

Karen DeMaria: – something about asking the person first? Basically, I've been hired to go up and down the Keys, and talk to people who have spent a lot of time on the water and ask them what changes they have observed that have occurred to the water. But also a part of that is talking to people who spent time on the water in the olden days and getting from them information on how things used to be, because by taking that information, I can try to come up with a picture of what Florida Bay used to look like before it became a very salty area with the Keys – the waters around the Keys used to be like, and hopefully by putting this all together and talking to people and documenting the changes, I can come up with some definite information like, well, during this time span, you know, I'm trying also to pinpoint years. I can try to figure out what else happened during those years that might have helped trigger something, or what happened before and if everyone's saying the same thing happened around the same time, well, that's an obvious problem. That's an obvious statement there that can be looked into. It's mainly just to try to document what the people of the Keys have seen and what they know. You'll be surprised that you know...

John Koenig: [inaudible] quickly then...

KDM: First, may I ask you some questions?

JK: Okay.

KDM: Okay. You said on your thing that you have lived thirty to thirty-eight years full time living in the Keys? Have you always lived in Key West area?

JK: Yes.

KDM: Because before that – did you come down here as a visitor at all or...

JK: Yes, I'm a native Miami. My wife and I are both native Miami's, born and raised in Miami. I came back to the service at World War II, went back to the University of Miami and finished the course, got a degree in Financial Travel. During that time when I was at the university, I always loved the water, all those fish. I used to have two flamingos before it was parked.

KDM: Right.

JK: That was when all of the fishermen moved down there on shots that they cut, trapped the leg fish in the stack room and the park was changed. We used to put in it [inaudible] you could [inaudible] anybody [inaudible].

KDM: What years was that?

JK: That would be [19]40 to [19]50.

KDM: That is the road that goes from the trail down to Flamingo right?

JK: Right. We had a little private boat with little 10 horse motor on. We used to dock it in the

– it wasn't really that bad, just a boat – and run across to White Water Bay, talking Creek. We're going there before daylight and the major problem in the area was there were mosquitoes. Mosquitoes were so bad. When we go to the army surplus store and buy, the old army socks – all the socks we used to have, wrap our trousers, pull them up, wore gloves and head nets and if you're smoking, you've got to smoke the cigarette through the head net, you wouldn't dare take it off. But we sit there, there was an Indian there that had a – we call it a shrinking boat, caved device and he kept shrimp and put it in there and you go in there on your honor and use the shrimp, telling how many years, and I think in those years, they were, like a dollar and a half – a hundred, barbeque jumbo shrimp. We'd sit there in an hour and a half or two hours, eating with shrimp that's artificial, get snook snapper, or...

KDM: What kind of snapper?

JK: Mutton snapper and gray snapper. The red fish would be up on the back too, we get the red fish and the snook off the backs. Mostly what artificials bring in after surfing in the bay was spinning would just come in [inaudible] coming in and can't [inaudible]. Of course, the park came in, took all that over and moved all the fisherman out.

KDM: What was the – do you remember the areas like on the – was the water really clear?

JK: As I recall, all of that water in there was pretty much clear, particularly around the perimeter of the Cape, run around the perimeter of the Cape. The first entrance West Flamingo was what they call Schlegel Ditch and Schlegel Ditch was a little muddy because it ran out of [inaudible]. But as you went around the Cape and you came into Shark River, which dumped into John River, all of that was very, very clear. We used to take a big cane pool with just plain water [inaudible], put a half mullet on there and drop it down into the edge of St. John where the John River word came out and gets you to explain 1535, it's just a classic blue pool.

KDM: [laughter]

JK: All that water was very, very clear, the oyster Keys on the perimeter on the outside, that was all pretty much clear now. You had a lot of mud up there in State Park Channel, which was to the East of Flamingo. There's a lot of mud in there and red fishes just [inaudible]. But as you got along the Cape and all the water grill – very, very clear.

KDM: Were there are a lot of grass on the bottom? When you look down, what did you see?

