

Teresa Vandecoevering Freeman Oral History

Date of Interview: September 23, 2014

Location: Garibaldi, OR

Length of Interview: 31:03

Interviewer: SC – Sarah Calhoun

SC: Today is September 23, 2014, this is an interview for the Voices of the West Coast Project. I'm with Teresa Vandecoevering Freeman, my name is Sarah Calhoun. Teresa, would you mind stating your name for the record to give notice of your consent?

TVF: Yes, my name is Teresa Vandecoevering Freeman.

SC: Thank you. I like to kind of start these interviews just going back to the beginning and asking a broad question of how you got started in the fishing industry?

TVF: Well, my family originally started in 1957, here on the Pacific Coast when my father, Larry Vandecoevering bought a commercial boat, he named it the [Abequa?]. And we come from a family of ten with 8 children in the family. My folks then purchased, started purchasing charter boats in the mid-60's and that's when we moved to Garibaldi from Tillamook. Then my folks purchased what's called the H&H crab stand, which became the Smith's Pacific Shrimp Company, later years they sold that. And then my folks also at the time had purchased the troller, Cafe and charter business. In those days it became the 24/7 business to where the fisheries and uh, became... the boats would leave for 4 or 5 days, come back unload, and leave again so it was around the clock business. And in those days, in Garibaldi, we also had the mills running in town so the little troller cafe functioned for the pit stop for many coming in and out of town. And then my folks, later on, decided they needed more room and built the new troller restaurant and lounge in the winter of 1975. I started, as I recall, working in the business with my brother Tony, we were like 10 and 11, running the crab stand. All 8 of us kids, if we weren't working on the boats, we were working in the restaurant and so all of us had that opportunity to work around the fisheries. In fact, my mother I believe, she could tell you that she was the first, my dad's first deck hand. Anyway, from there, later in the years, after helping with the crab stand I went and deck hand for a summer with my dad on the Solo, one of his, the folks many boats. And I think I was about 13, met a lot of wonderful people, it was a fun time. And from there later, I did marry a fisherman and had a few children with him. And he would be at sea for 4 or 5 days and it was really a hard time for family life because in those days too there was no cell phones, there was no communication basically; and if they were going to other ports, such as down south to Newport, or up to Westport, WA, it was, it just prolonged the time away. And I know a lot of dads; they missed their first step of their child or the first tooth. You know, that's what the fisheries took... that away from family life. Now, we have better communication. There's email, there's cell phone service and such. After that, then with married life, I stayed home to raise the kids and then later on, my father started having some heart conditions and I lost a brother at sea, and it was just time that my folks needed my help as bookkeeper so I became bookkeeper for the troller restaurant lounge, charters, and a lot of our commercial boats as well. Meanwhile I took a part-time job at the Port of Garibaldi, which gave me a lot of insight on what the port was all about. Because I grew up on the port, it was just a, part-time port secretary, 2 days a week; I never missed a meeting. The port logbooks from 1910, the history, I was really, I guess blessed is a word, to be able to read the history of my port, the town as it was and much of my family's business because they owned the leases on the port with their businesses because they had several. And as the mortgage holders for the boats, so I did get to read the history there and I was there 4 years, but because of my father's illness and my brother lost at sea, I was needed more in the 24/7 business as their bookkeeper. So I turned the job over to, or I knew another lady who worked in Tillamook at economic development so she then was trained to take my position. I didn't want to leave the job, but because of family I had to. And then, I stayed with the family business until I think about '91, when my folks started selling out of the charter business. Half of my brothers still have commercial boats and then you know, family life is different now for them too, but so it is through generation now. My nephew, Cody, is running my brother, Tony's boat, it's out of Astoria; so there again it's you know, down the line of the family business. It is a hard occupation though.

SC: And what is, what was part of the reason that your parents started selling off parts of the business?

TVF: Well, basically, it was because of my father's health number 1, he in '91, he did get a hear transplant and it was a matter of so many years of the same. However, my brothers continue in the business, and then my mother too. I mean she really pioneered it, she was, you know, when fishermen didn't have work at the time, she'd put them to work as a dishwasher. Growing up in a family of 10, we always had a pot of stew going or an extra bed so I really credit my mother too and that's why I hope you're able to interview her.

SC: So what is it like today, in terms of the charter fishing boats, compared to maybe 10 or 20 years ago? Was there more of a commercial fishing fleet?

