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Chip Shafer oral history interview by Terry Lee Howard, March 9, 2010

Irving Shafer (Interviewee)

Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)

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Terry Lee Howard: Okay, you may speak in your normal tone of voice. My name’s Terry Howard, and today is March 9, 2010. We’re at Fort Pierce, Florida, at the office of Hans—

Irving Shafer: Kraaz.

TH: —Kraaz, downtown Fort Pierce and I’m with Chip Shafer, also known as—or his actual name is—

IS: Irving Everett Shafer, III. Ergo, “Chip.” (IS laughs)

TH: Known as Chip. Nobody knows—he’s known as Captain Chip Shafer, and he’s very well known on the east coast of Florida. We’re here for the Gulf and South Atlantic Foundation, the foundation’s project with the Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank
HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. How do you pronounce Oculina?

IS: I pronounce it *Ahk-you-lee-nah*.

TH: *Oculina*, with an accent, *ah-culina*. Okay. With that, I would like to begin this interview. First, your full name, please spell it for me.

IS: I-r-v-i-n-g. Middle initial, E. Last name S-h-a-f-e-r, Third [III].

TH: Okay, and you were not born in Fort Pierce; you were born where?

IS: I was born in Richmond, Virginia.

TH: In what year?

IS: In 1947.

TH: Okay, and your birthday?

IS: 12 May forty-seven [1947].

TH: Twelve—

IS: 12 May, 12-05.

TH: Oh, May 12. (laughs) Okay.

IS: I give it the military way. (laughs)

TH: All right. When did you move to Fort Pierce?
IS: I moved to the—I first moved to the region and started fishing out of Stuart, Florida in 1974 from my home grounds in North Carolina. I moved to Fort Pierce physically, address in Fort Pierce, in 1976.

TH: How old were you? Are you married?

IS: Yes, I am married.

TH: When did you get married?


TH: Do you have children?

IS: Yes, we have two children.

TH: How old are they?

IS: I have two daughters, one twenty-two and one twenty-six. No, one twenty-one and twenty-six, I’m sorry. Twenty-one and twenty-six.

TH: Twenty-one and twenty-six.

IS: Yes, sir.

TH: Schooling: how much schooling have you had?

IS: I was—I dropped out of college as a sophomore in college.

TH: Where was that?

IS: That was Duke University.
TH: Oh, you were at Duke University? Cool. Do you have another boat besides charter boat fishing? Let me preface, I forgot to mention that this is Captain Chip Shafer. He’s had a career as a charter boat captain, and right now he’s working for a private individual. Again, do you have any other jobs other than charter boat?

IS: No. Just fishing; it’s all I’ve ever done.

TH: Do you currently own a boat?

IS: No. I do not currently own a boat.

TH: What is your present job as a fisherman, as a charter—as a captain?

IS: I run a private sport fishing boat that is normally in the eastern tropical Pacific. Central America and Mexico is where we fish, on the Pacific side of Central America up to Mexico. I fish from the Colombian-Panamanian border in the south to a place called Bahía Magdalena, which is 150 miles north of Cabo San Lucas. It’s a front of 2,200 miles from the northern point to the southern point.

TH: What kind and how big a boat is it that you fish?

IS: Right now, we own three boats. We have a sixty-four-foot John Bayliss in Stuart, Florida for sale. We have a forty-two-foot Gamefisherman that is presently in Puerto Quetzal, Guatemala that we’re actively using right now; and we are presently, in North Carolina, building a fifty-seven-foot Spencer, which will be ready for service probably in June. Probably take it through the [Panama] Canal in July or August.

TH: Do you take—does your employer take people or business?

IS: Nope, I only fish him or a friend.

TH: Him and his personal friends?
IS: No charter fishing at all anymore. Easiest job on Earth, and we only fly-fish for billed fish. He only fly-fishes, so it’s pretty unique. We just drag three Teasers around, and when a fish comes after it, try to get it close enough for him to catch the fly. That’s what’s we do. That’s what I’ve done for seven years. Pretty easy fishing, I’ll tell you! (laughs)

TH: Compared to what?

IS: Very clean, very clean, you don’t get your hands very dirty! (laughs)

TH: Cool. I’d like to ask some questions about the Oculina Bank. How familiar are you with the Oculina Bank?

IS: Pretty familiar.

TH: Could you elaborate on that, ’cause you did fish the area off Fort Pierce for how many years?

IS: I fished the area off—the waters off Fort Pierce from seventy-four [1974] until 2000, and I did a lot of—spent a lot of time on the Oculina Bank from 1976, bottom fishing until such time as the closure occurred. After the closure occurred, I still spent a lot of time fishing over Oculina Bank trolling for pelagic fish.

TH: That was, I think, 1984 is when they first—

IS: All right. I fished—it was a bread and butter fishery for me, bottom fishing in the spring in the months of February and March.

TH: So you’re very familiar with the Oculina?

IS: Quite familiar with the Oculina Bank.

TH: Did I pronounce it correctly that time?

IS: I suppose so. (laughs) You know, I may have pronounced it wrong all my life. Who
knows?

TH: In your opinion, or from what you know, why was the Oculina designated as an area to protect?

IS: The original story that was told to us charter fishermen and commercial fishermen here in Fort Pierce, I believe, is that Harbor Branch did a lot of diving on those things; found out what a unique structure that was; and indeed, it is that Oculina coral hills that we have out there.¹ And as it was explained to me, Harbor Branch or the Smithsonian or one of those groups, or a conglomeration of those groups, wanted to close that area. One, obviously, to prevent damage to it, by trawling and all that, which I thoroughly understand; but secondly, to see what would happened to fish populations in a completely protected environment. That is what I understood it to be.

TH: Now, to your knowledge, though, what damage—what fishery did the most damage to the bank?

(telephone rings)

IS: Well, obviously, I feel that to the—physically, to the structure, I would think that the trawls, when they were bottom trawling out there, would have been the most damaging. If they made a mistake and hit the thing, it would tear it all to pieces. It was actually—it was fragile. It was a fragile structure, I know. I’ve caught pieces of it that big (demonstrates) on a weight or something like that.

TH: He’s showing me his—about a two inch diameter, three, four-inch diameter.

IS: Yeah, I’ve caught little tiny pieces of it.

TH: Go ahead.

IS: And of course, you—you’ve fished in it, you hung in it quite often, so you left a lot of lead weights and hooks down there.

¹ Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institution at Florida Atlantic University conducted scientific research referenced in the Oculina Bank closure. It is a non-profit oceanographic institution dedicated to marine and ocean research and education operated by Florida Atlantic University.
TH: As the closure—did the closure or has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing and how? And I guess more—this would apply more to when you were charter fishing out off this area.

