

Sara Skamsar Oral History

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Interviewer: SC – Sarah Calhoun

SC: Today is December 8, 2014. My name is Sarah Calhoun and this is an oral history for the Voices from the West Coast Project. I'm with Sara Skamsar, Sara can you state your name for the record?

SK: My name is Sara Lee Skamsar.

SC: Beautiful, and also we are in Newport, OR. All right, so lets go back to the beginning, if you could just tell me about how you got started in this fishing business.

SK: Well, I came here from the great state of Wisconsin originally, I was a little bit of a wanderlust, but was surrounded by water in Wisconsin and just followed the water west. And it was a union welder that, I got laid off, but then I got a job in Toledo, OR for a Christmas shutdown, triple-time to weld, it's a mill in Toledo, OR. I had no idea it was close to the ocean and so I came to Toledo for that and stayed at a motel in Newport and started seeing all these fishing boats and everything and thought, wow what a great town. All of these boats and things. And then I found out that the reason it was triple-time welding is that there was a strike from the other, I was a boiler maker, but the electricians were on strike and so I [took?] this mill and I don't break strikes so I didn't go to work once I found that out. I hung out in Newport and I was a union welder and so these people, there were people that did manufacturing and fixing boats, you know, welding shops in town. And so I got a job welding on fishing vessels, fixing them and outfitting them with this independent welder guy and I mean I didn't know the difference between a freighter and a salmon troller or nothing. I had no idea what was going on, I was just a welder. But the water just fascinated me. And then I had, I got paid well, I was single, I was a woman, it was wintertime and it was Newport, OR and I became very popular, very quickly. Oh did you meet that new girl? She's got a job and everything [laughs]. So I was like, oh yeah, yup, fishermen, because I'm from farming and you know, so anyway. It was a lot of fun and then oh, I fell in love with some guy that was a musician that had a salmon troller, and would I want to go salmon fishing in the summer? And I'm like, oh yes. And so I went fishing on the 32-foot double-ender for salmon and realized after three weeks that he was a maniac and I hated him [laughs]. But I stuck out the season because I said I'd do it and I did it, and I loved it. And those 32-foot double-enders, so you're right on the water, and I never got used to netting the fish, I'd just kind of throw them up on the boat and just loved it. It was just an element that just, I'm a water person so I was hooked.

SC: Okay, and so was the man that you were out fishing with, did he become your husband?

SK: No, no. No, he went away [laughs]. So I got a job on another boat, just with a guy who, no romantic anything, just really saw that I had a great work ethic and we had fished around, well actually he was the owner of the boat we were fishing, this boyfriend of mine that didn't work out. And just really nice man and he had bigger boat, 39-footer, and so I went fishing with him that winter, crabbing, I got to crab with he and his crew member, I just loved crabbing also. Crabbing was just, wow. But there was no crab, so it was really belly up, but I went crabbing twice, two years with him and two years salmon fishing, so I salmon fished three years and crab for two years and then did one trip for about a month on a drag vessel. But none of it was making me any money. And so there used to be really, like working men restaurant/bar down on the bay front that seemed like everybody went to after you went salmon fishing you go drink in the bar, in the morning you could eat there and so I would see these women working on nets. And I wasn't making steady enough money to really make it fishing, it just wasn't working out because it was summer fisheries that I did and so, except for crabbing. And I thought wow: well I wonder what they do because they had grimy little hands and wolfing down their little lunches and running off again. And somebody said, oh they work on fishing nets. And I asked around, and yeah that's year-round, you know, you can work on fishing nets and so I went over to where they were working and got a job building fishing nets. There was steadier work and that started it all for me. So I was learning nets so I

could get on a better boat because I saw at the time that there were these bigger steel vessels that would go to Alaska or fish on fisheries offshore here with the Russian joint venture and stuff. And I'd heard about that through the net shops particularly because it was net boats that were the bigger boats that were making the money and the money just sounded unreal and I thought, well that's what I need to get into, is the bigger boats. And so I made sure that I learned my net-mending, I already was a good welder, I told great jokes, I was a good cook, I had good sea legs and now I can build nets. And so I figured I was indestructible, and I started asking around for boat jobs and they wouldn't hire me here in Newport because of, it kind of freaked the guys out I could tell when I asked for a job, or if a fill in, or just to let them know I was available. Oh, I don't think we can do that. It was because I was a woman and they said their wives wouldn't like it. A couple of them. And then a couple of them just said that they couldn't handle it, you know, one guy said, they couldn't handle it if I was onboard and for some reason hurt myself, that he just couldn't live with that. Which I thought was pretty honest, but I was flabbergasted really that I couldn't get a job on these bigger boats. It just looked pretty impossible and so by then I was really good at making nets and I went to Kodiak with the net shop and helped them open a branch off of some Kodiak and became the arm-wrestling champion of Kodiak island while I was there and other things [laughs] and came back to quiet, little Newport and uh, worked for really the largest net manufacturer on the whole west coast of America, had a branch office in Newport and so I got a job, moving from the first little net shop to them, well-versed in everything, that's why I figured I could get a job on the boats, but it wasn't going to happen. Well they left in 1984 and I just thought the fishermen have seen me working on the nets, and they would probably still have work, even though the fisheries were in a downturn in the mid-'80's, and so I called them up, you know, hi, I'm still here if you need help. And another gal that did nets and uh, my husband, we started the company together, Foulweather Trawl, and started building nets. So that's the history of how that got started.