JK: Grass was a very big navigational problem and if you had to stop for nearly ten minutes and clear the prop, the grass that was coming off the bottom would get in there – it was always heavy with grass. It didn't seem to get up the creeks back into the center part, but along the perimeter area...

KDM: Was it turtle grass or was it like it is thin grasses or what kind of grass was it?

JK: Actually, most of it looked to be turtle grass.

KDM: White?

JK: White, pink grass.

KDM: What about up near Flamingo and up towards that way, is it the same?

JK: The creek going up there was pretty clear. The further you got away from Lake Ingram – Lake Ingram evidently was a mudhole and you sticking roller and then all will be there and getting backed out a little bit – kind of real mud.

KDM: Real fine, yes.

JK: After they started to convert it to the park, I missed [inaudible] for a few years and – then of course, going out of route to Key West when we moved here in 1955. After we moved here the first five years we were here, we were raising our children and so we would put the boat on a trailer and we had other couple of fish locked in [inaudible] chain and we trailed on the two boats up there and that was our vacation of the year. We were there for five days. We stayed at Flamingo and Fish. Yes, but just because the crop fishing went better, the red fishing – snook. Of course, when we went back in here, they can't keep the rest of the other fish. It already built a motel, so we stayed at the motel.

KDM: Have you ever noticed any change from 1946 to – when was the last time you were there?

JK: Oh, last time I was in there was probably the early [19]60s, [19]61, [19]62.

KDM: Did you notice any difference between [19]46 and [19]62 in that area?

JK: Not any major difference, no. By the [inaudible] Bay. When we went fishing in the park in the late [19]50s, we go down in the South Bay, kind of a big difference down the South Bay. That, so the clarity of the water just went to park in the [19]60s, it's on that. It would come and go but you could see a very...

KDM: Did anything ever come into your mind as to may why?

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JK: Well, in those days, we thought maybe that a lot of it was the runoff and the runoff being affected by the growth of the truck farming and all in Homestead in that area, grows out and became – seemed like a lot of the farmers – truck farmers that moved through the area because of that hurricane problem from the water getting hot, baking off. So, we moved out into the homes of the area, got to do truck farming now. That would probably be the beginning of all the runoff problems in the area.

KDM: Anything else you remember about the Flamingo and the Cape Sable area of the water? Plus, you talk about really good fishing were like large schools of fish and large amounts of fish.

JK: The red fish would come through their schools and if – it would be unusual if you didn't see

a school with twenty, twenty-five fish in it, half of them being in the twenty-five million...

KDM: Wow.

JK: Big, big red fishes, and it's [inaudible].

KDM: [laughter] I thought that was something to see.

JK: It was. A lot of bird life in there. We used to see the flamingos in there and we saw the – bird...

KDM: Spurn bird?

JK: Roseate spoonbill.

KDM: Yes. Right.

JK: Spurn bird, I didn't find –. I noticed the waters that we would fish on the falling tide out of the mouth of Shark River over off the Cape, and that water used to be pretty near crystal clear in there. Recursive topping would come up, you would see a lot of motorcycles in the channel there [inaudible]. But the last couple of years we were there, we fished them out [inaudible] incoming tag or trap and red fish and you could see the fish in there, the clarity was...

KDM: Your incoming time? What about in the falling tide?

JK: The falling tide...

KDM: Same time?

JK: Pretty much so. Probably the incoming might have been a little less, maybe a little clear but we lost it. In the beginning, there was a...

KDM: When was that, in years?

JK: Early [19]60s.

KDM: Okay. What about down here? When you first moved down here...