IS: Certainly. Well, it closed us out of our richest deep water bottom fishing that we had. Ninety-nine percent of our fishing that took place over twenty-seven fathoms took place—we were shut out from it, soon as they closed that thing.

TH: What was your target fish in that area?

IS: We would attempt to—our biggest target out there would have been great grouper. Gag grouper, I guess, would be the book name for them. We also caught snowies in some places, scamps were often an important part of our catch; and occasionally, on some of the higher spots you would catch some nice catches of red snapper. But the red snapper were more inside than that, as a rule.

TH: Inside of the Bank, that would be what? Twenty-seven?

IS: Yeah, twenty-seven fathoms, which—twenty-seven almost meanders down that 80 degree inside mark. You can be legal or illegal depending on where you would be along that 80 degree mark.

TH: That’s 80 degree longitude?

IS: Eighty degree longitude west. I believe that’s the west—that used to be, I think, the western boundary. Maybe I’m wrong on that, I don’t know.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing on the Oculina was not prohibited—I mean, if you could still do it, would you fish there if you were fishing in this area?

IS: I never fished [or] anchored on the Oculina Bank, and I did not know of any charter boats that did. Ours was always power drifting.

TH: Okay, that’s the term, “power drifting”? 
IS: Just power drifting—a controlled drift.

TH: That’s where you try and hold it on a spot?

IS: Well, you figure out what the current is, what the wind is. It’s like shooting at a bird: you would lead so far up into the current, drop away your exposure time on the spot; [it] was a matter of seconds but if you hit it right, it was just—the seconds were usually enough to score.

TH: Very interesting. Okay, so—

IS: It’s a fascinating fishery.

0:09:43.8}}}
TH: You would still fish—I mean, if it were legal, you would definitely fish there if you were fishing in this area?

IS: Continuously, I’m sure.

TH: How and for what? You just said it, but could you just say it again, exactly how?

IS: We would—it was our most important bottom fishing grounds for deep water. Sometimes fish would be in shallow water, the offshore bar, eighty and ninety feet and you would fish there. And a lot of that was anchoring fishing. Often, there would be good fishing on the twenty-seven or the thirty-one fathoms and you would fish there. But sometimes, the fish were on in those other spots and they would be out in the deeper water, and we had many, many days where we made our day on the Oculina Bank. Without the Oculina Bank, we would have caught very little on some days. Even with it, on some days (laughs) we caught very little, but that’s fishing.

TH: Overall, how has fishing changed since you began fishing in the Fort Pierce area?

IS: The—not pertaining to this, the sailfishing, if anything, which was my main target fish in Fort Pierce. The sailfishing has gotten better and better, if anything, with some fluctuations, some ups and downs in the graph, but some of the last years have been excellent, excellent. Actually this year, case in point: bad weather, but wonderful sailfishing. Kingfishing—if any one fish has suffered a lot, it would be the kingfish, from
the mid-seventies [1970s], that I saw, until now. I cannot speak on what the population is like now, since 2000, when I gave up fishing. But it seemed to me that even after the net ban took place, although we got a build-up of the more snake-type kings and twelve, fifteen-pound fish, the wonderful big, smoker kingfish that we had here before, I don’t think has ever recovered to this day, unless someone can tell me different that’s involved with it.

TH: They were targeted primarily where?

IS: They were targeted—the smoker kings, they were mostly from the bar inside. They never went into deep water that I know. And the beach, for my fishing for the smoker kings, mostly took place off of the north beach at Fort Pierce and the cove off of Vero [Beach].

TH: That would be fifteen to thirty foot of—fifteen to thirty foot drop; right along that drop?

IS: Absolutely, absolutely, a wonderful fishery. Wonderful fishery.

TH: What happened to the smoker fish?

IS: I watched that fishery utterly collapse in the early eighties [1980s] when the roller rigs got active on the king mackerel after they finished up the Spanish mackerel, turned their attention to king mackerel. It was within two years, that fishery was non-existent.

TH: Have you had any experience with law enforcement within or regarding the Oculina Bank?

IS: I knew they patrolled it. I have not had any run-ins with them over—

TH: Who in particular patrolled it?

IS: You know, I—there would be Coast Guard cutters sometimes. I’m sure that they would try to enforce the laws out there. I saw airplanes that were official looking airplanes that would circle around; I don’t know if the Florida Marine Patrol was flying them, the U.S. Coast Guard. I don’t know who had the money to exhaust on that
enforcement effort, but I know that there was. And I have—off the record…. 

TH: This is going to be archived at the University of South Florida for researchers. Myself, I may—

IS: See what us clowns sound like, right? (laughs)

TH: All right. Okay. The smokers—well, I’m getting a side thing here. I know I caught my biggest kingfish right off Pepper Park. I had six fish; was it five or six fish for 250 pounds of kingfish?

IS: Wow. The biggest one I ever caught was off the cove on a—I remember I caught him on a live—I mean, a dead “D” boat hole bunker.

TH: Oh, yeah?

IS: Floated back there, and it was fifty-one pounds—which is no great big king, but that’s the biggest I’ve ever caught.

TH: That’s darn big. Fifty-five is my biggest, and I’ve been doing it a long time.

IS: Oh, my buddy Sam Crutchfield’s probably caught a sixty or something, I’m sure! (laughs)

TH: I’d like to get a hold of Sam.

IS: You gotta get Sam as part of this, too.

TH: I am. I’m going to get a hold of Sam. Now, I want to talk about your fishing history, specifically. What’s your earliest memory of fishing, and how old were you?

IS: Actually, it would have when I’m just a small child and fishing in fresh water.

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2 Sam Crutchfield was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00032.
TH: Where? Virginia, I assume?

IS: No, North Carolina. The Virginia—although I’m a Virginian by birth. The reason I was born in Virginia is my father was a student at Medical College in Virginia when I was born. I lived in Virginia no length of time. Before I was a year old, I was in North Carolina and have been a North Carolinian since. But fresh water fishing in North Carolina. As a young teenager, I was introduced to the ocean, fell in love with it, had a small boat down on the coast, fished—

TH: Where?

IS: Currituck Sound.

TH: Currituck Sound in North Carolina?

IS: Mm-hm.

TH: How old were you? How did you learn to fish? Who taught you?