SC: And what's Foulweather Trawl, can you talk a little bit about that?

SK: Oh it's a full-service trawl shop, net shop, we build fishing nets. Shrimp nets, bottom nets, mid-water nets, we do a lot of anything that has netting in it for the state. We do a lot of research. In 28 years we've grown to be the largest net-manufacturing company between Seattle and Mexico, the big shops are in Seattle, the big stuff is in Seattle, but it's been an ongoing concern. We've hired and trained lots of people that ended up getting jobs on those same boats that I couldn't get a job on, but my revenge, I always tell people is that I invoice the people that wouldn't hire me and so my revenge is in the paperwork [laughs]. But anyway, the fishing part of it was what, I don't know, it just got into my blood. And my husband, when I was out fishing with this other guy, this really beautiful boat went by one day and I was just looking up at this boat and the guy on the back deck was just really good looking, and the boat was gorgeous and he's just gaffing this huge salmon, throwing it over his shoulder like no big deal and I'm just like, oh my god. And then I saw that guy at the bar when we were in after our next trip and I asked somebody, I said, who is that? And they said, oh he's some A-whole, ra-ra-ra. They were jealous of him, I could tell, he was really good looking and had a nice boat so they said, he's looking for somebody to fish with him I guess, and I went err. I went over and asked him if he was looking for anyone to fish with and he said, no. [laughs] But we, I don't know, we just got together and we never fished together. He fished his own boat and by then I was kind of working on the nets and he had unbeknownst to me, had just been divorced and so his boat was in a partnership with his father-in-law and they parted ways and the boat got sold and so then John was unemployed, you know could have gotten on other boats and stuff and did for a while, ran other people's boats, but it just, we started working together on the nets, you know, and he put in 25 years before he retired here recently. And so, it's been a good life.

SC: Do you spend much time on the water now?

SK: Every chance we can, sport fishing. You know, we don't really get to go out on commercial boats... for research, I got to go out on research and stuff, taking videos of underwater stuff with the nets and fish escapement and selective fishing. But we fish a lot, in the mountains we fly fish, and steelhead fish and we're not real big hunters, but we definitely fish and we see all of our fishermen friends out fishing [laughs].

SC: So you say, you could never get on a boat because of being a woman, but you were a welder, which is not a traditional role for women. Right? [SK: Right] So how was that kind of transition, working in this male-dominated world and then trying to get out on the boats...

SK: Well I thought I was a shoe-in because I was just, [10:00] I mean I wasn't a run around kind of girl, I just you know, really worked hard, had a good work ethic, everybody knew that about me, I didn't think, there was no, I guess was, I guess what I didn't realize is that the Newport fleet particularly, is just so family and traditional. And so I just looked at it that way, well I'm from out of town, the women in town don't know me and I was 26-28 at the time and so I don't think I threatened anybody, but it wouldn't have been the first choice for the fishing family to have me on board because it was very traditional, unless you were family to be on board or you know, on the salmon trollers at the time, there were lots of women that fished on the salmon trollers and I had a lot of fun fishing with the other women on the, in the salmon fishing days because it was all on the radio, and uh, so we had our own code for what was going on that we interfaced and communicated with each other, and then we'd see each other on the beach when we'd offload fish and stuff. We communicated so that we could communicate with our skippers in a very subtle way to get them to go where we wanted to go, where we thought the fish were. And so, anyway, it was... So the big boats were just more of a business, more of a, I don't know, they were just... I couldn't even say traditional, they were just more corporate and they just looked at maybe having a woman on the vessels at sea, and some of these trips were over a month long, that they'd go on, and you just figured in a corporate way that would not, not probably cause problems. Having one woman on board with 5 guys for over a month, you know, I think they considered it just a risk they didn't want to take in a business way. So that's how I look at it, I never really held it against them. It did surprise me, because it's hard work, and you need to be qualified and have good sea legs and know how to get along, because any boat is small, once you're out there for a while. Anyway, I just kind of moved on. You have to keep going and pay the rent and all of that.

SC: Sure. Did you have any kids?

SK: Nope. [SC: No kids.] No, I really didn't even think that I could handle having a dog for quite some time, I was just kind of [laughs], I moved around a lot. I moved from Wisconsin to Portland and Portland to... Worked building box cars as a welder and I got a job working for the forest service doing brush disposal, and then I got a job working union tugboats on the Columbia River and so I always found it easy to find jobs and I was just, it was easier for me, growing up with an all-male family except mom and me and it was just an atmosphere that was homey to me, being around men. And you know, their ways, I understood their ways. So it was easy for me to fit in, the boats were a surprise.

SC: So it sounds like you're kind of a jack of all trades and have had a little bit of experience in all sorts of things, can you talk about some of the highs and lows of your career?

