

Tiffani Seitz Oral History

Date of Interview: August 28, 2014

Location: Morro Bay, CA

Length of Interview: 44:18

Interviewer: SC – Sarah Calhoun

SC: Okay, so today it is August 28, 2014, this is an interview for the Voices of the West Coast Project. I'm with Tiffani, Tiffani would you mind stating your full name for the record?

TS: Tiffani Seitz.

SC: Great, thank you. So I know we've been talking a little bit, but I'd like to start back at the beginning and just hear about how you got started in the fishing business.

TS: I married a fisherman, [laughs] is exactly how I got started in the fishing business. I met Rob when I was 24 and he was a deckhand on numerous fishing vessels out of Astoria.

SC: In Astoria, OR?

TS: In Astoria, OR, yeah.

SC: Okay, can you talk a little about what it was like then?

TS: Then, it was a lot different because we were younger and stupider. You know, I don't know how much you want to know about that part of it, I was a bartender, he was a fisherman, you know, typical love story. [Laughs] and then, you know, there was a lot of money in Astoria at that time. There was the fishing, at that time, groundfishing, you were pretty much just bringing in as much as you could catch, year-round if you were a year-round groundfishery. He also did crabbing, and he did shrimping, a little bit of tuna and just depending on price, what was paying more. And he was, at that time, he was a deckhand, and then I believe he started running his first boat, and he should be here for this because I can't keep all this straight... I want to say, I can't remember if Isabelle was born yet, but I want to say, no, probably Isabelle was three so probably '91, yeah, or '99 he probably started running a fishing vessel. Fishing was good in Astoria, it was a lot easier, and there was a lot more infrastructure in Astoria. And then, I believe in 2002 they did the buyback, the boat that he was fishing on was sold in the buyback. We did not know that the boat was going to be sold in the buyback until a couple months before the boat was sold. But he was pretty lucky, we were lucky because Rob was known for being a hard worker and a good fisherman. And so he got a job at a time where there were a lot of other skippers that were looking for jobs because there were a lot of boats sold in the buyback. We were very lucky. He, I mean, didn't, probably didn't even miss a trip after the buyback. So the buyback happened and that was in 2002, and we continued fishing. At that time was when they put in the bi-monthly trip limits that they decided that each vessel would each month, or every two months get an amount of fish to catch. And so they would go out and catch this fish, but if they already had a species already caught, when they would make a tow and you would catch two different types of species together, but they already had that species, they had to throw it overboard. So hundreds of thousands of pounds of fish got wasted. If you read articles way back, it was because the fishermen were overfished and the fishermen were not, you know, the fishermen were bad, when it was really the fisheries were mismanaged. It wasn't that, I mean the fishermen told the Pacific Management Council that this is a stupid way to manage the fishery. Also, it gave the processors advantage over the fishermen because at the end, two weeks before the two month period was up, if those fishermen hadn't caught that fish yet, they only had two weeks to catch it, they had to bring it in and take any price they could or they'd lose that fish for the two month period. So it gave the processors a huge advantage over the fishermen. So that went on until 2011, the IFQ (individual fishing quota) fishery. Rob was a skipper of fishing vessels, the ten years prior to the IFQ going into effect. So when they allocated quota to fishing vessels that the fishing vessels would get when the IFQ system came. We didn't get any quota because we were just, Rob was just a skipper, he wasn't the owner. The owner's of the boats, or the corporations of the boats got the quota and we pretty much, skippers didn't get anything. So I think that's a huge flaw in the IFQ system. There should be something in place for those guys that caught that fish in the window

periods that they allocate quota for. And then, in 2011 we had a good friend that helped us out and purchased a boat out of Morro Bay, California. He told Rob that if he ran it for 2 years, brought it back to Morro Bay, he'd fix it up, because it needed a lot of work, and bring it back to Morro Bay and have Rob run it, he would sell us the boat, and he did. So that's how we ended up in Morro Bay fishing IFQ fish. [laughs]

SC: Okay, so I'm interested, you have a ton of knowledge on the differences in what happened over the years with the management, and I don't know if it's the same for all of the women or fishermen's wives, so I'm curious what some of your roles were throughout that time?

