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Emil LaViola oral history interview by Terry Howard, August 31, 2010

Emil LaViola (Interviewee)

Terry Lee Howard (Interviewer)

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Terry Howard: Good afternoon, this is Terry Howard. August 31, 2010. I’m at White City. What’s the address here?

Emil LaViola: …

TH: … in White City, just north of Fort Pierce, Florida, conducting an oral history with Emil LaViola for the Gulf and South Atlantic Fisheries Foundation’s project with Fort Pierce fishermen on the Oculina Bank HAPC [Habitat Area of Particular Concern]. Welcome, Emil. Please state your name, spell your name, your place of birth, and your date of birth.
EL: Emil LaViola, E-m-i-l, LaViola, L-a-V as in Victor-i-o-l-a. Place of birth is Teaneck, New Jersey. What else?

TH: Date of birth.

EL: Date of birth is August 5, 1959.

TH: Okay, and when did you move to Fort Pierce?


TH: What brought you to Fort Pierce?

EL: I came here to go to school. My grandmother lived here and I just wanted to get the hell out of New Jersey, you know, and come to the Sunshine State.

TH: Where did you go to school?

EL: In Englewood, New Jersey.

TH: I mean, when you came here. You said you came—

EL: Oh, I went to IRCC [Indian River Community College].

TH: Oh, okay, when it was a junior college. You came here and you studied what?

EL: I thought I wanted to be an accountant, but that didn’t work out too well and I had to go to work. I was working full-time and going into school full-time, and I picked up carpentry and I picked it up pretty quick, so I stuck with that and got my contractor’s license in 1983 and have been building custom homes ever since, since 1983, in the area.

TH: Are you married?
EL: No. I’m divorced.

TH: Do you have any children?

EL: I do. I have one son, Anthony, who—he’ll be twenty-seven in September.

TH: Okay. How much schooling do you have?

EL: Two years of junior college, two years of college.

TH: And the next question is: what do you do for a living? So, you’re a contractor?

EL: A building contractor, general contractor, yes.

TH: What other jobs have you had?

EL: Well, that’s—again, since 1983, I’ve had my license. I was a carpenter prior, a union carpenter, prior to that for four or five years. I was actually a union carpenter when I got my contractor’s license. So, basically that’s it in my whole working career. I’ve been a carpenter and then a general contractor.

TH: Have you worked in the fishing industries: commercial, charter, or charter fisherman?

EL: No, I have not.

TH: Do you currently own a boat?

EL: I do.

TH: Please describe your boat.
EL: I have a twenty-nine foot Twin V, power catamaran, with a cabin. It’s what they call a “weekender,” or whatever, or “express.” It is a, you know, duo-haul catamaran—

TH: Powered by?

EL: Powered by twin 250 Suzuki motors, outboards. I love my boat, great boat.

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

EL: I’m pretty familiar with it. I know where it’s at. I know the regulations. Prior to the closure I fished out there with—actually, he was a recreational slash commercial fisherman. He did sell his fish. He was my next-door neighbor.

TH: His name?

EL: His name is John Clark. Had some great fishing trips out there, you know?

TH: Okay. Why was the Oculina Bank designated as an area to protect?

EL: From what I understand, the coral is being damaged by dredge or by shrimpers, and bottom trawlers, and stuff like that. So, I guess it was meant to protect the growth of the coral, the Oculina coral, is from what I understand.

TH: Is there anything else you can tell me about the Oculina Bank that you know?

EL: I can tell you that it’s phenomenal bottom, as far as—you know, it’s a great fertile area for fish, I guess, bottom fish that are, you know—what’s the word I’m looking for?—spawning. And just great structure for fish to—great habitat for bottom fish and pelagics as well. From what I understand, it’s great fishing for wahoo, dolphin, so forth and so on.

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

EL: I think I can understand—I think it stinks for not letting the recreational guy go in there and
fish the bottom. I could understand where an anchor can be damaging to the corals, but I also think it’s pretty difficult to anchor out there. But the typical recreational fisherman—and when I fished out there, we didn’t anchor. We drifted.

TH: Did you drift or power fish?

