

Ginny Goblirsch Oral History

Date of Interview: January 29, 2015

Location: Newport, OR

Length of Interview: 01:20:34

Interviewer: SC – Sarah Calhoun

SC: All right so today is January 29, 2015; my name is Sarah Calhoun and this is an oral history for the Voices from the West Coast project. I'm with Ginny Goblirsch; Ginny would you mind stating your name for the record?

GG: Ah yes, my name is Ginny Goblirsch.

SC: Great, thank you. So I like to just go back to the beginning to get us started and hear about how you got started in the fishing business.

GG: When I first came to Oregon about 40 years ago I guess, this is 2015 so it would be about 40 years. I was an army brat so I lived all over the world and when I got to the Oregon coast as a college graduate, I really loved the area so I made it my home. I met my future husband who was a commercial fisherman so we were married and that began my long relationship with the fishing industry. I also worked for [clears throat, excuse me] Oregon State University Extension Sea Grant program beginning in about, I think it was '77' and I was ultimately became a marine extension agent, worked my way up through the ranks and my field of interest and work was with the fishing industry, principally the commercial fishing industry and outreach and education.

SC: What stemmed this interest in working with the fishing industry?

GG: I thought it was very interesting, dynamic, a lot of mystery because people who weren't immediately associated or involved with the industry had a lot of trouble understanding the industry itself. What the men in the families did to make a living and what the different fisheries were and how they were harvested. So that translated into lots of misperceptions and poor communication between, sometimes between community leaders, fisheries managers, researchers, and the fishing industry itself. So as time went on I felt there was a real value in not only educating the public about the fishing industry, which we did a lot of that, but also teaming fishermen up with scientists to be participants in their research at sea because the fishermen have so much first-hand knowledge that could be useful in different formats for researchers. And because in Newport itself had a core fleet of really highly educated fishermen, college degrees, masters degrees, doctorate degrees, engineering degrees, that kind of thing. These guys understood the value of collecting data and ensuring the data was good and sharing that information with decision makers. Fishermen were always and to this day continue to be quite responsive, adaptable to changing conditions. I guess you could characterize it that way. Changing conditions and regulations and developing gear that would be more species specific to eliminate bycatch, which was a big issue for many years and still is. That's catching non-target fish. And just being more selective, which increased profits and that kind of thing. The whole thing is that the fishing industry itself is comprised of basic, is comprised of small family-owned businesses and through my work with Flaxen and the university [Oregon State University] those were areas that we spent a lot of time in, helping people to understand that, especially the regulators, that these aren't just fishermen going out to catch fish and make money, they were actually supporting families. These were dynamic units, small family units, much like family farms, and in that light to the degree that they contributed to the economic viability of local communities, that was something to be treasured and preserved.

SC: So you said that, you know this whole interest in fisheries started from the perception that community, or people outside the fishing industry had of the community, have you...

GG: Well it also started initially because I was working for Sea Grant and my audience was the fishing industry and I was married to a fisherman so I figured I better learn all I could about the industry and its people. My background is in anthropology and archeology, particularly the southwestern United States.

So I already had a sympathetic nature towards the sociological aspects of interactions with groups of people. I felt I couldn't do a good job in my work with the fishing industry or my work with fishing communities unless I had a full understanding of the industry itself, the people, how it operated, what its needs were and since I was living it myself, that also gave me a lot of credibility with the industry. Which helped me personally a lot in my professional career that I think many other people would have been handicapped by. Especially in 20 or 30 years ago, it was mostly if you weren't one of us then you're an outsider, you don't know. So I became one of them in that I married a fisherman, but that wasn't good enough, I needed to, I felt I needed to understand the industry. So the first thing I did was start reading everything I could about fishing boats, the gear, how it worked, and tried to understand the kinds of research that was being conducted on fish stocks, oceanography that kind of thing, and also markets, all of those things. But mostly I didn't want to go down to the docks and just ask stupid questions, I was too embarrassed to ask some basic questions because I felt like I would be viewed as stupid. And so I thought I needed to do my homework first. So I did that and actually that turned out to be a small publication called, *Oregon's Fishing Vessels*, which was drawings of each vessel with the appropriate gear on so that a visitor coming to the coast could look at a fishing boat, commercial fishing boat, and know what kind of fishery it was engaged in. From that I got a weekend job on a charter boat to get my sea legs and that was educational, it wasn't particularly fun, but it got me out to sea. And then I felt I was ready to go out on fishing boats, try to be of some help as a crew, certainly as an observer and spent some time going out on my husband's boat as well. It took quite a long time and I'm still learning, things change. But as far as deep-down appreciation, understanding and love for this unique industry, family business, I think that I have, that I can really understand the needs and the challenges and one thing I keep reminding our community leaders is you are proud that this is a fishing community. Visitors come here because they like to see the fishing boats and a real live working waterfront and there aren't many of those left. In order to keep those things, we need to protect the infrastructure that we have in our community, which supports the industry. Without support, without adequate infrastructure the industry, the boats will go someplace else where they can [0:10:00] get repairs done, sell their catches, and that kind of thing. Highly mobile, they'll go where the fish are and they'll go where the support is.

SC: So with all of your experience over the years, are there particular highs or lows in your career?