JK: After we quit fishing in the park, we were still good friends up in the Almanac area, we used to fish at that country, a lot of kerinci, fruit bae basin, and that was a lot of mud over there – just natural muddy area. There were red fish, trouts. We noticed a – I guess in the middle of the late [19]60s a decline in the amount of fish that were in the area. So, we quit fishing too much in the Backcountry and we went to fish in the Oceanside and off of any of the cups that would come to go back on the inside [inaudible]. Some of them with artificial with jades and some of them were crabs. The Oceanside was always very, very clear. Even in the summertime when the water went very warm, very hot. All those apartments are crustacean, like on the beach. The

crabs, [inaudible] and just squeeze the claw. They just drug themselves and then they didn't bleed, dropped their claw and just sitting there [inaudible], and then when they're bathing [inaudible]. Always had good bone fishing, long period, [inaudible]. All that water in the [inaudible] have been pretty clear. I know there's [inaudible] on [19]60s or maybe [19]70s. In the Gulf side off of that [inaudible] there certain times of the year picked in [inaudible]. It would appear to cloud up sometimes. We had all kinds of fishnets. We had a – on occasion, I guess that would have been the early [19]70s, [inaudible], friend of ours at a home around the lakes. Their kid dropped [inaudible] swordfish.

KDM: Really?

JK: – about 75-pound swordfish. The kid chased it – we don't know whether it was sick or not, and eventually moved on out, and moved back in. But it probably came in off the Oceanside at night or something and followed the channel and then it came back.

KDM: But for [inaudible], something that you really do not see that often when you see it, it's a definite oddity.

JK: We fish of all clear at 12:00. 1,500 feet of water, nighttime and we get fishes.

KDM: What about – okay, with do much fishing off to here?

JK: Then I guess, about the middle [19]60s, we started bone fishing, permit fishing between here and the Marquesas. Then we started going to the Fourth. We were close friends with a member of the fleet owners with shrimp boats at that time. When we get ready to trade the old boats off and they get to be booked before the crews step in, we take four or five couple [inaudible]. It's a very memorable experience to see what comes out of the next, when they pull out the next. We gagged those nets going down the first night in the grounds for two hours on one foot back, the other two [inaudible]. When they pulled the lifter, the big drawstring in the bar, you can imagine the Crustacean [inaudible].

KDM: Then tell me about some of the things that were in there.

JK: Crabs I've never seen with variety of crabs. Crawfish, our own crawfish and then the Cuban langosta which is the – they...

KDM: They have a different sponge.

JK: The shell, like the body, yes – doesn't have the...

KDM: Like shovelnose?

JK: Like a shovelnose, and we used to [inaudible]. Shrimp, in addition to pink, the –

KDM: Fish or shrimp or...

JK: No, the hard shrimp to eat – the...

KDM: Rock shrimp?

JK: Rock shrimp. We used to fish basket because it was very difficult to eat. But at most part, we've saved most of the trash fish that we sorted out to shrimp. We make those two holes about four hours, and we go on with our fourth and that was our [inaudible].

KDM: What kind of fish?

JK: All around the Fort with [inaudible], grouper – red grouper would – in those days, there were no rangers there and they did have some civil service people there. They're the staff before the civil service people and they closed in part of the room back in there. Right at the docks, docks to the right back to the old [inaudible] docks, steel structure's still there I guess. [inaudible] right off the docks, we had [inaudible] paying us £350. We fish off to Loggerhead and then north of Loggerhead up to Texas Rock. In the hot part of the arena, there's a group we called Dirty Dust, [inaudible], where the big [inaudible]. An electrical contractor, plumber varies between 12 and 14, we call them the Dirty Dust and we go down and uses Labor Day. Labor Day invariably would be pretty good weather – hot with good weather. During the times that we were affecting the tripped over for probably ten years, I took a bar and a cookbook. When I'm here off of a man key, the last channel down and I acquire the lease from the state of Florida from where they bought rights to an amount of – probably – about three hundred. It was on the shallow side of the channel. So, we put [inaudible] and constructed the [inaudible]. Ground floor with a kitchen sink and a gas range, refrigerator. We had a [inaudible], second story we went out of [inaudible] bunk so we could sleep sixteen people in there. There was a little gas generator [inaudible]. So, during that interment period, by the time we go down there – maybe the Thursday preceding Labor Day which was always a Monday, and the night is still pass we then check out the daylight and the port fish to come back on a Sunday night, the rest of the group [inaudible]. Up on the North End, the waters around the port were all very, very clear. I don't recall [inaudible] this year. I don't recall any real significant change in the clarity of the water down there.

KDM: How deep could you see?

