NATIONAL OCEANIC AND ATMOSPHERIC ADMINISTRATION

VOICES ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH NOAA HERITAGE AND THE NATIONAL WEATHER SERVICE

AN INTERVIEW WITH LAUREL BRYANT

FOR THE

NOAA 50th ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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IVINS, UTAH

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Molly Graham: This is an oral history interview for the NOAA 50th Oral History Project. The interview is with Laurel Bryant on November 13, 2020. The interview is taking place remotely, with Laurel in Ivins, Utah, and I'm in Scarborough, Maine. I like to start at the beginning. Could you say when and where you were born?

Laurel Bryant: I was born in Mount Vernon, Washington, on March 26, 1960.

MG: I am really curious about your family history. Could you trace it back for me as far as you can? I know you have some roots in Machias, Maine.

LB: Yes. My grandfather came from Machias, Maine. I understand that his father and brother worked in the timber industry. I don't know what prompted them to move West, but then they moved to Washington State. They continued in the timber industry, and both his brother and father died from black lung very young. This was before you had any health laws or anything to protect you. So I think at the age of thirteen or twelve is when my grandfather then had to quit school, and he went to work in the timber industry in the mills. He was still a young – I think he was still a teenager. I don't know if he was sixteen or seventeen. But he and another young man apparently got into a race to see how much wood they could chop. It was what they called a feeder saw that would grab the log and pull it in and cut it. Well, he had long sleeves, as his work [inaudible], and it grabbed his arm. He had the presence of mind to get down on his hands and knees. When it grabbed him up near his shoulder, he pulled away [inaudible] arm. Of course, he was bleeding to death. They put him on a flat car, got him into town – I don't know if the town was Mount Vernon. I'm not certain about that part. But wherever it was, it was a small town. They got him into the hospital, I guess. They gave up on him. "He's dead." Well, this is right out of Hollywood. I've always thought this would make a great movie. There was a young surgeon that didn't give up and kept working on him and saved his life. He was apparently in a quarantine tent. Of course, this is way in the late 1800s, early 1900s – no antibiotics. So he was completely quarantined. I guess it was well over a month or more before my great-grandmother could go in and see him. He was a cornet player. That's how he actually met my grandmother. He tried out for my great-grandfather's band. Anyway, when she walked in, the doctor said, "Don't cry. He can't walk yet. He's very, very thin. But he's doing fine. Just don't get upset." So she walked in. He apparently said, "Look, Ma, I figured out how I can still play my cornet." He'd had the nurse hook up a sling. My great-grandmother apparently burst into tears and had to walk out. But the real interesting part of the story is that the surgeon – you're talking about a period of time where there was no sensitivity to being handicapped. A man without an arm is going to struggle in that early century economy. And that surgeon put my grandfather through business college. Then my grandfather ended up working with the timber industry as a bookkeeper and an accountant and paid the surgeon back. So that's the kind of world it was, not terribly sensitive, and yet, there was clearly good strong chutzpah. So that's my connection to Machias. The other side, my grandmother, that side of the family – my great-great-grandfather came directly over from Denmark and moved to Canada, and then later on into Washington. My great-grandfather always was his own businessman. He ran the first telephone company or exchange in Mount Vernon. But he always had a band. He made violins. He built the family's house. He was a really interesting character. He had an opening for a cornet player. My grandmother was a very accomplished pianist and teacher. Anyway, the rest is history. Harold

Nathanial Bryant was my grandfather. My grandmother was Cora Juanita Johnstone. So that's how they met.

MG: Were these your mother's parents?

LB: Yes. This is all on my maternal side. I do not know much about my father's side. I never lived with him. I'm a bit of a love child. My mom had me at the old age of forty-one, back in 1960. My father had asked her to marry, but she had had enough of married life and doing it a man's way. She'd been in a very, very unhappy marriage for a long time. She was like, "No, I'm doing this one on my own." I guess I was three months old, and she picked me up and left Mount Vernon in 1960 and figured it out. So I was always raised as an only child. I did know my father. My father and his wife and my mom actually continued being friends. When I was sixteen, my father's wife wanted to get to know me. So I got invited up there and spent birthdays. It was a very modern family. I think we were a little bit unusual. It was interesting to meet my brother and sister. I have a half-brother and sister. When we first met, it was like looking in the mirror. It was really strange how many features my father was responsible for. I always thought I looked like my mom until I met my dad. [laughter]

MG: Can you tell me a little bit more about your mom and what her life was like raising you as a single mother during a time where that was less common than today?

LB: It really was. Divorce was not popular, so there was discrimination against divorced women. She ended up losing two jobs to bosses that would call her in on the weekend and chase her around the desk. She didn't give in to that and so the next Monday, she'd show up, and she was fired. I think one of the interesting things about my mom that I never knew until I was much, much older, is – and I guess this also shows the difference in the times of our economy. When I was very young, at one point, she didn't have a job, and things were really rough. She was still looking, and she actually had to go to the food bank to get enough food. This comes from my sister and my aunt that told me this story. She did not take – at the time, when you went to the food bank, they would stamp the paper bag with the name, so it was very obvious that you'd gone to the food bank. My mom was horribly embarrassed. She was of the greatest generation, raised during the Depression, lived literally four and five to a bed in a house that Great Grandpa Johnstone built. Because the first industries to go are timber, so, of course, my grandfather lost that. You don't do any construction during a depression. But anyway, she waited until night before she brought in the groceries. Then she went out back, to the backyard of a duplex, and she buried the bag. She didn't want anybody to know. It was interesting how life unfolded for her because, at one point, here she was in an apartment, very worried about "How am I going to pay the rent," still looking for a job, and she got a knock at the door, and it was the owner of the apartment complex. He says, "I understand you're a bookkeeper." She said, "Yes." He goes, "I need a bookkeeper." He says, "I'll bring in all the equipment. You can just use the apartment." So my mom was in the first wave of working moms that got to telework if you will. She worked right there. My playpen and bassinet were right next to her desk. I think one of my favorite stories that she told about – because she always wished she could go back and find this young girl." It was during one of the times that she didn't have a job and was very concerned about money, and it was Halloween. She didn't have enough money to go out and buy candy. I was still a little, little baby. I don't even think I was a year yet. So she turned

off all the lights so that no kids would come up. At one point, the door insistently knocks, and the doorbell is ringing. So my mom goes and opens it up. It's a young girl, and she's got this huge bag of candy. She's kind of sneaking around and looking. My mom is saying, "I'm so sorry. I ran out of candy. I don't have anything for you, but have fun." She goes, "Well, I'm not done trick-or-treating yet, and my mom's not going to let me keep all of this candy." So she gave my mom handfuls of candy so my mom could turn her porch light on. I always thought that was such a – she always wished she would have found out where that little girl lived and go talk to her mom and tell her. So there were some really interesting points where the universe unfolded really nicely for us. I think when I really understood my mom – not understood – appreciated – was when I got my very first job in Washington, DC, and I landed the position of legislative assistant doing environmental affairs for a congressman from New Jersey. I was so excited. It only started [at] $17,500 gross a year, and we're talking 1989. Now, in 1989, it's all relative, but it still was poverty wages. But that's how you started. I remember finding the old phone booths – you don't find those anymore. It was in the Cannon [House] Office Building on the Hill. I called my mom up, and I was so excited. I said, "Do you think I should take it? It's only seventeen-five gross, mom. I'm not going to have anything. I'll barely be able to pay the rent." She goes, "Oh, honey. I never grossed seventeen-five in my entire life." I remember just being dumbfounded because that is below the poverty line. I never knew that. I always assumed that I was middle-class. I think it's because, again, the greatest generation – my mom made it work. But when she'd tell me, "Honey, I don't have enough money for us to save to go on vacation," that's why. I realized if I wanted to try out for cheerleading, if I wanted to do the ski club and ski school, she was fine with that, but I had to pay for it myself. So I would quit asking to do those things. It was that moment that she told me that, and I reflected back going, "Wow, all these years. Now I get why she said, 'Of course you can, but you need to do the babysitting, and you need to figure out how you're going to pay for that.'" So we really did live paycheck to paycheck and got away with it. She was really strong and very smart, incredibly book-read and kind, just one of the kindest people I ever knew. I am definitely what I am because of her. She was definitely a trailblazer. She never knew what a trailblazer she was, other than the fact that she always said she wanted to do it her way. And that was her favorite song – Frank Sinatra. [laughter]

MG: She sounds like a feminist, but did she identify as one?

LB: I would say she identified as a feminist. Maybe not a bra-burning feminist. I think that was something that she would regard as a trivial distraction. But in terms of equality and wages and all of that – she really suffered discrimination, and she knew she did. She never had a college education. Her parents had saved up. Again, it was coming out of the Depression. My mom ended up having appendicitis and having to have an emergency appendix operation. So money for college was gone. So she ended up raising me and doing her entire life on three months' worth of business school. Yes, business school back in the 1930s. She was born in 1919. I think that's a really good question, Molly. No, I don't think she regarded herself as a feminist, but she definitely recognized the discrimination and the barriers that she faced and the disadvantages she had at not having an education and all of that. But she was feminist enough to know, "Yes, I love you, and you're going to be the father of my child, but I'm done. I'm going to do it my way." I think that's really gutsy.