GG: I think... I think that because the name, 'fishing family' and the consideration of fishermen as part of family businesses and the role of wives in that family business has become pretty well accepted as a norm. To the degree I had an influence on that, with my work and my work with Flaxen, that to me is very gratifying, that that helps to bring perspective to what it is that's happening with businesses like the fishing business. The other thing was, as a fishermen's wife, I of course reflected most of the concerns, many of the concerns the other wives had, and that was with the safety of their husbands at sea or their sons and daughters that went to sea. Or themselves if they went to sea, but mostly it was husbands and fathers and brothers that went to sea and we were always concerned about their safety, we wanted them always to come home safely. One of the things that was a major part of my work was helping to organize and provide practical, basic safety training programs and the use of life rafts and survival suits and fighting fires onboard ships and survival, cold water survival, and all those things. I was able to recruit an instructor that was highly regarded by local fishermen, he was retired Coast Guard, but he was considered one of the boys because he was a no nonsense guy and he really knew his stuff, that was Tom McAdams. And because he was the lead instructor, that added enormously to the credibility of the training and that made it all the more successful. Those were tips that I tried to share with the Coast Guard who was trying to work with the industry, to improve the safety record, and that I didn't think the Coast Guard truly understood the nature of fishermen, and that is: these guys don't go to sea thinking they're going to die out there, or they wouldn't be fishermen, that's why I didn't like going to sea, I was scared to death a storm would suddenly come up. They have a whole different mindset, they love the sea, they respect the dangers associated, but as far as worrying about dying at sea, nah, they are confident with their skills and their experience. So we tried to explain that to the Coast Guard that these guys don't think they're going to die at sea so when you approach them about vessel safety and training, you have to be, you have to be really tuned in to what it is they want from the training; what they feel they need. And you can also add in some other things as you go along and maybe they don't feel they need, but you think they do. So instructors for this kind of training program were very important, if you don't respect your instructor or your instructor has very little experience under his belt and he's just reading

what's said in a research report or in a text book, it's pretty boring. But having somebody like Tom McAdams made a huge difference in attracting fishermen to train. And this was before training was required, it's now required. And again, I think the value of the training based solely on the approach they take to the training and how it meets actual fishermen's needs.

SC: So it sounds like over time you've been able to facilitate connections between members of the industry. Have you seen those connections, whether it be scientists, fishermen, Coast Guard, fishermen's wives, have their been changes in those types of dynamics over the years?

GG: Oh absolutely, connections have vastly improved from early on, my predecessor with Sea Grant was Bob Jacobson and he was of the same mindset that I was, I learned a lot from him I have to say in that he saw the value of communication, getting parties together in a neutral environment to discuss various issues. From that you gain trust and with trust you could come to work together and so Newport has been, I think, a leader in the country in doing those things, those connections. And those connections have somewhat matured now in that I mean fishermen working with scientists is somewhat routine. Of course not all fishermen feel that way, but enough to where it is a unique aspect of this particular fishing community. Connections with the Coast Guard, here, have always been excellent. We respect the Coast Guard, we really appreciate the job they have to do and the conditions they have to do it, and when they're needed, they're really, really needed. And of course everybody wants them to be successful in their search and rescues so we've always had an excellent relationship with the Coast Guard here. Again, you don't see that in a lot of other ports, because the Coast Guard also is tasked with regulation enforcement at sea. But here for the most part, we can, we the industry, can separate the regulatory enforcement portion from the much more valued rescue, sea safety and rescue portion of the Coast Guard. And it's the men and women on the cutters and the helicopters that are held in very esteem. Newport was one of the first, I think it was the third city in the country to become a Coast Guard city, which means we support the Coast Guard, they're part of our community, our children go to school together, very much connected in a positive way.

SC: So I want to take us back [GG: Is this what you want?] Yes, yeah definitely. I'd like to take us back to a more personal, back to your roles and hear if you've had roles in the fishing business with your husband being a commercial fisherman?

GG: Ah yes. When I first married my husband, he was fishing; he was just beginning to start albacore tuna fishing. This was in... I guess it was the 70's, late 70's. And because of the cycle of the other fisheries that... he's a hook and line fisherman, so other species that he was at maybe salmon was dropping or halibut or whatever, but anyway, he got interested in fishing for albacore and was one of the first fisherman to actually target albacore because years ago albacore, was considered, albacore tuna was considered trash fish so marketing and all of that since then has changed albacore from trash fish to premium fish actually, the solid white meat tuna. So Herb started fishing albacore and didn't like the prices that the plants were offering, very low prices, so he figured he could sell directly to customers off his boat so he was the first fisherman probably, just about one of the, I can't say the, one of the first fisherman on the coast to actually start selling fish directly to consumers, to the public, off the boat between trips. That was a pretty cool deal, except that in order to make a business like that work, you had to follow a certain business model in being loyal to your customers otherwise every year you're starting over trying to attract people to your boat. [0:20:00] So we kept a mailing list and a phone list of everybody that bought tuna from us and they of course then wanted to be notified the following year when the boat was in with fish and he'd come in 3 or 4 times a summer with fish to sell off his boat. We didn't have email and text messages and all those things weren't part of the norm in those days. But of course telephone calls were, so it got to the point where I'd get a call from Herb that he was coming in and I should let people know, which meant I would first run around and put up signs all over town, and then get on the phone and start calling people and telling them the boat was going to be in, blah blah blah. And all this time I also had two young daughters and a disabled father living with us and I was working full-time. Calling what started to be 50 people, 100 people, it got up to several thousand people, it became horrible for me. I just dreaded when the boat came in because of that, because of all the extra work on my end to sell. Now most wives would say, probably, oh it was great! Helping to sell the fish, but I found it, since I was also working full time, to be very tough [laughs], I guess I'll put it that way. But Herb developed a