EL: We drifted, power drifted, I would assume—

TH: To hold it in a spot?

EL: Right, right. It was difficult fishing, especially—you know, the current is pretty strong. I guess you’re out at the Gulf Stream or edge of the Gulf Steam at times. So, you know, it’s not the easiest thing to do, but it can be very productive.

TH: Again, what do you think about the closure to anchoring and bottom fishing?

EL: I don’t agree with it. I think that the bottom fishing should be open to the recreational fisherman. The anchoring thing, you know, I could understand their reasoning, and again, I wouldn’t really want to anchor there because it’s almost impossible to fish, you know, unless you’re using electric reels and heavy weights and sinkers. I don’t know how damaging an anchor could be to the stuff down there. I guess it would be damaging, you know, for the novice—or not the novice, the inexperienced fisherman trying to set an anchor in those depths of water.

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

EL: Yeah. It limits my areas of fishing, because there’s only a—I like to fish in deeper water. I like to bottom fish in deeper water, you know? It’s less pressure. So, I’m left with—as far as deeper water, pretty much the twenty-seven fathom edge, which is outside the Oculina Bank, is the only area I could really fish in, you know, depths greater than 150 feet. So, yes, I’m limited to the area I can fish off of Fort Pierce, and you know, I’m not gonna travel to Sebastian or whether the end of the Bank is in relation to Fort Pierce. It’s just too long of a trip, and not economical.

TH: If anchoring and bottom fishing in the Oculina Bank was not prohibited—in other words, if you could fish there—would you do so?
EL: Sure. Absolutely.

TH: How and for what?

EL: I would probably power drift, and I would fish for snapper and grouper.

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

EL: It seems like it’s not as nearly—I’d have to say the catches—catches are down, especially for grouper. Used to be able to catch grouper right out, you know, a lot more productively inshore reefs, you know, the bar. So, that’s why I particularly like to fish in deeper water. My chances of getting a bigger fish and catching a grouper are better in the deeper water. I think that, overall, the fishing has declined, and I don’t know the reasoning for that. I think—I have my own thoughts of it, but I’d be happy to tell you that if you’re asking. (laughs)

TH: Yeah.

EL: Well, I think the commercial divers really put a hurt on the grouper fishing. I don’t think it’s very sporting, especially during this time of year, summer time, when we have these cold water upwellings. You know, they’re sitting there; the grouper are very lethargic and they’re easy to catch, they’re easy to kill with a diver. I’ve heard stories of them just kinda raping the reefs with these grouper that, you know, are just sitting ducks down there. They’re just not able to protect themselves and have—you know, I have—my own personal feelings that they’re the ones hurting the fishing is the commercial divers: not the recreational diver, but the commercial diver. I think that the limits that they’re giving us right now, I don’t see us hurting the population of the fish at all. So, that’s the discouraging thing, and I think that’s what’s hurt the grouper fishing, in my thoughts. Snapper fishing, the red snapper fishing, I’ve never—it’s been really good. It’s unfortunate that we can’t keep ’em. I disagree with that. I know that might not have anything to do with the Oculina Bank, but the closure, I disagree with that.

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

EL: No.

TH: I want to ask about your fishing history, specifically. What’s your earliest memory of fishing, and how old were you?
EL: Oh, I was quite young, probably seven or eight years old, fishing the Hudson River, you know, for anything that would bite. (laughs) You know? We mostly caught eels, but it was still fun.

TH: What’d you do with the eels?

EL: Pretty much threw them back.

TH: Eat them or anything?

EL: No. We used to catch them on these night crawlers, those night crawlers, the things, whatever they—those worms. You know, that was my earliest—

TH: Memory.

EL: —memory. Of course, I got into freshwater fishing after that.

TH: So how’d you learn how to fish? Who taught ya?

EL: I’m pretty much self-taught. I do recall my friend’s family was very sporting and very outdoorsy and did a lot of fishing, ice fishing and those sort of things. So I learned, basically, from my friends.

TH: Did you ice fish?

EL: Yeah. Mm-hm.

TH: There’s not too many people down here that knows what that’s about.

EL: No. Setting up the tip-ups, bringing out the big auger and drilling your holes.