MG: Right. You mentioned she was born in 1919. So she lived through the Great Depression and World War II. Did she share stories with you about those eras?

LB: Oh, yes. Absolutely. For the Depression bit, she was raised in a very – hostile environment might be too strong a term. My great-grandfather and grandmother, the Johnstones, my grandmother's parents, did not like my grandfather at all. He liked to drink. He wasn't a drunkard at all, but he would drink alcohol. He was a fun-loving, apparently fabulous storyteller. I have great stories about Papa Hal. That's what everybody called him, Papa Hal. I never met him, but I named my son after him because the stories of him were so larger-than-life that I feel like I knew him. So when the Depression hit, he lost his job, he was trying to do everything he could to make money, and my grandmother did. They actually both ended up working – my grandmother as a nurse and my grandfather as an orderly – at the mental institution, Northern State Hospital, back when we actually had those institutions. But my mother and her two siblings had to go live with Grandma and Grandpa Johnstone. They really were three to a bed, three and four to a bed. My aunt slept at the foot of the bed while my great aunts, three of them, slept in the bed. My great-aunt Dottie suffered polio. Two people in my family suffered [from] polio. She lost the complete use of her legs. My aunt would always talk about how cold Aunt Dottie's feet were because, of course, there was no circulation. So Grandpa Johnstone – they were not friendly to my mom and siblings. My mom really felt that. She was the oldest. My grandma and grandpa told her, "We really rely on you to watch out for your brother and sister." My mom really had a duty complex. She was kind of obsessed with duty. She always put everything else first before her – not the healthiest way to maybe live in terms of your own happiness. That was the Depression. They raised their own food. They canned everything, all those typical, Depression-era stories. When it came to World War II, I think the most striking story I remember my mom telling me – she was dating [the man] who ended up being my half-sister's father. He took her out to a movie. After they came out from the movie – no. First, they went to Whidbey Island. They toured one of the ships. Mom was coming out – I don't know what she said – "Nice boat," or who knows. I have no idea what she said. Anyway, it was the captain there. He goes, "Well, I guess she's going to see some action now." It did not dawn on my mom; [she] had no concept of what happened. This is December 7, 1942. Then they went to a movie. When they came out of the Mount Vernon movie theater, all of a sudden, there were military trucks going down the middle of Main Street. There was tarpaper. Soldiers were nailing tarpaper over the windows. It was like you walked out into a completely different world. As I've gotten older, of course, you appreciate that more. I think as you get older, you always appreciate your parents more because, all of a sudden, you hit some part of your life that you go, "Oh, I was such a jerk not to understand that." Anyway, those are the stories I remember most.

MG: There were a few things I wanted to clarify for the record. You mentioned they were tar-papering the windows. Was that because there was a blackout drill?

LB: Not a blackout drill. Because they were in Washington State, and they were right next to Whidbey Island military base, there was great concern that Japanese planes would make it over and could bomb. So as I understand it even the rooftops of the buildings and the Quonsets on Whidbey and any important buildings were actually painted to look like pastoral scenes so that it would camouflage them. All of the black tarpaper – everybody's windows had to be blacked out. You couldn't even go outside and have a cigarette because that could be seen from the air.

So I don't think that was true of most towns, but I think for West Coast towns and any of the military installations there, I think that was probably the protocol at the time.

MG: Okay. Forgive me if I misunderstood this. You mentioned your mother was on a date with your half-sister's father. That wasn't your biological father?

LB: No. No. That was the man that she married that was really very unhappy. They were married for twenty-plus years. My other half-sister and I – she and I are not – she's actually passed away now. She's twenty-one years older than me. So I, for all intents and purposes, was an only child.

MG: Right. I'm sorry for bouncing around. I wanted to understand better how your grandmother's family migrated to the Washington State area because I know they were homesteading in Kansas.

LB: So my grandmother's mother actually came over on a wagon train from Kansas. Her last name was Stern. I think that's when we did Ancestry, and it turns out I do have Eastern European Jew in my bloodline. I think that's where it probably came from. I think what was interesting is that my mom, in terms of her political orientation, would love to – listen, my family has always engaged in political conversation and discussions. We've always been the dinner table family conversing. Even at a young age, my mom said she would sit there next to the potbelly stove listening to grandma and grandpa – her grandma and grandpa – argue. He was very much the Democrat and very much an upstanding citizen in the community that really helped people, whereas grandma was very Republican and – "You don't give things away," and so very anti-welfare, whereas grandpa was very [pro]-welfare. But mom was very instilled with, "We don't need welfare." You could just see that throughout her life. It was like, "I don't need help." I found out something interesting. My mother, of course, because she was below the poverty line, she should have filed tax returns every year to get money back. My mother innocently – she was raised in an era where you believed in government, and you respected government. She never ever filed tax returns to get any money back because she felt other people would need that more, and that she knew she would someday be relying on social security. So she never filed a tax return. When I grew up and got married, doing your tax returns are an important thing. You have to do that all the time. But I never did that as a kid. I never had that experience.

MG: I'm curious about your early childhood. What are some of your earliest memories from growing up?

LB: Oh my gosh. I have some super early memories that are freakishly early. I actually have a very vivid memory of being in my crib. This doesn't need to be included, but just so that you know because it is funny. I've always thought how weird this was. I actually, to this day, can see, looking through my crib slats, in our backyard, on the other side of the fence was a grocery store and a fairly major highway. It was when mom and I were living in the duplex. The sign was "Art's Food Center," and I can still see the neon sign, and it went around and around, and I would watch that. Then, it was so weird. Later on, I remember that. I remember asking my mom, "Where were we? I remember seeing this sign." She goes, "You can't remember that." I

was eighteen months old or something. I said, "No, I really do." I just have these – I remember falling asleep on a scatter rug watching my mom work. I think my fondest memories really start when we lived in our last apartment. This was just before the [Lyndon B.] Johnson administration. See? I mark everything by music and who was president. We lived in an apartment that was a new complex at the time. It was only two-storied. It was a two-story walkup. It was on the corner. Our living room had a squared-off window, so it was a window here and then a window here. That window was huge. You could lookout, and we could see the Olympics [Mountains]. So we saw the mountains every day. There was just a lot of memories that happened there. That was when the great earthquake happened in 1963, I want to say, maybe '64. Our TV almost fell off the credenza it was sitting on. For years, before my mom could get a new TV, the TV tube inside had tilted, so you kind of had the watch the TV at an angle. [laughter] That's where we got our dog Pebbles, my first dog. She lived until she was like twenty, nineteen, or twenty.

MG: Wow.

LB: Yes. She was a little Chihuahua-Pomeranian mix – real cute. When she was little, a little puppy, she fit in my mom's pocket of her house dress. Our favorite thing that my mom and I would do when the weather was nice – we would go down to Carkeek Park on Puget Sound, and we would have a picnic. Mom would have made fried chicken or whatever, or we'd go get fast food, which at the time was either Kentucky Fried [Chicken] or McDonald's. There really wasn't anything else. Yes. We would go to the beach, and we'd have our little dog and read and watch the waves. So those are some of my favorites. Then, I think, June of 1965 or '66, mom had enough money. The Johnson Administration passed some kind of stimulus that allowed single women – it was targeted, I believe, to single women, and it allowed or gave some incentive to the banks to do thirty-year fixed mortgages. The interest rates were low enough, and my mom was able to qualify for a loan. My mother never paid more than a hundred dollars a month on our mortgage. The mortgage companies, as the property got more and more valuable, particularly in the '80s, they started to get really nasty because they wanted to get rid of that thirty-year mortgage. Of course, because they could make so much more money. My mom never – yes, she paid off the house in the thirty years. She stuck with it. [laughter] Anyway, moving into the house, that was pretty exciting, to have our own house, a backyard, all of those good things.

MG: Can you describe the house?

LB: It was very tiny. Little two-bedroom built during the war or just after the war. Yes. One little tiny bathroom and linen closet, and two tiny – it was little, but it was hers. We had some rough times. She got very sick with what I now understand is endometriosis because I ended up going through exactly the same thing and had to have a full-blown hysterectomy. But when my mom had to have it, and it was an emergency, and she almost died – we almost lost her – it was 1968. I know that because that was the year – it was when *Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid* came out. My mom was in the hospital. My sister came up from Portland, Oregon, she and my nephew, who is three years older than me, to take care of mom. She was in the hospital for, I think, two weeks, maybe a little longer, almost died. But no health insurance. The way my sister dealt with us kids and just the trauma of it all, we went and saw *Butch Cassidy and the*

