

Marylinda Guerin Oral History

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Interviewer: SC – Sarah Calhoun

SC: So today is July 18, 2014; I'm with Marylinda Guerin in Port Orford, Or. Mary Linda can you just state your name for the record?

MLG: My name's Marylinda Guerin.

SC: Great, thank you. So I like to go back to the very beginning to start these interviews off, and just hear about how you got started in this fishing business.

MLG: Well I guess I got started because my dad, his name was Jack Guerin, and he grew up in Langlois [OR], he was born and raised there and the parents had a cattle and sheep ranch, he milked cows. And he didn't like it so when he turned 20-21 he was working at the sawmills so we went and he brought lumber home. So he built his first double-ender boat and he built that and he took it down to the dock here and that's when all the big ships were in there so that had to be in the '30's, I don't know for sure. So he started fishing here and then, well gradually he built a bigger boat, I guess times got rough, and he decided that he wanted to move to Florida. So he moved to Florida and he got a big boat, and he had a, it must have been a 50-60' boat, Miss Premier. Anyhow, he bought a gas station and a store there. My mother ran that and grandparents. So he fished out of Florida, Tampa, Florida and he fished in the Gulf of Mexico and all over the place. And then, I don't know how many years it was, he got caught in Hurricane Audrey and he was trying to get home, back then they didn't have any radios or anything, so he got caught in Hurricane Audrey and he beached the boat, but none of his crew members made it because they all jumped off before he beached it. And he didn't know who he was for 2-3 months, Mayans found him. So he made it back to Florida, found the wife and said, I want to go back home to Port Orford. So, before they moved back I was born in Florida and they came back here and he got another boat and he continued crabbing here and salmon fishing and whatever and his deck hand quit about the time I was 13 years old so he wanted me to come out and steer the boat. Of course it was one of the roughest days and I'm sitting in the cab, I'm scared shitless because there's just huge waves, big ground swells on it, and I'm puking all day, and he kept saying, Head Northwest! And he was back deck all by himself pulling the salmon gear and so we came home and my mom was not very happy because she was sick, she had asthma and stuff, but I wasn't allowed to go fishing for another 6 months. But right after that my mom passed away because she had asthma and so then crab season came and then it was like I'd just go part-time because I had school, I was supposed to be going to school. And I guess from there I just started going fishing with him and my brother. So it was kind of off and on and then in the '80's I met Chris (Alieco), he came from I think New Jersey and he started fishing on the boat with my dad because I had gotten pregnant and we had a couple girls by then. And, oh I skipped a part. So before I met Chris, we fished above the cape and everything, and most, there's not a woman that could probably do this, because above the cape is just rougher than hell, you can't find any worse weather on a small boat. By the time we were done crabbing, in August, I was 8-months pregnant and the boys, they can even say it; they thought the baby was going to be born walking. So I had to have my husband come out and help bring the gear in so then I quit for, probably quit fishing for 6 months. And then went back fishing again, crabbing and salmon. And then of course had another kid. I quit fishing for 6 months, did it all over, but I've been fishing since I was 13. And my dad, I don't think he quit fishing until he was 85-86. We kind of had to throw him off the boat; I'd have to get up at 3 o'clock in the morning to take the boat because he'd always be down there. I don't know where else to go from here, I'm not real good at this [laughs].

SC: No, that's great. So I'm curious to hear a little bit, you say you only took 6 months off after you had the baby, so what was it like being a fishing family and being out on the boat with your kids back home?

MLG: Well it's really hard because by then I was married to Chris and we had a daughter and I had to take her to a babysitter and I was trying to breastfeed her, which I thought was the right thing to do. It was really hard because he would always me mad at me because he wanted a wife that would stay at home,

cook dinner, take care of the kids. Well I didn't grow up that way and then times were hard back then so I kind of had to keep fishing because we were buying a house and... it's like he always expected me to have dinner on the table when I came home, I was supposed to be the first one home. Well I was already tired when I got in and then I'd have to go pick up the baby from babysitting and here she's 6 months old, crying, the only thing she wants to do is nurse, she wants her mommy. So it was kind of a fight because I thought it was my job to take care of the baby when I got home and I thought, well he's a man, he can learn how to cook [laughs]. It worked out, yeah I don't know. It's really hard; I wouldn't suggest it for most women to have kids. You know, because you have to get up at 3 or 4 in the morning and then sometimes it's a 15-18-hour day. It's really hard on the young ones.

SC: So you said you had two girls and what would you think about them becoming fishermen?