TH: We had spuds that you had to (makes swooshing sound).
EL: Oh, no. We used the electric auger, you know, that’s power—

TH: That’s modern. I’m a little older.

EL: Yeah. Right.

TH: Your friend’s family, you have a name of the family or your friend?

EL: The Corring family is all I can say.

TH: C-o-r-r-i-n-g?

EL: C-o-r-r-i-n-g. Yeah, his dad worked for the state in New Jersey, and they were hunters. I never got into hunting; strictly fishing.

TH: When did you start fishing in Fort Pierce area?

EL: As soon as I moved here in 1977.

TH: Okay. What’d you fish for?

EL: I fished for everything and anything that would bite on the jetty. I did a lot of freshwater fishing—largemouth bass.

TH: Where?

EL: Right in Port St. Lucie.

TH: On the ponds?
EL: All the canals, and ponds. I was a carpenter, you know: wherever we were building, framing homes, if there was a canal out back, I’d be out there sending a rubber worm or a (inaudible), or something like that. I would snook fish the jetty quite a bit.

TH: That’s the Fort Pierce Inlet?

EL: At the Fort Pierce Inlet, yup. Go out on the charter boats; this was before I was—could afford to buy a boat.

TH: Did you go out on the charter boats, or the head boats?

EL: The head boats.

TH: There were fifty bucks a day?

EL: The blue—what was it? Yeah, gosh. Man, when you get older, your—can’t remember, you know? You get the CRS, Can’t Remember—you know, the old head boats. Hell, you’ve been around here forever. What’s the—?

TH: I can’t remember the blue one. It’s Miss—what was it? Lady Stuart, now.

EL: No. No, this was prior to that.

TH: I remember the blue one you’re talking—

EL: The Blue something, or whatever. I used to go out on that, and also the one (cell phone rings) up in—Lady Stuart.

**Pause in recording**

TH: Where did you go to fish when you began fishing? You say the ponds and the jetty. Anywhere else besides that you think of that—

EL: Anywhere? The bridges.
TH: South Bridge?

EL: South Bridge—

TH: Hot spot.

EL: —a lot there.

TH: Did you catch snook there?

EL: Snook on occasion, yeah, whatever. Drum, sheepheads, you know, maybe a redfish now and then, trout. I used to catch trout at the Little Jim Bridge a lot, you know, with a bobber and a shrimp during the day.

TH: What was on the end of the hook?

EL: Trout.

TH: No, I mean, bobber—was the bait?

EL: Shrimp.

TH: Shrimp. Okay. So you mostly fished without a boat?

EL: In my younger years, yes.

TH: When did you get your first boat?

EL: My first boat I think I got sixteen, seventeen years ago. So, I was probably in my early thirties.
TH: Who did you fish with?

EL: Back then I fished with people that I employ: my subcontractors, and the people who work for me, mostly. I didn’t meet Larry [Benning] right away, until I got my Twin V.¹ The first boat I had was a Pro-Line. I almost forgot about that.

TH: Can you describe that boat?

EL: It was a center cons—no, it was a walk around, twenty-three foot. Yeah, it was a twenty-three foot, single engine, powered by a 150—oh, God, it was a two-stroke Mercury, I believe.

TH: Okay.

EL: It was an older boat, it was a nice boat, it was solid haul. Had a lot of good times on that boat.

TH: During what months of the year did you fish for what fish? Can you break it down, start in January? What you’d target or fish for?

EL: I fish year round bottom fishing. I target—I always go out for grouper and snapper year-round. In the summertime—you know, in the wintertime I would go out and bottom fish for mangroves and grouper, and then in the summertime, I would venture to the Bahamas and do a lot of bottom fishing over there.

TH: With your small boat?

EL: No, not with the twenty-three foot. Once I got my twenty-six foot Twin V, which was my second boat, that was a twenty-six console—it had a console, it was a twenty-six catamaran powered by twin 115 Suzukis, and I rode that boat hard. I took that to the Bahamas a lot. I did a lot of trips off Fort Pierce. I did a lot of night fishing, which I still do. A lot of snapper fishing, which is probably my most enjoyable type of fishing these days.