SK: [laughs] The lows come to mind for some reason, you know, it gets lonely out there when you are a woman doing this stuff, because there's not a lot of other women to talk to, when you're, you know, the days go on and you know, the guys are okay, but I was lonely for hanging out with women after awhile instead of always hanging out with men was kind of a low spot that. And then you end up just hanging out in the bars, drinking with the guys after work and Friday nights and things. So I was sorry, I was working all the time because I didn't have as much cultural things to do and I kind of really like cultural things too. Where a little more unavailable being more country oriented, working in the woods, burning up the woods, and being on tug boats and welding for a living, you know it's just a different lifestyle so that was probably, you know, something that would have been nice to have more buddies to do stuff with, but it was just a pleasure, every job that I had, to perform well. I was a good worker, I was always on time, and I think what I enjoyed the most, and I always consider a highlight of my career, is that I was a good example. I was a good example as a strong woman and I know that I paved the way for a lot of other women that come behind me and so I always consider that a real, you know, gosh and gollies, I didn't know I was doing that, but in the end I know I've done that, was that I've really led the way for other women to... And I'm sorry that there aren't more women today, you know, welding and doing things like that. Or just in general, I don't think there's as many men either, I don't think the trades are as attractive, you know, you need a degree and you need more than a bachelor's degree, you need a master's degree, you need a

doctorate, you know, and those are all things that in some ways I wish I had a better education, there are more doors that open if you have a degree. And I didn't realize that having any kind of degree would have been a great advantage to me when I was young I just wanted to get the hell out of it and live my life, so that was I guess the lows and the highs, but it just, you know, I liked what I do, I still like what I do, I love building nets, I like being in the outdoors, I like working with the fishermen because a little part of me goes out on every boat, and I'm just like, oh my god I'm old enough now that somebody said, oh Sara, you can't ever quit, you're like an icon [laughs]. And I'm like, an icon?! All righty, I never wanted to be an icon, but I sure wanted to be a good example for other women and so I'm very pleased as punch about that.

SC: That's good, it sounds like an honor to be an icon.

SK: Yeah, in the end. You know, men, you can never really believe everything they say though so you have to take it with a grain of salt, but yeah it's been, you know when I was welding I liked seeing that my welds were good and what ship I welded on, it wasn't going to sink because I didn't do a good job. And some net that goes out there, that some guys under the net pulling on it trying to get the fish out, you know, something's not going to break and fall on them. You know, I take everything really seriously about what a job is and I also was treated like crap a lot in different jobs, being a woman. You know, not offered the same wage, I was definitely victimized by that my whole career, working for other people. Unbeknownst to me, all of the sudden someone would say something at the wrong time and I'd realize, what do you mean profit sharing? I was not offered profit sharing at one business, but the men were. I was paid a buck-fifty an hour less, backing crab was one of my first jobs when I was here, to just get up at 3 in the morning to back crab in a warehouse, I was getting like a buck-fifty less an hour than the other guy is, and so. And then, you know women are very much discriminated against in the worksite, and it wasn't because I was a... Sometimes it was an advantage being a woman in a bunch of men worksite, I mean then you get, you never have to buy your own beer, that's for sure and, but they'd be, oh no let me help you with that, let me help you carry that welding lead, or let me help you pull that web around. And I'm like, I would just drop it and look at them and go, I don't need help. And so you get a little extra that you know, I never wanted that, I didn't want to be singled out, oh someone go help her. You know, no one was running to help the guy doing the same thing I was doing, I didn't want someone running to help her and so I developed this, I don't need help kind of attitude, which, you know, gives you strength and stuff, but can get in the way a little bit. So in that regard it's an advantage because they're watching out for you and things, but I just wanted to not go out of my way to prove a woman could do anything, just that I could do it. That I don't need your help, I can do this all by myself, you know, and then do it well. It was satisfying to me.

SC: Over the years and the interactions that you've had in the fishing community, have you noticed changes in women's roles, whether its being on the boat or wages or gear-making, baiting the lines?

SK: I think that there is. Because this is a small town and again, I really, now that I'm a little older, I think I was really had an impact on changes like that in Newport with fishing. Like, no, Sara did it. You know, and I think that it wasn't odd to see a woman working that wasn't family, or you know. I think it's just up to the individual women in the family and the stuff that goes on really, but I do, I know a couple 3 or 4 women and I'm really happy to say that there's two daughters working on some of the big boats now, out crabbing and mid-water fishing. And so I'd like to think that me being on the boats, jumping around, working on the gear, pulling the bale, toting the barge, whatever [laughs], then it isn't so odd to see a woman doing it. And I had one example where I was coming down the hill, on my way to work, butted right up against the fish plant to get out on the bay front and here there is this woman, that was like, oh my god that must have been what I looked like when I was young, and she just had this look on her face and was offloading this stuff off of a truck and putting it on the dock and I looked at her [20:00] and I thought, wow, good for her, look at that woman is out there doing that work. And I thought wow, that must be what people thought when they saw me, look at her, wow, she really knows what she's doing. And so, any woman that's doing it, I think the more people see it, then it's like, oh, oh no, I heard she was better than the guys, you know. And so that, I think is definitely the way it is in the fisheries. I think that there's... because the skippers are younger and society has changed, women can play soccer and win world championships and women can do this, and women can do that, and their own daughters are in school doing all these things that used to not be so, you know the sport stuff especially, to be so dedicated to sports was never

a woman's role in school that much and now it is, so I think that, I think it just reflects what's going on, there's a long way to go for women to not be snickered at and things, but it's uh, I really see that men would look at women as just as capable as anyone looking for a job. I don't think that they'd have as much a bias except their own bias, you know. But as far as getting the job done, I don't think there is as much a bias.