MLG: The only reason I didn't want them to, because I could see salmon fishing was on the decline, crabbing was good, but I just had seen the fisheries going downhill, there's just so many rules and regulations, newcomers. And the port down here, I don't think is safe anymore with the jetty so I didn't encourage them. They did go out with us, but I told them I never wanted them on the boat and the boat we did have, I kind of had it burned so they couldn't go. I mean that's a sad thing. Because I had gotten in a car accident and I didn't think I'd ever be able to fish and the boat was already 60-65 years old in. But my oldest daughter, she wanted to commercial fish, but that's not where I want her to go. And then the youngest daughter had asthma so that was just totally out of the question; she was born with it like my mother. But, you know, I think that women that want to fish, like I'm going back to Alaska, Captain Sid on the Northwestern, you know his daughters go fishing with him, I think that's cool, I think that's great, I think she'll make a wonderful fisherman. I think you have to... I think you have to be born into it to see if you want to do it. I don't think a woman can come out of the city and just say, I want to be a fisherman. I don't think it will happen. I just think you have to grow up rough, tough, be in a man's world. Otherwise, you know, you have to lift one hundred and something pound crab pots, it's rough all day long. It's hard enough standing on the boat when it's rough, but you just have to be a little crazy, you know, I never got scared out there. We almost sunk the boat a time or two because we should have come in and we didn't. But you know, we're making money and you just keep pushing and pushing and pushing, I remember one time we were above the cape and it was summer, but the wind switched to the south and it was probably blowing 40 or 50 and I think Ore Smith was with us that year and a couple others. And we were on the inside and we just looked offshore and this big breaker came and it came over the cab of the boat and it was green water, it came right over and it crashed on the, on the boat. At that time, we thought it was going to sink, and we got on the radio and everybody goes we're calling it a day [laughs]. You know, it just, green water, I didn't even have time to get out of the back hold to get in the cabin because my dad was steering at that point. But the boat just went down, and then the bow came up, it was just straight up and down. I thought when we caught the breaker; I thought we were going over backwards. I thought it was just going to flip. A lot of scary, scary episodes like that. But we got up the next morning and did it again [laughs].

SC: Yeah, that takes a strong person to be able to do something like that.

MLG: Yeah, most men and women, I don't know, yeah most women would never go back out again. But I always liked the thrill, the more the wind blew, I guess I kind of liked the adrenaline, like people do drugs, I get, I guess you say you get high, it's a thrill doing that, it's like going around on a Ferris wheel. So you just keep going for more, it's really stupid [laughs].

SC: Well it sounds like there might be a lot of ups and downs, I'm wondering if you could talk about some of the highs and lows of your fishing career?

MLG: The highs? I think there's more lows [laughs]. Here, the weather has been really nice in the last ten years [0:10:00]. The weather I remember here, the winds always blowing, it's always blowing out of the south in the winter. You go crabbing, I hardly remember any nice days, the wind is always blowing, but when you do get one of those nice days, you just take your boat out of gear kind of and go slow and just kind of enjoy it. But I mean the money's there. I guess those are the highs. After a hard day's work, you get a nice paycheck. I mean, otherwise I don't think any of these guys would be doing it. I don't know,

there are highs, but I don't know how to explain them. It's more misery because your family is suffering, you know, you're getting up at 4 [am]; you don't know when you're going to come home. Sometimes you don't even know if you're going to make it home. I don't know.

SC: What brings you the most joy?

MLG: I love the ocean. I mean, for me, I love going out there, I love the ocean, and I like being alone. I think that's mostly it, I couldn't see myself in an office. You're out there, there's only 1, 2 or 3 of you, there's really nobody to argue with. It's just, I don't know how to explain it, and it's beautiful out there. You see the sunrise; you see the sunset. Everyday, the ocean's different; the fog comes in, the wind changes, it's just never the same. I think the rest of these guys will probably say that. I don't think it's any different being a woman than it is being a man out there, but I think it's probably a little harder on a woman especially when she's got kids, I wouldn't recommend having kids and commercial fishing. It's hard on the kids. But both of my girls grew up happy and they both have good jobs and I'm their best friend [laughs], and they love their mother. So that's the cool part, because most parents, you know their kids hate them, but mine always seem to come back for more.

SC: So it worked out somehow. (MLG: Yeah) So I'm curious, you talked about these daily changes, but have you seen changes over time in the ocean or the coast, or the fishing?