TH: Snapper and grouper?

¹ Larry Benning was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00044.
EL: Snapper. It's night fishing for mangroves.

TH: Oh, yeah?

EL: Yeah. I do that a lot.

TH: You can do that in shallow water, too, can't you?

EL: Yeah, I know. Yeah, I go to the—I don't go out to deep water; sixty-five, seventy foot of water, you know, the inshore bar, stuff like that.

TH: What do you use for bait?

EL: I try—mostly, for snapper, the best bait is live shrimp. I mean, that's deadly. You can't beat that out there. You know, sardines are great, too, if I can get 'em, live sardines. I like to use live bait even at night. Not that it matters that much, but I've had most success with shrimp, live shrimp. They're irresistible to the snappers.

TH: To the mangroves?

EL: Mangroves, yep.

TH: How long does a fishing trip last, or did a fishing trip last, say, when you started fishing?

EL: It was an all-day thing for me. I'd be early at the ramp and back late afternoon. When I do a night trip, I would leave at four or five o'clock in the afternoon, be back at midnight, one o'clock. If I go to the Bahamas, I'd leave bright and early before the sun rose and be back maybe nine o'clock at night.

TH: I mean, one day? The whole thing?

EL: If I do a one-dayer, yeah. I've done some one-dayers over there, yep. I'll get there, clear
customs and fish and go for conch. And then, at nighttime, I would do some night fishing. If they were biting pretty good, I’d hang around; if not, I’d be back in two hours, two and a half hours, you know? Usually the bite’s pretty good, so we do well.

TH: How much would you catch on an average trip, say, an average night trip?

EL: An average night trip?

TH: Yeah. Just out fishing, either here or the Bahamas, or just the average?

EL: On average night trip, we would—some nights we would be pretty close to our limit. If I had four guys on board, we’d have twenty snappers, twenty mangroves, if not including maybe some extra muttons, or vermilies, or (inaudible), and an occasional grouper or two, too. I’ve even caught blackfin tuna in the evening. I can’t believe it, but I have. Just anchored up on the reef.

TH: What reef?

EL: Right here off of Fort Pierce.

TH: How far up?

EL: In sixty-five foot, seventy-five, inshore bar.

TH: Okay.

EL: I was surprised. I thought it was a bonito.

TH: That’d be north of 12 [buoy]?

EL: Probably. No, no.

TH: Sixty-five, seventy?
EL: Northeast grounds, the 380s, is where I like to fish.

TH: That’s almost—that’s getting toward Bethel.

EL: Bethel, yeah. 380s is where I’ve had success. I really haven’t—I’ve tried straight off of the inlet, too. But I’ve had more success there, you know? It doesn’t have to be very profound bottom, either, you know. They’re just active at night. That’s, again, a fun night.

TH: Do you usually go in your own boat?

EL: Yes.

TH: Okay.

EL: I rarely go out on other people’s boats. I like to be in control.

TH: Now, who you usually fish with?

EL: I fish with Larry, who you interviewed, quite a bit. Again, the same people I’ve fished with for the last twenty years, you know: my subcontractors, my workers, my girlfriend on the weekends, and family, you know, they’ll come aboard. But typically, it’s a group of guys. My dentist is always with me, too. So, it’s like three or four pretty regulars.

TH: What’s his name?

EL: Lon Massaglia.

TH: Can you spell that?

EL: L-o-n Massaglia, M-a-s-s-a-g-l-i-a.
TH: Okay.

EL: Yeah, he’s a big time fisherman. He does adventurous stuff a lot, too.

TH: So on an average—once again, the average trip thing keeps coming up again. There’s gonna be some repeated questions.

EL: Yeah. Average trip, on a day trip off Fort Pierce, would be maybe four or five snappers, maybe two groupers, a kingfish or two, and a mahi now and then. So, we’d have a pretty good cooler full. We’d always get at least, I’d say, (inaudible) some trips; of course, you never know. Sometimes you hammer them hard, you know. But we all have a couple of dinners. Four or five people will have enough couple of dinners.

TH: Their families?

EL: Right, right.

TH: All right. So how often do you go fishing offshore now, would you say?