TVF: Well I think it was, 20 years ago it was just really booming; it was uh, the state and federal government, there's a lot of regulations now as there wasn't like 20 years ago. The limit of fish per se and the quota on the big boats, now it's pretty much regulated and as with everything else, the cost of insurance and fuel and everything goes up. It's not as booming as it was, but it continues. People still like to go fishing and like my father, he was a charter captain for 40 years and he always said it's, he said there was always never a guarantee of a fish because you pay for sport fishing, it's a sport. So, you know, and that's what it is, it's fun times. Big groups, companies would come fly into Portland from all over and my folks at the time too had many rentals in town so they were able to put a lot of people flying in from Portland into overnight stay, so yeah. It has changed a lot somewhat, but it's like with everything else, industries, timber, fishing. It has changed with the times I guess.

SC: So you mentioned quite a few different roles that you've had over the years and I'm curious what have been the highs of being a fishing family?

TVF: Well they say a family that works together, stays together. And that's how I feel with all my siblings and my folks. And many of my sibling and I myself, married a fisherman or someone who knows someone in the fishing industry because it becomes a network to where, it's like we stay connected in that way. But when there's one who is struggling we are there for each other in that sense. Or, we appreciate the highs when someone is doing well and if there's someone that needs something up the road, you know, boat parts or something, and someone's going that way. You just work [0:10:00] together in that sense. Because you always hope that they would be there for you so that's a positive. We become a family and a network. Not only my family, but like I said, many others in the family and we did a lot of this marry into others who are fishermen so that's about it.

SC: So I think that touches a little bit on the Garibaldi community itself; can you talk a little bit about the Garibaldi Port community?

TVF: Yes. My family, well the first 4 of us kids were born in Silverton area outside Salem and then the last 4 were born in Tillamook area, but we didn't really get involved; like I said, my dad did buy his first commercial boat in 1957 and then we didn't really get involved in the Garibaldi community until we moved to Garibaldi in the mid-'60's. It's been an amazing community, always there for each other, and I remember the days down at the court when it was hussle-bussle when the boats would come in 24/7. In those days they had to unload the boats by hand, like 35-45,000 pounds of shrimp, by hand. And then ice in the boats in kind of the same way, with big totes down in the fish hold. Now, it's all like a vacuum where they can unload and as is the ice, it's that quick. In days past they were going to sea for 4 or 5 days so they had to really stock up in those days. In fact, [unclear recording for 3 seconds], I was blessed to have such a great town because... the sadness and tragedy that I've had in the family, as my family has, and with other fishermen who have lost loved ones, our town just pulls together. They just, with city hall up here... there's no asking for help because they just know to come together and we just take care of each other in that way. But we've had happy times too. At the end of shrimp season, I know my mother actually started it, like a harvest festival, we'd have happy times of gathering the fishermen at the end of the shrimp season and have a party up at City Hall for the end of shrimp season so, there were weddings and other happy events where everyone comes together and so.

SC: And is it still like that today?

TVF: A lot of it is diminished in the sense that our town in particular has become a little bit of a retirement community, for people you know just with the sport fishing. They move from the big cities, they want a little small town and so they can crab and fish. But it is still the same, yeah. I mean, in the days ago, there would be kids and dogs and skateboards and just a lot of activity in the town, but I do believe when the big mill, the old mill marina, it shut down in 1973, so a lot of jobs were lost then as was kind of the fish plants when they shut down. Those were the jobs that families, you know, they move out of town and a lot of the retired folks have moved in, but we're still a tight-knit community, yeah.

SC: And you mentioned you have children; do they have any involvement in the fishing business?

TVF: Well my son was a crab fisherman and I lost him in February of 2006 on a crab boat, on the Tillamook bar. And ironically, I lost my brother George on the same Tillamook bar February of 1986, 20 years to the day, 20 years minus one day. So, my son no longer, he was, I think he was 30 when he passed, but he deck hand when he was a young boy on the family boats, as did all of us in the family. He started in the fishing business, my daughter is married to a fisherman and she grew up in the restaurant, the 24/7 restaurants that the folks had. So she's very much aware of the fisheries, she's still in the restaurant business, but married to her husband, being gone, he'll deliver in Westport, WA or he will be down in Newport, away from home. So they have issues too about trying to raise their children when he's at sea or trying to have family time so anyway.

