Richard Kluglein oral history interview by Terry Lee Howard, June 26, 2010

Richard J. Kluglein (Interviewee)
Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)

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Terry Lee Howard: Good morning. This is Terry Howard. Today is June 26, 2010. I’m at the Fort Pierce City Marina with—

Richard Kluglein: Captain Richard Kluglein.
TH: Captain Rich Kluglein, conducting an oral history with Captain Klugman [sic] for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation project with Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Captain Rich. Please state your name, spell your name, your place of birth and your date of birth.

RK: It’s Richard James Kluglein, K-l-u-g-l-e-i-n. And I was born in Huntington, Long Island on April 2, 1960.

TH: April 2, 1960. So, you’re exactly how old?

RK: Fifty.

TH: Fifty, exactly fifty years old. You’re born, again, exactly where?


TH: Okay. When did you first move to Fort Pierce?

RK: I moved to Port St. Lucie in ninety-two [1992], I believe it was, ninety-two [1992], built the house. Moved to Florida in eighty-eight [1988].

TH: Okay. What brought you to Fort Pierce?

RK: Came to Fort Pierce because we were living down in the west Boca Raton area, and we bought up in Port St. Lucie for a better home value at the time.

TH: Okay. So, the home values. What did you do down in—

RK: I worked as a registered nurse.

TH: Okay. How old were you—er, are you married?

RK: Yes, I’m married.

TH: How old were you when you got married?

RK: Twenty-nine.

TH: Good, good. Do you have children?

RK: I have one daughter.

TH: Okay. How old is she?

RK: She is eighteen.
TH: And her name?
RK: Samantha.

TH: And how much schooling do you have?
RK: I have a bachelor’s of science in nursing.

TH: Okay. From where?
RK: University of Western Connecticut.

TH: Okay. Do you have another job besides charter boat fishing? What other jobs have you had? So, basically—
RK: I work as a nurse.

TH: Okay. Do you currently own a boat?
RK: I own a boat.

TH: What kind? Can you describe it to me?
RK: It’s a thirty-four foot 1998 Crusader.

TH: Okay. Now, some questions about the Oculina Bank. How familiar are you with the Oculina Bank?
RK: I’m very familiar with it.

TH: Why was the Oculina Bank designated as an area to protect?
RK: How they wrote that, or how I feel about it?
TH: How you feel about it.

RK: Well, I do follow the agenda of the Magnuson Ferguson Act\(^1\) for quite some time. And that listing of closures were listed in the early eighties [1980s], as well as the closures that are occurring now, as well as the closures that will be occurring this fall throughout Georgia and up through the Carolinas and, as they have tried, many attempts. The portions of the same ridge of the Oculina Bank, off of Marathon and Islamorada, all that was slotted for closure in the early eighties [1980s].

TH: By?

\(^1\) RK is referring to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act. Originally passed by Congress in 1976 and reauthorized in 1996 and 2006, this is the main piece of federal marine legislation.
RK: Actually, I believe it’s environmentalist groups, but they do consider it a habitat of particular concern because of the Oculina coral. I do know that the Harbor Branch Oceanographic Institute had quite a bit to do with the research put forward to do this. But, the actual—from what I understand, and if you go back and look at the history of this, the closures that are actually happening now beyond the Oculina Bank closure were put down in the early eighties [1980s].

TH: Okay. Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank?

RK: Well, it has a lot of fish involved in there. There’s quite a bit of snapper, all different types, amberjack. It attracts pelagic fish on the surface. I do know fish come and go. So, they can take a picture of it, which some are on the computer, to show that—a picture full of life, with grouper. And then, the next picture they’d look at like looks the same area is devastated with no fish. But I can tell you that the fish constantly move in and out off a rock, or off an area.

TH: What do you think about the closure of the closure of the Oculina Bank to anchoring and bottom fishing?