huge following and I distinctly remember, and I would go down and help him sell off the boat and as other fishermen saw that he was successful doing that, we'd have people lined up all the way down the dock and out to the street and he would get the fish out of the fish hold and then I would make the sale and haul the fish up to their cars. It was not a short walk and those fish are heavy so I think on one of our heaviest days, I personally moved about 2000 pounds of fish off the boat in one day and I was exhausted. Then competition came in with the other boats, and that was fine, nothing wrong with competition, but everybody was sensitive about price, nobody undercut the other, blah blah blah. But every now and then somebody would offer a customer a good deal if they were buying a lot of fish or whatever. So Herb had a habit of disappearing on me when we were down there at the boat, I got to go do an errand, and he'd be gone a couple hours. We didn't have cell phones and actually it turns out it doesn't matter because he's not one to ever call in and say where he is and when he's going to be home. So I would be there all alone trying to sell fish and one time I did have a customer come down that wanted quite a few fish and so I gave him 5 cents off a pound or whatever it was. Within the hour, Herb came racing back and said, what are you doing?! And I said, what are you talking about? Everybody's talking about how you're undercutting them! And so it was cutthroat business and I was furious. I think I just went home [laughs] I was pissed off at that. So that's a hard way to make a living; that really is a hard way to sell your fish. The public loved it because they had fresh product immediately available and all of that, but the logistics were just a nightmare. We finally transitioned over to having bit by bit, having our catch custom canned. There was a little cannery in town that would take your fish and can them. We started selling fish that way as well and slowly moved over from selling whole fish off the boat to going, and this was a several year process, to full fledged custom canned product albacore, we'd can it, it had our own label on it and marketed it to health food stores and individuals across the country. While I was still with Sea Grant, we didn't have a website and Herb did all of his business out of a paper bag so at tax time, he just dumped the bag and started sorting and I kind of just sort of went [sigh], ignored all of that, you know bore with it until I retired. And then when I retired, I said, okay we're getting a website, we're going online, and we're also going to have our books on QuickBooks, we're incorporating, we're doing the whole bottle of wax, so that's what we did. Herb initially thought, oh god, all the expense of a website, are you kidding? Turned out, once he realized that we were online and people would just go online and order, he just said, oh that's like crab pots, click, click, click, you know you're making money, click, click, click. We, Herb once again, with my help, pioneered the fishermen to consumer label that so many others are doing now and have basically followed our business model and that's fine. And we have a very strong, good business going to this day that our daughter is slowly taking over and as part of my retirement, she's doing everything now as far as operating the business, except the books, I'm still doing that. But I'm figuring a year or two and I'll turn the books over to her and I will be out of that part of the business, so that's good.

SC: And is your husband, Herb, still doing the fishing?

GG: No, he retired about 10 years ago, he had a bad back so we ended up having to hire skippers. And learned a lesson that we already knew that nobody runs the boat like you do and once you have a hired skipper, who's responsible for costs, in other words, fuel and things like that come off the top so that they don't just spend at will, then the basic maintenance on the boat starts to slide and he was always breaking down, it became very annoying and we were not making a profit off the boat because of that. The final straw came when our skipper took the boat offshore tuna fishing, I think he was off several hundred miles and ran out of fuel, ran out of diesel. And that was horrendous getting fuel out to him and all of that. When the boat got in safely, we fired him and sold the boat. I told Herb, I said, we've been lucky, never had any major accidents, nobody has been badly hurt and nobody's been killed, but if this continues he's going to sink that boat and bankrupt us. So we sold the boat and got an excellent price for it, I was surprised, I was very surprised, but the kind of boat we had, a 50-foot boat with multiple permits, went for a good price and so now we purchase product, tuna, from fishermen that we know keep high quality standards. I should back up and say, one of the things that set our products apart was attention to quality and Herb bled his fish onboard and landed them on pads so they wouldn't bruise and did all of the things it took to produce a high quality product to the end. There were days he had to quit fishing because he was catching too many to keep up with refrigeration and so those are all things that go into having a loyal customer base because they could rely on the quality of the fish they were getting. Now we are not actively engaged in commercial fishing, other than, but we do continue to have our seafood business.

SC: Over the years, have changes in management affected your business?