IS: As far as the salt water fishing, charter fishing, I was—when I dropped out of college, I joined the Marine Corps, and while in the Marine Corps, I was—I served as an infantry platoon commander in Vietnam. I was wounded, and they always sent you to a hospital nearest where your home is. And they sent me to a hospital in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, and while I was there, the commander of the sub-unit that I was a part of really liked me. He asked me if I would stay on as his executive officer if I wanted to. Well, that was not getting sent back to the war and it’s [a] plush job, easy, great duck hunting, close—I had already discovered some fabulous duck hunting and great fishing, so I signed on. I spent two years at Camp Lejeune, so I ended up mating some for an old-timer at Swansboro, North Carolina and that’s how I started doing some—a little bit of charter salt water fishing.

TH: So you—

IS: I would have been twenty-two or twenty-three years old at that time.
TH: You were a Marine Corps lieutenant?

IS: Mm-hm.

TH: You went through Quantico [Marine Corps Base, Virginia]?

IS: I did. I went through Parris Island. I was enlisted for almost two years before I became a lieutenant, but they did send me to Quantico.

TH: Then you were a platoon commander?

IS: Mm-hm. Vietnam, 1969. But I didn’t last very long; I was there about three months and I got shot. (laughs) Got out and didn’t go back. (laughs) Decided I liked fishing a whole lot better than infantry.

TH: Where and how did you get wounded?

IS: I got wounded in a firefight in a place called the Que Son Valley.

TH: Was the wound serious?

IS: It kept me in the hospital for about three months; a bullet. An AK [Kalashnikov machine gun bullet] went through here and came out back here.

TH: He’s pointing to his upper right-hand shoulder, and [the bullet] went in just around the center of the shoulder and out the back.

IS: Very lucky. No disability, no nothing.

TH: How ’bout your platoon?

IS: We took some losses that day.
TH: Was it—were you ambushed or were you trying to—

IS: We were trying to recover some bodies out ahead of us. The NVA [North Vietnamese Army], we were fighting the NVA—good, hardcore NVA and they were good at—they knew that if they could wound a couple of us, that we would try to get to those guys. We tried to, we always did. It was a good set-up that they had. They were great. They were great soldiers. We were good too; we gave about as much as we took, back and forth for all those years for little of nothing. But anyway, that’s neither here nor there. When I—no, we don’t get to politics, it’s B.S. (laughs) Sometimes what I see on TV takes me back to those days and what the long-term effect was, which was nothing.

TH: Maybe at another time, I’d like to spend some more time with you on that.

IS: You may have had some background in that, too. Many times we run into one another and go for years and don’t even know that we were both there.

TH: I was not, but I had very good friends that were and I was—anyway, how did you decide to become to become a charter boat captain? You say you fished with an old-timer and—

IS: I just really enjoyed it, liked it, so I mustered out of the Marine Corps. I think it was January 1973. I threw my shit in my truck and went, drove to Hatteras, North Carolina and got a job fishing.

TH: As a mate?

IS: As a mate.

TH: And who—what captain did you fish for?

IS: The name of the captain was Captain Ivy Batton on a boat called the *Gulf League*, old Harkers Island boat.

TH: Harkers Island?
IS: Built in Harkers Island, North Carolina.

TH: Where was this that you were fishing?


TH: Cool. When did you start fishing for—okay, and how long did you do that before you became a captain?

IS: I really got—I was kinda old, at any rate, and I fished one year with Captain Ivy Batton and a second year with a great guy; he’s old now, but a very close friend of mine named Captain Emory Dylan on a boat called the *Early Bird*.

TH: And that was in the same area?

IS: Same area, Hatteras. Then a fellow that I had fished with bought a boat, had a boat ready to fish with; it was a forty-two foot boat and he had a boy hired to run that boat. He had fished with me as a mate and he had a boy set up to run his boat, and I swear, the boy was in an accident: a tractor turned over and killed the boy. As a result of that, he asked me if I would like to run that boat for him, a guy named Monty Howe. First class guy; ate supper with him about a week ago down in Guatemala; he came down there fishing. And I went to work for him in 1974.

TH: How old were you then? Forty-seven [1947]—

IS: I’d have been twenty-something. I got into fishing relatively late, compared to most of the guys in my life. Most of them, you know, seemed like [they] started fishing at thirteen and never stopped, never did anything else, but I spent a little time as a student, a little bit of time as in the military. But anyway, (telephone rings) I started running that boat for him in 1974, ran it for my—and Monty wanted to come south in the winter; he wanted to fish in Florida in the winter, so he sent me south. [In] 1974 I came south following his boat, came to Stuart for two years.

TH: What was the boat? The name?
IS: The boat was called the Temptress; I just inherited that name.

TH: Oh that was the Temptress?

IS: Mm-hm. He had put that name on the boat, the Temptress. I never changed the names. I fished for him from 1974 to seventy-eight [1978]. In seventy-eight [1978], he sold me the boat for what he had put—what he had in it and I put a new engine in it. I fished that boat from 1978 until 1990.

TH: The Temptress?

IS: Mm-hm. That was a forty-two-foot boat and I had a fifty-three-foot boat built in the summer and the winter—well, the year of 1991. And that year, I came down here with probably my best friend’s boat: he owned the boat, but while my boat was being built, I had a chance to sell my older boat. And a good friend of mine who fished in North Carolina, we brought his boat down. I ran it and he mated for me, even though he was the owner, in the winter of 1991, called the Pelican.

TH: The Pelican. At what point did you decide that—I guess he offered you it, but you were just mating until the time that this gentleman offered you—?

IS: Correct.

TH: Okay.

IS: Although I had put enough time in the water in various small boats and stuff where I had gone and got my license. I got my license, actually, in 1973 and I had amassed a lot of time in small boats, really. But in those days, you went and got your license without going to one of these schools; it was a little bit different.

TH: That was—the first one was a six-pack license?

IS: Six-pack, and that’s the only license I’ve ever—I don’t care; I don’t want to get involved in bigger rigs than that. That’s all I’ve ever carried was a six-pack.
TH: What did you fish for, okay? And how did you fish for this kind of fish? And let’s go—we’re going to now to—it’s going to get a little laborious here, ’cause we’re gonna go through the different kinds of fish and how you fish for each, and you can be general or—

IS: I have a pretty well-rounded career in that. We did what we had to do to make a living. We fished for—most of my fishing was charter fishing, but I did some in Florida, but particularly in North Carolina in the fall, I did a lot of commercial fishing for king mackerel, in the fall. We have wonderful runs of kings up there in those days; still do, some in the spring. But the spring, we were occupied with the charters, but in the fall, sometimes you’d have a charter, sometimes you wouldn’t. So we did a lot of commercial kingfishing then.

TH: So the wintertime was not big for charter fishing in North Carolina?