RK: I agree with the anchoring portion. I don’t believe that anybody needs to anchor in any deep water habitat to catch bottom fish. I don’t believe that you need to stop bottom fishing in that area. I don’t believe that a twenty-ounce sinker would do any harm. Also, if you’re fishing with rod and reels and not electric, it’s not all that easy to bring up a thirty pound grouper.

TH: Has the closure of the Oculina Bank affected your fishing, and how?

RK: Well, it has affected our fishing in the way that, in the wintertime, it’s actually improved the fishing because maybe there’s a little less pressure off the Oculina Bank. However, once they figured that out, that we catch grouper in the winter, they closed that on us, too. So, yes, it was doing a good job and so we could catch fish in 180 feet, 200 feet, just west of the Oculina Bank as well as on the offshore bar, which is 80 to 90 feet; but once they figured out that we were still catching the fish, they shut that down as well.

TH: On the Oculina Bank?

RK: Sure, the Oculina Bank. You cannot catch them through January through April, which is when they’re here.

TH: Okay. You’re taking about the closure?

RK: Right. But what I’m saying is that they’ve extended it from it. It all goes together. I mean, if the fish come down here in the winter, they do their—basically, in my belief, they not only migrate east and west, they also migrate north and south. Okay? They know that we have more

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2 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.
fish and the Oculina Bank is supporting the fish, and in order to preserve it more, they’ve extended the fact that we can’t catch any of the species, other than amberjack, when they’re here.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank was not prohibited, would you fish there? I mean, if you could fish there.

RK: Absolutely. Yes.

TH: How and for what?

RK: Gag grouper, red grouper, scamp, rock hind, amberjack, and snowy grouper.

TH: Okay.

RK: Red snapper, but that’s not in the ballpark, anyway.

TH: Because of the closure of the bank?

RK: Because of the closure.

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

RK: Well, over the years, people are finding out more and more and more that the memories that they had [of] fishing in Fort Pierce and getting all these nice, big bottom fish and amberjack and lining the docks up—I believe at one point in time there was over twenty charter boats here that were busy, and now we’re down to six that are not busy. So, I think people are—the knowledge is there that the—whether it’s because of the closure or the fact that we’re just not catching those fish, the people have really gone away.

TH: Okay. Now, the population has increased.

RK: Absolutely.

TH: But the commerce?

RK: The use of charter boats has drastically decreased.

TH: Okay. You believe that’s because of fishing regulations, because of fewer fish, because of—

RK: I don’t believe it’s for fewer fish, I believe it’s for fishing regulations. Are there fewer fish than there might have been twenty years ago or prior to this closure? That’s probably true anywhere. But you can certainly see that in the wintertime, even not fishing the Oculina Bank, just fishing on the inshore of it, you can readily catch your limits of grouper in, sometimes, if condition’s right, a half a day. That’s off the table now. It’s a hard time believing that’s there’s not a lot of grouper around if I can catch the boat’s limit before noon.
TH: Have you had any experiences with law enforcement within or regarding the Oculina Bank?

RK: Yes, I have.

TH: Can you describe those?

RK: I was boarded on the Oculina Bank and checked for bottom fish.

TH: And?

RK: I was not bottom fishing. I was trolling.

TH: Okay. By who? Who boarded you?

RK: The—actually, the state and the feds. They used a State of Florida boat, but there was a federal officer on board.

TH: Okay. Now, your fishing history, specifically. What is your earliest memory of fishing and how old were you?

RK: I was about eleven. Well, I tried fishing before that, but I didn’t catch any fish. I think I caught my first fish when I was eleven.

TH: Okay. Can you explain that, how and where?

RK: It was in Long Island, New York, and it was a rainbow trout.

TH: Okay. So, it wasn’t in the ocean. (laughs) It was in a river—a river or a lake?

RK: It was in a river.

TH: Okay, a river. Okay. How did you learn how to fish? Who taught you?

RK: Well, I fished all of my life. A lot of it was self-taught over trial and error. And then I fished in Fort Pierce with another captain, Captain Dennis Meheen, who’s fished in the Fort Pierce area since the 1970s.