Sundance Kid almost every night at the drive-in. It was winter, so it was cold. When mom got back out of the hospital, she went through two months of convalescence in my bedroom. I remember it being Christmas because we brought her a little music box Christmas tree that could be by the nightstand. But at the time, hysterectomies were a big deal. They're still a big deal. I had to go through a six-week convalescence. But with no insurance and those bills coming through, it bankrupted us. I remember we had really nice furniture; she was so proud of it. It was cheap. It was J.C. Penney and a place that doesn't even exist anymore called Butler Brothers, a discount furniture store. But it was hers – very '60s. It's so weird. It was mid-century, and that's all popular again. I remember her hiding a stool that she really liked, and then they came, and they took everything else, and we had no furniture. It was really devastating. They didn't take the stove or the refrigerator. From that point on, we had old, broken-down hand-me-down furniture that friends would give us. That was really devastating to mom. I think it was later on the '70s; there was a sale at, I think it was J.C. Penney, and we were able to get a new couch – super '70s. I look back on that, and it's just like *ugh*, I can't believe we even liked that style, but it's all there was. But yes, there were some tough times, but I didn't appreciate it at the time. At the time, I didn't think anything about it. I look back, and I realize how traumatic it must have been for my mom. My father, who was just absolutely horrified that she filed for bankruptcy, just absolutely turned his back on her, apparently for a period of time. That really crushed her. He never did anything to support us. He gave her a hammer, and he gave her a car. That was it. [laughter] However, when I graduated from high school, by then, we'd gotten closer. We were actually much closer to his wife. He gave me a certificate of deposit for ten-thousand dollars. This was in the '80s when interest was at twelve and thirteen percent. So I took those ten-thousand dollars, and I just kept rolling it over and over and over. I worked full-time and part-time; it depended on the job and what, but I only went to college half-time. I went to college on that and paid for my own gas. Oh, my dad did get me a car after I graduated from high school, an old used Vega. Fill it up with a tank of gas and bought a case of oil because it burned oil like a demon. But yes, I put myself through college with that. That was a really good investment. A lot of the money that I had saved I had planned on going to Europe. I wanted to go to Europe for a year and do the Eurail pass and all of that. Instead, I got hit by a truck. My mom and I were on our way to the University of Washington. She was retired by then, and she was just auditing classes. So we were going to the college together. My father had passed away, and we'd gotten through the funeral and all of that. We were on our way to start the winter quarter at the University of Washington, and a man, an older gentleman on his way to the doctor, didn't stop for a stop sign and T-boned us. I wasn't wearing my seatbelt, and I smacked into that windshield really hard. I ended up pretty broken up. As fate would have it, when my father was dying, literally, my mom said, "You got to get here. He's going now." He was at his house, and my mom was up there helping his wife. So I did a quick drive-by, drop off my registration for winter quarter, and I forgot to check the extra five dollars for student insurance. Forgot to check the box. Didn't even think about it. So all the money I had saved ended up getting eaten up in healthcare costs. We went to court – the two insurance companies fighting. I don't know that we even got ten-thousand dollars out of it. It was enough to try to get – well, no. We never got mom's car replaced. It never was enough. Two insurance companies and I think we had the same insurance company or some damn thing. Anyway, I laugh at these insurance companies. Like, "Yeah, right." [laughter] So I ended up finishing college, just barely. I didn't finish what they called an honors thesis; I was in the honors program. I didn't really finish it. I was exhausted by then. It took me eight years to get a four-year degree because I

only went half-time. I was really ready to get a job. I wrote an essay and got accepted to a program basically on libertarianism. It was a week-long seminar of speakers and professors and all that, and it was in Berkeley, California. I had written this essay. It was one of my professors that said, "You know." Because I always was questioning. I really was at the very beginning of what now is common practice in environmentalism, and that is using market mechanisms to incentivize good conservation and stewardship behaviors, as opposed to only penalties. I was fascinated by that. This is a professor that I remember raising my hand, saying, "Why are you regarding pollution as only a negative externality that cannot be avoided? That's ridiculous. You need to charge them for the use of that. Then that gives them the incentive to behave otherwise, not just the penalties for polluting the water, and not just the regulations against it, but let's work with that." Anyway, it was that kind of line of questioning and conversation that my professor and I would get into. So he said, "You know, you might want to try out for this. I know some of these professors. Here's the thing. You've got to write an essay." Well, I got accepted. After that, I realized I was exhausted from school. I just couldn't get myself to go back. I wanted to finish up my last year. I didn't want to go through the honors thesis process and all that. The fire in the belly was out, and I was ready to get a job. I was also ready to get out of Seattle. I was in a relationship that just was never going to go anywhere, and we'd known each other and been together for years. I didn't want to hurt his feelings. I just needed to get out. So I was able to get a scholarship – more essays, more blah, blah, blah. I wrote about that environmental issues and natural resources were going to be the thing that ushered in the next century, that that was going to be the focus. I used the Bhopal chemical release in Bhopal, India – I think you're way too young to remember that. [Editor's Note: Ms. Bryant is referring to the December 1984 gas leak disaster at a Union Carbide, India, Limited pesticide plant in Bhopal that resulted in three thousand estimated deaths initially and fifteen thousand estimated deaths since.] It was an enormous chemical release and a poisonous cloud that killed thousands of people. It happened in the '80s. I think it's called the Bhopal incident. Then, the other one was the – what was the name of it? Islip? Anyway, it was a garbage barge that had all this toxic garbage. [Editor's Note: Ms. Bryant is referring to the infamous *Mobro 400*, nicknamed "garbarge," which, in 1987, was loaded with refuse from a full landfill on Long Island, New York, and traveled to Central America and back trying, unsuccessfully, to find a port to unload the garbage. After five months, the garbage was eventually incinerated in Brooklyn.] Nobody would accept it. So it kept going up and down the Atlantic Coast, trying to find a place to go. So I used those two examples of this is where environmental law is going to start addressing – we're going to start seeing changes. Anyway, I ended up getting a scholarship from Burlington Northern [Railroad] and – I think it was Union Carbide. They sent me to Washington, DC. I got an internship with an environmental group called Environmental Action in Washington, DC. I was the assistant to the attorney, who was working then on the reauthorization of the Clean Air Act. It was when [John] Dingell from Michigan, where all the cars were made, was very anti. Henry Waxman from California was the other member on that committee. He was a Democrat. So was Dingell, but Dingell was all auto and all union, and Waxman was liberal California. Anyway, that was my first introduction on the Hill. I realized this is where I can thrive. I can get a job here, and I can do it. So when my internship was over, I had a fiancé by then. We met in Berkeley and corresponded. So before I went to my internship, which started on January 3rd or 2nd, or something like that – no, January 5th – something like that. Doesn't matter. He convinced me, "Why don't you come to my place in Chicago and spend Christmas with me? I'd like to introduce you to my family," and so I did. It was fabulous. It was remarkable. I'd never

been to Chicago. I'll never forget how flat it looked when you're flying in. I had never seen such flatness in my life or bigness. I mean, the city at night, when I flew in, it just went on and on and on. It was endless lights to the horizon. We woke up the next morning to three feet of snow. It was amazing. That was the amazing part. When he finished college – so when I finished my internship at the end of March, I went up to Chicago, lived with him, and then when he finished college, we moved back down to DC in August of 1988. Hottest summer I've ever been through in my life. I'd never experienced humidity like I did in Chicago and DC. It was like, "Oh my god. I cannot believe that the forefathers decided to stop and build the nation's capital in Washington, DC." I would have gone, "Let's just keep moving West." It's so sticky and god-awful. That was during the election for President [George H.W.] Bush. [Ronald] Reagan was done, and Bush was running. Now that I know Washington, DC culture, when you're that close to an election, nobody hires anybody. Everybody's just waiting to see who wins the race, and then they'll start making plans from then on. So you can't get hired. So here it was August of '88. So I end up doing temp work with a place in DC that you had to have a bachelor's or higher, and started me at 9.50 an hour. I mean, 1988 – hey, I took it. We found a little condo, a rental. Yes, it started off the career. It was in February of '89 that then I landed the job on the Hill. Things were opening up, and people were interviewing, and that's how I got it. I never looked back. I hit the career rocket, and the rest is NOAA [National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration] history.

MG: There are a couple of things I want to go back to. You talked about when your mother was in the hospital, and it was your sister who watched you. Was she someone that would take care of you?

LB: Well, no. She lived in Portland with her husband and her son, but it was before Christmas. It was after Thanksgiving and before Christmas. So I think it was that period of time. I think my nephew was able to be out of school. He was three years older. I was eight. So he would have been eleven or twelve. They came up, the two of them, and we took care of my mom. Then, when she healed up, and it was after Christmas and all of that, then life got back to normal. She went back to work. They held her job. My mom worked at a nonprofit my whole life. Well, not my whole life, but from the time I remember – from about three or four years old, she worked at a United Way organization called Family Counseling Services. I didn't really understand what that was at the time, but they were filled with psychiatrists and psychologists and social workers. My mom was the bookkeeper. She was there until she retired. There were some interesting things that happened there. I think the things that are interesting to me – again, back to the feminine groundbreaking thing that mom and I were in, there were not a lot of single mothers with single children. The ones that maybe were, I would venture to say – well, I don't know. I don't know what to venture to say. You'd have to go back and look at what the data was. But we were very unusual. We were not common. They [Family Counseling Services] really embraced my mom. So my mom could take me to the office during the summer and everything. I spent the summers there, and I helped the switchboard lady. I helped lick envelopes. Mom would put me to work. I remember that the most important father figure – besides Johnny Carson, who was the most consistent male figure in my life – was the deputy director if you will. There was the director, Dr. Joseph Kahley. But the deputy was Dr. William Bell. Dr. Bell was an African American. He actually had gone to college and roomed with Dr. Martin Luther King. When Dr. King was killed, my mom's office closed. From that point on, we always celebrated

Dr. King's birthday. My mom would take me out of school. This was before it ever passed in law. We went to the church where Dr. Bell went and joined that. I think we were the only two white faces in the audience. It was Mount Zion Baptist Church in the Central District in Seattle. My mom felt very strongly about it. When I would go through troubles, I would go talk to Dr. Bell. He'd sit me on his lap. The sad thing that I remember is that his office always was filled with cigarette smoke. You'd go walk into his office, and there was that blue haze. So he died when I was a teenager, probably about fifteen-years-old, fourteen – don't really remember. But when we went to his funeral, Coretta Scott King was there. So I never got to shake her hand or do anything because that would have been inappropriate – like, "Oh, hi. Can I have your autograph?" But I did get to see her at his funeral. So some really remarkable things – always supporting my mom. Then in retirement, when she retired, it was fun. All of a sudden, we became college buddies together. So those final two years at the University of Washington – was it two years? No, probably the last year, she audited classes, and we'd meet at the HUB [Husky Union Building] and the pub and the coffee shop. It was fun.