EL: I try to go once a week.

TH: Are there some months that you go fishing more frequently?

EL: It all depends on weather. So, the summertime is more conducive to fishing. I would like to fish more in the wintertime, but typically more in the summertime, just the simple fact of the weather.

TH: Are there months where you never or rarely go fishing?

EL: Yes, the windy months like—

TH: March?
EL: March, right.

TH: Okay.

EL: But I’ve had good trips when I do go in March and April, you know?

TH: On average, how far offshore do you go?

EL: Twenty miles.

TH: So, you fish—you primarily target grouper and snapper?

EL: Correct.

TH: Who do you fish with? You go with your own boat. How do you decide where you’re gonna fish? You say you’re gonna fish this week; how do you decide where you’re gonna go out this weekend?

EL: Well, that’s a hard question.

TH: I know.

EL: Sometimes—I typically like to just venture to the northeast and start out in sixty foot of water and see what’s happening. And then I’ll go out to ninety foot of water, and then I’ll—or I’ll shoot straight offshore when I know that there’s lack of current out there. You know, the less amount of current, the easier it is to fish out there, and the more productive it’s gonna be usually. Before I go out, it’s hard to say, but I typically will start inshore and see what the conditions are, you know. By inshore, I mean sixty-five foot of water, you know, the inshore bar, which I’m sure you’re very familiar with.

TH: Right. Do you consult anything else before you go?

EL: Oh, yeah. I try to check with other fishermen that have been out.
TH: Most recently?

EL: Right, recently. Like, I’ll call David King, one of your guys, and see if he knows, ’cause he talks to the divers and to the other fishermen.² I’ll make some phone calls, find out where the bait is if there’s bait. Instead of, like, going to 10-A [buoy], or whatever, I’ll find out if they’re up at Bethel or whatever. I’ll check the current, or I’ll check the weather. That’s basically it. I mean, it’s word of mouth is what I usually—

TH: I guess what I’m looking for is whose mouths? Dave King, you mentioned Dave King.

EL: Dave King. Glenn Cameron, another one.³ I’ll give him a call now and then. You know, he local charter captains, which I have become friends with. I’ll also check the bait shops to see what they’ve heard.

TH: Which ones? White’s Tackle?

EL: Flint’s, usually.

TH: I don’t know Flint’s.

EL: Grand Slam? What do they call his place, right on US 1?

TH: Grand Slam? I’m not sure.

EL: Or White’s. I’ll look at White’s website. They have a fishing report. I’ll look at the Captain Lew’s fishing report. I do that religiously.

TH: Where’s Captain Lew’s fishing report? Is it on the computer?

EL: It’s here. It’s on the computer.

² David King was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00009.
³ Glenn Cameron was also interviewed for the Oculina Bank Oral History Project. The DOI for his interview is O6-00006.
TH: I just talked to—got off the phone with him.

EL: Yeah. I check his stuff out, because if he’s catching snapper, then I know I can catch snapper, you know?

TH: That’s what he targets.

EL: Right, right. So, I know he’s bottom fishing all the time. I pay close attention to his website, and he tells me if the water’s cold, dirty, if there’s sharks. Like, recently, he’s been reporting a lot of what he calls “gray suits,” you know, on his website. Gray suits are sharks.

TH: Little puppy sharks?

EL: Yeah, I guess.

TH: (inaudible)

EL: That indicates to me it’s dirty water. So, when I know it’s dirty water on the reefs, then I’ll think about going out deeper into the twenty-seven fathoms.

TH: Start out deeper?

EL: Right. And if I can go the Oculina Bank, I would. I wouldn’t even stop at twenty-seven. I’d go out to the Ocaluna [sic], work my way back in.

TH: Oculina.

EL: Oculina.

TH: Okay. Once again, I’ve already asked that—how much you catch on an average trip? That’s a wide open question.
EL: Yeah, it’s wide open. I mean, I usually don’t get stumped. Let me put it that way.

TH: Okay. Finally, we’re gonna go back to the Oculina Bank in a minute. I’d like to talk about how your fishing has changed over time in regards to the Oculina Bank. 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? The Oculina Bank was initially closed to trawling, dredging and bottom longlining in 1984. Did this affect your fishing?