TH: Dennis Meheen?

RK: That’s M-e-h-e-e-n.

TH: M-e-h-e-e-n.

RK: Right.

TH: Okay. And when you came to Fort Pierce, you mated for Captain Meheen?
RK: Right. We worked together. We met a long time ago. He ran the *Happy Hooker*, a boat that used to be a popular boat, especially for the type of deep water fishing that we’re discussing. And he was very well versed at it, and I have every number of pretty much every rock pile between here and Daytona Beach on the Oculina, as well as well-versed in how to fish deep water.

TH: Okay. When did you start fishing in the Fort Pierce area, age and year?

RK: It had to be 1993, ninety-two [1992]. That would be—I would have been thirty-two.

TH: Okay. Were you fishing commercially, recreationally, or working on—

RK: I was fishing recreationally.

TH: Okay. And working in charter boat sector?

RK: Charter boat for ten years.

TH: Okay. As a mate, before you—

RK: As partners with Dennis Meheen, as a mate.

TH: And you fished for what?

RK: We fished for snapper, grouper, kingfish, amberjacks, cobia, sailfish, whatever swims.

TH: Okay. How did you fish for—let’s start with the grouper, the bottom fish.

RK: We did it a number of different ways. If we were fishing deep water, what we’d do was we would stem the tide and slow the drift down. So, we never had truly ever anchored in any deep water. We would just use a sixteen to a twenty-ounce sinker. Current’s usually two knots or less, although you could fish with faster currents, and that’d just—customers didn’t really care for it, because then you had to go with a three pound weight. So, generally, we fished in the deeper waters throughout the winter and up until about maybe end of June.

TH: Okay, and trolling for sailfish and kingfish?

RK: Throughout the year.

TH: What kind of gear and bait did you use?

RK: Mainly, for kingfish, we live bait. For sailfish, we troll dead bait, ballyhoo.

TH: Ballyhoo. You don’t troll for kingfish? You started live baiting early on?
RK: Generally—we occasionally troll for a kingfish, but generally we’d use live bait.

TH: Okay. Did you only use live bait for your bottom fishing and for grouper fishing?

RK: Yes, correct.

TH: Who did you fish with? Who owned the boat? How were you related to this person? I guess that would go back to Dennis Meheen?

RK: Yeah, that would go back to Dennis Meheen. We were just good friends, and I guess he was an old ornery charter captain that had a bunch of knowledge that he felt like he wanted to give away. I’m not really sure how that worked out, but it worked out for me.

TH: Now, is he still alive?

RK: Yeah.

TH: Where’s he? Is he still fishing?

RK: He doesn’t fish anymore. He worked for Pursuit Boat[s]. Getting back to the fact that he used to fish full time and then couldn’t make any living on it whatsoever; getting back to the fact of the continued closures.

TH: Gotcha. Where did you go to fish when you began fishing in Fort Pierce?

RK: Well, we would go to the offshore bar, the—

TH: That would be the ninety-foot—

RK: Ninety-foot, ninety-foot area: basically, from a little south of the power plant to probably a little south of Sebastian Inlet. That used to be the zone. We would generally fish for—we would usually start out live baiting. If it was, say, May, then we would get whatever we could get with our kingfish, then we would do some trolling for some dolphin, and then we would stop at some offshore rocks and catch grouper or snapper or amberjacks. It was basically the routine.

TH: Okay. You’d start south and work with the tide?

RK: That generally depends on what the—you know, honestly, it matters which way the tide is going out of the inlet. If I leave the inlet and the tide’s going south, then it’s a whole nother story. If the tide’s going north, that’s a whole nother story. So, it all depends on which way the current’s going. I have an idea, but it changes very rapidly.

TH: And what fish were caught most recently?