SC: So, I think it's really important, and interesting to see these women taking on these non-traditional roles, but what are thoughts on being a fishermen's wife whether in the past or currently?

SK: Well I was, a fishermen's wife. I still am. John was a fishermen and then we got married so that made me a fishermen's wife and his son, he had three children and his son came to live with us so I was suddenly in charge of this little boy and you know, your dad is going down to California tomorrow and he'll be gone for a couple three months and it just, boy oh boy, it's a responsibility. And I think that fishermen's wives are super strong women, just the, man they just get hit with everything right away, and talking to them and knowing more wives through the years, inevitably, let's see, dad left last night, got up this morning, the washer and dryer had puked on itself and flooded the basement and car wouldn't start and so you have to be strong for everybody. You have to be strong for the kids, and dad's gone, so I have huge amount of respect for the fishermen's wives and think that it is it's own challenge and has it's own rewarding stuff for sure, you know, to raise the family, and I don't consider it a traditional thing, except amongst fishermen's wives to take so much on when you know your dad's not only gone, but he's gone on a very dangerous job. So it's just a, I don't even look at it as a traditional family, I just look at it like, oh my god family. Wow, how do they keep it together? And it just shows the strength of women, is you know, how it's kept together on the beach. And the only problem is, I heard a lot of them are like well, and me too, I was like, thank god he's leaving! I can finally paint that kitchen the color I wanted to, because he won't be under foot, and so for fishermen's wives, I think are really cool that way, is that they like having their husbands gone [laughs] to some degree so they can finally get such and such done, and get the kids on a routine, blah, blah, blah. And they rule the roost, by god, those kids are going to do what mom says or else, and then dad comes home and like ruins the routine, you know, so they have to get used to dad being home again and that I think is the hardest part of their job, you know. Is to make dad feel welcome back home, because it is a real transition for them, season-by-season, year after year.

SC: What kind of community does this create? Can you talk a little bit about the fishing community?

SK: The fishing community is symbiotically, biologically, cosmically, every which way connected. It's like, with this helicopter problem right now, that they want to take our helicopter away. Thwop, thwop, thwop, thwop, you know we hear the helicopter going through town, everybody looks up at the helicopter, you know and everyone thinks to themselves, oh it's not going real fast and it's going over land, so it's probably just doing a routine thing. But when we see it go storming out to sea, we collectively become just one entity. It's just powerful, because I've been in the fishing community in Newport now for 34 years and not close with the families and stuff, but you're close with the families, everybody is just everybody's family member in the fishing industry is how close it really is, you know. Because I grew up in a farm families and stuff and there's always a farm community, but the fishing community in Newport, we're tied to our ports, you know, so everyone in Newport is the Newport fishing community. And you just, you know immediately if something happens to some other family member, you know immediately if there's... the word spreads up and down the coast just like wildfire if something's going on. And everyone's there to help and talk it through, or whatever. But it's just like never seen anything like it, that you're just so symbiotically tied to each other, just without even an effort. You're just tied together, and it's the ocean that does it because you get out there, it's a great equalizer and a lot of fun.

SC: How do you mean that it's an 'equalizer'?

SK: Anyone who goes out there becomes their true self. Somebody told me, I don't know, I was influenced by things I read too much maybe, but like the Laundromat was a great equalizer [laughs], everybody goes there to do their laundry, you know, whether you're a millionaire or a college student or whatever, you got to go to the Laundromat! So when you're out on the ocean, you're just stripped down of anything, but your essence of a person. Because the minute you cross the bar and you're in water, I

mean, it just takes over and I think it strips people of their morals, or their morays and their thoughts of people and their thoughts of land and their thoughts of, you know, going to the gas station, you're just so stripped down on the basics in life and the task before you. To make money and raise your families, it just, I don't know, it just equalizes people, that you're either good on the ocean or you're not and that was kind of the deal, you either like it or you don't. And people that you think would be great, maybe aren't, you know. So it just, those, I don't know, it just makes you feel very simple. Close to the water and the sky and the fish and the bait and the hooks, but that's about it. So it's, I don't know... and the nets. It used to be that I would just kind of, you know you would see the bridge coming in and it's like okay you're heading home whether you have a load of fish or you don't and you start thinking, oh my god, did I pay the rent? Oh my god, did I... oh shit, I wonder where I left my car again, and ah man. It seems so busy on the beach. Things going on, that I know a lot of fishermen, and myself included, was just like, when are we going back out? [laughs] Are we getting ice in the morning? Oh good. Because it was just so overwhelming to be around all these people and all this stuff going on. When you're out on the ocean, you're just, it's so simple. There aren't all these distractions. Especially back in the day when there wasn't cell phones and things, it was just the marine operator and so you were really isolated as far as nobody calling and things, so it's a little different now being out on the ocean, you can call people on your phone and so it's a little different in that regard, but yeah. It was one of those things, I didn't want to come back to land once I was out there. That was the, eh, and then you had to cross the bar [laughs].