TS: Actually, throughout that time, my role in the fisheries really wasn't anything except for that I had a husband that that's what he talks about all the time. We kind of joke at home and always say it's foreplay [laughs] so, just listening, you know, listening to Rob talk and reading. I was interested, very interested, it was our livelihood. So I was interested, and reading, I wanted to know what was going on. And if I wanted to have a conversation with my husband, I better have a little bit of knowledge [laughs] so my role at that time really wasn't anything, except for, I was very lucky. Fishing is hard, but it has been able to let me stay at home and choose my, when I did work part-time or just to get out of the house and have adult conversation. It allowed me to do that, it allowed me to take the kids to school everyday, it allowed me to be president of the parent club, it allowed me to volunteer at the schools, it allowed me to go back to school when our youngest child went to school full time. And a lot of women have husbands that go away for months at a time, months and months at a time, Rob and I didn't have that kind of situation. In Oregon it was more 4 or 5-day trips offloading, gear work, boat maintenance, you know, working. But he was home 2 days a week and then he'd be gone, so that in the fishing industry was kind of hard. Just because you could never plan anything. You know there were so many vacations where we planned and we had tickets and everything, and Rob ended up not having to go because we had crappy weather up until the day we were supposed to go on vacation and the weather got good. Well [0:10:00] if you haven't fished for two weeks and the weather gets good then you can't just not make the trip. So there were a lot of vacations that Rob didn't get to go on. I was very lucky, my mother lived near us. His brother was a commercial fisherman in Astoria, OR and they worked on, sometimes they worked on boats together, but most of the times in their older years worked on different boats, or they each ran different boats. So I had his brother if I needed something, if there was an emergency, I had my brother, you know, we always, my mom never met Rob for like the first two years. We dated, at that time she was living in Montana, she didn't move back until a few years after Rob and I got together, but she had met his brother, his mother, his sister, and every time she came to visit Rob was out fishing. And she used to say, He's not real, he's not real. But I think, the fish, being in the fishing relationship, I think it's harder on the man. You know, I think not being there, you know, I got to do a lot of the kids' stuff. And I think it's hard, on Rob. Especially, I don't know, in our situation, I think there's some guilt there, but he tried very hard.

SC: Sure, so what is it like now being in Morro Bay and owning a boat?

TS: Morro Bay is different, from Astoria with the infrastructure. We, especially because the South Bay (F/V) is the only trawler in Morro Bay. It's one of the biggest fishing vessels in Morro Bay. There isn't, its not like if something happens we can just go and buy cable at Englund Marines, we'd have to have it shipped, from Astoria. We still do a lot of business with Englund Marine and mail-ordering stuff. So infrastructure is different. The weather is different, actually which kind of surprised us. Springtime is very, the weather, it blows crazy here in the springtime. So that's different. His fishing schedule is different and that's because we've changed how we fish. Before we, he would go and do 4-day, 5-day trips, come in, offload and bring in a lot more fish. The fishing vessel that he ran in Astoria was an 82-footer, the South Bay is 56 feet. So it doesn't hold as much, can't fish as bad of weather. When we first got here, we discovered Santa Monica Seafood didn't have Morro Bay fish at the time, it was another fish buyer. Before we got here, Rob had come down and talked to them, and they were all excited because having a trawler in a small fishing community is pretty important. Because it helps build a little bit more infrastructure. It helps the fuel dock, you know, we take a lot of fuel. It helps keep that ice moving and for the smaller boats that want fuel and ice and marine supply stores. So a trawler helps keep that in a small fishing community. I'm kind of lost right now, where was I? [laughs]

SC: The benefits of having a trawler...

TS: Oh, so that is something that's different in Morro Bay. But anyway, what it was, is we fished differently. And the reason why we do that is when we brought in our first couple loads, from fishing, well actually the first couple trips that Rob took were a disaster. Because it was August, three years ago this month, we got to town. The boat was in the shipyard in Astoria for about 5-months getting fixed. The IFQ system went into place January 2011. So when we came here, Rob had not fished in 2011. We were in the shipyard and then we came to Morro Bay, we had, he had no idea of the grounds. He had no idea where the fish were. I mean, the trips did not go well. And it was very scary and nerve-wracking because the IFQ system was in place and some of those overfished species, if you catch 365 pounds of them, you're shut down for the year. So it's very critical that you know your area, that you know where to get these fish. So it was kind of, the first couple of trips were like oh my goodness. And he kind of talked with some people around here, the Nature Conservancy was excellent, we met Rick Algert, who was the founder of the Morro Bay Community Quota Fund, who was giving us his knowledge. We brought in fish and discovered that they couldn't handle that much fish. At that time, we were bringing in dover and a few lingcod and some rockfish. You know, we're bringing in 20,000 pounds of fish and they couldn't process it, they didn't know what to do with it because it had been so long since a trawler had been here. So they're like, oh you can only bring in this much, and Rob's like, We're paying 3,000 dollars for fuel a trip, we're paying for ice, we're paying for an observer, we're paying. When he leaves the dock we're 4,500 dollars in debt and we can't make a pencil bringing in 10,000 pounds of dover for .35 cents. It's not going to work. It took some working and we found a buyer in San Jose that wanted to buy short spines, which are a fish, a great fish actually, Americans don't really eat them or really know about them, but the Asian markets love them and they want them live. And they'll pay \$5 a pound for them live. So Rob rigged up the boat with totes and circulation and salt and started targeting live fish. We would get 800-1200 pounds of live fish and only do, with live fish you have to make shorter trips so he goes and he gets fish, gets the live fish in and he comes in. So he makes shorter trips and more value fish so that we get more money, but it costs less fuel. It costs less quota lease, so that's how it has changed. We're learning how to fish differently and how to fish with the rules of the IFQ system.