RK: There’s been some dolphin out there. Well, I can give you a recent trip that comes to mind because of the Oculina closure, okay? We went and got some kingfish on the offshore bar,
basically straight off of Fort Pierce, all right? I went because I could not be on the Oculina with amberjack. I went down to the wrecks just south of the power plant and caught their limit of amberjack. Then, I went southeast to a wreck in 500 feet of water—oh, the limit of amberjack: one per person. And then I went to a wreck in 500 feet and caught their limit of snowy grouper, one per person; and then went outside the Oculina Bank, still south of the Oculina Bank, to catch their limit of tilefish, which is also one per person; and then had to go all the way back south, while I’m trolling, not to carry these fish over the Oculina. So, basically, it took me out of a normal path that I would do of well over twenty miles or more. It’s a considerable fuel burn just so I could not be on the Oculina Bank with what they would consider bottom fish.

TH: On board, that you didn’t catch there?

RK: That I didn’t catch there. As the current’s going north, of course. So, now I’m fighting the current the whole way to stay off the Bank. And that’s how it affects me all throughout April, and May, and June.

TH: During what months of the year did you fish for—and you already explained that. Stemming the tide, can you describe what that means?

RK: If the current’s running two knots and you have—you set off to a rock that’s to the north of you, and you are basically drifting, slowing down in your drift while you’re going east or west to get over the target that you want. So, slight turn to the right, slight turn to the left or east or west, like kicking in and out of gear, or you can use a trolling bow. Basically, you don’t want a bait flying past something for a grouper at two knots. So, you basically slow that drift down to a knot or less.

TH: Okay. You try and basically hold the boat in position?

RK: Not really holding the boat. You’re still going backwards. You’re moving in reverse, but your bow is forward and you’re pushing into the wedge. Basically, if your current is running at nineteen degrees, which is often the way it is, then in order to stem that tide, you have to—in order to get nineteen degrees—you would line up your rock at whatever, .05 to .010 nautical miles north at nineteen degrees. So, you’re still going backwards, even though you’re slowing your drift down, but your path is still nineteen degrees, in reverse.

TH: Okay.

RK: That make sense?

TH: Yeah, it does, it does. How long does an average fishing trip last?

RK: Eight to nine hours.

TH: Okay. That’s half day, full day?

RK: I don’t do half days.
TH: That’s just a day.

RK: It’s prohibitive to do half days, because I can’t get anywhere in that amount of time with the speed of my boat.

TH: Okay. Nine hours, then. What’s an average trip’s catch? Now, you just mentioned that, a recent trip.

RK: Well, that would be an average trip’s catch that we can do in May and possibly June. There was also some dolphin involved in that. But prior to the closure, prior to the closure of the Oculina, which actually at that time when they reviewed to open up the Oculina Bank—and I went to numerous meetings—they reviewed it. They had a scientist from Harbor Branch who said they should have consulted him because the bottom fishing was, with sixteen to twenty-ounce sinkers, was not hurting the Oculina; nor were the gag or red grouper endangered in that area, that they were plentiful. And this was out on Okeechobee Road at the Holiday Inn Express, and that was the ten-year reunion of the closure: it was 1994. And I realized then that they had their own—even the scientists from Harbor Branch said they didn’t think it needed to stay closed. When we were able to fish inside the Oculina Bank, okay, in eighty feet of water in the wintertime, say from January to April, it was very common to catch your limits of grouper and snapper. And that was up until last year when they closed it.

TH: And the limits back then were larger?

RK: The limits were larger. It was two grouper per person. For gags, you could catch one Warsaw. In addition, you were able to get scamps, which were not in that; it was a five grouper aggregate bag limit. Two would be in gags, or you could have five scamps, for instance; one Warsaw per boat and two amberjacks per person. So, this box here (taps), which is not a small box, was needed.

TH: Okay. So, you’re showing me a box that’s approximately—

RK: It holds 500, 600 pounds of fish.

TH: Okay. All right.

RK: Do you agree with that?

TH: My box holds about 500 pounds packed of kingfish, and that’s about the size of my bag box, the one that holds my fish (inaudible). That looks about 500 pounds’ worth. Maybe pack a little more in there?