SC: Well now your job is shore based. [SK: Mhm] What kind of relationships with the ocean or with the people coming in from the ocean do you create?

SK: I don't know, I always tell the fishermen there's going to be lots of fish and they're going to get so rich it's ridiculous, and to remember me, and you know, we just are a support service. When I see fishermen, it's like oh, well can we help? Do you need something? And so we're just helping, like what do you need or... and they're just such BSers, they'll stop at the net shop and then they'll get a phone call, I'm here at Sara's shop talking to her, and then they'll just talk about you know, I wrote down counseling fees on one bill once [laughs]. So I think that I'm a figure that, I'm very respected as a sea person, as a hardworking net builder, but they all remember that, oh yeah she was a really good deck hand too. And then I sailed in the yacht club for quite a number of years, and oh yeah, she's a really good sailor too. And so I just think I'm one of them, and they look at me as I'm one of them and I look at them as they're one of me and so I just don't feel, I feel like I'm on the boat still, kind of is how they treat me and how we treat each other. Real respectful.

SC: So, we kind of know that fishing is an evolving industry [SK: Mhm] How does your, does your business, or how do you evolve with the industry?

SK: [30:00] Well, I've put in fewer hours lately. That's the other thing, people are like, I had one person who was in a very important position in ODFW (Oregon Department of Wildlife) tell me that, oh my god, I couldn't do what you do because it's so... you don't know what's going to happen tomorrow, you know. You can't plan a career when it's based on what the environmental circumstances and regulations will be, it changes all the time. You know, what we were working on starting out, we still work on the same nets, but they are so different. And I don't... it's either adapt or die. So we just, It's just part of, part of everyday life. You know, you hear a little bit that somebody got a net that did this and that and you're like well where did they get that? Then they'll rip it up or something and we get to look at it and so we're constantly seeing what other people are doing and looking at the gear and constantly thinking about how we can make it better. I mean that's our job, is to be innovative with the fishermen. Because that keeps us relevant to their needs because they're doing the same thing. They're buying new electronics, they're buying this, they're buying that, they want new gear, have you heard about that rope, that Atlantic line? Well it used to be, they called it flat line, but now there's a core in it and I want that rope. And if we don't know what that rope is, then we don't get that job. And so, I've got my radar up all the time and am just gleaming every little word someone says or what someone heard from some other net shop or this or that. Or that guy caught a bunch of fish and he was running blah, blah, blah. And I'm like, well that's no good, he should be running our net. And I'll go so far as to chase them down on the roadway and beat the horn and ask them what the hell they're doing, running someone else's net. I mean, pretty aggressive really, but in a nice way. And so it's survival, I want that net shop to... I want to be able to pay the crew on

Friday again and then it's like, this is how I make my living. So I need to really be on top of it. My husband was just d mister do everything right and I was the get it done. And so having his influence into the shop was huge because he was very detail oriented and really familiar with fibers, he was a trained weaver in his other life. And so you see that someone has these skills and knowledge like you want to take advantage of it and you want to foster some, you know, bringing that forward, and if you think that would be a good idea, why don't we try it and see? And then you get a fisherman and you explain to them that if we made this net out of blah, blah, blah it would be easier to fix and you know, it's similar to this other thing, but we think this is better and there's always been a fisherman in Newport, with the fleet that we work with because they're good business people, they want to buy what's new, they want new technologies, they trust our skills. It used to be, oh the rope cost \$.50 cents a foot and now it cost \$27 a foot or \$35 a foot. It used to be the web for a shrimp net cost \$2 bucks a pound and now it's \$19 a pound, lets get that knotless stuff from Japan. So we're buying things from around the world and that's, it's just a combination of a fisherman wishing he had heard about this, and our job to find out about that and then know how to splice it and use it and integrate it into their gear. And then see what they think. Then work off of what they know, and they say it worked really good, but maybe we should, you know, on the tips do something else. And we're like, yeah, yeah why don't we... And so it's a wonderful, fascinating thing to build nets for fishermen. Because they're thinking about it all the time, especially because some guy might have caught one more fish than him and so I thought we had the same net, how come he caught more? And I tell them, because he's a better fisherman, and then they look at me and wonder why they stopped by to see me. [laughs] So I have a real caustic sense of humor sometimes that has gotten me through a lot of rough spots [laughs].

SC: It sounds like that's another good skill to have when you're working around a bunch of fishermen.

SK: Yeah, because they like to get ya. They like to just set little traps and get you and see your face turn red, and ha-ha, got her face to turn red. And they get me pretty darn good, it's like having 60+ brothers and then I hire... I don't have kids, but I have had probably over a thousand little crewmembers in and out of the shop in my time. So it's not like I don't have kids. And I know I'm a good influence on the young kids out of high school that we hire too, in the last 5-6 years I've had two sets of parents thank me individually for, I don't know what you did, but my little guy, all the sudden he became a man, whatever you did, rur, rur, rur. Number one, I don't let them get away with little boy crap at the net shop, they can either do their job or they can go away. I'm not their babysitter, I'm not their momma, and so I think some of them think, oh she likes me, watch this. And then they'll screw up and, watch this, she fired me. You know, it's not, I try to be as kind as possible, but you really have to expect things from people when you're hiring them. I think of them the first real job for any number of young guys that are trying to break into the fisheries. And the ones that understood what we were trying to get through to them, they are the ones that are now running boats. So I've seen the little kids come in with their dads, are now running their boats, their dad's boats and then I've been meeting little grandkids. About ten years ago I met this one little grandkid and said, oh my god, if I'm still building nets when this kid starts running your boat, shoot me. Well he's like a year away from running the boat and I hope they don't shoot me, but. It's like wow, generations now. I feel like a bay front character, like oh god, I'm just becoming one of those people [laughs].

