

Mary Schreiber Oral History

Date of Interview: July 25, 2014

Location: Garibaldi, OR

Length of Interview: 18:41

Interviewer: SC – Sarah Calhoun

SC: So this is a project with the Voices of the West Coast. Today is July 25, 2014. I'm with Mary Schreiber, Mary could you state your name for the record?

MS: Mary Schreiber

SC: Great, thank you. And so I just want to start and hear a little bit about how you got started in the fishing industry.

MS: Well, I was with my husband for many, many years and their policy, father and son, was no family. So I did other things: worked at the nursery, pumped gas, waitressed, and then they were having trouble getting help. Then Billy went to his dad and said, 'dad, she'll do a good job, she won't interfere with the office'. So about the middle of August in '90, I went to work as a bag lady, which is putting the shrimp in the bag and then passing it off to be weighed and into the freezer. I did that for three months and then the season ended. And then during that timeframe in the winter, Billy's father passed away, three days into the shrimp season. So I was brought back into the plant and I was put into the office. And retailed. And I loved retail, it was so fun, people were really, really nice. And then we started canning tuna fish, and we got into a mail-order business with the tuna fish and I kind of grabbed that by the horn and did that. And some days I'd go into UPS with 14 cases of fish to ship. And I did that with Billy for eleven years, and then we had a chance to sell the plant, which we did. And that was in 2001. And we've been having fun ever since.

SC: Can you talk a little about your current involvement, what do you guys do now, post-plant?

MS: Mm, we fish a lot. We garden a lot, walk a lot. Billy does projects around the house, cuts firewood. I'm an oil painter and I had been going to oil painting classes for 12 years and then my class was cancelled. So now my friends come over here and we paint up in the game room, and I read a lot. I'm planning a trip back to Minnesota, I leave on Wednesday to go back and see my family I haven't seen for 8 years.

SC: Oh wow.

MS: Yeah, so that's kind of exciting. We just keep really busy.

SC: So do you spend, or have you spent much time on the fishing boat?

MS: No, just our little sport boat. I never, I went out once on a captain Ryan, and we took my dad's ashes to sea. And other than that, I had nothing to do with the boats at all, other than make and alter fish tickets.

SC: Is there any particular reasons why you didn't spend much time on the boat?

MS: We just never did, that's what the fishermen did and we as processors, we processed. And there's kind of a fine line there between, you know, either you're a processor or you're a fisherman. And probably at that point in my life, I wouldn't have had the guts to go out there and do that. That's hard work. I've only met one girl that was a crewman, and I don't know how she did it.

SC: Yea, it's a tough, tough way of life out there.

MS: Oh yea, I don't have any problem going out sport fishing on Billy's little boat, but I don't think I'd want to go out there and spend 5 or 6 days at a time.

SC: So I wonder if you could talk about what it's like to be a fishing family, the dynamic.

MS: It's lonely. Billy was gone most of the time, you know, especially when he worked nights. He was gone from 6 in the evening until 7 in the morning. And after his dad died, he went into the office so he was gone from 6 in the morning until almost 7 in the evening. And while I worked there it wasn't so bad, because I could at least see him. But when I, again it was a very lonely life. High pressure, lots of stress. I wouldn't recommend it, haha.

SC: So I wonder; if you did have any advice for a young woman thinking of marrying a fisherman or becoming involved in the fishing industry, what would it be?

MS: Think twice. If you really, really love the man and think you can have a wonderful life with him, go for it. But you have to think about how often am I going to see him? Or, is something going to happen to him when he's at sea? All I can say is, it was lonely. And maybe if I had grown up here and knew a bunch of people it would have been different, but we moved out here from Minnesota and I didn't know anybody so it was kind of a challenge.

SC: What was that like, making that transition to kind of a small, tight-knit, fishing community?

MS: The town I grew up in in Minnesota was only 12,000 so it was not a problem coming into a small community, and in fact I like it. I don't think I could live in a big city; I'm not a city girl. But, once again, it was tough, I was homesick and lonely. But once I started working and meeting people it got a lot easier, and I wouldn't leave it now.

SC: So I wonder if you could talk about, you kind of talked about it a little bit already, but how the fishing business has changed over time and why some of those changes have maybe occurred?