EL: Did it affect my—yes. I mean—

TH: When they closed to trawling, dredging and bottom longlining in 1984, did that affect your fishing? This is 1984.

EL: Oh, so it was still open for bottom fishing in eighty-four [1984]?

TH: Yeah, this was just for trawling, dredging, and longlining.

EL: No. No, it did not affect. Absolutely not.

TH: Then, ten years later in 1994, the Oculina Bank was designated as an experimental closed area where fishing for and retention of snapper [and] grouper species was prohibited. Snapper [and] grouper fishing boats were also prohibited from anchoring. Was your fishing impacted by this regulation? It was 1994.

EL: Ninety-four [1994]. All right. The years just slide by, you know? (laughs)

TH: Now, did that affect your fishing?

EL: Yes, absolutely. That did indeed affect my fishing.

TH: ’Cause you enjoyed fishing there?

EL: I enjoyed fishing there.
TH: And it was very productive?

EL: Very productive.

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

EL: No, because—

TH: It was already impacted.

EL: It was already impacted, correct. I mean, because I don’t troll. I just don’t make it. It’s just not part of my—

TH: The next question: In 1996, trawling for rock shrimp was prohibited in the area to the east and north of the designated Oculina Bank. In 1998, this area was incorporated into the Oculina Bank HAPC. Fishing with a bottom longline, trawl, or dredge was prohibited in this expanded area, as was anchoring. I assume you could still drift fish for bottom fish, but you could not anchor, trawl, longline or dredge.

EL: Right.

TH: Was your fishing impacted by this regulation, and if so, how?

EL: No, because I rarely fish north of Sebastian—yeah, north of Sebastian, or on the outside; it’s just too deep on the outside edge of the Oculina Bank.

TH: As a rule.

EL: Right. So, it really didn’t impact me because I just don’t travel that far to fish, that’s all.

TH: All right. Now, this is the essence: The designation of marine areas that are closed to fishing is being used more frequently as a fishery management tool. How do you think—what do you
think about the use of closed areas to fishing compared to other types of management regulations, such as quotas, closed seasons, trip limits, slot limits, et cetera?

EL: As far as a recreational fisherman, I think the closed areas are detrimental for me. I could see it being—you know, I mean, ’cause—let me try to understand this question.

TH: I’ll repeat it.

EL: Yeah, why don’t you repeat that one more time?

TH: 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, such as quotas, closed seasons, trip limits, slot limits, et cetera?

EL: Yeah, I like the idea of the other alternatives, such as size, quotas, and—

TH: Trip limits.

EL: —trip limits. I think that would—that gives the recreational fisherman at least a shot to go out and catch a fish and have an enjoyable fishing trip. I mean if you close an area, you don’t even have a chance to catch a fish. I mean, if you can go fishing and catch one fish, one fish is better than no fish. I think that is a better—a viable option, using the other regulations.

TH: Trip limits.

EL: Trip limits versus closing an area completely.

TH: And then, this is a follow-up and sort of the same question: What do you think is the best, most fairest, most equitable way to manage the fisheries for both the fish and for the fishermen? What are the tools, you know, that should be used?

EL: I think quotas for the commercial guy, which would encompass what, the amount of weight or fish that they could catch.
TH: Well, it’s the total amount of fish in an area. That’d be a quota. Like, there are so many million pounds or hundred thousand pounds are allowed for certain areas. And then there’s trip limits.

EL: Right. Well, once you meet that quota, doesn’t matter how many trips it takes. You could catch your quota in two trips or two hundred trips, right? I mean, I think the quota—no. I mean, am I understanding that right? I’m not sure how it works with a commercial guy, you know? He weighs his fish and it all goes in a computer and then they have—they reach the point where—

TH: We have trip limits of fifty head or seventy-five head depending on the season. In the summertime, when there’s more fish, we have seventy-five head trip limit. In the wintertime, it’s a fifty fish trip limit.

EL: I gotcha.

TH: Anyway, that’s your opinion on it. It’s not my opinion on it, and I won’t insert my opinion.