SC: Those people are good people, they have a lot of knowledge and stories to share with everybody.

SK: It is you know, and so. I know a lot of people have gotten a kick out of watching me through my career, you know, being this like 'know nothing' young person showing up on the docks to basically ruling my end of the docks [laughs]. So it's just been really rewarding.

SC: So where do you see it going from here, into the future?

SK: Retirement. I think that the IFQs and the catch shares and all of that and the net fisheries, I didn't like the fact that a lot of the small boats were not going to... the small drag fleet is what I hung my hat on, thinking as a central Oregon net shop we didn't have to rely on the big boats, which means you have to have a bigger crew, bigger equipment. But we could settle into our, you know, careers doing more of the smaller boats, but those are the ones that went away. And so I didn't like that because of the loss of that knowledge. You know those mom and pop drag fishermen for generations fishing the coast have such

knowledge of the ocean and the fisheries and such strength. I think that's what I've gotten most from working with the fishermen is just strength to keep going. Because they have, you know, they lose their family to the sea, they lose their boats to the sea, they lost it all, and they just bounce back up and keep moving forward. And that strength is what really, I think all of the fishing industry for helping me to garner that kind of strength within myself. To just keep going, because it's so easy to give up, but I think the way the modern fishery is, is going to be good for the American fisheries on the West Coast and I think that the fishermen are much more educated and ready for a modern fishery and they didn't know the old days, it's fun to hear about the old stories, but they didn't live it. They lived where they had radars from the get-go, they had good electronics, they had nice platforms to work on and so, starting out in a professional fishery, they're just going to make it more professional. And they're innovators and they're competitive and they're, you know, family histories are involved with it and they're not going to take their families' legacy and turn it into something, you know... oh thanks, we got the boat for next to nothing because I'm one of the... you know they're really charging forward is very leaders of their own little dynasties of their boats, but they're concerned with long-term acidification of the ocean, they're concerned with... you know one fisherman says, oh I don't like the fact that the bottom of the ocean, the lower water is getting warmer. So they're looking to the science community to help them understand what the ocean is doing, I've noticed that. Which only makes sense, you know, if they're catching crustaceans for their entire livelihood, and raising families behind catching crab and shrimp and there's acidification in the ocean that's eroding the abilities of these critters to make shells, you know, they're concerned. And that's like, wow! They could happen not even in your lifetime. They want to be good stewards of the sea, I think being stewards of the sea as a modern fisherman is a bigger picture than what their parents and grandparents had. [40:00] You know, it was.. So I'm really optimistic about the future of the fisheries. And then I'm optimistic about the future of Fawlweather Trawl. I thought it would just be something that I worked my fingers to the bone and grow old and arthritic and fade away [laughs] and it's like, oh wow, I think we've built up a pretty cool little business, maybe somebody would want to buy it so in that regard, our outlook and our view of the industry has improved and is a more, you know you don't just do it until you can't and fade away. You build up something that either your family or somebody you hire long-term can buy into the boat. We've seen several things like that, that fishermen were discouraged, young fishermen were like, well how the hell am I going to get into the fisheries, it's so limited now. Well not all family members want to take over their parent's dynasties of fishing and so these wonderful boats that are trimmed down and meaner and greener and cleaner group of vessels, more professional group of fishermen aren't necessarily going to be family run. You know, they're going to be the boss's probably, but I've seen several guys move up into the long-term jobs they've had on one vessel and be able to start buying shares and do it at the very least. And that is you're sharing the whole experience of expenses and things, becoming a partner with the boats, but I see more and more young guys being partners in the boats. And that gives their families a much more stable thing they can, you know, invest in. The banks are happy to see... I think that there's... people that are in it are really seriously into fishing and so the bankers and other people can support them with loans, and I think there's going to be a lot of room for young people in it too.

SC: It's nice to hear positive outlooks like that because there's... some people talk about the greying of the fleet, where there's not a lot of people coming into the fishery.