MS: It's changed over time because there's hardly any processors left. In Garibaldi, when we first came there was three canneries and now's there none. I think a lot of it is, the bigger conglomerates are taking over the smaller people and there's not that many boats left. You know, they cut down the size of the boats when they had that buy-back, and I just don't think that many people are interested in it anymore. And if you're going to be a commercial fisherman now, you have to deliver to either Newport or Astoria because there's no place left to deliver in Garibaldi. It's just different. It's too controlled I think too. The bigger companies want it their way and pretty much have got it their way. It's tough; it'd be tough for a small businessman to start a business now in the fishing industry.

SC: Mhm. And do you have any kids that are in the fishing industry? Any children, nieces or nephews?

MS: No, we don't have any children and our family is back in the mid-west.

SC: Okay, so I'm wondering if we could talk a little bit about the Oregon fishing community, just the community in general. How would you describe it?

MS: When it was really going good, like in the 70's, it was a really close knit, little community. You know, there were lots of fishermen, lots of kids, but as the fishery dwindled, the community got smaller, people died, people moved away. You'd find it hard now to go into Garibaldi and find a group of fishermen standing around talking. But it used to be like that all the time. 'Troller's' was always full of fishermen; 'fishermen's corner' was full of fishermen. You could go down to the docks and find fishermen, but you don't see that now. It's just different.

SC: What other type of industry or economic on goings are here in Garibaldi besides fishing?

MS: Well there's fishing, there's charter fishing. The mill, the mill is a big, big contributor. That's about it. There's, I mean there's little tiny businesses: the food basket, the grocery store, gas stations, but there's just... camping, there's camping. There's just, it's all just changed so much over the years.

SC: So, I'm wondering if there was any sort of fishing community association here or a fishermen's wives' association?

MS: I don't believe so. I think that's down in Newport. I don't think there's anything like that here. They have that FACT that Billy was involved with for a while, but that was mostly for the fishermen, not the wives. And never being a fisherman, of course I wouldn't have been involved with fishermen's wives because they wouldn't want a processor in there with them.

SC: Why is that?

MS: They just don't trust the processor, they never have.

SC: That's interesting. So I'm wondering if there have been any sorts of economic changes or effects on any of these changes that have occurred in the community over time.

MS: I think economics is probably the biggest thing. There's nobody down there to support the fishermen and you know, the way the economics is all over the world, it affected a lot.

SC: So now that you guys are... you go out sport fishing. Is that primarily for your own benefit or do you still selling fish?

MS: Oh no, a sport-caught fish cannot be sold commercially, that's against the law. So we just go up there and fish for ourselves, and can tuna fish, catch salmon and smoke it. Like Billy told you, smoked black cod yesterday and it's just for fun. It's a lot of fun, have you ever tried it?

SC: Just once I was out on a, I did a fishing survey on one of the marine reserves. I caught a big... mostly rockfish and a big lingcod.

MS: Uh huh, oh nice! Yeah, if you get a chance you should really go out again. It's so much fun.

SC: Yea, yea we got really lucky on a beautiful day too.

MS: Yeah, like today.

SC: What's your favorite type of fish to eat?

MS: It'd probably be lingcod or petrale sole.

SC: Hmm, I don't think I've tried the sole, but I love the lingcod.

MS: Oh, me too!

SC: So, just as an overall, this is a broad question, but what does fishing mean to you?

MS: Well at one time it meant the income, because that's how we made our, that's what we did for a living. And now when I think of fishing I think of going out and having fun, seeing different people, watching people catch their fish. I especially like it when I'm out there and I see a family, you know, mom and dad, kids and the dog and they're teaching their kids to fish and the dogs barking and having fun. That's the best, when you see that.

SC: Mhm, and do you still see a lot of that?

MS: Yes, yeah, especially in the fall when the Chinook are running in the bay. Yeah, you know if the dog's barking, they're catching a fish.

SC: So, let's see here. Have you seen any changes in the ocean over time?

MS: I haven't really been out there enough to tell you that. I started fishing with Billy in probably about 2004 so up until that point, I was not an ocean person. I didn't like to go to the beach, so I can't answer that.