SC: So can you talk a little bit more about what it's like being a fisherman's wife?

TVF: It was a struggle, but there again, the network that was good is the fishermen's wives with the children. We all had each other, in our own little group, knowing that our men are at sea. We would have playtime with our kids and do things together and we could compare notes on how it is to be a fisherman's wife. You know, the struggles and the good times. Yeah, it was nice to have other women that you could relate to, there husband would be gone too and your trying to raise children by yourself, and in those days there was no communication like I said, no cell phones. There were BHF radios, the big radios that some of the wives had in their homes, or charter offices had the BHF radios, the big radios. To where if you needed to communicate, there was that connection to doing that.

SC: Were there many women out on the boats, out at sea?

TVF: There are, in my days, I did deck hand with my father and as years progressed too, my folks, their captains would hire the girls. Because, I must say some of them are better, they work just as hard, they kept a cleaner deck, yeah, I don't know if it was because they had to prove themselves in the man's world, but I'm not sure right now if there are still deckhands that are women, but absolutely, I'm sure there are. And I know my brothers who are the captains of their own vessel; they would meet women up and down the coast who had their own vessels. So, yeah.

SC: What was it like for you, being a woman or young girl working as a deck hand?

TVF: Well the connection I enjoyed the most was that time with my father. Because of having such a large family, there wasn't that one-on-one experience and the fact that he had trust in me as a girl versus the boys, you know the boys are boys, but it meant a lot to me, to work with my dad. Yeah, and also as the passengers and customers too would come aboard, I was only 13 and I remember once being seasick and this one man, he was a coach for professional boxers, and I remember in those days he gave me a \$5 dollar tip when he got off the boat and I was so thrilled about that because here, most of the trip, I was sick, but I got up after I was sick and kept at it, went back to work. So it was kind of in reference to down, but not out and I was just, I met a lot of really wonderful people, all over the world. So it was fun [laughs].

SC: And do you still spend much time on the boat with your family visiting or out with your brothers?

TVF: No, my husband does have a sport boat, a 27-foot sport boat and in fact that's why we have family coming from the valley. But he goes out quite often and I do occasionally, but he enjoys the boat and we have March down here, and he's got his crab pots, yesterday he was salmon and crabbing. I tend to, I don't know, I'm more of a... I guess I don't know if I had my time at sea or I have, knowing I lost my son and brother out there, I just enjoy... I live up the river now in the forest, but my brothers and my daughter's husband are fishing, you know commercial fishing, but I just don't go out there often, but on good days and with family, yes, I do.

SC: So I want to revisit a little bit again, you said a lot of the changes have happened in the past 20 years, some are due to regulations that's kind of caused the fishing industry to evolve, can you talk a little bit about what those changes have been?

TVF: [0:20:00] You know I'm not really the person to ask that to because of the fact that my husband is in sport fishing, but my brothers are the ones in the commercial industry as is my son-in-law. But as far as regulations, uh, it's pretty tight-knit that they have to follow all of the rules. So they would never jeopardize because it's their livelihood and so I'm not really the person to ask on that one, but I know a lot of it has changed.

SC: Do you know if it has caused changes in the business itself?

TVF: It has. I would say it has. A lot of it because of technology or electronics and it's like a, they have big brother there that watches every move of the vessel [laughs] so you know everything is pretty cut and dry as far as that goes. And it reflects to on the fish plants, they too have to follow every rule there is so yeah. I hope you are able to interview someone that has more knowledge on that.

SC: Thank you, so I'm curious if you have any advice to give to a young woman thinking of getting involved in the fishing business or marrying a fisherman?

TVF: [Laughs] Well, let me see. Well, it's a good opportunity to, you know a good trade. It's competitive in a way that sometimes the men think they can do it better, but sometimes women have to work twice as hard to prove themselves and they can do a great job. And it's important to keep a network of other women in the business or wife of the fishermen. To keep that support whether it's good or bad days, you always need that support. [laughs]

SC: I have a couple other questions, but I just wanted to open it up to you and see if there's anything you can think of that I haven't mentioned or favorite story...

TVF: Hmm, I don't know. I think I've actually covered quite a bit. Yeah, yeah, I don't know any others that I can, I mean time has changed a lot.

SC: Is there anything you miss most about the old days?

