing. Same thing.

KDM: Because I know I have seen some of these traps from the guys that were showing me parts eaten up. I could not believe the traps that were one year old were still eaten apart.

TD: Everywhere we get barnacles, we've got worms. It seems they're hand-in-hand to a degree. I don't mean that's every case, and I don't mean it's got to be that way. But in the areas where we catch worms, we get barnacles. In the area where we catch barnacles, we get worms. So, we don't know how to separate that.

KDM: Do you hear that same kind of problem coming down off the Key West and the guys in the Lower Keys? Are they having the same thing? I do not get the impression that they are. They might get some barnacles.

TD: No. They don't have the same problem that we do. Because they don't have the brackish water flow that we do, and that's what helps create this situation in my mind.

KDM: Well, that was my other thing, when you were talking about that line at Harbor Key, I was trying to envision the brackish water coming out of Shark River Slough and knowing the transportation around there. So, I am wondering if there is some reason why it is starting to move over.

TD: I'll tell you something that's pertained to that is that we found out this year that we never knew. When this large May storm, storm of the century, came through, we never realized just how much the current took the stuff to the west and caught and came back around and came back up in this stream. Now, this is not something I think. This is something I know from seeing it. We got the traps destroyed out there. Many of them were just totally destroyed. The rope and the buoy and a piece of a trap would be floating on the water. It took about two months. Now, you would have thought that thing flowed out of the north and northwest. You would have thought it flowed most of that through the bridges and onshore and went out in here. But we know that this current goes to the east all the time, out there, say, 15 to 20 miles in that stream. Two to two and a half months after that blow, we begin to find our traps out there coming up that stream going east, and our buoys. Recognizing some of our buoys and traps where they had made the journey from the far Gulf out there in 60 feet of water. They had made the journey, slapped down around, and come back up 20 miles out here. The strain is as late as last week, still coming through.

KDM: I wonder where they came across. [inaudible]

TD: They had to go on down.

KDM: [inaudible]

TD: They would slap down and got in the big current and came around. That's what put us so far offshore. It had to, in our mind. But that just blew me away because I couldn't believe that.

KDM: That is interesting.

TD: But it definitely did. So, I was never of the impression that that stuff would go that far west before coming around and being on this side.

KDM: Yes. I would not think that, but thinking about it now, I did see that.

TD: Sure did. I was out there.

Female Speaker: If I forgot anything, I'll just get it. Just let me know.

TD: Good, thanks. I was out there two weeks ago, and I actually found traps. I recognized the buoy of some of our traps that I marked Storm. I was 20 miles straight south of Marathon. The weed line is going east.

KDM: [laughter] That is crazy. It looks like what Don was saying, he fishes out in Marquesas and Dry Tortugas, and he has seen a lot of buoys. There are a lot of buoys down there.

TD: Well, I think they go back through Rebecca, and even down around where that tide down those splits come back that way down there. But for this stuff to get that far, I never envisioned it would go that far out. I felt it would flow through the bridges before.

KDM: Yes, exactly.

TD: But the time frame that it took to get it around, it could not have gone through the bridges.

KDM: No, exactly.

TD: It's too long. It's very interesting to me.

KDM: What about on the traps? We talked about the barnacles and the worms. Have you noticed any algae growth on the ropes of the traps?

TD: Always had that.

KDM: What kind? What does it look like? Green, brown, red?

TD: Yes. At certain times, we have different types come in there. That would be red-looking stuff. We call some of them gumbo. We call some of them old green grass. We call some rolling moss, and fire grass. It's just our name.

KDM: It was just the same as everyone else has been telling me around here.

TD: Yes. This stuff, when it comes in there and starts to grow, it's short-lived. It'll start dying. That stuff will build up in that base sometime and get on your traps and slinky ropes. They'd live on your traps for three weeks, then they would start dying. You can smell it when you come across that. As it starts to die, that smell is coming back up.

KDM: Does that change your catch? When those algae or the rolling moss has changed your catch at all?

TD: Yes.

KDM: Increase or decrease?

TD: Well, I'm ahead of it as it begins. Like a wave coming in, you catch fish ahead of it. As it happens, you don't catch any. Then as it starts to clear up, now they're all starting to work back. I think my stuff gets bad enough that it's like a fence, so fish won't come up to it. They won't go into it, and they know better. They'll trail the edge of it sometime.

KDM: Now when you are flying around, have you noticed flying around with water clarity and an algae bloom or anything of that sort when you are flying between here and Naples and stuff? Have you noticed anything interesting? You have got a different perspective from being up in the air. I know you are looking mainly for fishing stuff, but you should be – I would think that you also noticed some other interesting items.