SC: Okay, so I wonder what brings you, or has brought you over time, the most joy in the industry, but also the most grief?

MS: Probably the most grief, is getting a phone call and they tell you a boat went down with no survivors. That's the worst. And, I don't know about the best. Probably the best for me is the day we sold the plant. Because then I knew I didn't have to do that anymore and we could, you know, start a new life doing something more fun. But losing the boats or losing the people, that's the worst. And that happens way too often.

SC: So it sounds like you're very happy now being able to go out sport fishing and gardening and doing what you love to do.

MS: I am. Yes, I am.

SC: So, I wonder what are your greatest hopes for fishing in the future or for the sport fishing?

MS: I wish that commercial fishing would be like it was in the 70's and 80's where they could bring their catch into Garibaldi and there would be processors to take care of their product. And sport fishing. I hope they don't overregulate it so we can't do what we like to do. I'd really like for Garibaldi to be like it was, you know, a very productive town with lots of fishermen and lots of boats and lots of processing plants. I don't know if that will ever happen, but it would be nice. [Laugh]

SC: Yeah, so, if you had one word, and it could be an emotion, an idea, or whatever that you could associate with fishing in general, what would it be?

MS: Hmm, dangerous.

SC: Did that bring you a lot of grief or anxiety when Billy was out fishing or...?

MS: Billy didn't go out on the boats, he was a processor. I would be fearful for the fishermen that were out, especially if they went out at the wrong time and there was a storm coming and are they going to be able to get home and cross the bar... um, you just worry about them, and then when something tragic does happen, it's amazing how everyone just pulls together, and takes care of each other, and gives the family support. That's the hard part.

SC: That sounds like that's one of the really great things about being in a small community, or fishing community is coming together like that.

MS: Yeah, and they really do. You know, it's amazing. Well this isn't even fishing related, but a couple days ago our friend lost his father and he said that he's had people come out of the closet that he hasn't talked to in years wanting to talk about the dad. And that's how it is; they come from everywhere, just to give support.

SC: So I wonder if you could do anything differently, would you?

MS: No. No I wouldn't. I learned a lot when I worked with Billy, he was my boss. We weren't a husband and wife when we were in the plant. He was the boss and I worked for him, and that was kind of hard sometimes.

SC: Could you talk about what that's like, the dynamic from the workplace and then transitioning back into the home at the end of the day?

MS: We did it, you know, it was hard for me at first because I thought I could help him, but he says no I'm the boss and you work for me and as soon as we leave the plant then once again we're husband and wife. But when we're there, that's not how it is. And it was a challenge, but we worked it out. We worked very well together, we still do.

SC: That's important.

MS: Yes, we've been married for 41 years. That's a long time.

SC: That is a long time. So if you had any advice for a woman thinking of becoming a fisherman, today, what would you give her?

MS: I'd ask her if that's really what she wants to do. And I know you're not really supposed to say well that's a woman's job or that's a man's job, but I really do feel that being a commercial fisherman is a man's job. You know, it's hard work, it's physical work, and I would just tell them to think twice about their decision. Maybe go back to school.

SC: Great, well I think I've touched a little bit here on most of the questions I have, is there anything you'd like to add at all? Maybe a favorite fishing story?

MS: My fishing stories would just be sport fishing with Billy.

SC: That's okay.

MS: Um, when I go fishing, especially in the fall, it's really crowded and there's lots and lots of boats. And Billy always lets me catch the fish and he nets it, which is great. And we went out there one morning and it was maybe 7 o'clock, 7:15. We get out there and we put our pole in, I put my pole in the water and I turn around to say something to Billy and I've got a fish on! Like 10 seconds, 15 seconds we're out there and I had this big fish on and we got it in the boat. Billy says, well we got our first fish, I said, well we better try for another one. Hahaha. And we did, we got our second fish and we went home, but that 30-second fish was just amazing, to catch them that fast!

SC: Yea, oh, day's done, we can go home now! Ha-ha

MS: Yea, but we did, we had to stay and fish some more.

SC: That sounds wonderful.

MS: Yea, lots of fun.

SC: Great, well thank you, Mary. Thank you so much for your stories and your time.

MS: Okay.