IS: In those days, no. Charter fishing was essentially over by Thanksgiving. Ergo, I came to Florida. See, from seventy-four [1974]—through my entire fishing career, I’ve spent the winters in Florida, from seventy-four [1974] until 2000.

TH: How’d you fish for—let’s go back up to North Carolina. Well, how’d you fish for kingfish?

IS: It was hook and line fishing. We used lard in the spring; we could catch most of our fish on spoons. They were smaller fish: five, six, seven, eight-pound fish. In the fall, the fish were much bigger and we usually would use sea witches and strips of mullet or strips of fatback.

TH: Fatback being bunker?

IS: Being bunker, yeah.

TH: All right. And then, let’s see. Did you fish for sailfish?

IS: Yes. Our charter fishing in North Carolina was probably one of the best variety areas going. We fished for blue marlin, white marlin, sails, yellow-finned, big-eye, blue-finned tuna, black-finned tuna, dolphin, wahoo, and kingfish.
TH: For trolling—

IS: No bottom fishing in those days for us; we didn’t do it up there.

TH: For trolling for sailfish or marlin or wahoo, did you usually troll the same brigs?

IS: Patterns vary from season to season, when one thing would be predominant. A lot of wahoo around, we would use a lot of wire. Tuna fishing—we eventually ended up using almost all mono—

TH: Now, you say—be more specific. Use a lot of wire leader?

IS: Wire leader. Wire leader, not wire lines. Not so much wire lines, although we did use those some, too. It was just a ton of different spreads for different—depending on what was—if there were a lot of big eyes around, they were big fish; they would weigh anywhere from ninety to 270 pounds.

TH: What’s “big eye”? Could you elaborate?

IS: It’s another tuna, big eye tuna. When they were around, you needed heavy leaders to get—just to be able to hold ’em beside the boat and get a gaff in ’em. For the yellow fins, a lot of times you would find down to very small leaders. It was just—it’s really a lot more than we can get into here. We can talk for days on spreads and stuff. (laughs)

TH: Interesting. Well, let’s—okay. Let’s—a little bit. How did you adjust—okay, you told me quickly. How did you adjust for marlin or when did you know you were going for marlin? Is it that the charter asked to go for marlin?

IS: Sure. He had a lot of people during the seasons for the marlin.

TH: What is the season for marlin?

IS: For the blue marlin from Hatteras and Oregon Inlet—a lot of my fishing took place
out of Oregon Inlet, too. I eventually became a member of a consortium there that had a marina that we got—we fished a lot, an awful lot. You stayed booked every day. North Carolina, the marlin season would run May, June, July, August, September.

TH: Let’s bring you back to Florida. Can you get marlin out of here?

IS: We do. We catch a few marlin here, but we don’t target ’em very often. This is sailfish country here and it’s good sailfish country, a lot of ’em. We find everything (telephone rings) way down; everything’s down. Now, it’s sixty to eighty pound monofilament leaders, ballyhoo. Largely circle hooks with the—in the tournament, certainly—

TH: For trollers?

IS: Yes, indeed. And they help a lot—fish mortality rate. We used to kill a lot of fish on J-hooks, even though we released ’em. And the circle hook takes all that out of the picture.

TH: That’s—

IS: Circle hook is a good law—a good law for targeting sails. Now, for general-purpose fishing, for the general—the guy that goes out there [and] wants to catch some dolphin or wahoo, some kings, circle hook is not much of a tool for that. It’s a—they just don’t hook ’em very well. (laughs)

TH: So you’re really—those are fish that you catch for food, for—?

IS: That we keep, that we keep.

TH: You keep for food for the—

IS: And the billfish, we release all of them.

TH: Release all the billfish. Okay, very good. During what—okay, now once again, you don’t have to tell me in great detail about each fishery, but what months do you fish for
what fish again, even down here off Florida? Let’s concentrate on—

IS: Florida, our traditional Treasure Coast sailfish season would run from Thanksgiving until the fifteenth of February. I used to always tell people that wanted sails to try to get here by the fifteenth of February. I’ve seen that vary a little bit. I’ve seen it last until the end of February. In fact, I believe the most sails I ever caught in a day in Florida was on the nineteenth of February; but by and large, December and January were the best.

TH: What were the most sails?

IS: Thirty, thirty. That was all on live bait, though.

TH: One day?

IS: Yeah, twenty. Twenty’s the most I’ve caught trolling. We don’t really approve much of live bait here. We went through a spell of a few years where we did. We were like drunks with bottles. (TH laughs) It’s so easy. It’s just like stealing candy from a baby. But the twenties are what I’m most proud of. Those—the boys have caught more. I believe Glenn [Cameron] has caught probably thirties, thirty-two or thirty-three.\(^3\) I think Hans has caught thirty. There’s been some good catches.

TH: How much was an average trip’s catch? This is hard.

IS: Oh, my goodness! It’s so hard. That’s—year-to-year, all that. During the season, we had a lot of trips where we were thrilled to catch three sails. I’ve seen years where— (telephone rings)

TH: Where you were slow.

IS: Yeah, I’ve seen years where I’ve never caught more than ten in any one day in a season. It varies greatly. Like I say, that has been very good of late years. They’ve had some better sailfishing than I believe I saw.

TH: What do you attribute that to?

\(^3\) Glenn Cameron was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00006.
I have no idea.

I know it cycles.

Cycles of abundance of things in the ocean, I guess.

Okay. So then—let’s see, that—so you’ve fished in Fort Pierce for—you gave me the years, from seventy-four [1974] to—


Two thousand. Sometimes you would go back in the summer?

I’d always go back in the summer, yeah.

To North Carolina.

I did a lot of branching out. After that new boat, I started going to Cancún [Mexico] every spring. It was an excellent sail fishery down there, and I would fish there from March, April, May, come back the first of June, and go right on to North Carolina. Fish June, July, August, September, October, half of November, in North Carolina and always try to be back here by Thanksgiving.

So you traveled a lot. How did that affect your family life?

My wife was good with it. She—we moved around; we were back and forth, but we had places at both places so it wasn’t so bad. The kids for a while changed school and then she started just bringing ’em on down to Florida, just keeping ’em in a Florida school. It worked out fine. I have great kids. They haven’t suffered from that. In fact, they’ve has some great travel opportunity; Mexico. I fished one fall in Venezuela with a boat, chartered. That was just out-of-the-world fishing down there.

That’s what I’ve heard.
IS: Unfortunately, that’s gotten politically difficult do to now, but you talk about some exciting fishing. My kids got to come down there and visit and all. They got to see some places that a lot of kids don’t get to see.

TH: Now, this is a question Fox and I—I tell everybody ten, fifteen miles. He said he tells everybody twelve miles. In average, how far offshore do you fish here in Florida?