EL: Right. I hear ya. I think the limits are okay. Again, an area can be overfished if you—you can make so many trips. I think the quota is a pretty foolproof way of figuring it out. I mean, if they put X amount of fish in this area, we got to shut this off to the commercial fishermen, you know. Then again, I could see that being where one guy could have a great day, the other guy doesn’t, and that’s a great couple of trips, and the one guy doesn’t. Maybe trip limits would be the best way. Then again, there’s weather to be—you know, some days you can’t get out. So, there may be a month you can’t get out. You know? But I guess trip limits would be the fairest way to do it and go about it.

TH: And quotas.

EL: And quotas, yes.

TH: How about closed seasons? Like right now, you can’t catch—

EL: Snapper. Snook. I don’t like the idea, because then you can’t—I mean, I can’t go out and fish for something I want to fish for. If I had a quota—if they minimize the amount of fish I could keep, I could still go out and fish and enjoy myself and bring home something to eat, you know?
TH: So instead of closed season, you’d rather see the trip limits lowered?

EL: Right, right. Yup. Absolutely.

TH: Okay. Thinking ahead to the future, what do you think fishing in Fort Pierce will be like in ten years? Think about the pressures from different directions from fishermen, from pollution. In ten years what do you think fishing will be like in Fort Pierce?

EL: In Fort Pierce—I think it’s so regulated now that I don’t think there’s gonna be a problem in ten years. I just think it’s just regulated to the point where it’s hard to catch fish, so I don’t see a problem. I don’t see a problem. I think fishing will be fine.

TH: Okay, because of?

EL: Because of the existing regulations—

TH: Strict regulations.

EL: —strict regulations, yes, absolutely.

TH: Okay. That concludes the bulk of the interview. I have a couple of follow-up questions, and then we’ll wrap this up. Can you tell me, offhand, probably one of the most—you know, a couple of the most interesting and unique experiences you’ve had fishing here in Fort Pierce?

EL: Yes, I can. I can tell you probably the most unique-est.

TH: Most unique. (laughs)

EL: Most unique experience. I was—it was the doldrums of summer. I was anchored up out on the reef, offshore bar; I think it was ninety-foot of water. It was a slow, slow day. The fish were not chewing. It was hot. There was two of us: a friend of mine, his boat, we were anchored up out there chumming the waters; onboard the other ship, the other boat, was a marine biologist or whoever. And we saw a great white shark that came up to our boat and made two passes around
my boat. It was the biggest thing I’ve seen in the water.

TH: Was this your twenty-nine foot boat?

EL: No. This was my twenty-six foot boat, I believe it was. It was the most incredible thing I’ve ever saw. He just (inaudible) to the boat, made two passes around the boat. I had some young kids on the boat, and the one of them—they had their feet out in the water. I said, “Get your feet out of the water!” And then I saw this submarine coming near us, and the one kid picked up a little piece of sardine or something and threw it out there, and I said, “Don’t do that, man! Don’t do that! Don’t get ’em worked up!” I was actually in a state of shock, because I’ve never seen anything like that.

He just made two big slow passes around our boat, and just moseyed on off. He was wide as a car, and as long as my boat. I have a lot of witnesses, and I had a camera right there, and I just froze when I saw it. The one guy on my boat said, “That’s a great white,” the guy, the biologist on the other boat confirmed it, and I just couldn’t believe it. Man, it was the biggest fish I’ve ever seen. It was the craziest—I would never dream that I would ever see a great white shark out in Fort Pierce in the middle of summer. But sure enough, I did. So, it’s a vision that I have instilled in my head that I’ll never forget, and it was really cool, really cool. So that was really one of my most memorable things out on the water. You want another one?

TH: If anything comes to mind, we’ll wrap it up.

EL: If anything comes to mind. Probably, I got into—as far as fishing, I got into a spawn of muttons, and that was probably the most fun. As soon as the light—as soon as the sun went down, the fishing turned on like a light bulb. We were catching mutton snappers, ten to fifteen pounds, as soon as we dropped it into the water. Yeah, that’s a genuine. That’s a genuine there.

TH: Where was this?

EL: Over on the other side, though.

TH: Over in the Bahamas.