MLG: It just seemed like everything's, maybe in this port, I think it has a lot to do with the dock and the jetty. Yeah, the weather seems nicer now, maybe it's just because I'm not fishing anymore, but I don't remember any nice days. You know there are changes, I just, I don't think I, in this time, I don't think I'd want to do it because there's so many rules and regulations. You know they want to follow you around. I mean there's nothing wrong with that, but I just kind of don't like it. Because I think people here in Port Orford are kind of independent, we all take care of each other, I mean there's no coast guard here, you don't depend on the coast guard because you'd drown. You just get on the radio and call your nearest friend out there to help you. Yeah, I'm not good at this [laughs].

SC: No, no you're doing great. Well can you talk a little bit about the Port Orford fishing community?

MLG: Well we're really... A lot of us argue and we don't really like each other, but no matter what, everybody's there for everybody. When you're out there in the ocean, you're a family. Ya'all stick together, I mean you kind of have to. We all get along really well. It's just like a close-knit community in Port Orford. It's like, I don't know, it's just like one big family. It's kind of weird because I'm a woman, but I don't have any girlfriends. All my friends are the guys at the dock. It was kind of hard on the husband. So that relationship went down hill really quick.

SC: Were there any challenges working in a male-dominated industry?

MLG: I don't think so because I grew up here, so I knew all the boys. I mean they tried to push me around, but my dad was really a strong man so he taught me when I was younger, don't ever let anybody push you around. So, I mean, if they started pushing me around, I'd fight back. You know what, I'd be down there at first thing in the morning and some of the guys, I'm not mentioning any names, they'd pull their wood underneath there, I'd rip them out of their truck and tell them to get the blank out of the way. So I never let anybody push me around. They'll probably tell you that's pretty obvious. The same coming to crabbing, you know, lay a string of pots, just keep your distance. Just because I'm a woman doesn't mean you're going to come and cork me. Because you won't be happy [laughs].

SC: What kind of advice would you give to a woman thinking of becoming a fisherman?

MLG: I would say, for family, if she had a family that was in fishing, go for it. If you think you can do it, if you can lift over 100 lbs. go for it. But if you didn't grow up in a fishing family, I would say don't even consider it. I mean, maybe that's the wrong thing to say, but it's a really hard life and the men will walk all over you. And I don't think I'm a normal woman, I think I'm really, I'm quiet, but I'm bold. And they'll take advantage of you.

SC: What advice would you give to a woman thinking of marrying a fisherman?

MLG: [Laughs] I would say go for it. They're not, they're all good men, and it's just a hard life. You're not going to get to see him much if he's really a hard-core fisherman. He's going to get up at 4 in the morning, he might be getting up at 1, he might not come back for a week or two. I don't think there's anything wrong with marrying a fisherman. It's going to be harder than normal I think. They come home grouchy. [Laughs] And they have all these needs, I want, I want, I want.

SC: So I think I heard you say earlier; you're not fishing anymore?

MLG: No, because my dad, when he hit 85 he started getting alzheimers and dementia. And then my brother was getting older too and he didn't want to go in a rest home and my father has always been really good to me, he's the best father you could ask for, so I told him I wouldn't put him in a rest home. They said he would only survive 6 months because he had cancer, he made it 8 years. The first 5 were okay, but I had to quit fishing. I couldn't leave him and we tried getting a caretaker, but he was mean, he couldn't remember anybody. So I kind of quit fishing. But then I thought I would go back fishing because the boat sat down here for years, but it got to be a hassle paying dockage. And then, I got in a horse accident with my daughter, right here in town. We had a 4H group, and it was on the old highway. And I was off the road and so was she, and I'm not mentioning names. Lady came off the white line and I had just jumped off my horse because I was trying to rescue my daughter. I jumped off, she came in a ditch, she hit my horse, and it was a 1500 lb. horse. She hit it so hard, it took its back leg off and it was pregnant, it was just gross. Anyhow, the horse landed on me. A year later, I never thought I'd get better, I didn't have any broken bones, but I was just crushed, all my muscles were pulled. It took 5 years to come out of it, but in that whole time I was taking care of my dad. So I kind of got rid of the boat for other reasons, but it was a mistake getting rid of it because I know I could have rebuilt it. And it's like last year, I felt bad I let the crab permit go, I sold it. I'd love to go back crabbing, even though, I think I'm 58 now, I'd love to go back out on the ocean. But I don't have a boat now. But I can't blame my father, I mean I took care of him for 8 years and finally he died of cancer, lung cancer, liver cancer, he had cancer all through him. But he was so strong he made it 8 years and they gave him 6 months. So, I'm not saying it ruined my life, but the last 8-10 years it did. So I'm basically, the last 5-8 years been trying to recover from that. And then I lost my brother here about 2 years ago of cancer too. So that wasn't good. So then I went in and of course these guys don't know it; I was diagnosed with, blood work wasn't good and they thought it was cancer, but I'm not going back because I feel good.