IS: That would be twelve to fifteen miles (inaudible). (TH laughs)

**Pause in recording**

TH: Okay, average trip—let me get back to this—where did I leave off? How far off shore? Twelve to fifteen miles, average, off Florida; but sometimes you catch right on the beach, and sometimes—

IS: Sometimes I’ve made days where—back in those great kingfish days, where for two weeks, I wouldn’t leave the beach.

TH: I don’t know that you ever mentioned—before we go too much further, what happened to the kingfish? Oh, you did mention it.

IS: They were netted out. I had a—

TH: First with the—

IS: The roller rigs. The roller rigs were set by air, set by planes. I was off north of twelve there one day, and I don’t know why you guys weren’t out, but I was commercial fishing on my *Temptress* here, and we had a—we were fishing two spoons, (telephone rings) and it was me, my mate—and I wasn’t married at the time—and two girls that were fishing with us. We got in a circle of fish that [were] just marked black, pure tea black.

TH: Tell me about the black wad. Now, you know, some people don’t have the old resounder recorder—

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4 Maltbey “Fox” Foxworthy Watkins, Jr. was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00004.
IS: It would just knock it right out. Just solid black, you couldn’t even get to the bottom for the kings in running. I think you can look over the side; you could almost get a flicker of them moving down there. That was north of twelve, and nobody was out there and I don’t know why, ’cause it was a pretty nice day of weather. Maybe they were fishing on the Northeast or whatever, I don’t know. We were on a bunch of fish; me and a boy named Chris Hickman. I had a—I had two hand lines, and the hand lines were pure hand lines, you know, pulled by hand, not a motor on them. And I had a Khan reel that I used to mount on—one of old Mr. Khan’s reels that I used to mount on a little pedestal in the middle of the boat where the chair went. And me and him caught—me and that boy caught five hundred pounds in an hour and a half. And I looked up and there was a plane over me, and two of the boats came. I think one might have been the Razor? I’m not sure. I can’t remember the boat names, exactly.

TH: It was out there a lot.

IS: They sat on me so close that they left me one—they sat on both sides of me and left me one little—like alley, you couldn’t even circle them. I hadn’t touched the wheel for an hour, hour and a half. It was just fast. Hell, you wouldn’t even get the (inaudible) before they were skyrocketing on the spoon back there. It was beautiful fishing, and I do remember it was the fastest, I believe, I’ve ever caught kings. The most I ever caught in a day is, like—I think I had a ticket for 1260 [pounds], and that was in North Carolina with those bigger fish. But we caught—I’m sure we—I think we had 550 [pounds] and I’m sure we caught them in an hour and a half. It was just the damnest bailin’ of fish you’ve ever seen. But anyway, what I was getting ready—when that net, when those nets hit the water, we had never had another bite. Another bite. And it just— (snaps fingers)

TH: They caught how many thousands?

IS: I think they caught 37,000 pounds there, I believe. That comes to—and I may be way off there. Somehow, the number 37,000 comes to my mind on those two boats.

TH: This was a sad time for—

IS: Oh, you could say this is the—this is what’s going to go on. ’Course, they were of the—I know, they fed us all this crap of, “Well, these are just part of what the fish are.” And then the stupidest thing was that, “Oh, well, there’s lots of kings offshore, that pass by offshore.” Which— (laughs) I’ve spent a lot of time in deep water and I’ve never caught a king out there.
TH: What happened after these nets were outlawed?

IS: Well, the smaller fish came back. The fish on the bar, the typical—what, six to twelve-pound, fourteen-pound fish? They seem to come back fairly rapidly. But like I say, I’ve been out of it since 2000, but as of 2000, the smoker fishery, the big fish fishery, had never recovered.

TH: Okay, but I mean after—what, is there another kind of net that came into play?

IS: The drift nets came into play and they caught a little bit of everything. They probably caught some sails, some kings, too. All of it just too—just caught too many: too few catching too large a percentage of what was out there to take.

TH: Let’s go back now. When the fishing was really hot, like when you were catching that day when the net (inaudible), have you ever been on a black wad of fish or, you know, solid black marking on your recorder, when they did not bite?

IS: Well, I have marked things. I have marked stuff that I did not catch fish out of.

TH: That’s what I meant.

IS: Yeah, I’ve marked stuff that I have not caught fish out of, but I don’t think that those were marks of kings when I was doing that. It was some kind of bait of something that I couldn’t figure out what it was.

TH: I guess what my question is, is keeping—

IS: I’m sure there’s times when there are fish like that. I don’t remember marking anything after they set. I think it broke everything up when they set. I don’t remember marking any fish after the set, but I could have. Believe me, what I had in those days, if you were marking fish, there were fish there! (laughs)

TH: I guess the question I want to ask is, do you think hook and like fishing could have fished out the kingfish?
IS: No way in hell. Every man, woman, and child armed with a rod and reel or a hand
line in Florida would never—would not dramatically change the kingfishery. I don’t
think, and I honestly believe that.

TH: What, the way it was?

IS: That’s right.

TH: Okay, that’s what I was—okay. That brings us to average trip. How many years have
you been a charter boat captain?


TH: Finally, we’re getting down to the end. You’ve done great, Captain Shafer. I would
like to talk about how your fishing had changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank.
Did I say that—I hope I said that correctly. Since 1984, several changes have been made
in the regulations of the Oculina Bank. I’d like to know if any of these regulations
affected your fishing and if so, how? Point out—I didn’t bring my map up here, but I do
have those small maps I gave you. (shuffles papers) Okay. How did this affect you? It’s
kind of repetitive. We talked about it at the beginning, but once again, 1984, that’s when
they first outlawed the dragging, the shrimp dragging. Did that affect you?

IS: That affected me in no way, shape, or form.

TH: Initially closed to trawling, dredging, bottom long lining; that didn’t affect you?

IS: No. (telephone rings)

TH: Next: 1994, if you fished prior to 1994. The Oculina Bank was designated as an
experimental closed area where fishing for and retention of snapper/grouper species was
prohibited. Snapper/grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring. Was
your fishing impacted by this regulation?

IS: I was not impacted by the anchoring regulations, since I never ever anchored. I know
the commercial boys were, because they did traditionally anchor there; I did not. However, how it impacted me was it shut me out of 98 percent of my deeper water bottom fishing capability. Yes, it impacted me horribly.

TH: Okay, very good. All anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing? So, it wasn’t the anchoring that—

IS: The anchor did not impact us at all. We never anchored there.

TH: But it was the not being able to retain bottom fishing grouper and snapper.