SK: Yeah, well they're everywhere. There's young people that just can't wait to climb that mountain, and it's so refreshingly independent to be out on the ocean and a lot of guys that we work with started out when, whether they were family or new to the area, it's about half and half really with the people that we were work with. They're all about my age, in their late '50's, they've been running these boats for as long as I've been working on their nets, and I'm like, well I can see why I'm still working on nets because it's not like you're going to get rich working on support services for the fleet, you're going to get rich being out on the ocean catching the fish is where the money is, not that we haven't had a wonderful life and plenty of income you know to own a home and are happy and all that, but anyway. These guys are, I ask them, how come you're still fishing? Because it's really hard work and then their knees are shot, their backs hurt, stuff like that. They're deaf, they're all backs are hurting, their knees are going out and they don't really have an answer, you know they just talk about their mortgage or, oh we've got three kids in college. But it really, I know they are just like young men when they cross the bar. That's their world, and they're in charge of it. When you can be the king of the universe out there on your own boat, why would you want to

come and do the laundry with your wife, I mean [laughs]. It's a real manly thing and you know, they aren't having to do the hard work like I'm not having to build the nets now, I just sit in the office and look out the window now and then and scream at the crew, and they can do the same thing on the boats. Get on the loudhailer, hey, I told you to stand aboard starboard, what are you doing on port? [old fisherman's voice] So it's easier work, we all worked for our positions, but you know, so I get a kick out of that. And it is really good money and they do have kids that they're putting through college and they aren't that old, but it's going to be sad when I see my buddies start really dropping, you know finally retiring and stuff, but that's how ingrained it is. They just, I don't know, I just figure they just love it. So it's going to be a good future.

SC: Do you feel the same way about your job?

SK: Oh yeah, I really like working on the nets. I wish I had more time off, you know, because it's never, there's no rest for the wicked and the righteous don't need it as they say, but yeah, it's like, it's why I wanted to get on the big boats, is they would get like 2-3 months off. They rotate crew. And that's important because it's grueling work, you know, and you're going to Alaska a lot with our distant water fleet, and away from the family and it's not like you're one person is away from the family for 6 months now, they rotate crew so you're two months on, one month off, two months on, one month off, but you know each boat is different on how they get paid to make it more equitable, that you don't have to be physically on the boat to get the boats share is a really good thing. And so, you know, I'm envious of their time off, even though their time off, they get a call, so and so hurt their foot or something and you have to fly back up or... so they're always kind of married to the boat, but that's my goal is to kind of just squeak out more time to go fly fishing and give the crew more time to deal with things on their own. But it's, all of it is helped with the technology. I actually was catching a lovely trout with a fly rod and my cell phone rang when we were out camping and I looked at it and I had put it so that, oh my god, I could even see it and I forgot, and it was a fisherman. And so I held my fishing rod in one hand and talked to him for a while, and then it wasn't a very serious need that he had and I said, actually I have a trout on my fly rod so I'm going to let you go, but I'll be home in three days. Oh okay! I hope it's a big one, nice talking to ya! So you don't get into trouble if you're out fishing and you're talking to fishermen as long as you're catching them. You catching anything? Oh yeah, I've got one in my hand here if you let me go. So it's, you know, I just want to get away more to have some time to enjoy things other than building nets.

SC: Mhm, more on the fish side.

SK: Yeah, or just the nothing side [laughs] I think it will happen.

SC: Do you have any other roles in the fishing industry, whether it's an association or?

SK: I was very involved with Newport Fishermen's Wives for many years and still am. I've been busy with them for like 11 years, was the president for a while, happy to step down. Leadership roles with groups of women wasn't as easy for me as leadership roles with men, but it's a fantastic group. So I've been involved with them and I learn a lot, and it is a lot of young wives, which is also good for me. I was real active in the yacht club and I'm real active in research and development of selective fishing gear right now. So I've been, unwittingly, professor Sara, that's my new hat, I'm like a little professor. And I'm doing all these workshops for really educated people and my mother would be so proud that I had the freshman class of new professors from OSU (Oregon State University) come over to the net shop and learn from me about what was going on in the selective fishing. Which was real groundbreaking, we're leading the way in Oregon, we're leading the way in, I think we're leading the way internationally in some ways at this point. And it's our passion, when you have a passion for it, it's like what, what's the new thing? I want to know all about it. So I'm tackling that, I want to know all about it. And as we find out more about it, we find out that our net shop is perfectly situated and almost meant to be working on this selective gear. Very experimental nets and devices that will allow fishermen to selectively catch, and we've been getting a lot of good results and it's helped our income quite a bit too because of our quality of a smaller shop, that we can fit into that world. But the upshot of that is this like outreach that I've done, because fishermen don't have time to talk to people about what they're doing, and they mostly don't want people to bother them or anything. But here we've got a big screen TV with underwater video of the net and the fish and the fish getting out and things to do and the process that we take to try and find these things to work. And we can

share that story because of the videos and my passion I guess. And just able to shoot the breeze with people, but it's, I think this year we've educated well over 150 people at the net shop, and they walk away just enlightened, you know. And we got these really cool thank you cards and that's so gratifying to know that you're changing people's minds. You're educating them, they don't know about, and they're like, oh! One gal was in here, she goes, I never even thought about fishing nets! I guess if I did think about it, I thought that oh, they must order them in little boxes from China, and they're like, oh my god. And just the fun little things that we get to do. We built a grizzly bear trap once for Montana, we built the pooper scoopers for the otters at the aquarium, we built a medical pen for Keiko the whale when he was here, because they had forgotten his little net-enclosed thing, when he had to get his medical treatment and so we... and we do netting for vacation homes for the railings so they can see [50:00] out of the windows and not see the rails and still be. So we find ways to fit into all kinds of different walks of life and in that, we're educating people about the fisheries and it's so cool. And my mother, from Wisconsin came out and she was so educated in the fisheries that she saw seals hanging out, she was real unimpressed with the people watching seals, she just goes, those are nothing but salmon eaters, you know they just eat the bellies and then toss the rest of the fish, seals, all they do is eat the salmon. So she wasn't one of those happy little vacationers looking at the seals.