MG: Yes, I want to ask you some more questions about that experience, but I'm curious about these social movements and how they were explained to you. You were fairly young during the Civil Rights and the Vietnam War era.

LB: Yes. Well, one of the big ones, of course, was the gay movement. That was when they termed themselves gay. Right across the street in what later became the Pioneer Square Theater, which I loved, but at the time, it was an empty space, and the gay liberation took it over. My mom's office window – they were on the fourth or fifth floor. I can't remember which. I'm surprised I forgot that. I can still remember the phone number, though. But it looked right out, and I would see some of the most colorful gay men in drag going into it. I was just fascinated by it. My middle name is Gay, and so for one year, I thought, "Maybe I should put an E on the end of it." Then, after a year, it was like, "Well, that's stupid. That's my name, and it's okay that they've got …" Mom was pretty liberal. She wasn't really pro. She's of her typical generation – "Oh, lesbianism, and this and that." It was kind of like, "I don't need to know. You do what you do." That was her approach to that – don't ask, don't tell kind of thing. I'm sure my mom probably agreed with that. There was that. Certainly, the Vietnam War. I remember asking her who won, and she said, "Nobody." It certainly was the war on TV. I remember those TV announcements. I remember Watergate like it was yesterday. [Editor's Note: On June 17, 1972, several burglars were arrested inside the Watergate office complex when they had attempted to break in the Democratic National Committee offices. After being reelected and attempting to cover it up, Richard Nixon resigned as President in 1974. Vice President Gerald Ford assumed the presidency and pardoned Nixon of all his crimes.] Oh my god. My mom watched Watergate. The minute she got home, the TV was on. What else do I remember? The night that Bobby [Kennedy] was assassinated. [Editor's Note: On June 6, 1968, Sirhan Sirhan shot and killed Senator Robert Kennedy.] I was asleep, and my mom came and woke me up. She was just in tears, and she didn't want to be alone. I remember seeing the picture of Rosey Grier, who at the time was an ex-football player, kind of actor, big African-American dude. He's the one that sat on top of Sirhan Sirhan to stop him from getting away. I remember seeing the pie tin slid under Bobby's head. That was back before they could edit stuff like that. You were watching it live. Yes. Those were some things that I do remember. But I think one of the funniest things – because of the cultural revolution, it was also at the time where they started sex education. The

funny story about that is we're driving in the car, and my mom almost drove off the road; she was laughing so hard. She couldn't believe it. So we're driving along – and I think I'm in fourth grade. I said, "So, mom, I totally get that the mommy has the egg and that the daddy has the sperm and that it penetrates [the egg]. What I don't understand is how does the daddy's sperm know to leave the daddy and go into the mommy's egg." My mom, she was like, "After all of this and sex education, and I get the million-dollar question?" [laughter] My mother described it as a sneeze. She said, "You know when you have to sneeze, or you have to hiccup. That's kind of like what happens to the dad." [laughter] Isn't that funny?

MG: Yes. [laughter]

LB: Those my moments of the cultural revolutions of the '60s.

MG: I'll have to remember that in ten years when I give my kid "the talk." [laughter]

LB: I never had to do it with Nathaniel. I don't know. I think they got all that – I don't know. There's so much online now.

MG: It's scary. Did you always live in Mount Vernon?

LB: No, my mom left Mount Vernon when I was three months old and packed up what she could in her car, and went south to Seattle. So I always lived in Seattle most of my life. Again, I can't remember when my mom got the house. I don't know if it was June of '65 or '66. But I'd always lived in that one house until I left Seattle in December of '87.

MG: Can you tell me about the schools you attended, starting in elementary or grammar school?

LB: My mom was one of the first ones – when I first went to school, I went to primary, and then first and second at a private Lutheran school where they had after-care, so a lot of working parents. My mom, I think, was one of two single moms. She would park the car there, I guess, and then she'd take the bus. Anyway, one of the after-care givers lived right there in the neighborhood that now you could never even afford to live in that neighborhood. It's near Green Lake. It's those old World War II bungalow-style – beautiful area now, and it was then, too. That's where the church was located. When my mom had to work late, or she missed the bus, then I would go home with Mrs. Miller. I would stay with her and her husband. A couple of times, I actually spent the night, and I don't know why. I don't remember what mom was doing or what. But once or twice I spent the night there or at least fell asleep, and then mom would come get me. Mrs. Miller's husband, I called him "Grandpa Go-Go." I loved their house because they had so many cool things. It was the first time I'd ever seen canned mandarin oranges. I thought that was so exotic. I'd never been introduced to that. Mrs. Miller was really eccentric, and so was her husband. She had a genie bottle that was the exact replica of *I Dream Of Jeannie*. So I loved that. We would always watch – oh, what was that one with (Adam West?) in it? *The Wild Wild West*. It was when it was a new show. It was when it was actually on. So we would watch *Wild Wild West*. They were the first – mom and they became friends for a brief period of time when I was young. They took me out fishing. The first time I ever caught a fish was with Grandpa Go-Go. We also went up to the mountains and the snow. We didn't

ski; I think we just played. Anyway, then elementary school, I started third grade in public school because Dr. Kahley and Dr. Bell felt, "Joyce, she's very protected there. She needs to get out in public school. You shouldn't have to be affording this. You don't need to." So that certainly saved mom some money, I'm sure. I have no idea how much it cost to send me to private [school]. So started in Parkwood Elementary. I don't even remember – I think toward the end of my time there – our schools went from kindergarten to sixth grade, and then middle school was seven, eight, and nine. Then, high school was ten, eleven, twelve. I just don't understand why the rest of the country doesn't do it; it makes so much sense. Because sixth graders have a right to be the big frog in the pond. Over there on the East Coast, at least down there in Virginia and Maryland, where my son grew up, the sixth graders are [in] middle school. It's six, seven, and eight, and then nine, ten, eleven, and twelve. I think it's just dumb. I just don't think sixth graders are ready. Seventh graders are a whole different world than sixth graders. Anyway, I think I remember that during the time that [George] Wallace got shot. [Editor's Note: George Wallace served four terms as the 45th Governor of Alabama, and in 1972, he ran in the 1972 Democratic presidential primaries. In May of that year, Wallace survived an assassination attempt while campaigning in Laurel, Maryland. Wallace was paralyzed from the waist down from his injuries.] I remember Wallace getting shot, and our principal came over the loudspeaker, and she shut the school down. Over Wallace. Boy, did she show her colors there. [laughter] My god. Yes. I think [what's] interesting about jobs – flash-forwarding more toward my career and moving into NOAA, I think what was interesting and what I was so lucky to witness at the time was the bipartisanship. It was all about – each committee had a mission, and it was about that mission. It wasn't about red or blue. On my committee that dealt with natural resources, sure, there's the conservative bent that's all about business and less about environmental regulations – yes. Okay, but there's a whole lot of gray in that. My boss, who was a moderate Republican from New Jersey, voted all the time on committee with the gay Democrat from Massachusetts, Gerry Studds. Whereas, the Democrat, Billy Tauzin from Louisiana – oil, oil, fishing, fishing, all of that – voted all the time – despite his being a Democrat, voted all the time with the Republican from Alaska. So it was really about the mission. It was really about the resource. What I think was so cool was that we worked hand-in-hand with the other side. It just depended on where your boss was in terms of his district's economics and demographic profile as to where you were on an issue. So at one meeting, you'd be cloistered with some people on one side and away from the other, and then, two hours later, you'd be in a meeting, and you're with a different group. So, really, it was working hand-in-hand. Every bill that our committee brought forward – staff had worked it so well, we knew if there was going to be somebody that couldn't support it okay. But we really got everything through that we intended to get through. It was all bipartisan. When [Newt] Gingrich came, that's when things started to change. I left the Hill by then. I started with NOAA in February of '94, and that was when the Republicans won the house, and Gingrich became the speaker, and things started to change dramatically. Within the end of that year, I still had friendships that were there on the Hill. The acrimony was really building. I think it was because the Republicans felt that that the Democrats had had enough power for so long and that they couldn't do certain things they had to do. There was a lot of getting even on the part of the GOP [Grand Old Party] side, and some dramatic changes were made. I really look back at that and think, "That was the beginning of the huge industry of lobbyists that we now have on the Hill." Gingrich kneecapped and essentially got rid of what was called the Congressional Research Service. When a member of Congress needed to know things, didn't understand a