GG: For us, changes in management came mostly with salmon regulations and actually that and actually that propelled us more and more towards albacore, which as a highly migratory species, really wasn't under any strict management regime. Catching a highly migratory species that just show up off your coast for a couple of months a year with hook and line, created a very small impact on the health of the [0:30:00] fish itself, the overall stocks. So no, there really was no management. So we weren't particularly impacted other than Herb looking ahead knew that we would have trouble surviving under regulations that were pretty much ever tightening so we could never plan ahead. It's hard to plan a business if you don't know what product you're going to be able to have for the coming year and what price you're going to have to pay for it or get for it and all of those kinds of things. So it changed our business in that we took the road that we felt we had more control over rather than staying dependent on the road that was less in our control. That was a mistake I think a number of salmon fishermen made, that tried to fill in economically between good and bad salmon seasons by albacore fishing and then trying to get a better price by selling to the public like we did. They didn't have customer... what's the word? They weren't loyal to their customers, some of these guys, not all of them; some did very well like we did. But a lot of them didn't have, didn't offer customer support in that if they didn't like the price of tuna they were going to get at the plant, they'd take them to the docks and sell them. And it didn't matter to them particularly what quality they were or how they were. The other thing was, they didn't keep lists of customers, they didn't bother to let people know year-to-year when they were going to be in because it can be quite intimidating for the average citizen to walk down on the docks to where the commercial boats are and you know, those rough-looking guys all working on their boats. Especially if you're driving in from some distance, not knowing if the boats even going to be there or not, if there's any fish. So the guys that kept trying to stick with salmon and other species that had really ups and downs in both stocks and the ability to harvest those stocks are the ones that went out of business or if they're still in business, they're scratching and complaining probably a lot about their state. But fishing is a business and it has to be operated like a business if you're going to be successful.

SC: And so you mentioned one of your daughters is now taking over the business, does your other daughter have any involvement in the fishing industry?

GG: She, um, my other daughter doesn't because she has Asperger's syndrome and so it's a high-functioning autism, and so her interests are very different than fishing, but Sueanna is very interested in supporting the industry and being a part of the industry and running our business, but she shows no interest in going to management meetings and so as I look ahead and see perhaps more management coming in the albacore fishery, she's going to have to learn those skills and I've tried to teach her and I've taken her to a few meetings and it's like most of today's young people, oh this is boring. So far... and she's brought, she's kept the business fresh and relevant in that she uses social media. I mean I'm lost with twitter and I could care less about Facebook, but she is doing all those things, which is another thing you need to be able to do, change with the times. And fishermen need to change with the times as well.

SC: And have you spent, has that been one of your roles in your career, is to make sure you follow up with all of the management and going to Pacific Fisheries Management Council meetings?

GG: Yes, yes. I did a lot of that. A lot of meetings. A lot of going to... yes. Some of the meetings were with fishermen and some of them were just with agencies where I would try to share fishermen's concerns because they were always, what do fishermen think? Well, a lot of times they're too afraid to even ask fishermen what they thought so I was kind of the bridge between the two groups so to speak. Fishermen... I just lost it; I was going to say something else... It's gone.

SC: Well have you had involvement with any community associations over the years?

GG: Yes, I've been involved with the Chamber, I've been involved... I've been Port Commissioner. After I retired, I went on the, I got elected to the Port Commission and served on the Port for 7 years. Part of that time as the chair, and during that period that I was chair was when we were able to successfully bring NOAA to the Port of Newport! The NOAA's Pacific Marine Home Port for its pacific fleet, that was quite a

coup for Newport and the port in that NOAA's then current location in Washington, their lease was coming up so they sent out a notice that they would be accepting bids from other deep water ports from Coos Bay, from southern Oregon to Washington, as potential bidders on the home port, have it relocate to their ports. As a port commission, and as a community, we met with city council, we met with the county commissioners, and we met with the public, and we said it's our inclination to submit a bid for this, we feel we have zero chance of getting it, but the process of submitting a bid will require us to get all of our, all of our assets together and market them in such a way that might be attractive should another bidding process happen, maybe for one ship. In other words that Newport had a lot to offer for research vessels, for the NOAA fleet and that kind of thing, and we were a deep water port, we had infrastructure, we had community support, we had high quality of life for employees, all of those things we had. So we put together a proposal, a professional proposal and did a first-rate job, which was our intention, we wanted to really show off ourselves, never thinking we would succeed in getting that particular contract. And in the end we won, because we had a lot to offer, we did the best job of bidding, price-wise and plans for building the homeport and what we had to offer. Unfortunately, I think those folks in Washington that felt they had the best chance of getting the contract, they didn't work as hard for it as we did, it was a very valuable lesson learned there. They simply didn't work as hard to market themselves and we came out on top as the best location, which we always felt we would be the best location, but we couldn't imagine them actually moving away from Seattle, that seemed impossible, but they did and they're here now. So that was real, that was a real highlight, that made all those years of listening to people grumble about what the port was doing now worthwhile [laughs].

SC: Do you remember what year that was?

GG: Yeah, it hasn't been very long; it's been about 5 years ago now. Yeah, so I want to say... I'm terrible with dates, but yeah it's been about 5 years ago now and I'm very proud of that. What my involvement in that was, so yeah, it was definitely a team community effort, everybody worked very hard, so that was great.

SC: So I know you said you're retired [0:40:00], but what are your current roles in the fishing industry?