TD: Years back, there was always a problem with barnacles and different types of mosses, what

we call flamingo channels, coming out. That's where that water comes out of Taylor Slough. It comes out of that main channel right by Flamingo and turns straight west out through there, right at Seascape. All my life, that's been an area of that water there that has had that change year to year, different colors and different types. We don't understand how Jesus or somebody else does, but you wouldn't catch fish in it that time of year when it gets that certain color. We catch fish like pompano. You catch pompano in colored water. We don't catch pompano in clear water. We don't catch pompano in real soupy water. Unless it's northern or something. It's just everything's moss. But a fisherman determines the fish are there by the way the water changes. It's hard to describe until you've done it and seen it and shown you ride for hours on end. All of a sudden, you say, "There's the color water I'm looking for to find that fish. They're somewhere east of us." Then you find that fish there. You learn all those little things. But the first time, the first algae bloom, or what we all call algae bloom, that I remember was in 1972, [19]73, out there west of Sand Key, about 10 miles. That stuff came in there on us back then and the environmental movement wasn't even in full bloom at that time. It sunk about 6 square miles of our traps out there in just three days. They were gone. Six square miles of traps, at that time, were a lot of traps, a lot of industry among us. They were just gone. There weren't buoys sticking out in a 6-square-mile area, 6 or 7 square miles.

KDM: What kind of a bloom was it? Was it a moss bloom?

TD: It was that old reddish and greenish moss came in there and just sunk half our traps. We were all fishing. We were in trouble. It was [19]72 or [19]73, maybe both years, right at that time. We had trouble with that in smaller areas several years over there. But when it hit us, that's how it hit us. Just boom, it woke us up. We'd get in a little of it. Sometimes, at that time, we'd move out of it and go somewhere else. But this thing just came in there and took us over and sunk us and wrecked us. We didn't even know what was happening.

KDM: I think somebody [inaudible] mentioned something about 1971, [19]72 also. Well, it is like some of the old flat-skied fishermen that I talked to up in Islamorada. That other big algae bloom that they are talking about off (arsenic?) or anything, Grassy Key, he talks to some of his old flat-skied fishermen. They tell me that back in the [19]30s and the [19]40s they remember there being a bloom right there. But it never was that large, and it never stayed for as long as it is now. Something triggered it to become larger and expand, but there was always some sort of a bloom.

TD: We've always had the same thing in the Bay for pompano fishing. Because there were thirty or forty boats used to come down and drift pompano nets. It was cotton nets, and then there wasn't a [inaudible]. When I was a kid, when I was six, seven, eight years old, my dad's boat was fishing around. I remember that at times you couldn't fish areas out there in this bay off of Seascape, off of Sand Key. You'd run in there, and you'd see this stuff in the water. You wouldn't put your net in it because it'd wreck your net. You couldn't catch fish. So, I remember that back forty years ago. Every now and then somebody would mess up and get in that stuff and ruin their nets, just ruin it. They would do all kinds of things and take it out there and run it over fast and make it fling and drift it all night trying to wash it out, and doing all these things. I remember as long as I've been alive, all these things happening. So, there's no doubt about it, there's been algae blooms. But I think there was always a little source here or there that created

that stuff, for one reason or another. But I think what created the problem is we have channelized all our water systems from the highlands. Now, when the water comes, it comes in such a volume. Because when they get in trouble, it comes in such a volume that it just overwhelms what's there and just blows that up, makes it worse than it ever was before until it goes away. It used to things work in such a slower fashion until it couldn't get there at such a volume. It just worked in a natural way. It didn't overwhelm it like it does now. That's what I think is creating a lot more trouble. I think as long as they continue to dump – if they dump water, you're going to have repercussions. If they slow it down and let it as it rains, it's going to be a lot more trouble. I think that's what's going to happen. If they slow it down and let it, as it rains, work its way up here –

KDM: Yes. The way it is supposed to.

TD: – it may rain up there in Central Florida, in that Sawgrass area, and it may be a month before the first drop ever gets into here to the old system. I don't know, two months. I don't know. But now, it can rain up there, and they can dump it in here in three days, or a week. That's what's the trouble. I've seen that stuff forever, but what really – I was in a meeting in Key West, and he was there in the school.

KDM: Talked about South Florida water [inaudible].

TD: I didn't speak. I was going to speak that night, and I finally thought better of it because we had been represented by Tony or someone. I found out at that meeting, and I made a note on my pad. I forget now the year. It was three years ago or four years ago. I've told some of these boys this because I'm associated with everything, lots of people and friends up there. They had the biggest blue crab year they've ever had in South Florida. They caught blue crabs right down to Middle Cape, Northwest Cape, which is unheard of. Tons of them, up there off the Everglades and the Shark River. Down as far as Northwest Cape, they caught the most blue crabs. They started a pure gold rush up there. Never in the history of that country has there ever been such a thing down there. They run all our stone crabs down. There's always a strong stone crab up ahead to that part. Up in [inaudible], we caught very good stone crabs. This year, we went and ran our stone crabs, and we didn't catch any stone crabs. These blue crabs showed up, and we just caught them in our stone crab traps. The boys got in and they came down there and it looked like August here along these bridges. I'd never seen it in all my life.