topic, didn't know the history of it, what are the workings, you could call the Congressional Research Service, and they would put their experts on it, and they would literally craft a report with citations and all of that. Then it would be submitted to both sides of the aisle, both in the House [of Representatives] and the Senate. This became neutral, factual information. Everybody operated from that premise. Well, when Gingrich took that away, who's the one supplying all the information? Lobbyists. That's where the staff get their talking points and get their information and their understanding. They're not getting it from an expert that's researching factual, historical data of any kind. You flash-forward all these years later, and ~~the~~ lobbying is the biggest industry in DC. It's out of control. So it's a sad state of affairs. Anyway, I'm glad I got to be there when it was so good. I think I got to see dramatic changes at the agency. I think one of the funnest things I've enjoyed over the years has been learning about the history and putting it together in a narrative, and being able to remind my younger colleagues, or even some of my peers who didn't have that time – I'd be more and more into communications rather than policy [and] did have that time. It's interesting to remind people just how far we've gone and what an impact NOAA's mission has had with regard to fisheries. I was born in 1960. The Marine Mammal Protection Act [of 1972]. Before it passed, you actually had a whale rendering factory right there near Carmel or La Jolla. There were up to 90,000 to 100,000 dolphins being killed in the Eastern Tropical Pacific tuna purse seine industry at that time. It's remarkable to look back, and nothing is fixed or certain. Now you've got Japan that's promising to go back to whaling again. I never thought I would see that. It's like, my god, don't we understand? So the Endangered Species Act – the late '60s and '70s, it wasn't just cultural. It was the time – I always say – the body politic entered the consciousness of being aware of our environment. We had pooped in our nest for too long. The bald eagle and the bison and the wolves were blinking out. They were going the way of the dodo. We had acid rain. Nobody hears about acid rain anymore. When I was a kid, and in the '70s, that was real stuff and the soot all over the buildings downtown Seattle, and just everything being – all the facades and statues being just eaten with all the acid rain. The ozone hole – all of a sudden, discovering – "Oh my god." Then fluorocarbons were [responsible] – all of those new things. At the time, in the '70s, the Cuyahoga River in Ohio had fire departments all along the river because it burned every day. When you look back at old EPA [Environmental Protection Agency] records, the only thing that lived in the Cuyahoga at the time were bore worms. Nothing lived. It literally was sludge. We had put so much crap and chemicals and sewage – all of these things happen, and now it's so weird to see the dismantling of those environmental protections. You didn't get clean air because we didn't care. You got clean air because, all of a sudden, we made industry – we did the sticks big-time. But we also, as we evolved those laws, we start to put in carrots – carrots for sequestration of carbon, carrots for wetlands. The wetlands destruction that was going on – we're still doing a lot of coastal wetland destruction and development, but it's not like it was. All of these things that four years ago, I felt so good about. It's like, "Oh my god. We're really rocking and rolling on this. Now we're going to embrace climate change. If we solve those problems, we're okay." As my son says, "We engineered our way into this shit, and we're going to engineer our way out," and we can. I really do believe jobs, jobs, jobs will come from this. But to see this backward movement, both culturally and in policy, I don't understand it. There's no logic to it at all. You realize it really is cultism. That's sad. That's sad to see, especially since our agency played such a vital role in implementing some of the cornerstone natural resource laws that really have identified the United States environment compared to other parts of the world.

MG: It's very scary.

LB: It has been a real honor to work for the agency. I remember there were points along the way where I'd get offered another job, even to move over in a different agency in NOAA that would have been more money, that would have been more – I really was absolutely in love with the mission of Fisheries. I felt like it was real. A lot of the other agencies at NOAA, I don't feel like they're in the same fight. They do geodetic surveys, and they do the data, and they do excellent science and all that. But Fisheries, man. You've got this human dimension. It's like we can put you out of work or not. It's that use of a living resource that has to be sustained – man, you are right in the fray, and yet, you're making an impact—you've got to get things right. We really do get to say, "Buy US seafood." Because if it comes from the US, it's cool, man. I mean, whether it's fished or farmed. It was so fun to work on those stories and get those narratives out. Also, not look at our stakeholders – the fishermen or the fish farmers – as the bad guys; they're not. They're the eyes on the water. They're the ones that have spent a thousand dollars for a tank of gas to go out and maybe get five-hundred dollars' worth of fish. They're your partner, and I loved being able to get people or trying to get them to open up and look at them from that perspective. That was a joy. It was such a challenge. I feel like the last ten years, I was able to really tie it all together, really get support, and get those programs going from Fish News to Fish Watch, and exhibits, which Cheryl and I certainly bond on because she gets the power of that and getting that stood up within Fisheries and get support for it so that now it's an integrated part of it.

MG: Before I ask you more about these things in detail, I wanted to trace more clearly the path to your career. You're talking about the environmental movements and issues of the early '70. It sounds like this was in your consciousness and in the news. Did it influence what you would go on to study in college?

LB: Absolutely. Yes. So the first big epiphany where I knew I wanted to not be a ballerina, which every little girl wants to be, was watching a Jacques Cousteau special. He followed a whaling vessel, and they harpooned it. It went for hours and hours and hours dragging this boat with the harpoon. It finally – what Jacques Cousteau called the bloom or the rose, and it's where the whale finally gives up, and all the blood comes out. I was devastated. I can't even talk about it. Yes. My mom let me stay home from school the next day; I was so upset. I still am. Isn't that weird? So yes, that really did it for me.

MG: It shows me how tied you are to the work you do and how much it means to you. So I understand.

LB: Going forward, in college – when I first started college, I went to a community college. My mom certainly couldn't put me through. It was when my dad had given me the certificate of deposit. I didn't think I could get into a four-year college. Number one, I really thought I wanted to go into theater. I had been in theater, and actually, professional theater. I actually got paid. In Seattle, I was part of a troupe for a number of years. So I was going to get my associate's, and then I wanted to go into the bachelor of performing arts program at the University of Washington because that's where my director was, and I adored my director. She

had a huge influence on my life and those decisions. I got into the community college. I never was a good student in high school because I didn't give a shit. I didn't study. I was a butterfly. Even in high school at one point, I actually pulled an F in a class. I was like, "Oh, boy. I guess I better start paying a little more attention." But the two classes that I liked that I aced were the two hardest teachers there, and I think it's because they were challenging, they were motivating, they were interesting. Everybody else just put me to sleep. Math, I hated. Here's a particular thing when I should have been told to study up, go get a tutor or something in math – all the counselors, everybody, were all men. He was older. He goes, "Well, Laurel. You're not good at math." I don't know if he said most girls aren't, but that was certainly the attitude. He said, "Don't worry about it. You just have to get through this. You're better at the softer sciences. So just get through this, and don't worry about it." Well, get me into community college. I fell in love with school. I absolutely fell in love with it. It was like being in a candy store for the first time. There were interesting professors. Well, professors are passionate about what they teach, right? So they're interesting. From logic classes to Spanish classes to chemistry to biology, I loved it. But I absolutely had no background in algebra or calculus – barely scraped through algebra. So, as a result, I get out of community college. I have over a hundred-and-twenty transferrable credits. The University of Washington will only take ninety. So, of course, they took my top grades, and they were all science courses, with the exception of my logic and philosophy. I took a lot of philosophy and logic courses. I looked so good on paper that they put me in a 300 or 400-series class on biostatistical analysis. I remember looking at the counselor going, "I don't think I can do that." "Oh, you're going to do fine. You've got all this." I'm going, "Okay." So I get there. I'm really excited. I'm really nervous. I'm a bit older than my peers because I've taken three years or whatever to go to community college and get a two-year degree, or maybe four years – yes, I guess four years. I get there and this biostatistical analysis class – I loved the professor. Her name is Professor Loveday Conquest. She's actually associated with NOAA; I found out later on. I could follow the classes. I could get what she's talking about. She's essentially giving you mathematical tools in the box to then apply to a problem that then you have to break down. I couldn't do it. I could conceptually understand when she's giving her lecture, but then I would spend hours and hours trying to understand the book, trying to do it. I failed every quiz, everything. I was devastated. I was doing well in my other courses, except for organic chemistry, because they closed it down that year. I can't remember why, but it got stopped. Anyway, I remember going to her, and I was almost in tears, but I wasn't. I held it together. I said, "Professor Conquest, I am going to have to drop out. I've got this great grade point [average]. I've done so well until this. I can't do this. I've never had calculus. I barely made it through algebra in high school. I just don't have the background to move forward. I know I look really good on paper, but those were 101 courses." I think maybe I took a 200-level course. Anyway, it was Christmastime. She was a very thin Asian woman and still is. She always had a cold. She was always blowing her nose during class. She looked at me, and she goes, "I want to take you to lunch. Before you do that, let's go talk about this." I was like, "Okay." So she took me to lunch at the professor's lounge, which is this lovely mid-century building with an entire glass front façade that looks over Lake Washington. Very beautiful. So I put on my best skirt that I had, and it was a navy-blue pinstripe straight-A skirt. I had and found a pinstripe pantsuit that my dad bought me. I didn't have the pants hemmed yet, but it was also navy blue with pinstripes, but the stripes were a little bit different, but you didn't really notice it. So I was all dressed up to go to that and met her. We get our table. Then it was a buffet situation. We're standing there. This male professor starts engaging with her, doesn't