RK: Yeah.

TH: Smaller fish? I dunno. Okay. For how many years did you fish for grouper? That’s to start with.
RK: Well, that’s been ever since I started fishing in Florida. So, back to 1988.

TH: And the same for sailfish, kingfish, all saltwater fish?

RK: Correct.

TH: Okay. Why did you stop fishing for grouper?

RK: Because they’re not here in the summer when we’re allowed to catch ’em.

TH: Okay, and because of the closure.

RK: (inaudible)

TH: And the same with snapper, you don’t catch snapper?

RK: Oh, the snapper? We do catch snapper on the inshore reef, but not in the Oculina. We don’t fish the Oculina. But on the inside of the Oculina where we were allowed, there’s a few rock piles and things like that where there would be nice vermillion snapper and nice red snapper; but they’ve closed that as well.

TH: Okay. I think we’ve covered most of this. What do you fish for and how? Okay. That one trip you talked about, about how many pounds of fish? Let’s run down the number of fish. That was a good day fishing. You caught one of everything.

RK: Well, it was a good day fishing in the fact that there were fish everywhere we went, and conditions were right to catch the fish everywhere we went. But they took the captain and the mate out of the numbers. So, the captain and the mate used to be able to—say, for instance, if amberjack was two per person and there was two people on the boat, then we could count the mate and the captain in. So, those people could have got four. Okay? Now, for instance, they could have got four themselves and then four from us. So, they could have had a total of eight amberjack or eight grouper or, at the time, eight red snapper.

Now, they cut the limits down so much that—this particular trip that I happened to mention happened to be two women, two nurses from Longwood Medical Center. And we went out and caught their limit of kingfish, which could only be four ’cause the captain and the mate ain’t involved in it. Okay, so now what do we do? Well, let’s go catch your limit of amberjack, which is only one, and the captain and the mate ain’t involved. So, we catch two amberjack on a wreck, so that took all of about a half an hour, and then we chug on out to 500 feet of water onto another deep water wreck, and we catch two snowy grouper ’cause the captain and the mate are not involved in that. And then we travel a little bit further and catch two tilefish, which used to be five, and the captain and the mate aren’t in that.

So, you follow what I’m saying? I’m traveling the globe here to have themselves a decent fishing day, and burning a whole heck of a lot more fuel.
TH: I see.

RK: And that’s frustrating.

TH: But how many fish did you end up with, about?

RK: We would up with their limit of snapper, we would up with their limit of kingfish, their limit of amberjack, their limit of snowies, and their limit of tilefish, which wound—and they wound up with four dolphin that day. We did trolling between. So, let’s see, that’s four kingfish, two amberjacks, now we’re at six. Two snowies, now we’re at eight. And two tilefish, so we’re at ten. Plus, they had four dolphin. So, they had fourteen fish.

TH: Nice day. Okay. Finally, I would like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. Now, you’ve already—

RK: I think we just explained that. That’s exactly in a nutshell.

TH: Let me get a little more specific on this one, though. 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? Where were we? We’re here, dredging. If you fished prior to 1984—the Oculina Bank was initially closed to trawling, dredging and bottom longlining in 1984. Did this affect your fishing?

RK: No, it didn’t, because I did not fish prior to eighty-four [1984] here.

TH: Trawling, dredging and bottom longlining.

RK: Trawling and dredging continued on for quite some time, up until recently. It was a regular thing at night that you would see the rock shrimp boats out there.

TH: Even after the closure?

RK: Well, after the closure. It wasn’t until they wound up with their actual patrol boat that it was actually stopped. I mean, I used to regularly fish off the shrimp boats that were tied up inside the Oculina, of course, in the mornings for whatever was sitting behind their nets when they were cleaning their boats. But they didn’t trawl inside it, they trawled outside it. They trawled in it.

TH: They trawled in the Oculina?

RK: Yeah, up until the last—probably they started waning off three years ago. But in their rounds, there could easily be twenty shrimpers out there in a night working the Oculina Bank up until a number of years ago, certainly well, well after the closure.