IS: Not being able to fish, not being able to do our drift-type bottom fishing. Drifting, power drifting, controlled drifting-type bottom fishing killed us.

TH: Okay, HAPC. What the hell is that? Let me get this. (consults notes)

IS: Habitat Area of Particular Concern, it looks like, here.

TH: There we go.

IS: I’m like you; if I hadn’t seen that written down, I’d have no clue.

TH: Well, I should know. Anyway, 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area east and north of the designated Oculina Bank. Nineteen ninety-eight [1998], this area was incorporated into the HAPC. Fishing with a bottom long line trawl dredge was prohibited in this expanded area, as was anchoring of any vessel. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation and how? I assume this would mean no more snapper [or] grouper in that entire—

IS: ’Cause you can’t drop it. If I can’t drop a bait to the bottom and try to catch a snapper [or] grouper, yes, I’m terribly impacted.

TH: Okay, that’s the point, I think. The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more frequently as a fishery management tool. What do you think about the use of these closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management
regulation?

IS: I think it’s the poorest form of management that we have available to us, in that it causes geographical areas, communities, to suffer horribly while other communities don’t. And I think that the limits are a much fairer way for a charter boat to deal with.

TH: Well, let’s go back. When you say communities, you mean—

IS: Fishing—I mean communities ashore, people trying to make a living, yes. I feel like areas can be horribly impacted that way.

TH: So it does impact the fisherman in an area adjacent to the HAPC?

IS: Absolutely.

TH: So you think—continue on your ideas on what—

IS: I think that the limits, which initially were hard for us to swallow, are actually proven to be beneficial. People are living with them, accepting the limits that we have—

TH: Like quotas?

IS: Well, not so much quota as a daily bag limit for a boat, for recreational [fishing]. Now, commercial needs to be treated differently. I understand that. But recreational, the daily bag limits that we have had for the last few years, we’ve learned to live with. The grouper bag limits, the snapper bag limit, the kingfish bag limit—which I think is a little bit low for sport, but we’re living with it. We’re still getting out. People are catching fish. I think that’s the better method. I think a real example of that today is that, although I have not been involved in the red snapper fishery recently, my friends who do red snapper fish tell me that the fishery has been better the last couple years than it’s been for the last fifteen of twenty years with some good-sized fish being caught. People are catching their limit of—I believe it’s two per day per person, going home with some fish, happy.

And then all of a sudden, the whole darned rug is pulled out from under everyone. You can’t—the season is closed or you can’t catch any for God knows how long. I think
that’s thoughtless on the part of the government to do that, when the already scientifically established limits that we have have been working. They’re working! And then we come up with some draconian measure like closing the season on these fish, to give no one access to ’em. No excuse for a recreational or charter boat to even leave port? No, that’s pitiful. I think that lawmakers, particularly, on the—for instance, on the Oculina Bank specifically, that we’re talking about. I think one of the things that these people should think about when they make some of these laws is, “Is this law going to tend to be something that’s going to make a patriotic, law-abiding, taxpaying, American citizen have to be”—what would you say?—“to be tempted to break this law only to make the living he has made previously?” I think it’s very, very wrong, and I think that this is something that all fisheries laws, all game laws, should be a factor in deciding what law we’re gonna pass, what law we’re not gonna pass. You shouldn’t make law-abiding citizens into criminals.

TH: Because they’re tempted to do something they’ve done for years?

IS: You’re tempted to do something you’ve done for years that was morally correct, morally right.

TH: Okay. Now, you did mention earlier that you felt like the Oculina Bank, because of the living coral aspect of it, was a—

IS: It’s a unique environment, I think.

TH: Yeah, a unique environment. Do you think that bottom fishing with the—without anchoring, which is what you guys, the charter captains, mostly do—and your bag limit of grouper and snapper in place, do you think that you’re impacting negatively, the fishing on the Oculina Bank?

IS: I do not. This was originally closed in what, 19—you said 1994 to bottom fishing, I guess—


IS: Has anyone gone out there to see if there are any more fish now that there were then since they closed it for what, sixteen years or—?
TH: I don’t know.

IS: (laughs) I think that would be a part of the equation, too.

TH: Okay. Thinking ahead, we’re winding up with the—it’s been great; you’ve been very gracious—

IS: Well, like I said, I can talk about this stuff forever, just like you probably can.

TH: I can, too. Thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years?

IS: I think that with the present laws in place that we’re—with the net ban—that no fisheries are gonna go into a decline. We’re gonna see some fisheries that grow poorer, but they would have grown poorer if the white man had not even been in this country, I think. You see peaks and ebbs in cycles of some abundance of some fish, and I think we saw that for years and years and years, in all kinds of things. A case in point: Where I’m from, striped bass. For years there were no striped bass, almost no striped bass on the East Coast, just little small estuarine-type of striped bass. Now in the ocean, in the Mid-Atlantic, are more large, and by large I mean thirty-five, forty, fifty—there was a sixty-four pounder caught in North Carolina last week in the ocean, a striped bass. These things were—for years there were some, for years they were absent. Now they’re back again. One day there will be none, whether—no matter how we regulate ’em. They come and go, just like the big blue fish that we used to see offshore that we don’t see any more.

I believe with the limits that we have now for sport and recreational and commercial, that we can have—we have sustainable fisheries. I don’t believe we need to close the season on anything, because I think that you’re gonna have about the same number that you have, or even increases like the red snapper I was talking about—for periods of time. But even with those laws in place, you’re gonna see declines in certain types of fish at times. But you’re gonna see that with or without law.

I would like to see a check on the abundance of fish on this closed Oculina Bank to see if it’s noticeably more fish there than it was before the closure fifteen or sixteen years ago. If they can’t show that this area is spawning an awful lot of fish and sending them to other places, I say open the thing back up to sport and commercial fishing. I agree with no anchoring henceforth and forever more, because that could damage the coral. But I don’t believe that sport fisherman dropping a jig or a twenty ounce lead down there are
gonna destroy this coral that is 230 feet down, in most cases, to 190 feet down where—what percentage of the American public are gonna see this that it invalidates closing this off to local fisherman? We’re not gonna destroy these reefs.

TH: How ’bout if it was an area of protected habitat closer to shore? I mean, you just don’t believe in closing—

IS: I don’t believe in it at all. I believe in the limits that seem to be working right now, and I was not a real limit fan. We who fished in the ocean for years, us older guys, we were sort of used to catching whatever we could whenever we could, and we were wrong. We were wrong, just like I’m sure the old guys that in the duck hunting days back around 1918 thought they could keep shooting ’em forever. But we were wrong and they were wrong. We need some laws. There’s so many of us out there trying to take a resource. But some of these things are very, very ill-founded, like these closures of areas. I cannot go along with them.