JK: Well, I know right after the put the Rangers in there, it was a Ranger that [inaudible]. We used to – kind of tease each other a little bit and the first day of this particular trip we went down – we went down that evening. The next morning, we went up north of Loggerhead and we were in 50 to 60 feet of water. [inaudible], we had – no depth finders. So, we use a – still have a wooden bucket. We could see the bottom and there was a crevice. We were just throwing a kicker, have word in and out and moving along and while I was looking, you could see a crack in the floor and there was a fish laying around with the crack. You know, I think that's a jewfish, and it's hard to say what size. So, we stop, we back up, several others looked at and we dropped a hand line down there for the sash laid on it, had a snapper [inaudible] if it was dead, it wasn't alive. First two times we dropped it back up, we're looking at it through the last bucket when we dropped it in front of me walked out and took it. When we got in into the docks right in the away, £200. That's crystal clear though and I tell you, most of that is still pretty sweet.

KDM: You have not been there this year yet, have you?

JK: I have not this year.

KDM: I think you will know the change.

JK: Really?

KDM: It is starting to – my husband fishes Tortugas a lot and he has not been able to do much diving at all this, this – from January until now, his world has been really dirty. He is a diver.

JK: Would that be due to – some of it due to the turbulence?

KDM: That, but it is usually when the turbulence, you know, in like in a couple days, it is okay again. Yes, because it is – but there is something else in the waters. It is like analogy or something that is causing the water and not be clear, even with no – even without the wind and the turbulence. It seems like just this year is starting to get out for them. I do not know where it is from. I do not know if it is part of Florida Bay, if it is from the Gulf or – who knows? I mean, they have been having so much rain up in the – in Texas and everything in the last couple of years. Who knows what is going on?

JK: On the analogy, and the slot...

KDM: That green...

JK: – that was very significant up in this area, just north of the Marquesas from Ellis Rock to New Gran, staying there close [inaudible] and fished that area. I remember the children – they throw a line over using their cheap seekers in 35 to 50 feet of water. Patty catfish here, bring it up and then have a [inaudible], this slimy...

KDM: What color was it?

JK: Brown, and you just had to pull it off, you could shake it off.

KDM: When was that?

JK: That was particularly in the in the summer months, from – oh, June, July – the hot areas all through September.

KDM: Was that like, every year or...

JK: Every year.

KDM: Every year.

JK: Always has. You could fish at far north until the drop down into 60 to 65 feet and all that stuff to the South Brooks of Marquesas was all full of county. Have we made any difference what the time was?

KDM: Yes.

JK: Flat dive.

KDM: But it was not in the deeper water like if you said, you go out or...

JK: One week – when we drop off on the North End into the area 60 feet, most of that stuff was pretty flat. So, we really didn't do very much fishing out there, but when we did, we've seen to find the [inaudible]. I guess that's what it worked out, yes.

KDM: Yes. What else have you noticed around? Let me give you a fish list here. Just look down the list and see if there is anything that is far from memory or story.

JK: Kingfish of course. It was always [inaudible], and the gulf. [inaudible] and the commercial boats down there and the commercial boats [inaudible]. We would anchor up and usually [inaudible]. We would fish then on the bottom underneath The Cape, catching the beautiful red grouper, and yellowtail and they were feeding off of the [inaudible] the kingfish.

KDM: Do you think there has been a change in the kingfish?

JK: I think there's been a significant reduction in the schools of kingfish. Migratory and we don't – I don't think whoever reaches the stage where we won't have anything, relaxing that you restrict – and there's an argument there. If our people don't let them and they're allowed to be editing some other county. What's the difference? You going to stop [inaudible]. I'll say in the last ten years, I've noticed the most significant difference in the reduction, I'd call the barfish. Of course, I'd say probably the billfishes too, but primarily in the bone fish, the red grouper – black grouper. I guess I attribute some of it to the increased number of boats, the pressure on the fish, fishing pressure. But something we never had before – the fish traps and I really think the fish straps were very harmful too – to the bone fish.

[talking simultaneously]

[end of transcript]