TH: In eighty-four [1984]. In 1994, the Oculina Bank was designated 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 in 1994?

RK: At 1994, no, no. It was impacted on the fact that I had to go around the Oculina Bank and not have a single bottom fish on it. And the fact is, it covers—I can’t even catch a grouper or snapper on my way out on a legal rock and then continue off to catch dolphin, which I can, because I have to cross the Oculina Bank. So, it costs—it’s extremely—it costs me fuel and it costs me how I would normally fish. I can’t catch a legal grouper in the morning, when they would bite, for fear of being caught on the Oculina Bank looking for dolphin later. That’s how it affects me now.

TH: Interesting. Okay. But in 1994, retention of snapper grouper species was prohibited in the Oculina Bank. So, that did directly affect you?

RK: Right. There’s lots of rocks prior to the Oculina Bank, and morning, for bottom fishing, is certainly better. So, what we would normally do—even presently now, until the closure that they just recently did now past the Oculina Bank—is we would run out with live bait, hit some deep water rocks, catch some amberjack, catch some grouper, and then we would look for dolphin in between the rocks. Now, I can’t go less than eighty degrees. Otherwise, I can wind up with a massive fine, even though I caught the grouper in the legal area.

TH: Then, in 1996, all anchoring was prohibited within the Oculina Bank. Did this impact your fishing and if so, how?

RK: No, it did not, because I did not fish there.

TH: It had already been impacted.

RK: It had already been.

TH: In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area to the east and north of the designated Oculina Bank; and in 1998, this area was incorporated into Oculina Bank HAPC. Fishing for with a bottom longline, trawl, or dredge was prohibited in this expanded area, as was anchoring by any vessel. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation?

RK: Well, other than the fact that on the way out to some of these deep water rocks, these boats would generally be anchored in 150, 120, 180 feet of water during the day. So at first light, we would fish off the backs of the shrimp boats, which we no longer do because they’re no longer here.

TH: Okay. The designation of marine areas—now, this is probably the most important—some of the most important questions coming up here. 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 closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations: quotas, closed seasons, et cetera?
RK: Well, I think that they actually got a perfect storm of it going. If they actually had a closed area at a certain time of the year, that would be fine. But the fact that they understand what the migration of fish is and they understand where they go—winter versus summer, east and west migration, from shallower water to deeper water for instance, up the Cape, because a lot of those of those fish do come in eighty feet of water. Once they’ve learned how to deal with it, they’re shutting it down in every single direction. I mean, they take our fish data and they use it against us because then they figure out that, “Oh, let’s wait a minute. They have a lot more catches of gags in eighty feet of water. Heck, they don’t even need to go in the Oculina Bank to catch their limit of gags. So, we got to do something about that. So, hmm, what happens in the summer? Well, in the summertime, we get cold water upwellings. The water’s colder here in the summer than it is in the winter. Where do the fish go? Oh, they go up to Georgia. Geez, let’s shut it down there too now, and we’ll shut it down here in the winter for them, and geez, that opens it up for commercial guys off the Carolinas, doesn’t it? Let’s figure out how we can shut it down for them.” And now they’ve got their closure on the Oculina Bank all the way up through Georgia. They’re really just using migration of fish that they’re figuring out where they go. They’re gonna shut it down, and everybody—

Pause in recording

[Transcriber’s note: Interviewee’s response was abruptly cut off during interview. The remaining audio is of poor quality.]

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

RK: I personally don’t believe that it will survive. I think that it will be pretty much done because people have come to Fort Pierce for quite some time, prior to the closure of the Oculina Bank, because of the amount of large grouper and snapper that we are able to produce for them. More and more closures as they go along, people are realizing that we’re not producing that fish—we’re really not a tourist area. They came for the fish. We’re not able to get ‘em the fish. It’s a lot of money to go out there and catch ‘em some kingfish and a few other type of fish that they may not be interested in, such as an amberjack. So, without the opening of it, I don’t believe that charter fishing in Fort Pierce is going to survive.