GG: I... when I retired a few years ago, I slowly retired. By that I mean I was on the Port Commission so I was very involved with the fishing industry through that. I wasn't participating in Fishermen's Wives as an organization formally because I had been there, done that, you know booths and festivals and all that sort of stuff. I was tired of doing that, I was tired of going to management meetings and so I didn't do any of those things, I just was on the Port and ran the business, our home business and started trying to just do some things that I was interested in, mainly some genealogy. And so I got very involved with that, which created, I ended up being pretty much a recluse because of all the concentration and research that entails; that by the way is very worth while, but you have to have a lot of time to do it. And then, last year, early in 2014, I got a notice that the Coast Guard had put a line item budget, a line item in their 2015 budget that would close the helicopter station here in Newport, it's a search and rescue helicopter rescue station here in Newport. And since I had been involved in the initial establishment of that station, the community in the 80's had to come together with Fishermen's Wives and push really hard to get that helicopter stationed here in the first place. Simply because the nearest stations, which were, were both an hour flying time away and in the cold water here, if you end up in the water on the central Oregon coast, you won't live an hour in this cold water. So that's why we got the helicopter in the first place. Was because we worked hard to convince our congressional delegation that we needed it and so they provided the funding through the Coast Guard budget. Coast Guard said all along that an hour flying time was plenty because they had a standard that was developed in the 70's; it said when you're looking at where you place search and rescue assets, two hours is a reasonable response time to be applied nation wide. Our contention was: the pacific northwest has the coldest waters outside of Alaska anyplace in the United States, by far colder than anybody else, and as cold year round. The northeast waters warm up in the summer time and ours are cold year round. Plus the nature of our coastline was rocky and storms and all of that kind of stuff. The Coast Guard was applying a national standard, cookie-cutter type standard to a situation that we felt meant the difference between life and death for people on the central Oregon coast. And so we got the helicopter, the Coast Guard never, never agreed with us about the need for the helicopter. And the reason for that is, that they kept clinging to a standard, like I said, that was in the 70's,

it said people can actually live 2 hours in cold water before they die of hypothermia and that is true, you can live two hours, even in our waters, before hypothermia will kill you. But more recent research has shown what we knew all along, that the onset, the effects of the onset of hypothermia when your arms and legs become numb and you can no longer use them, that happens within about 10 minutes of going in the water. Then you can no longer help yourself and unless you have protection, like a survival suit or you're in a raft or you're on top of something that's keeping you out of the water, then you actually have 10 minutes to 45 minutes before you die of drowning because you can't help yourself and you slip under and drown. Or even in a PFD, you can be so stiff you can't keep your head out of the water. In other words, the waves crashing over your head and you can't turn your back to them, that kind of thing, you can't help yourself. So you can drown even in a survival suit, you can drown in a PFD, you certainly will not live 2 hours treading water or even holding on to a buoy until help comes. And we already knew that, but finally the research had demonstrated it. The Coast Guard knew about it, they talked about it and elected the commandant since 1993 has neglected to ever update their standard, to reflect this cold-water research. Okay, with that as a background, in 2014, they line item our helicopter to be, our little helicopter station to be closed as a cost-savings for them. They said it would save them 6 million dollars and we currently, our helicopter base is one helicopter that rotates out of North Bend every 24 hours so that's actually two helicopters; one comes up here, the other's in maintenance, then it goes down in 24 hours and the other crew comes up. A small little building at our airport with a couple of cots, a small kitchen, and a bathroom and a fuel tank; and that's it for the facility. But they wanted to take the two helicopters that are stationed here and relocate them someplace else in the United States that needed helicopters. So we said, not only would that not save any money because you're spending it elsewhere, but you're going to be subjecting people who either live, or both people who live here and visit here to the potential of dying of cold water immersion. On a fairly regular basis we have tourists that get trapped on rocks, they go out at low tide and then the tide comes in and they go, oh my goodness, what's happening? The only thing that can get to them is a helicopter hoist. Boats can't get in there, it's too cold, what do you call them? Life... [laughs] At pools... You know people at pools that... [SC: A lifeguard!] Lifeguard! Geez, man I guess I'm getting old [SC: Brainfart] A lot of beaches around the country have lifeguards for that kind of thing. Our water is too cold, we don't have lifeguards. We are currently in the fight of our lives quite frankly, to keep that helicopter here. When it was announced in 2014, our congressional delegation first spoke with the Coast Guard, commandant, who told us that if it closed it wouldn't be before the end of 2015 and in any case, he didn't expect it would close at all so we didn't worry about that, we thought okay well it gives us this year, 2015, to ensure the funding is there, not an emergency. But then beginning of October this year, of 2014, the Coast Guard suddenly just announced they were closing our station as of the end of November 2014. Basically giving us 8 weeks. Appropriations process had already concluded in Congress, there was no chance of us being able to get funding added back in because we knew we were a line item, but we had been assured that we could deal with it in 2015. They basically just pulled the rug out from under us and gave us no options. They would, they never had any public meetings, they didn't even give the congressional delegation, they gave nobody a heads up. And what's worse, December 1st, which is the day of the closure, was the beginning of our Dungeness crab season, which is a wintertime fishery and dubbed the most dangerous fishery on the west coast, so there are a lot of really bizarre situations there. We had to scramble, we got huge community response, 17,000 signatures in 3 weeks [0:50:00], that kind of thing, on a petition in 3 weeks, that kind of thing, news stories, calls, letters... So that when congress went back into session for a few days before then holidays, that's all the time we had, was time between about the 2nd of December and the 11th of December to get something done. We were able to get language inserted into the Coast Guard reauthorization bill that said, no air stations would be closed and no air assets would be moved around for a year until January 1, 2016. So that gives us our, this year, to do something. Well that penalized the Coast Guard a lot more than we had intended because they could close no stations, but I think that was for the best so that somebody else didn't lose a station because we could keep ours. There's a lot of political ramifications, causes, that kind of thing, homeland security, pressures because of other missions the Coast Guard has been assigned, but personally, and this is what I'm continuing to fight for, I strongly believe the Coast Guard search and rescue mission has been downgraded as a result of additional pressures to do other things with immigration, drugs, terrorism, that kind of thing. You can only spread your force so far. What concerns me about the Coast Guard is they don't acknowledge that, they don't even ask for funding for search, adequate funding for search and rescue, so they have created a situation, this situation themselves, I believe in Washington, the commandant's level because of the preoccupation with wanting to get, what I call, the boys and their toys.