pay me any mind. Then finally looks at me, and honest to God, the first thing he said – or the only thing he said to me – he says, "Well, don't you think your stripes are a little off there," or "those don't match." I could have crawled under the table. I was so embarrassed. Professor Conquest says, "Don't you think you're looking a little too close there, Matt or Dick?" or whatever his name was. He was kind of [inaudible]." She goes, "We're having lunch." She just took charge. She just flicked him away like a flea. We went and sat and had lunch. The gist of the conversation was – she goes, "You know, Laurel, I have made numbers dance all my life. I've never worked at it. I love numbers. It makes sense to me." She goes, "But I don't write that well, and you do. You look at your transcript and things like that. Don't drop out. Let's think of another course for you, another direction that you can take this work." Anyway, I ended up getting accepted in the honors program in the political science department, and I really have her to thank for it. She didn't have to take time with a student that wasn't good at that, and she did. I think it was one of the most feminist moments I ever had to have this woman come in and really mentor me and give me that strength. So that was a very formative experience in my life, and I had the honor and pleasure – I found out years later, just probably a couple of years ago, that she is on some advisory body that works with our science lab there in Seattle. One of my favorite colleagues that I know really well, she was his professor, and they worked together on these things. She's still very involved. I knew she was involved in a lot of things in natural resources in Seattle, particularly in coming up with statistical measurements, standards, and parameters for measuring pollutant loads and gauging improvement in terms of water quality in Puget Sound. Anyway, the last time I was in Seattle, I was able to get a hold of her. Mike gave me her email, and she wrote right back, and I took her out to lunch. She's retired, but she is just still typical Seattle, fastidiously dressed. She is a member of – oh my god – I can't remember the author, like Emily Dickinson – a whole society. She's certainly taking care of her writing concerns. I feel like most of the people that have had influence in my life have been women. At NOAA, the reason why I got hired at NOAA – I had been working with my boss because he had a huge dolphin die-off in his district in the late '80s just before I came to work for him. He had worked across the aisle with a Democrat in the next district to pass the Ocean Dumping Ban Act, prior to which, that's where sewage went, was in the ocean. Following that and this huge dolphin die-off, where over seven-hundred dolphins washed up in his district on the shore. Because of that episodic event, we put together what was at the time called the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Act, which amended the Marine Mammal Protection Act. I think it's been reauthorized or renamed as the Marine Animal Stranding Response Program. Through the process of working on that and being one of the staffers and my boss being the lead ranking minority sponsor on it, along with the Subcommittee Chairman, Gerry Studds. I certainly was not the lead staffer, but I definitely worked for the lead guy that came up with the idea. I got to work with Nancy Foster, who is a huge name in NOAA history and lore. I remember her pulling me aside. She goes, "If you ever decide to send out your parachute, Laurel, I want you to contact me and let me know." I was getting pretty tired of working with my boss. He was not thinking big picture. He didn't have a big picture mind. It was all about responding to constituent letters and *blah*. I was kind of done with that. Anyway, I did let her know and I got hired on in February 1994. The Marine Mammal Protection Act was last amended – reauthorized – in 1995 so some of my first big assignments I worked on were a number of requirements of the newly authorized MMPA. The first was putting together a report to congress on the impacts of feeding dolphins in the wild, a report that lead to policies and regulations against provisioning and habituating wild marine life and the educational campaign to keep the wild wild. The next

project I worked on was to develop a way to communicate to fishermen the activities being implemented under the newly reauthorized MMPA. One of the biggest complaints in the last authorization was we were making all these rules; we were shutting people down from fishing. The only way we were communicating was through the federal register notice and putting a notice in newspapers. Well, that's not exactly what fishermen do to get their information, and not everybody has a lobbyist. So it really led to an enormous pushback on the agency as it should have. We didn't have any strategic communication capacity. Zero. So anyway, it was very – again, another woman really influenced my life, trusted me, saw my potential, and really empowered me. There was another woman that came along after Nancy. A very brief impact, but a very important one. She was at Fisheries for one or two years, but she was a super businesswoman, administrator. She excelled at all of that stuff. I had been given the new job of reading a number of strategic plans on communications that had been developed by a number of temporary "tiger-shark" strategic planning teams within the agency. These reports were part of a larger strategic planning project initiated by Nancy Foster to build more strategic processes within the agency, including better communications capacity. There were a number of reports that dealt exclusively with communications – from branding and exhibits to messaging and public interface. It was my job to identify and prioritize the recommendations and opportunities the agency had to help move things forward. I was alone in this new initiative and had mentoring or guidance as to how to communicate "up" to leadership on recommendations. She really took me under her wing and guided me and actually defended me at one point. She found out – I don't know how she found out, but there was an office director who had been a lead on one of the tiger-shark team reports. She was a difficult personality, and when I interpreted one of her team's recommendations that apparently didn't comport with her own she absolutely yelled at me and told me I was pathetic. I never said a thing but I was pretty crushed and told one colleague because I was upset and was trying to get it under control, but I think that colleague is who told. Boy, this woman – her name was Mary Langlis. She called me into her office, and she asked me point blank, "Did this happen?" I said, "Well, yeah, but that's fine. This [office director] was expecting something that I didn't know she was expecting." Anyway, Mary Langlis mentored me, really exposed me to some professional standards and things I'd never been exposed to before. I remember thereafter almost every meeting when it came to conversing about strategic planning and branding and all of the things that had been handed over to me to research and figure out how the agency could implement – and I did a lot of surveying and data collection. Every single time we met, this other office director was at the meeting and Mary Langlis had me sit next to her. She goes, "It says everything. You sit right here."

MG: What was Mary Langlis's role at NOAA?

LB: She was the Director of Management and Budget. She came over from NOS [National Ocean Service] with our then new Deputy Director. The two of them were with Fisheries for only a year or two but her professionalism and empathy really set a bar for me.

MG: I wanted to ask just a quick follow-up question. Was Professor Conquest teaching at Shoreline Community College or the University of Washington?

LB: University of Washington. She was when I got to the university and that first-quarter where I just tanked in her class. I was just like, "Oh my god. I don't belong in a four-year school. I

have hit the wall. I am not going to be able to go any further." I was absolutely convinced that I wasn't made of the right stuff to go to a four-year college. I had it in my head, and then I lived up to it in her class. She really turned it around, and I didn't just get into a new program; I got into the honors program and got accepted. I think that was where I had two male professors that actually had a good influence on me and the choices that essentially led me to Washington, DC, and the career that I had. So anyway, one foot in front of the other – you connect the dots, but it's up to us to connect the dots for our own lives.

MG: I also wanted to ask about your time in community college. You were going to school part-time and working part-time. What were you doing for work during those years?

LB: I worked at an environmental law firm, did some office work and worked at Waldenbooks, which I don't think is in business anymore. During my years at the UW I worked at a sauna and tanning place called Tubs. It is no longer in business but it was quite the popular place to work in the U. district during the roaring 1980s. Lots of fun memories.

MG: I was reading about Shoreline College, and it sounded like it was a school that was founded for students just like you. It was rated nationally for the best bang for the buck. It was established to meet the needs of students who wouldn't otherwise have the opportunity to attend school due to financial reasons.

LB: Exactly. It really was. I could go and take a full load, and I did a couple of times. So I didn't work the whole time. I think it cost me, between tuition and parking, a hundred-and-six dollars. That did not include your books, and I certainly had gas to pay and those kinds of things. It was a lovely campus. I met a very, very dear friend of mine, my logic professor. He and I are friends to this day. He performed my first wedding ceremony, and he attended my second and last wedding ceremony. So it was a really, really good experience. Very dedicated, talented professors. It's where I learned to love science and realized I really liked it. It really turned me on. I loved political science, and I liked history. As I said, it was a smorgasbord. All of a sudden, I loved to learn, and I wasn't an idiot. I could pull a 4.0. That was a really good experience. So I've always told people – and I even told Nathaniel, "If you don't feel like going right to a four-year college, go to a two-year. It's cheaper. You can figure it out and get a direction." I think a lot of these kids that just immediately go into the pressure of a four-year college and all the money and all the changes in the classes – I think it worked out perfectly for me. I know two of my friends that went immediately into the University of Washington and, within a year and a half, dropped out – horrible experience, felt like failures.

MG: Were you living at home while you attended school?

LB: Absolutely. The whole time. I was twenty-seven when I left home. My mom said, "I can't put you through, but I can give you free room and board." I was only a ten-minute ride from the University of Washington. I was a five-minute drive from Shoreline. Yes, it was pretty easy. It was sweet. I certainly struggled with that. I would have loved to have an apartment, and this and that. I look back on that, and I realize my mom, she didn't want me to leave. So she wasn't good for me in that sense. I had to figure out a way to get out that didn't give her any opportunity or wiggle room to interpret that I was leaving her. That was another reason why I

had to get out because I was twenty-seven, and I was taking care of my mom a lot. I look back on our time together during that, and she was showing the initial stages of dementia. I didn't know it at the time. I was still very egocentric at the time. I was still trying to get out and have a life. So I was pretty self-absorbed. I look back on that and not paying attention to those things. But that's how I was able to move on. I knew once I got in DC and this and that, it was like, "No, I don't think I'm leaving. I think this is where I belong."