TH: You think that in ten years, you know—you mentioned before, when you came, how many charter boats were there?

RK: Well, prior to it, when you talked about Sam Crutchfield and you talked about that other gentleman, Chip Shafer, it was over twenty.³

TH: There were twenty. That was back in the early—in the eighties [1980s].

RK: Yeah.

TH: And now there’s six left.

³ Samuel Crutchfield and Irving “Chip” Shafer were also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOIs for their interview are O6-00032 and O6-00002, respectively.
RK: Now there’s six.

TH: And you don’t think they will last in Fort Pierce?

RK: No, I don’t. I don’t. They’re hanging on with a shoestring budget, every one of ’em. They’re going out there and expending more fuel than they need to spend to go find a few fish and get the limits that they’re allowed to and trying to get around the Oculina Bank, like I discussed earlier, and they’re not—it’s just not what the people want anymore. They’re always asking for grouper or snapper or dolphin. Or, you know—I mean, dolphin’s not as important as far as the Oculina goes, other than the fact that it would be nice to be able to get grouper and be on those grounds where the dolphin are. But we can’t have that catch on the boat and look for dolphin in productive areas like the Oculina Bank.

TH: Okay. So, what are these other boats doing?

RK: What are they doing now?

TH: Yes. I mean, if they can’t fish—

RK: I’ll tell you what they’re catching now: in all winter, they’re literally catching kingfish, bringing ’em to the wrecks to the south, and catching their limit of amberjacks. And most of my customers don’t want anything to do with that. So, I’ve lost most of my customers. They want grouper and snapper.

TH: So, do you see that the charter boats are going to other areas?

RK: I’m planning on building my boat, fishing my boat, to leave, as a matter of fact.

TH: To go to?

RK: Well, I’m hoping maybe I can work something out over by Grand Cay [the Bahamas], near Walker’s [Cay, the Bahamas] or something like that. I’ve already spoke to Rosie. But even with that, I just don’t even believe that the—forget the commercial people. But I just believe that in the future—people are spending a hundred thousand dollars for a center console; more money to maintain than a house. And they’re not gonna go out there and catch two kingfish. They don’t even like the kingfish. They want the grouper and snapper. They want, you know, quality fish. They’re not gonna be out there to catch some AJs [amberjacks] and catch some kingfish.

TH: Okay. So, you’re planning on maybe moving your boat to the Bahamas?

RK: If it’s even possible, or I’ll be out of business and just fish on my own. And it won’t be here, because I’m not gonna go out for kingfish. It’s not—

TH: Other charter boats are going to the Bahamas and to Mexico.
RK: I think that the ones that can. I think that the ones that can’t, they’ll die; that business will be done.

TH: Okay. One more thing: you said you talked to Susie? I need to get all the names correct.

RK: Susie?

TH: Over at the Bahamas, in the Bahamas. Just now.

RK: No, Rosie.

TH: Rosie?

RK: Rosies’. Rosie, he’s on Grand Cay, which is one of the Abaco Islands just east of Walker’s, where Walker’s Cay—but Walker’s Cay has been closed down for a number of years, but they still check in over there. Rosies’ is the next island over that sport fishing boats can tie up there. It’s still very good fishing.

TH: Okay. So, Rosie is the name of the island?

RK: No, Rosie is just a guy who owns the hotels on the island of Grand Cay.

TH: Okay. What I need is his complete name.

RK: No, I don’t know his last name.

TH: Okay. That’s all right.

RK: You can look it up, but I don’t know his last name.

TH: I will. All right. Now—

RK: It’s always been Rosies’. (both laugh)

TH: How do you spell that? R-o-s—

RK: R-o-s-i-e. Like a girl’s name.

TH: Okay.

RK: Yeah.

TH: All right. With that, thank you very much for sharing your fishing history with me, and it’s been a pleasure speaking with you, Captain Richard.

End of interview