Fancy new, high response, you know, long range endurance cutters; those are great for running down smugglers and immigration, people on boats and stuff like that, they do nothing for search and rescue as far as we're concerned because they only go as fast as the ocean will allow depending on if you have a rough ocean, they're pretty slow. So they're not going to be on scene in 10 minutes, when somebody around here goes in the water. Those are totally different from search and rescue. And I just think search and rescue is sliding and for whatever reason the Coast Guard keeps saying we can do more with less and consider the fact that they can get here in an hour from either Astoria or Coos Bay sufficient. Because it meets their standard from the 70's, it says people have 2 hours to live, but doesn't incorporate the more recent cold water research, and by recent, I mean the 90's, it's not that recent, they don't incorporate that into the planning. And I am totally baffled by that to tell you the truth, completely baffled by it. So, I think it's important that somebody stand up and speak up and so I'm working with Newport Fishermen's Wives, the city of Newport, Lincoln County, Board of Newport, and the Mid-water Trawlers Cooperative to take this to congress to let them know what's happening with search and rescue as a Coast Guard mission. We do not want to get into the whole homeland security rats nest, but I think if congress and the public knew that the Coast Guard's most sacred mission that we all love, respect and expect, that of saving lives, is taking a back seat to some of these newer priorities, they wouldn't be very happy about that, as we aren't. So the issue is keeping our helicopter, by educating others, the congress and others, that the helicopter in Newport is not a redundant asset, it's an asset, the only asset available to us in a cold water region, which will save lives when people end up in the water off of central Oregon.

SC: And do you have high hopes that you can, that this decision will be reversed in the next year?

GG: Yeah, I cannot see that it won't be. We are absolutely determined, completely determined. It's like you get to a point where enough is enough. As a professional, I've known about this standard for many years and just said it's a ridiculous standard, all it is, is a starting point, and when it was developed that's how it was described, as a starting point, to consider where to put search and rescue assets. Not the be all, end all. No closer than two hours, no. But that's the way it's being used now. We were given that as a reason that the station closing, we were given some other reasons like improved communications and safety equipment on fishing boats and all of those things. The only reason that holds water is funding. Why they didn't just say, we don't have the funds, I don't know. Because that could be rectified pretty quickly, I think their priority is to take every gun they have and put it into fancy equipment for drugs and smuggling and those kinds of activities rather than search and rescue. The Coast Guard will never, never, never admit it, but that's the only way I can think of this to not even talk to the local people here on the grounds that know what the situation is on the central coast and what a difference timely rescue in cold water makes. To me, is just unthinkable and so we feel we have to speak up, like this can't go any further, here or anywhere else in the country for that matter. So that's what we're doing. And I'm fully confident that we'll be successful, I mean we're that determined, we're going to do this.

SC: Well it sounds like there's a good support group and it's...

GG: Fabulous support group and the support comes I guess like we talked earlier about the connections and the interactions and communication... with the fishing industry and the community and community leaders and because of that, when the fishing industry says, this is a real problem, we're concerned, the community listens and takes action. They understand that it's a real problem, and it's actually more of a problem for the public than it is for the fishermen because they do have rafts and survival suits so if they have the time to get in them, they can live a couple hours, but for somebody falling overboard, recreational boaters don't have any of that equipment, we get people caught by logs, washed out to sea, trapped on rocks. Those kinds of incidents are rising with the population, every year we have more visitors and more people move here so those incidents are really on the rise. And our local first responders have come out and said they are totally reliant on helicopters as their backup. They're the ones who try to do surf rescues in place of lifeguards, like you'd have in other places. They will not, and they're mostly volunteers and they will not go out there without the coast guard backup for their own people's safety. So that's how integrated it is here and it's a dangerous ocean here, it's a dangerous beach and the locals know it, visitors don't particularly, and those are the ones that mostly get into trouble.

SC: Can you step back and talk a little bit about Newport Fishermen's Wives role in the helicopter issue?