MG: Were you able to find ways to participate on campus, like in clubs or organizations?

LB: I really didn't. I look back on that – when I talk with my husband, when I talk with Alan, he had such a fabulous college experience that way; he really did. Everything from living with his brother and going to the games and being a TA [teaching assistant]. I realized just how ignorant I was about any of those processes. I didn't have anybody in my – I was the first woman in my whole family that went to college. Well, my nephew went, but we were so close, going through it together, that we were both on a learning curve. So I didn't know about teacher's assistant stuff and the game. I was raised by this single woman who hated sports and games, so I didn't have that exposure. I missed out on that part of college. I was older, so even the people that I was in class with were four years younger than me. I wasn't living in a dorm, and I wasn't coming from another state. I'm living with my mom ten minutes away. So there are some things that sure, I wish I would have had. But I've known enough people now in college that at least I understand what it was. I think we're all going to miss out on something in our lives. Yeah. It still worked out, but I wasn't a part of any clubs. If I had to do it over again, Molly, I would do it very differently. I really would. But I also had my mom there. We had a blast together.

MG: You ultimately graduated with a degree in political science and economics?

LB: It was political science, and they don't do a minor at the University of Washington, at least at the time I went. So I had more of an emphasis in environmental sciences and political economy – macro and micro. Then, I think, if I wanted to, I could actually go back and probably get a second degree in philosophy because I'm so close to finishing a degree in philosophy, although I've completely forgotten everything I knew about it.

MG: Tell me again about this essay you wrote about environmental incentives. What was the connection to libertarianism and that week-long conference in Berkeley?

LB: That week in Berkeley, I was surrounded by people who embraced the *free* market and all of that stuff, much more strong ideologues than I have ever been or ever will be, but it was still fun to be around professors and authors and people who examine policy from that perspective. Three of them were the founders of what, at the time, was called the Political Environmental Research Center. They called themselves PERC. It later changed – they kept the same acronym, but it changed into [Property] and Environment Research Center. I think political shifted – anyway, they did an awful lot of environmental research and stewardship and conservation, utilizing market mechanisms, and they lit me up like a Christmas tree. I was so excited, and I learned so much from them that when I got back – this was a summer thing at Berkeley. It took place in August 1987, and it's where I met my first husband. When I got back and was getting

ready to take the courses again and go into another class schedule, blah, blah, and finishing up, then I had to start working on my honors thesis, and I hadn't come up with that yet. As I said, the fire in the belly was gone. I didn't have much money left after the accident and all of that. I was pretty deflated. The professor that had turned me on to this thing that I got accepted to – all I had to do was pay my airfare; everything else was covered. My mom and I were able to cover my airfare to get me to and from Berkeley. But that same professor, we talked. It was through another program to get an internship in Washington, DC. He says, "You can stay matriculated, and this will give you the final last three credits you need. You don't have to do your honors thesis." So that's what I did. That's where that connection and the influence really hit and worked for me. It was the interview that I gave my boss – I was the twentieth person he'd interviewed. He had hired another person prior to me, and that person in the first week left and went over to a Democrat congresswoman that just got an office. He was from Washington State, and she was from Washington State. So he left my boss in the lurch, and through the grapevine and a connection through my husband at his job, I found out that this guy had an opening. I don't know if Kent put in a good word for me or said, "Hey, you ought to try this person out." Anyway, I interviewed. I knew that as liberal as I was and conservation-oriented as I was, I knew I could appeal to his business and fiscal sense if I talked about the environment from this perspective. I also knew he had a really good environmental record. As I said, he came from a populated coastal district in the northeast. So you're only going to be so conservative when it comes to the environment. Anyway, I nailed it. I always credited being in that and being able to have the new vernacular that was emerging at the time. It was starting to emerge in all sorts of environmental policy.

MG: Who was your boss? Can you say?

LB: Yes. His name was Jim Saxton. He was, at the time, the thirteenth district in New Jersey. He had, I think, over fifty miles of shoreline. He extended from Barnegat Light all the way down to just above Cape May, or something. That was his district.

MG: Can you say a little more about the work you did for him? Then I'll ask you about your time at NOAA. Please let me know if you need a break.

LB: I know. I can't believe I've got anything more that you want to hear. When I first started the first year, he was a ranking member on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries oversight subcommittee. My first period of time with him – and I cannot tell you if it was a year or less – but I had a desk in his personal office. If it had anything to do with a shrub, they regarded that as the environment, and that was my problem. So from the agricultural bills to the Clean Air Act to forests to anything to do with the environment, it was in my lane, my wheelhouse. I basically researched issues and responded to letters, after of course – "Here's the position. What do you think about?" and then you send it out. This is really at the very beginning of computers. We had the computer terminals, but it was like the old DOS [Disk Operating System] world; I hated that. I was never good at that. But I also started giving him more environmental chops, if you will. When I'd see opportunities to say something about the environment or do a House floor statement or getting something in there, I wasn't a good writer at first, and I was still too verbose, but I started to get my own chops, personally, by getting him engaged in issues and giving him some show time and giving him some green brownie points, if you will, back home

in his district. So I did that for about a year, and then there was a shift. I don't know what it kicked off on, but when he became ranking – I knew he was on Merchant Marine and Fisheries, but then he became a ranking member on the oversight subcommittee. When that happened, he appointed me as his staffer on the committee. So the committee is comprised of subcommittees, and he now was a ranking member of the oversight subcommittee, and that was my shot. I got to move over and have an office down in the committee. I no longer had to be burdened with all of the mail and all that and constituent responses and everything. I still met with all of the things to do more and more under the lane of Merchant Marine and Fisheries committee; so much more to do with fish and wildlife and all of that. So still managing it and still doing it, but it was from a different perspective. I took the shot because he'd had the dolphin die-off. Here he was ranking member of the oversight committee. It was a perfect opportunity to find out what the hell killed the dolphins and why and what did you find out, and blah, blah, blah. We put together a big hearing that ended up being fairly contentious.

MG: What did happen to the dolphins?

LB: If I remember correctly, it was a biotoxin that had infected and poisoned them – probably through eating fish contaminated with the toxin. At the time, of course, everybody was fearful it was something to do with the ocean dumping, and there was some god-awful thing. This was the same period of time that hypodermic needles washed up on the shore, all of that stuff. It doesn't mean that it wasn't about pollution that led to the increase of toxic tides, which of course, is what we're seeing now more and more. It was a big, big event of its kind at the time. I don't know if it was the first. I'm sure there's been die-offs before, but I think it was a pretty spectacular one, and definitely pointing to ocean conditions. They just must have hit a school of fish is the working hypothesis, and just ingested too much of the stuff, and it killed them.

MG: You sent me a list of environmental laws and policies that were passed around this time – Dolphin Safe for tuna, the Ocean Dumping Ban Act, the Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Act, and then the reauthorization of the Magnuson Stevens Act.

LB: Right. And reauthorization of the Marine Mammal Protection Act.

MG: Were those things you tackled while working for Jim Saxton, or around this time in general?

LB: I was able to be involved. I was a young, inexperienced staff, and I didn't have a lot to offer and contribute in terms of drafting legal language, but I was my boss's representative, if you will, at the staff level on the committee, reading, understanding the legislation, meeting with the constituents that were impacted by it, wanted it, didn't want it. So as his representative on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries committee that had jurisdiction over these issues, that was my involvement – ensuring the interests of his constituents and economy were represented and considered. The oversight—certainly working with the majority lead person – what were our hearings going to be on? What were we going to be looking at? I think it was the Subcommittee on Oversight one year, and then the next year Mr. Saxton became ranking member on the Oceanography subcommittee. Then the third year he became the ranking member on the Fish and Wildlife subcommittee, and that was the subcommittee that I was on the longest, and the one

that had the broadest jurisdiction over the legislation I mentioned earlier. I think another law that we reauthorized while my boss was on the oceanography subcommittee was the Coastal Zone Management Act. I believe the Chairmen of the subcommittee at the time was from Michigan, and that is why Michigan, believe it or not, is designated as a coastal zone management state even though it's landlocked. It's because that member was the chairman, and that act needed to be authorized, and well, that's just how things get done. So surprise, surprise, Michigan is a coastal zone state and has a marine sanctuary. Ta-da.

MG: Was that what put you on NOAA's radar and the involvement with Dr. Foster because I know she was with director of protected resources and involved in the marine mammal protection act?

LB: Yes, exactly. It was really her work having to do with marine mammals and our work on that Marine Mammal Health and Stranding Response Act. Plus, her bailiwick when I really worked with her, she was the director of the Office of Protected Resources in Fisheries. The Office of Protected Resources deals with marine mammals, of course. So that whole stranding [issue] was under her bailiwick at the time. So I got to meet her a number of times. I guess I impressed her. Clearly, as I said, though, I was the junior staff on the committee. I was working with people that had been there for years, and a lot of them [were] attorneys who really knew a lot. So I was not writing legislation, but I had good ideas. I was good at strategy. I could write a good speech, and I could listen and learn pretty quickly. I think that was to my advantage.