TVF: Yeah, it was in those days, our little port was like a community in itself, but aside from our city, because of all the activity going on, in the '70's there was a lot of salmon trollers coming in to port and they would dock like abreast to each other. So our town was just, I mean the little port was just full of boats from all over. But I do remember one, it was a salmon troller, I think it was in the mid-'70's and I think we had lights, kind of like a runway on the dock, and he was walking up the dock and it was dock and I was standing outside my folks' restaurant and he was playing his flute walking up the dock and he had his dog to his side and I can't recall his name right now, but it was just so beautiful, serene. Because the whole port was just quiet, except for the flute. You could hear him walking up the dock, and I will always remember that. I think it's because I used to play the flute as well, but I thought that was just such a serene, beautiful, you know sight. Where he's walking, the salmon troller, because the salmon fishermen in those days, they lived on their boat, they ate on their boat, in those days too there was no real communication so a lot of them, if it wasn't them and their dog and their guitar or instrument. That was their life. You know going from port to port. So that was kind of neat; that was kind of neat.

SC: You created a really great picture in my mind.

TVF: I know. I wish I had a camera in those days.

SC: It sounds like a really beautiful memory. So I hate to ask the other side, but is there anything you don't miss?

TVF: We lost a lot of family time. Before my folks moved to Garibaldi and we had the 24/7 business, we had our Sundays to where we went to church in the morning and we, my father used to work at the plywood mill, but we had that sit down time for dinner, all ten of us, we'd watch Walt Disney on Sunday night. We had a schedule, a routine, dad worked 5 days a week at the mill, but then we got here in Garibaldi in the '60's and it was like we grew up in the restaurant and our home was actually where we're sitting right now. My folks bought the appliance store here in the mid-'60's, it had a big apartment upstairs that fit all ten of us and the downstairs here, my folks had the Laundromat in town and then we had recreation for kids and then there was a second-hand store on this side of it [laughs]. I guess what I'm getting at, is we lost that family time, where we could sit down and eat together and share our day; because it became like when the folks did have their 24/7, we would close the restaurant for Thanksgiving and Christmas, but we would open it up to other fishermen and families who didn't have Christmas or Thanksgiving, which again, it made our hearts feel good, but what I miss was the fact that we didn't have just us, our family unit anymore. We just didn't, we lost that when the fisheries and the business started. And even my friends at school up here would say, oh you get cheeseburgers and french fries and pop anytime you want! And yes in the beginning we did, but I really missed sitting down to mom's home cooking and just us [laughs]. And with a family of 10, it's hard to get us all together anyway, at the same time so. Yeah, that was the negative aspect, and of course the tragedies, boat accidents and stuff, definitely. But like they say, it's in the blood with fishing business, it's kind of like I married a man who's been in the logging and trucking for 40 years and it doesn't change. Even though there are the accidents, the families or the business keeps going, it goes with the job. Anyway.

SC: How about now that there's a little bit less involvement in the fishing business, do you have a lot of family time?

TVF: Well we're all kind of spread out now, but we do try to get together. But as the generations, as we're all growing, there's some that remain in the fishing business, but we don't get together anymore like we used to. Well since my father passed, he passed years ago. But my mother, 3 years ago, we gave her an 80th birthday party and many of the community and people in the fisheries came to her party so, yeah. You know, we're still united and try to get together, but it's harder as the years go by.

SC: So I'm curious if you have one word to associate with fishing, what would it be?

TVF: Oh, that's a good question. Pause. Hmm, bittersweet, yes.

SC: I like that, I haven't heard that one yet.

TVF: [Laughs]

SC: So unless you have anything else you'd like to add, I do have one last question, I'd like to hear what your greatest hopes for fishing are?

TVF: For it to continue, with the technology and the regulations, it's all controlled, but I do hope that you know, and it is managed in a great way, but I do hope that it will always be. Since the time, of years [0:30:00] ago [laughs] I do believe it will continue on, but like I said with all the regulations and such, it does make it difficult for anyone wanting to get into the business. For purchasing a vessel, for insurance, for fuel, yeah, it really is a difficult occupation now, as it was then, but it's more difficult now I believe because of the limited regulation, on just how much quota they can be bringing in and such. But it will always be. [laughs]

SC: Well thank you Teresa, do you have anything else to add?

TVF: No, I think that's it for now.

SC: All right, well thank you for your stories.

TVF: Thank you.

[End Interview 0:31:03]