SC: And can you talk a little bit about the IFQ system here, does it pertain to all of the species that are caught on the boat or are there specifics?

TS: You know, the specifics of species and stuff, I think your question is like, all groundfish that Rob catches, all groundfish is IFQ fish, but there's different species that you don't want to catch. And to tell you the truth, I could be wrong about that, I'm not sure because he catches skates, I don't know [0:20:00] if skates are one of the fish. I think there are some species of groundfish that you catch that may not be in the IFQ, but I could totally be wrong about that question. I just know that every pound, every pound of fish we catch, we pay a lease on. And yeah, I mean, I wouldn't quote me on anything about that.

SC: That's okay, another example of the complexities of fisheries management. Well, I am curious if you could talk a little bit about the community quota fund here in Morro Bay.

TS: Well the community quota fund is very new, but I think that the community quota fund is... Community quota funds are the key to making IFQ systems work. It keeps quota in small fishing ports, it helps new entrants get into the fishing industry, and that's what it is. I think it's pretty much, if anything is going to help small communities and small fishing vessels, there, we'll be seeing a lot more quota funds or we're going to see a lot more big vessels catching all the fish and small fishing communities won't exist.

SC: So, what are some of your roles here? Do you have a role in the community quota fund?

TS: No, Rob is the president of the community quota fund and we also are members, I'm an officer of Central California Seafood Marketing Association, Rob's the vice president of that organization. That organization is pretty much a marketing association, what it does is it helps us with the anti-trust laws, we pretty much have to have an organization that protects us so that we can discuss price, so that we can deal with the California risk pool. The California risk pool is working collaboratively with three other fishing ports: Half Moon bay and Fort Bragg, and then we have a gentlemen out of Moss Landing that's in our

group, working together to harvest target species and stay away from the bycatch species. We're letting people know what we find out there, what we see.

SC: And how did you, so you said you didn't have too many roles in the fishery back in Astoria, but it sounds like here in Morro Bay you have a lot more involvement.

TS: I think that's because the kids got older. You know, before I was pretty busy with soccer and football and gymnastics, school. The kids are older now so I have more time. I think that why, when I first got to town I joined Central Coast Women for Fisheries. I just had more time, is why I'm more involved now. I mean, I don't think that I wasn't involved before, I just wasn't in the organizations that I am now. Just because I didn't have the time then.

SC: Okay, and your kids, do they have any involvement? Do they go out fishing?

TS: I have one son that's a deckhand on the boat with Rob, that fishes with Rob year-round. Gentry, who's 25 and so he's been fishing with Rob here, in October it will be 2 years. And then James is 13, and he has done fishing trips with Rob, but this summer, it worked out that there was a spot open on the boat and so James went out as a crew, it was his first deckhand, he did 6 trips with Rob this summer and worked on the boat. And then my daughter helps me in the farmers (market), you know we just started those a month ago. Helps me in the farmer's markets, and then on Mondays my 13-year old son helps me in the farmer's markets.

SC: Can you talk a little bit about the farmer's market?