TH: We’ve been talking for about forty-five minutes. I’d like to ask you about one of the—do you have any—and I know I’m—any really unique experiences of fishing? If you look back on your career as a charter captain, can you tell me one or two unique experiences, whether it be storms, big fish, that come to mind?

IS: I have a couple stories that involve people, really, more so than fish, and I’ll tell you two of them that are probably my best stories involving fishing.

TH: We’ve got about ten minutes.

IS: Okay. All right. Back in the early eighties [1980s], it was during the period of the Cuban boatlift and the Cubans leaving in the little rafts. You ran into the rafts out here, you remember that?

TH: I have an oar from one of those rafts in my house.

IS: Okay. I was running—I used to fish a lot in Chub Key in the spring, I didn’t mention that to you, but I fish in Chub Key in the Bahamas. I’d put in about three weeks of people together, back to back. I’d keep my boat over there and the people fly in April, late April and May. Very good fishery. I was on my way over there. I’d left—I ran down the coast to Fort Lauderdale, spent the night at a friend’s house down there at his dock, and then I would run across to have less affect of the Gulf Stream against me, you know,
running over the (inaudible). Anyway, some bad weather was coming, a cold front was coming the next day; but I was enjoying the southwesterly that was running with the current so it was pretty calm. I was running across, and I looked up ahead of me and I saw something floating. Of course as a fisherman, you’re always interested in anything you see floating ’cause it’ll hold fish and all, just out of curiosity. As I got off, I could see it was like a big, big truck inner tube with web in it, and two guys were in the thing.

TH: Go back. You said if there’s something under—if you find something floating—

IS: Yeah, floating. It will have fish but that’s why I always take interest in always pass—you’ll always veer out of your way to pass by something floating just to look down there and see if you see anything around it, even if though I wouldn’t have caught whatever was there. I was on my way traveling, you know?

Anyway, I looked and I saw these two people in this raft, so I hollered down to my wife —she was with me, and my mate—and have them pass the shotgun I loaded. In those days it was kind of the wild, wooly West out there, too, as you remember. This would have been the late seventies [1970s] or early eighties [1980s]. Anyway, I hollered down there and my wife passed me the shotgun and I eased up to ’em and shoved some shells in her, just eased up, pointed it at ’em. I guess these poor Cubans thought, “Oh, my God, we floated all this way and now this crazy bastard’s gonna shoot us out here in the middle of the Straights.” (laughs) It was about equal distance from the bank or from the U.S. Anyway, it turned out that they were two students from Havana that had thrown this contraption in the water about five days earlier; they’d been there a long time, and they were floating up the Stream. Like I say, next day, horrible cold front come through. I mean, a bitter, bitter, horrible cold front.

Anyway, I called the Coast Guard and said, “Look, I’m not—I can’t turn back, I’ve got to go on to the Bahamas. I’ll carry these boys to the Bahamas and turn ’em loose, but if y’all want ’em I’ll hold here a little while, let you get to me.” They gave me the runaround, but finally they sent a cutter. Anyway, one of these poor boys was about to freeze to death. He was just down there shaking and shivering and all. And I had a jacket with me but I wasn’t gonna need a jacket where I was going, so I just give it. I said, “Here, just take this jacket. Bienvenidas [a los] Estados Unidos. Welcome to the U.S. and take this jacket. (laughs) Warm up a little bit.”

Well, they came, we all floated. The boys and I continued to the Bahamas. I didn’t think anything about it. Well, about three or four months later, Time magazine ran a big piece on the Cuban balseros—you know, the guys in the little rafts coming ashore—and I turned the thing open and there was my two Cubans being unloaded at the gangplank in Miami down there, and there was one with my jacket. So, I’ve always said, “I’ve never
made *Time* magazine, but my jacket did!” (laughs) I’d like to know what happened to those boys. I have no idea. I hope they’ve done well and have big businesses down there in Miami.

**TH:** Well, they were allowed to stay back then. And you said you had another story?

**IS:** Yep. And the second story that’s kinda good deals with stuff floating, too. Back in the nineties [1990s]—I forget what year, but in the nineties [1990s] I was fishing off Fort Pierce one day in the spring. The fishing had been real, real slow, but it was real, real calm and I ended up after about thirty, thirty-five miles further out that I normally fished, just looking for flow, trying to catching a dolphin around flow. I remember we caught a couple of wahoo. And I saw something up ahead and I got up to it, and it was the bow of one of these pangas just stuck out of the water about that high—

**TH:** (inaudible)

**IS:** The motor, the motor of a panga, you know; it’s that typical type of open—about twenty-two, twenty-four-foot open boat that Latin Americans use for commercial fishing or all kinds of stuff. It’s a skiff, it’s a twenty-four-foot skiff; had about a sixty horsepower Yamaha on it. Anyway, it was sitting there with just its bow up and it was the end of the fishing day, so my mate jumped over, looked in it. Water’s just slick calm, slick calm. Looked it around and said, “No, there was nothing on it, but the motor was holding it down.” So I asked my people, “Y’all mind if I try to get this boat?” And they say, “No, Chip, go ahead and do it. We’re—you know, the day’s over anyway.”

So I put a rope on that thing and put ahead, put some pressure on her and picked up my speed gradually, and shit, that thing popped right out. So I slowed down, put my mate on it and we popped right again and he pulled the plug on it and we—hell, we had that thing—I come home about seventeen, eighteen knots with that thing bouncing along behind me, running just as pretty. I called Bud Tillman, had him meet me to take care of the motor when we got here, which he did, and had the thing pulled up, I forget where. I think I put it behind Bud’s. Bud was out there on Angle Road in those days, Bud Tillman’s place—

**TH:** St. Lucie, Orange Avenue—

**IS:** St. Lucie Outdoor Marine out there. Bud—I don’t know if you know Bud or not.

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5 Murray “Bud” Tillman, Jr. was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00001.
He’s a first-class guy.

TH: I’m gonna interview him tomorrow or the next day.

IS: Yeah, Bud’s a good guy. Anyway, the boat name was the *Marinada*; it was written on the bow of that boat, and it was a very familiar looking to me. I’d seen there was a big fleet of those boats down there where I fished, Isla Mujeres, which is near Cancún there.

TH: Mexico.