SC: Are there any other avenues that you could get back on a fishing boat?

MLG: Yeah, I think there is. I mean I think there is, but my knees are shot, my arms, you know the joints are gone. I don't know, unless I was captain I probably would so I don't have to work back deck. I always worry about falling over now because sometimes when I walk, my knees give out. So it's probably not smart to go back out on the ocean, but if it was a bigger boat and I didn't have to take care of the granddaughter in a year or two, I might. But I do like the ocean [0:20:00].

SC: What are your greatest hopes for fishing?

MLG: What's a better definition of that? The industry itself?

SC: Sure, yeah.

MLG: I just hope it continues. So other families can do what I've done. I mean because there are so many families in Port Orford that are just struggling. I just hope it's not on a downhill decline.

SC: So do you think it's Port Orford in general or the fishing industry that's in decline?

MLG: I think its Port Orford. I don't know, I haven't been up north or south, I can't answer that because I haven't been around the last 8-10 years. So I don't know what anybody else is feeling.

SC: What makes the Port Orford fishing port unique?

MLG: Oh, because we all have to be picked up by those dang hoist. You know, sometimes a big swell will be coming and there's, you know, at low tide you can't get in. And you'll be sitting out there in our boat, you know, if we hit bottom we'd flop over and take on water. It was always so dangerous, it's just so cool that you can just pick your boat up, get it on the dock, you don't have to worry about it sinking and go home and get a good nights sleep because you don't have to worry about your bilge pumps pumping all night [laughs]. And you can paint it. You know Port Orford is unique, I think there's only one other port like us. It's just, more people should come to Port Orford to see it.

SC: So if you had one word, it could be an emotion, an idea, anything, to associate with fishing, what would it be?

MLG: One word: thrilling [laughs].

SC: I like it. Well do you have anything else that you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked you? Anything you can think of?

MLG: Oh there are lots of stories, but I don't know.

SC: Maybe you could leave us with your favorite out-at-sea story?

MLG: Well, I don't know if it's a favorite, but this one comes to mind. And I can't remember what year it was, maybe it was 15 years ago. And the boys probably remember. It was summer and it was rough and we're going down to Frankfort, and there's a big boat down there. And none of us knew what he was doing, I think the name of it was the California Sun. So we pull all of our crab gear and come back in and go fishing the next day. Well that boat was still down there at Frankfort and we couldn't figure out what it was doing so the next day we go back out and the damn thing is on the beach. Well there's the coast guard here, there's helicopters and we're trying to pull crab gear and the coast guard never did come and hassle us, but there were bags of marijuana floating everywhere [laughs] there were big bags and we thought well jeez... I thought we could just grab a couple of those and make some money! I mean there were hundreds of bags and then I was putting them in the crab pots and thinking and thinking. And we're all, well we'll just all go back out here and get it the next day, have the whole fish hold full. And then the coast guard helicopters are flying over and so my brother, he's all paranoid, he threw it all overboard and it all went to the beach and I said, hey we're saving it so tourists don't pick it up. But anyhow, the sad part of that day was there was a little sport boat down there, they wouldn't let them come into Port Orford because they didn't want them to be around the drug scene and it got rough at the end of the day. So they made the little sport boat go into Gold Beach, and I can't remember their names, but they all drowned. I'm thinking it was 15-20 years ago. That was the most fun day and the saddest day, you know, it was just something we'd never experienced before. A drug raid at Frankfort and I don't know how the bags got there, but I think they hit bottom and it just kind of blew up.

SC: It's kind of incredible to have such a high and a low in just the one day.

MLG: One day, yeah! That was kind of thrilling, otherwise it's been pretty, pretty the same except for that one-day. That was one of the different memories [laughs]. Only in Port Orford.

SC: Well that was a good story. Do you have any others you'd like to share before we wrap up today?

MLG: Oh, maybe if you catch me next time. I mean there's many others, but these guys probably have better ones than me. I mean we almost sank it a couple times, but I still never thought the boat was sinkable. Because every time it would go down, it would come back up [laughs].

SC: Well thank you MaryLinda.

MLG: Thank you for having me.