GG: In the helicopter issue? Well they were, they initiated the drive... Let's say 30 years ago, you do the math, this is 2015, 30 years ago, we had a couple of serious vessel incidents, vessel accidents. One was a capsizing with two fishermen trapped inside the hull and ultimately they got rescued; very hairy, very hairy, scary [0:60:00] situation, but ultimately two of them were rescued by divers who swam under the boat and up into the boat in the dark with all the gear and nets and stuff. There were problems with the helicopter getting divers and equipment to the scene because at that time the helicopter was in North Bend and took an hour to get to Newport, quickly offloaded the equipment and then had to land on the beach because they'd ran out of fuel and couldn't get more fuel. So that was a handicap in that situation. The other situation was when a fishing vessel capsized off of Depoe Bay I believe, not very far off Depoe Bay and the water wasn't particularly low, but they capsized, they sent out a mayday and it took... a helicopter arrived on scene, found two fishermen still on the surface floating, partially in life jackets, the third one was gone, I guess he had sunk. One was barely alive, the other was dead, but they had been floating there for an hour and it took the cutter out of Depoe Bay, cutters came from everywhere, but the quickest cutter I believe was about 45 minutes. Again, they're slow moving in the ocean, they're not speedboats. So there's a new criticism of the cutter, it's just an illustration of why we need a helicopter because they're the only asset they can get on scene in minutes. But this helicopter at that time, came from Astoria, was on scene in about an hour, recovered the gentleman that looked to still be alive, got him to the hypothermia unit at the local hospital who worked on him for about 3 hours before they pronounced him dead. The other fisherman was dead when the helicopter got there. It seemed fairly clear, and the coroner pronounced death by hypothermia, that the cold water killed them in an hour, within an hour. Because that's when the helicopter got there and they were already gone. So the mother of one of those fishermen, and the owner of the boat, but also the mother of the skipper was a member of Newport Fishermen's wives and she pretty much galvanized the group to come together and lobby for the stationing of the fast response helicopter closer, in Newport, so that if such an event were to happen again, and we knew it would, it's part of the business, a helicopter could be on scene quicker. So I was a part of that and now actually there was a really dedicated group of about 4 or 5 of us that worked on it pretty much around the clock or as much as we could. And we first had to convince the community and they were easily convinced, then we had to convince the congressional delegation, they were not too difficult to convince, but it took an active congress ultimately to get it here. The Coast Guard never relented, they said, you don't fit the standard, we can get to you within an hour, that's plenty of time, blah, blah, blah. The Fishermen's Wives at the time were on letter writing campaigns to the commandant of the Coast Guard and to our congressional delegation. At that time the commandant answered the letters! And we had exchanges back and forth, that were civil, we did public speaking before the chamber and all of that, newspaper articles... it was an old fashioned PR campaign that was ultimately successful. So we've had that asset here for 30 years and it's surprising to me to hear that the Coast Guard's stance has never changed, that they still think it's a redundant asset. But the difference between the campaigns then and now was astounding because when I got notified by senator Wyden's staffer that the Coast Guard had announced they were closing the station, I got a hold of my colleagues in Fishermen's Wives and I hadn't been going to meetings or anything, but I said, hey ladies, heads up. I said, we need to have a meeting and plan our strategy. Before we even had the meeting, those ladies had a petition online, they had a Facebook page going, directing people to the petition, and I think we had several thousand signatures in the first day and I just went, whoa! [laughs] Am I ever out of date! They were letting no grass grow under their feet, so they did a marvelous job with getting the word out, using modern media, communication. And of course we had the community support already and the delegation support already, it still just boils down to the Coast Guard's attitude about us being no more than a redundant service. In other words, not needed. And funding. And I think neither one of those are adequate reasons for the closure. Is that what you wanted to know?

SC: Sure. Well I know... so we've spent a bit...

GG: I have actually, today's Fishermen's Wives, when we started this again, were much younger like I was when we started years ago. So they have been learning as they go and I have been able to provide I think some continuity between back then and now, and also since my career with Sea Grant, I spent a lot of it with search and rescue and dealing with those kinds of issues. I understood the standard and what it

did and didn't mean, I understood what they were talking about with safety gear for commercial fishermen versus not even mentioning a recreational and the public, they didn't even mention them, because they don't have any gear. Aunt Millie taking a walk on the beach isn't wearing a survival suit or even a PFD, my god she doesn't even have a radio with her. I had, or I have, a fairly good understanding of that, and one of the other fishermen's wives, I hate to use older, but I will use older and more experienced, also had a good background because she unfortunately had lost a son at sea. So she had a big stake in this whole process and understood what cold water would do to a human and was like me, not willing to stand by and let this happen. She was completely dedicated to stopping this and the current president of The Newport Fishermen's Wives, Jennifer Stevenson, is a lovely lady, she's a young lady, I actually worked with her mother back then, back in the day. And so she's learning and she's a very good speaker and very eloquent, she's a fast learner and she has no, I don't know, ego or control issues, which means that we can conduct a campaign, respect everybody's opinion, talk out how we should do this campaign, and come to agreements, very simply. Because each of us respects the other's views and attitudes. Jennifer's more modern, she understands those kinds of things, modern with the fishermen, modern with media, PR, and that kind of stuff. Michele and I know some more technical stuff, so it's worked very well, has been very effective. In fact, people think, we've been magical in how we've been able to conduct this campaign and it's been really a grassroots campaign all along, there are no professionals involved.

SC: Continuing on over the next year, that will include Newport Fishermen's Wives, as well as you...

GG: Oh absolutely, absolutely. We are board members of Newport Fishermen's Wives and so as board members, Michele and I and the president Jennifer are the [01:10:00] lead on the helicopter project, it's not a project, campaign, it's a campaign, we're the lead. So we're the faces that you see and the voices. But the wives themselves, the rest of the organization does a great job with setting up informational opportunities, getting the word out, flyers, all that sort of stuff, everybody has a role. And every role is very important.

SC: And have you remained on the board of Newport Fishermen's Wives throughout the past?