EL: Yeah, Bahamas waters. It was the funnest fishing. I mean, we limited out in no time. The deck was just covered with muttons. There was four of us, we caught thirty-nine of them, and I had no more room in my coolers. It was just nonstop. It was like the sharks were in feeding on
them, too, so we were fighting sharks, but yet the mutton still bit.

TH: How did you fight the sharks off?

EL: We just brought them in and cut our line. We hoped one guy would catch a shark; the other guys could be reeling in muttons. You know, it was a blast. Also, I caught a big gag [grouper] off of Fort Pierce—it was forty pounds; that was another great trip, a memorable trip—that I have mounted. I’ll show you my mount upstairs.

TH: Gag grouper.

EL: A grouper mount. I’ve caught a lot of big groupers in Fort Pierce, and I just love it. I have a lot of fun trips out there. I’ve hooked a blue marlin once off Fort Pierce.

TH: Bottom fishing?

EL: Just threw a flatline out. I think what happened is I caught a dolphin, a peanut dolphin, and he came up and just, you know, pirouetted out of the water with this dolphin in his mouth, and I had him on for second. I would’ve never landed it. He was huge. It was quite a sight.

TH: How big?

EL: Oh, God. He had to be—he was bigger than this couch, I could tell you that.

TH: Good twelve, fifteen foot?

EL: Yeah, maybe, maybe. That was a beautiful thing. That was a beautiful thing, seeing him come out of the water, shaking his head.

But I do miss fishing in the Oculina Bank. I’ve caught all kinds of stuff out there, bottom fishing, when we were allowed to fish out there. I truly hope that they will keep the recreational fisherman in mind, do away with anchoring. I have no problem with that, just drift fishing over there. Let us keep a fish or two, you know, a grouper or two out there. I think that’s all I can think of as far as memorable experiences.
TH: With that—

EL: Another bad experience I had—I guess there’s good experiences and bad experiences. I was stung by a stonefish trying to de-hook it. I was in complete—do you wanna hear this?

TH: Yeah, then we’ll wrap it up.

EL: Another bad experience I had was getting stung by a stonefish, which I pulled up and I tried to take it off the hook, and it was the most painful, instantaneous pain I’ve ever had. My arm swelled up incredibly large, and incredibly quickly, too. I was just in intense pain, and we had to end the trip. It was early in the morning. I had to have somebody else take the boat in; I couldn’t even run the boat. So, it taught me a lesson with those ugly fish: to just cut the leader, to not even try mess with them. So, I’m very careful with that.

TH: One last question.

EL: Yes?

TH: Have you ever been in a storm that has caused you to maybe get religion?

EL: Yes, I have. I’ve been in a storm where it was dead calm, flat calm. It was like the calm before the storm. I was out in the Gulf Stream—

TH: Off Fort Pierce?

EL: Yeah, off of Fort Pierce, coming home. I was probably on the other side of the Gulf Stream coming home, and it was flat calm beautiful. This was before I had—I now have the Sirius XM Weather Satellite onboard, which has been a great tool for me. I ran into a storm, it just kicked up so bad that it must have been, I don’t know, twelve, fifteen-foot waves, and they were probably three foot apart, and I was scared to death and so was everybody else on board. (laughs) So, I just went real easy into it. That boat just—it was very, very scary. It was raining cats and dogs, lighting was cracking all around me, the waves were taller than the boat, and again, they were very close. It was very uncomfortable, and I was saying a few Hail Marys.

And then, you know, I just calmed myself down and just went slowly, quarter in the waves the
best I could, and holding on for dear life and trying to be calm, because I know everybody else is just as scared as I am. We got through it. It was probably about fifteen miles of storm, but it was incredible, because it was so glassy calm just before that, you know? I respect Mother Nature, I truly do. And that’s why I do have that weather satellite, because I am out in the summertime a lot. So, yes, that was one experience. I’ve been out in a few; but the one in particular, it was on my twenty-six footer. It just made me get humble, humble quick.

TH: With that, Emil, I want to thank you very much—

EL: My pleasure.

TH: —for doing this interview, and thank you.

EL: Okay. Thank you.

*End of interview*