TS: The farmer's markets, is something Rob and I have wanted to do for years. Well not farmer's markets, we have wanted to market a portion of our fish to keep it local. I mean we have, in 2009, I believe we, 2009 or 2010, we tried to get a NFWF grant to do a community-supported fishery. At that time, they were kind of like, Whew that's crazy. [laughs] and I believe they've given out 2 or 3 since, but they've given them out to, and which I understand totally, they've given them out to more business majors and people that want to start more of a distributing type thing, CSF. Because nobody, it seemed to me at that time, giving a fisherman a grant to do that just seemed crazy. Which I don't, I mean, whatever. [laughs] so it's something that we've wanted to do for a long time. That is one thing that Morro Bay has given us the opportunity to do. In Astoria, they have a great farmer's market, but they have one, on Sunday afternoons. Here you can find a farmer's market within 20 miles everyday of the week, sometimes you can find 2. So, doing the farmer's market, it's really, at this point, we've only been doing it for a month, and we knew, when we started, we're not going to get rich off this, but it's a great way to be out there to educate, to let people know that we are here and that there are other ways to get our fish. So I think just talking with the people and meeting the people, and I, in this last month, there is so much room to grow in the farmer's markets. So, and even if we do grow, I don't think we're going to get rich off of it. But I think just being out there and talking with people and educating people about groundfish and the IFQ system and the Morro Bay quota fund. People are surprised, really with, I mean they don't know how much the fishermen have worked to make this a sustainable fishery, out of the trawl fishing. They, yeah I'm just surprised of what people think of trawl fishing.

SC: Do you think that they more often than not have a negative image?

TS: Oh I think that they really have a negative image of the trawl fishing because there is so much bad publicity out there by people by groups that don't speak the truth. So I think it's great to go out there and tell these people that we bring in live fish and that we work with the Nature Conservancy and that we're fishing Morro Bay community quota. That we work with the Monterey sanctuary. We want our children to be able to harvest fish, you know, in years to come. We don't want the fish to be gone. So it's very important to us, to let people know, and to harvest sustainably.

SC: And so do you think the IFQs is a good movement towards sustainable fishing?

TS: I think the IFQ system is a great move toward sustainable fisheries, conservation, the IFQ is a good thing. I think that the IFQ system needs to be fixed in a way that the IFQ system is the Wal-Mart of the fisheries. It's designed to consolidate. and it's [0:30:00] designed for the smaller boats and the smaller ports not to make it. So, that part of the IFQ system needs to be fixed. And I think it's being fixed with quota funds.

SC: So what are your greatest hopes for the future of fishing? Does it include your son's continuing to fish?

TS: I don't know if my older boy will continue to fish. I think that at this time, you know I can see him fishing another 5 years or so, but I don't know if that's what he would choose. My 13-year old son, I could see, or he wants to be a fisherman. He has always wanted to be a fisherman. And he loved it this summer, I could see my 13-year old son wanting to be a fisherman. But the older boy, nah. Maybe, but I don't know if it's his heart's desire.

SC: So, I have a couple questions left, but I was wondering if there was anything you can think of that you'd like to talk about that I haven't asked or mentioned.

TS: Well, and I don't know if we want to do this on... (Tiffani pulls out some files and accounting documents), I mean I can kind of explain to you why the IFQ system is, it's designed for consolidation. And the reason is, is because it's an expensive fishery. It's very expensive, and this time of year, and this is a good trip (pointing to figures on the accounting documents) this time of year is the best fishing, we get in quite a few trips, I mean Rob has been working like crazy these last couple months because this is a good time of year and we don't know what spring will bring. So this is an excellent trip to tell you the truth. So this right here, is what the plant paid us for our fish. Then we have the buyback loan that we pay, comes out of every check. And then, in, oh I want to say January 10, they put on this new fee, and it's the 3% cost recovery program, which now we pay 3% off the top of our gross. And I believe in July there was a letter sent out from NOAA, saying that they were going to extend that, that they weren't going to apply this fee because it was, the IFQ fisheries just wasn't stable enough, the boats weren't making the more money that they were supposed to make when the IFQ went into effect so they were going to discontinue that for the time being. We heard that, I want to say the middle of June, July something. And so I was like okay, I kept calling, calling the plant and what I have heard is, and I believe that this came from NOAA, is yeah they did decide that, but keep paying it. So this is our trip from August 13 (2014) and we're still paying the 3%, so I don't, you can maybe ask them about that. [laughs]

SC: Can I ask, so what does the cost recovery program, what does that money go towards?