GG: No, no. When I retired, I retired. [SC: Okay] It's time for a younger generation and that's the way it goes, you have Fishermen's Wives organization that works very hard, da, da, da, and then as their daughters grow up, become young ladies, young fishermen's wives, they sort of start assuming more activity, more responsibility for what their mother's had been doing. And the mother's retire. Okay, I can stay home now, kind of deal. Kids are grown, you can take over. So it's not...it's a lot of mother/daughter, but it's not just mother/daughter. My daughter never joined Fishermen's Wives; she's sort of a whole different kind of mindset, but youth and experience. You have the experience that retires and then the youth comes on and learns from the experience, when it's necessary those of us who used to be active in Fishermen's Wives come forward to help the current group if we have skills or knowledge that's useful. So that's kind of the way it works, and that's the way it works in this particular situation. Yeah, when I retired, I wanted to... there were no pressing issues in Newport Fishermen's Wives or the industry that I felt strongly enough about to stay involved with, so I just wanted to kind of just go into a whole and live a quiet life and do some things, and I did that until October of 2014, when the Coast Guard announced they were closing our facility here, and I had to come out of my whole. I couldn't let that happen.

SC: Well you have a lot of knowledge in the history of everything that's gone on so it's very valuable.

GG: I felt that, yes, that somebody who had been there at the time and lived here all these years and been part of the industry could offer something to the campaign. Because with the Coast Guard, they change personnel every 2 or 3 years, the collective memory was gone as far as I can tell now. It's just not there anymore. Gosh knows, we don't want to return to the mistakes of the past that caused people to lose their lives. If we aren't successful, people will die, there's no question about it. And it just is not justifiable, the nature of this port, the activity in this port, I mean every criteria you can name does not, I mean justifies a station here in Newport.

SC: So moving forward, if you had a piece of advice that you could leave for any woman thinking about marrying a fisherman or becoming involved in the fishing industry, what would that be?

GG: You need to be self-reliant, you're going to have long separations, sometimes long, sometimes short, there are problems associated with both. You need to be able to be... if you're not fishing with your husband, he's going to be doing his job and he needs to go fishing when there are fish to be caught. That might mean going on an opener the day after you give birth, as happened in my case. At least he was there for the birth; in some cases they're not even there when the child is born. Certainly it means going to a lot of public engagements, people's marriages and funerals and stuff without your husband. So you need to be... cognizant of that, he can't be there for all those life moments that you want him there for and still make a living at sea. That when he's at sea, he appreciates the support you can give him, whether that's marketing or lining up crew, or just being understanding of what he's going through out at sea, but at the same time you need to make sure he's going to appreciate your role at home, being the one left behind, having to raise the kids, probably working at least half time, maybe full-time, dealing with family issues and all of those kinds of things along with the worry for the safety at sea. So he needs to be, he needs to be on the same page you are, and you need to be on the same page he is or you're going to have a situation where a young woman will be feeling left behind, left out, unappreciated, unloved, which is probably not the case. And a husband who feels his wife doesn't understand what he does. For god's sake, at least learn what he's doing, how he does it, what fishery he's in, what he's catching, what kind of gear they use, what kind of market challenges there are, and learn! Learn about the industry, then you'll appreciate what it is he's doing. And I think this isn't very much different from the dynamics of the lives of firefighters, policemen, military, any situation where couples are separated because of work and there's an element of danger. He or she is in danger doing their job. Either appreciating what his wife or partner is doing at home, keeping the family going or not, and the same thing for the wife, feeling left out or being proud and understanding and supportive. So you just need to be on the same page, both have roles that are very important to the success of the family and the success of the business. And if you don't understand those roles, you're going to have a tough time, and if you're not willing as a young woman to spend more time alone than not, than you're not going to like being married to a fisherman, because what he does, is he goes to sea, and the more he's at sea catching, the more successful the business is. You can't have it one way or the other.

SC: Well Ginny I'm towards the end of my questions [GG: Okay [laughs]] so is there anything you'd like to add?

GG: Don't you just hate this stuff [referring to the energy-saving lights going off in the room every 20 minutes] it's ridiculous. I remember many years ago the University declared they were going to start saving on power by putting timers on all the heating elements, the heaters. So they're only on during office hours and then putting a lock and key on the timers so that nobody could mess with the timers. That was fine, they did it, I didn't care. But after I don't know, it could have been a year, it could have been 2 or 3 years, the office started feeling colder and colder. And so I said, okay enough of this, so I broke in to there and looked and all the times we had lost power through the years, had made the timer get that much further off. So we had heat blasting all through the weekend and nights [SC: Oh no] and off during the day when we were at work [laughs]. Anyway, I'm saying I don't know how much you save by having the auto on/off.

SC: Well they have them in our lounge, where the MRM students are and I'll be in the middle of eating lunch and the lights will turn off. [laughs] Well Ginny, I have one more question to ask you [GG: Okay] if you could use one word to associate with fishing, what would it be?

GG: One word... I'm tempted to say historical, because of my interest in history, but it's not in my view, fishing is changing, but it's not going away, so I hate to pin it with the word historical. So I would say... Respect. Respect for what it takes to bring food to our tables. What people go through to feed the nation. I would say respect.

SC: I think that's fitting, I like that. Well thank you very much. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

GG: No, I hope I didn't talk too much.

SC: No that was wonderful, thank you Ginny.

GG: [Laughs]

End of interview [01:20:34]