SC: She was educated.

SK: Yeah, she was educated. Those seals, oh they're terrible, there should be a season to hunt them. I'm like, mom, okay, you can be quiet now. But it's amazing how little people know and they think all these terrible things, because you see terrible things on TV. Whenever there's something terrible going on in the ocean, you're normally going to see a net. Which John and I just sit there at home and go, oh a story about something in the ocean, wait for it, wait for it, there it is! A net with some little creature all messed up and half dead, and it's true, there are ghost nets out there, but my god. The American fisheries, their regulations, it's been draconian, and revolutionary in 34 years, and building nets is just like holy crap, and thank god, in the end. As holy crap as it all was, and the world is coming to an end, at least a dozen times in the last 30 years the world was going to come to an end for sure. And then it got better! You know, but a lot of it is dependent on ocean conditions. Right now, the crab aren't out there, you know, people bringing in their pots after two weeks into crab season, that's you know... so the world will probably be coming to an end pretty quickly again here any minute. But then, oh shrimping might be good and life is good again so. I'm amazed at how the fishermen adapt, I just, like what are you going to do? With these really huge managerial changes that came through all these years, and they're, well, I guess we'll have to figure it out. You know, they're not going to give up. I'm always like, wow and these are just normal guys that grew up in Newport and they can think this big and invest that much money and really take a chance, I think is what I admire most about fishermen in general. Is they are risk takers. Like, wow. And it doesn't always work out, you know. So they keep going and I just admire that and hope some of it has rubbed off. I'm a giver upper mostly. [Laughs]

SC: Well do you have advice for someone that was thinking, or a woman thinking, of getting involved in the fishing industry, what would it be?

SK: Don't give up. Don't take that first no. I mean, I maybe took the no's here in Newport a little more seriously than I should have, and just blown it off and gone to Coos Bay and looked for a job or something, but... So if you're serious, just stay serious, you know. Don't give up, don't let anyone discourage you and at least do it until you're satisfied that, wow, I really thought that's what I wanted to do, but man it kind of sucks and I don't like it. At least get yourself, don't not do it. Just get on a boat, get in the fisheries. Start at the fish plant. I mean I started backing crab at 3 in the morning in a really cold warehouse and did what, you know you have to move, you can't walk into it, and you have to move up. And the other one that I know that are deck bosses on the big boats in Alaska or fishing here in Newport, I know a couple of the gals and they just kept going, you know. If the first boat didn't work out, they get... other fishermen are looking all of the time, whether you're a man or a woman, is this person good? Is this person good? Or is this one trouble? I think that the world we live in now, it's not a real gender bias. The fishermen need someone who will do the job, so I think that just sticking with it and letting fishermen know you can do the job in any little venue. You know, unloading or boxes of some buoys or something. Whatever, any little job, just shows that you can show up on time and you know, keep your head above

water and not let nasty comments get you down. Because there are some real pieces of crap men out there that say terrible things to your face or not to your face. I can't believe some of the things the guys actually said to my face, it's just like, oh wow. I would never say that to anybody in my life, but you know, they're assholes so what can you do [laughs] except go whoa! And you can't let that get to you, you just have to consider the source is what my dad always told me. And if you want to do it, just do it. And if it looks like, hmmm, right away, that it isn't something you thought it was then you just do something else. But I think it's a... I think there's really good money in the fisheries. I think that a woman going out there and getting on a deck position can move up to being a captain and this is a lucrative fishery here in the west coast these people are doing. It's not some small potatoes kind of deal. I mean I was kind of shocked to find out last year what a couple of guys made on some of these boats was just quietly, woo, really good year. When there will be not really good years. I think there are real ways to move up and get a really good career out of the fisheries. And much safer than it used to be. Not that it's always safe, but. So yeah.

SC: Still a risky business.

SK: Oh yeah, so is being a grad student [laughs] lots of competition! Oh god, why did I do this?! [laughs] Yeah, you can second-guess yourself on anything. I don't know, if you like the ocean, it's just what else? It's just perfect. I mean when I first got a job salmon fishing, I was just like, you've got to be kidding me! They're going to pay me to stay on this boat and go salmon fishing? And they're going to feed me? So they're going to feed me, I have a place to stay, and I get to catch fish for a living. These people are fools, I mean I'd do it for free! And so, that was my enthusiasm. I just loved it right from the beginning, but it's a... there's money out there.

SC: Well I'm towards the end of my questions I have for you [SK: Good [laughs]] is there anything you can think of that you'd like to add?

SK: No, Sarah I can't think of anything.

SC: Well if you don't mind, I'd like to end with one more question.

SK: Mhm.

SC: If there was one word you could think of, just one, like a word or an emotion, or idea, to describe fishing, what would it be?

SK: I even knew this was coming [laughs]. Excitement. Yeah, it's exciting.

SC: Well, thank you.

SK: Yep, done. Thank you.

[End Interview 0:57:24]