IS: So I called a very good Mexican friend of mine and I said, “Look, I found a panga (telephone rings) out there today, the name is the *Marinada*.” He said, “Jesus Christ, Chip! We had a terrible blow down here about two weeks ago.” And he said, “That boat was owned by a family. They had three guys on that boat. When that cold front hit, all hell broke loose and the Coast Guard found it. The Mexican helicopter went out there and found those boys hanging on that boat, which about run out of fuel. Came back in, refueled, went out and never saw them again. Never found anybody or anything. Never found the boat.” Anyway, I—

TH: They lost all three?

IS: The three guys were gone. They’re gone to this day—disappeared. Anyway, I said to him, “Well, I found the boat up here at Fort Pierce,” six hundred and something miles north of where it went down. And I ended up—I tried to get the Coast Guard to get the boat back to them and they couldn’t do it. I finally found a guy who ran little old island-type boats down there, and he ended up—I got the boat to him, and he got the boat back to the family. I returned the boat to the family that owned the boat, the Mexican family.

TH: Back in Mexico.

IS: Now, the motor I sold and gave them the money that we got for the motor, ’cause I didn’t think the motor would do them any favors after we pickled it and all that. But I don’t remember exactly—but I did, I gave them the money that I got from the motor. I can’t remember what it was, and the boat was delivered to them. And that boat was—but to me, the miracle of it was, how did that boat float through the Keys with all the fishermen there? Miami, [Fort] Lauderdale, Palm Beach—
TH: All through the Florida Straights.

IS: All the way, for a guy to run into it that fished right where they—that fished two months, three months out of the year, right where that boat came from. Wasn’t that odd? On a day that I would never—it was so unusual for me to be out there where I found that boat. Isn’t that odd?

TH: Slightly, yeah.

IS: Well, it was really neat. We had a—when I got back that spring, we had a ceremony and the commander of the Mexican Coast Guard returned the keys to the boat to the family. (laughs) It was neat. It was neat.

TH: That’s cool. That’s a really cool story.

IS: The chances of them ever seeing their boat again were piss-poor when that thing was lost. But I thought that was a good story.

TH: That is a fantastic story. I hate to end this thing. I mean, I could go on, but I want to thank you so much.

IS: Well, I thank you, and I thank you for writing that book about our area and those guys.

TH: Well, it’s been a—

IS: I think it’s really good. I think Tommy McHale—we were not close friends, ’cause Tommy, as you know, Tommy was hard to get to close to, anyway.

TH: Oh, yeah.

IS: He was a very to his self-type person, but I lived beside him. In fact, I bought—at the house that we bought, that we live in—we bought from Anne Arena, who was Tommy’s girlfriend, maybe wife? I don’t know if they were ever married or not, may not have been.
TH: Was his wife.

IS: Anne Arena.

TH: Okay. I’m gonna turn this off, but I usually—when I turn it off, I get some of the best I get some of the best stories—

**Pause in recording**

IS: —stay close friends at all, but Tommy and I would speak a lot and he’d show me a spoon or something, or whatever. He loved to talk about the fishing—but always close to the vest. Always, you know? And I never bothered him about it either—

**Pause in recording**

IS: —water fish. They don’t—there’s no such thing as spots. They don’t call any one place home. I know kings do. They orient on bottom, but—

TH: Well, the way things are today with everybody having a LORAN, you know—

IS: GPS.

TH: A GPS—

IS: Or a bottom engine.

TH: Then with divers, I mean, it’s—everybody knows all the numbers.

IS: I’ll tell you, the worst—one of the most dangerous things, too, is something that I was aware of in my bottom fishing—but it’s become gangbusters now—are the damn radars that I can sit three miles from you and put a cursor on you and I know exactly where you are. That’s a dangerous tool right there.
TH: As long as everybody knows where everybody is—

IS: And everybody has that. And you and I may have some of our favorite secret spots; you fish it sometimes, but you won’t fish it when you see me, and I fish it sometimes and we don’t even know we’re fishing the same spot, but we are! (laughs)

TH: I think the kingfishermen have given up on that. We just—we tell each other where the fish are.

IS: Sure.

TH: Somebody should catch it, and if you can get there and fish for an hour and catch a few, then you get on the radio and—

IS: One thing y’all have going for you is y’all get out there early, so you got a good two or three hours, usually, before the vast majority of the sport boats show up, so that helps.

TH: The other thing I noticed, and I learned this from Tommy, is sometimes we’ll fish—we’ll be fishing a whole season in one area and the fish will be somewhere else. (laughs)

IS: That’s a hard call. This is not very good fishing, but it’s good enough to hold me here. It should be better somewhere else, but do I leave? One of the things that was told to me was, “Never leave fish to find fish.”

TH: Yeah, exactly.

IS: And I find that in the Pacific that gets me sometimes, because being raised in the Atlantic where you better take advantage of every little thing you find, I tend to see a fish or two and then I start turning over rocks looking to see, “What else is here? What else is here?” When sometimes, in the Pacific, with some of the huge groups of fish that are there, you’re better off to just sail right out across the horizon and hope that you may well run into something a whole lot better, you know? And I have a few friends that fish there that always do, and I love having them around, the guys that you can’t stop with just a few fish. They’re gonna bore on. They’re gonna cover some ground.

TH: I know, I know. Well, it’s—
IS: But it takes all kinds to make a fleet, as you and I know. Not everybody in a fleet, in
your kingfish fleet or one of my sport fishing fleets, is the same. You learn how to read
different people and you know what to expect. You can almost tell where somebody’s
gonna be, not even knowing where they are, because you’ve known them long enough,
you know how they fish, where to expect them to be on a given condition. If they tell
you (inaudible) they think probably nothing—that maybe nothing is going on there, you
know?

TH: Yeah, if Tommy McHale wasn’t with the fleet, you knew he was catching fish
someplace and generally, he was—

IS: He was of the few of y’all who was really good on that beach. He could get in those
smokers and catch them, now. He was good on the beach. He was one of the few boats
during that great beach fishing that I would see right in there—

TH: When nobody else was there.

IS: When nobody else would be there, but he’d be getting those big things.

TH: Same thing now with (inaudible), he’d go to the south end. We’d all be up northeast
scratching and he’d be down there, he’d come in with more fish than anybody else.

IS: And it may not have supported the whole fleet, but him having it by himself staying
on ’em, he could make it there, right?

TH: Oh, yeah, and there’s—I can’t tell you how many times me and everybody else
(telephone rings) fished right next to him and just—you’d get tired of watching him catch
fish and you’re not catching a darned thing.

IS: I know. (TH laughs) And kingfish is one of the worst of that things. Every time you
look, you see, and when you get in you feel like you must have seen him catch every fish
three times. You know, that you think you had twice but he actually had! (laughs)

TH: Oh, yeah. He’s something else. He was a classic. Let me turn these things off. I got
that—
End of interview