KDM: What year did you mark down?

TD: It was the year they first started dumping water back in Taylor's, back out in Shark River. They told me in that meeting, and I wrote it down.

KDM: [inaudible] I think I wrote the same year down. [laughter]

TD: It was three or four years ago. They turned that water out Shark Slough, they said, out through Shark Valley Slough. When he said that, it made sense. All the blue crabs were inside that fresh water in the park, and they can't fish in there forever. When they dumped that multitude of water out there for the first time in, I don't know how long, and they said they were

dumping more. His statement was, "Well, we've already been dumping water out. We've started in so and so." You might as well have slapped me on the side of the head just like that.

KDM: It was May of [19]88 or [19]89.

TD: It was three or four years ago, three or four. That's where all the blue crabs come from. So much freshwater came out until it pushed the stone crabs off. We couldn't catch any stone crabs on that shore. They tore the blue crabs up the whole season from that water. All of a sudden, more water coming out pushing them out. Well, who would have ever thought of this happening? That's why so many studies need to be done. If you're going to have it for commercial fishery, I guess I'll get into a little preaching here. If you're going to have it for commercial fishery, then we need to stop doing these sporadic things. We need to study the fishery and find out how to make it work and how to preserve it. Them doing stuff like that up there, dumping that out there, destroyed us. We can't talk no stone crab there in a sense. Because all this time, they've been holding that water back. The crab was working, and they found a new way to do it. Then all of a sudden, when they dumped that fresh water out, it just changed that whole system. The whole world doesn't even know it.

KDM: When they start releasing all the freshwater that all the environmental people want into Florida Bay, into northeast Florida Bay, down Taylor Slough, you are going to have a total change.

TD: Same thing, and we're gonna die.

KDM: I was talking to Herb Marvin. He was telling me about when he was a kid – you know Herb Marvin? He is a lawyer. His family is a bunch of commercial mullet fishermen.

TD: I've heard of them.

KDM: Fished at Cape Sable. His brother now owns [inaudible] fishery, I think.

TD: Oh, yes, Stanley Marvin.

KDM: But Herb is a real nice guy. On weekends, he does his mullet fishing. He was telling me, he goes, "Fishery changed in the [19]50s." That is when he started doing all the digging in the park. He said he saw the change in Florida Bay where it went from being more of a mullet [inaudible] to water cleared up, you had different grasses growing, total change. So, we are talking about when you start putting back all this fresh water and stuff, it is going to change back to what it was in the old days, too.

TD: But it's going to kill it to change it.

KDM: Yes, it has to.

TD: I don't know if the commercial fishing industry will survive that. If they want a fishing industry, they need to deal with it.

KDM: I am not sure they want a fishing industry. I am almost to the point that I – it is scary. But I think in five, ten years, there are not going to be able commercial fishermen down here.

TD: That's exactly what they're trying to do, it seems.

KDM: It is just disheartening.

TD: You know what? If they want the fishery out, they should come in here and deal with that on that basis and get us out.

KDM: Do you think it is going to become a sportsman's paradise?

TD: There's no question about it.

KDM: Which I do not think it is fair, and I think it is wrong. Because part of what I have been doing is also reading a lot of old books and gathering the history of the Keys. It is like the history of the Keys was sponging and commercial fishing and wrecking, which is now salvaging. They want to totally just change the history of the Keys. Granted Islamorada has always been a flat fishing-type area. That is a little bit [inaudible] the Lower Keys Marathon commercial fishing.

TD: Well, you must have a commercial fishery. You must have it. You must have something to feed people fish. We're not outlaws anymore. We've moved up into the twentieth century with everybody else. We're driving cars with four tires on them.

KDM: My mother-in-law, when I got married, Don told me, she was saying, "Oh, yes. He has done well for himself." He said, "She had nothing bad for a scumbag, is it?" She always considers commercial fishermen scumbags. So, I was like, "I cannot believe my mother just said this to me." I was like, "Why would she?" I was just mortified by it. I looked at that thing, a lot of people still think that way. It was not right. It was not right. But I grew up in Barnegat Bay in New Jersey. I grew up in South Jersey. I always used to hang out at the dock, blue crabs. I remember fishermen up there and stuff. I have always been around commercial fishermen all my life. It is just frightening to see what is going on. It really is kind of new.

TD: I'll tell you something that might ring a bell in a few years when they figure it out. On the years when that – let's call it – Gulf Stream, coming back from Texas, Louisiana, back this way down this coast.

KDM: The loop current.

TD: Yes. On the years when that comes ashore up here on the west coast of Florida, we have major algae blooms in that 30-, 40-, 50-foot of water. Do you know how we know when it's come ashore?

[end of transcript]