TS: I have no idea. It goes to helping pay for the IFQ program, putting it in place. Because it's such an expensive program, probably dealing with the observers is what I would think. So, yeah helping pay for that. So, after that this is what we get (points to another figure on the documents). So I take this home and then I put this here and then right here, so this is what we pay for fuel for that trip, this is what we pay for ice for that trip, this here is our lease fee, and this, we have to lease our fish, every pound, because we weren't allocated fish so we lease. This is a great price for our fish because, I mean it's a lot of money, but compared to the open market, they give us a great discount for being new entrants. So that's a great price. This here is our observer costs for a 3-day trip. So every trip we have to pay that. This is taking out of the check, so this is what the crew will get paid off of. This right here, you're looking at Rob's, so Rob makes 18%, this is what he made for that trip. And then we take groceries are divided so we have two crew and captain so divided by three. So there are groceries for that trip. So this is what he takes home. So then we minus 30% for taxes and he gets this (points to final number on accounting documents). And then the guys make 11% so the guys come to this, minus the 30%, that's about what they're taking home. I don't take out taxes, for the fishing industry, they're considered self-employed so they're, when I do this, this is what they get and it's up to them to take out that 30%. Which a lot of young boys don't do that, you know it's hard to do. So if they were to do what they should do and set that money aside, this is what they'd make. And really that isn't that much money to tell you the truth. When you go and we have this amount and we're taking out this for expenses, we're taking out this for captain and crew share, our payment is \$80,000 a year, I shouldn't have said that. [laughs] you know, so we have a boat payment, we

have a huge boat payment and interest. And it totals up to about 2,000, Rob makes, averages about 40 trips a year. You divide that boat payment by 40 trips, \$2000 of that trip needs to be set aside for boat payment. Insurance, we pay huge for insurance, and it's about \$600 per month, or dividing the cost of insurance by 40 trips it's about 600 dollars. So this right here, is what it's costing, so this right here is what the boat gets to keep. [laughs] but then you're not taking into account, we did a ship yard trip, I mean every two years a boat should do a ship yard trip, get hauled out, get new things, that was 14,000 dollars. Every two years the boat should get cable, that's 10,000 dollars. Net, you know, you got to make sure your net's good so buying web, each year we get about 4,000 dollars worth of web. Each year we get, probably 3,000 dollars with the oil and lubricants. I mean, there is so many more added costs, so a small fishing vessel, it's hard. And so, that is why we are trying to market more of our fish ourselves, so that the price of the catch goes up for the boat. Marketing it whole, selling hopefully to restaurants, whole fish. To make a pencil.

SC: Right, because without going into the details of the numbers, you can see that it's not a lot and it is a labor of love and so what keeps you guys afloat?

TS: What keeps us afloat, we're living on love, no [laughs] I mean, it isn't a lot of money, but you know, it's what Rob has always done. It's kind of hard [0:40:00] to change, I mean he's been doing it for 25 years, it's kind of hard to change your job occupation at 47. It has supported us. I'm hoping it will continue to support us, it's harder now. But I think Rob and I both are passionate about having a sustainable fishery that will work for conservation and the fishermen. And to tell you the truth, the groups that we have worked with in Morro Bay and the Nature Conservancy have really been great. You know, I'm not a big fan of the environmental groups, but I'm pretty impressed with the Nature Conservancy.

SC: That's good to hear.

TS: Yeah.

SC: So if you had one piece of advice, or multiple pieces of advice, what would you give to someone thinking of becoming a fisherman or getting involved in the fishing industry or a woman thinking of marrying a fisherman? What would you tell them?

TS: Oh goodness. [laughs] I would say go for it. I mean because it is interesting, it's definitely not boring. Because something is always going on, so I think that it's either, the fishermen that can adapt to change and are willing to adapt to change, can make it work. But I think if you keep having, I mean you can't look at it, fishing isn't what it used to be. It isn't the same. So I think you have to be able to adapt to change. And, I think it does take a wife that's willing to go with the ups and downs because it's not consistent and that was kind of hard actually, because I'm very organized [laughs] you know, so it's not consistent. April could be great and then the next year could be nothing, so you kind of have to know when to, when you're making that money to put some away so that if that April or May isn't good, you can still pay your rent. I mean you can't create a budget you know, it's not like each month you can say, Ok I'm paying this much, this much, this much. Because you may not have that much or some months you may have way more so you have to know. So I would say, to be a fisherman you have to be able to adapt to change and to be a fisherman's wife you have to know that there's no consistency and you're going to go on a vacation by yourself. [laughs]

SC: I think those are good pieces of advice, well Tiffani that's all I have, if you have anything else to add?

TS: No, I think that's good.

SC: Think we covered it all?

TS: I think so.

SC: All right, well thank you.

TS: Thank you! Very nice.

[End of Interview 0:44:18]