MG: Yes. On your survey, you said you learned about the rules of your position from elders. I was curious about who they were and what they taught you.

LB: I think the two most – one told me that there are three golden rules. Then there's a fourth one. But the three golden rules are – number one, you don't know anything, so, for at least six months, keep your mouth shut and your ears open. That there are rules that can be broken even though they're not written down, and you don't know what they are. So just listen and learn. That was one. The other was never lie. Ever. Don't ever mistruth anything. If you can't say something or if you can't say what your position is or you can't – be honest about it, or say, "I can't comment on that," or "I don't know that my boss is going to support." You just have to – but you can't say, "Oh, yeah. We'll support it," and then, all of a sudden, your boss goes the other direction. You're mud. It's a small town, and everybody knows everybody. The man that first had my position and then a week later left, he was never trusted that much. I know people to this day that think he was just a total jerk, not maybe because of that one instance, but it doesn't leave the memory bank. It's just too small a town. The third golden rule, which is my absolute favorite, and I lived it personally – I did not follow my golden rule at one point, and I personally paid for it – is be careful of the toes you step on today because they may be attached to the ass you have to kiss tomorrow. There is no truer truth in Washington, DC, than that. I experienced it firsthand.

MG: Yes. [laughter] I think the fourth rule may have been something about getting a good seat in the hearing room.

LB: The fourth one came from another gentleman that worked with me. The first one came from a younger gentleman, but more my peer, who took me under his wing. He worked for Congresswoman Claudine Schneider from Rhode Island. I don't know if that name rings a bell to you. The other one was from a true elder, who'd been working on the Merchant Marine and Fisheries committee, and he did actual shipping and boats and stuff for a gentleman by the name of Norm Lent, I think out of New York. May he rest in peace. Sadly, he is gone. But he took me under his wing, too. One of my favorite things he told me is – he said, "So, one of the things that you need to understand is that the person that really runs the hearing room – it's not the chairman and it's not really the chief of staff." What was her title? It was the main committee administrator, the one that really ran the show. She was a tough cookie. He said, "But what you need to do, if you ever want to use that committee room for a meeting for your boss or an after-work event, or anything you need, she needs to know you, and she needs to like you. So when she's not harried and not busy, you need to just go in and introduce yourself and just have a chat." I'd never had anybody be that blunt and blatant about strategic human relations. It wasn't like, "Be false or talk her up." It was, "You need to be an entity and one that she respects and likes." I always thought that was a good rule of thumb. Always really know who's working the mechanisms. It's not always the boss.

MG: I want to get into your time at NOAA now. Are you doing okay for time? Do you need a break?

LB: No, I'm okay.

MG: Okay, good. Tell me about how it worked. How did you transition into NOAA? What was your first position? What was Nancy Foster's role?

LB: My first position was in the Office of Protected Resources. There were some regulations dealing with the requirements for captive marine mammals at public display facilities—think Sea World, etc. I'd never written regulations. It was weird to give it to me but I understand these had been sitting around for some time and the office needed somebody to start drafting an outline. I at least got something going and drafted that then went on to other expertise staff and attorneys that took it from there. After the Marine Mammal Protection Act [1995] had been reauthorized I was given a number of assignments dealing with some of the provisions in the newly reauthorized-amended— MMPA. First was a report to congress on the impacts of feeding and swimming with dolphins in the wild—an activity that the tourism industry in the south was starting to developed but for which these animals were becoming habituated, often resulting in harm and sometimes death. After that I started working full-time on figuring out how the agency could better communicate with fishermen and keep them informed of and engaged with the activities being implemented under the newly reauthorized MMPA. This effort lead to what we named the MMPA Bulletin, a printed newsletter that came out periodically and was mailed to the lists of fishermen around the country that we had on a mail-merge database—like writing with a stubby pencil compared with the internet and today's communication platforms—but that's what we had.

During this time, I got pregnant about four months after I started working at Fisheries. I had never gotten – didn't think it was even going to be possible for me to get pregnant. Anyway,

kind of got lazy on watching that – boom, ended up pregnant. By December of '94, I had my son, and then I took an extended vacation and sick leave time for four months. I didn't really come back and start working again until April of '95.

Not too long after I returned from maternity leave—maybe a year— I was approached with the opportunity to do a detail with NOAA's Legislative Affairs—working on Fisheries' issues and serving as a liaison to Congressional staff on various issues under the agency's jurisdiction. This was the first time I worked with Alan Risenhoover who is now my husband. At the time one of the legislative staff for Fisheries was on detail working on the environmental disaster in the Persian Gulf as a result of the Gulf War. Alan needed someone to take over and manage his portfolio of issues. Having come from the Hill and having gotten a good perspective on agency policies, it was a perfect fit for me. It got me away from protected resources and in with people again. Alan handed me some really prized issues that were nasty and challenging. He had his own nasty challenging issues with turtle excluder devices and snapper and wetlands. I dealt with Atlantic bluefin tuna and the International Dolphin Conservation Act, and other protected resource issues. So that was a lot of fun, really enjoyed it. Then that ended, and there was a first ever communications position advertised and I went for it. This was the position I mentioned earlier working for Mary Langlis. There were a number of other communications positions advertised for the regional offices and sciences centers that ended up being filled as Public Affairs positions — media folks. These positions were created as a result of the strategic planning and tiger-shark team exercise I mentioned earlier. However, public affairs positions generally don't do strategic communications or constituent work. Rather, they generally put out news releases. Mine was the one position that was focused on more strategic communications, public branding, building familiarity with the agency and the public as well as better access with constituents. By then, I had enough experience to know that if I don't know something, I know how to figure it out and go learn. Guided by the many tiger-shark team reports and recommendations the agency had drafted, I did a lot of research. I did a lot of historical investigation. I think this is why I learned so much about NOAA's history and NOAA Fisheries history. Under Nancy Foster and the strategic planning exercises and tiger-shark teams, the agency began to recognize that Fisheries really had a real communications and image problem. With the establishment of NOAA, the original mission of the Bureau of Fisheries—our predecessor under the Department of Interior—our whole mission changed from assisting the fishing industry to fish, to a science mission of conservation and sustained use of fishery resources. At the same time, all the dedicated communications and education positions within the agency were relocated and absorbed into NOAA's headquarters. As a result, the agency lost its strategic communications expertise and its relationship with fishermen and the regulated community. Over the years, the relationships had become more adversarial – things were pissy. The Tiger-Shark teams focused on a lot of aspects of communications. One focused in on exhibits, and one focused in on branding and one focused in on outreach— but they all were talking about the same thing, but from a different perspective, and it was being done by people who didn't know what they were doing. It was being done by the same people that are writing policy and regulations and conducting science. So I ended up inheriting these reports and much of the communications capacity we have now has its roots in these early efforts—from FishNews and FishWatch to strategic partnerships, corporate engagements and exhibits to amplify our programs and messaging.

MG: Can you talk a little bit about the evolution of Fish News? What did the first few issues look like compared to later ones?

LB: Oh, God. Well first, the initial purpose of FishNews was to provide regulated stakeholders with information on the agency's regulatory activities—from proposed rule-making and opportunities for public comment, to other regulatory activities affecting their operations. There were a few people in the agency's leadership that were concerned that centralizing this information could prove to be bad optics – presenting an image of being over regulatory. However, at the time I was also the Designated Federal Officer for the agency's advisory body-the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee. There were a number of folks on Committee that supported the need for a tool like FishNews. With both external and internal strategic support, FishNews was given the green light. However, I had to absolutely agree – the only way I could get it through – I had to agree that I would only use only pre-approved text from the federal register notice after it was published. Couldn't do anything else. I had to pull directly from using that godawful legalese and then link to it or give the right title to it or whatever. That's all I could do. I couldn't do anything else. Once I got that done – it truly was just an HTML [Hypertext Markup Language]. There was nothing pretty about it – indented paragraphs with a title. I can't even remember, Molly, if I could insert a link. I don't remember, but that's what it looked like. I literally would have to write it in Word, send it to the Alaska Science Center in Seattle because they only way I could get a list serve going was to piggy-back off their list server. Somebody there would then put it in code, and then load it on the server and push it out. It had no branding. It had no nothing. By the time I retired, we were at over 46 thousand subscribers. And it was pretty, and it's graphically beautiful. Yeah, so I'm pretty proud of that product.

FishNews started out with only several hundred subscribers I pulled from all my stakeholder contacts and any lists the regions and centers were willing to provide. But the big break came with the BP oil spill crisis. [Editor's Note: On April 20, 2010, an explosion on BP's oil drilling rig *Deepwater Horizon* caused a massive oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.] Every crisis has an opportunity. By then, the wheels were falling off the server at the Alaska Science Center in Seattle so I was in the process of trying to figure out a replacement platform. I got pulled in as the communications person for the front office in Fisheries to deal with spill crisis. They needed a way to quickly communicate to people and fishermen where the spill had migrated and where it was and was not safe to fish. So I went and did not ask for permission – I just went ahead and signed up for a Constant Contact account. I had the communications folks in the Gulf region send me what emails they had for their fishermen, and then I pulled my own list of emails from Fish News, and I started out sending out those communications. Then I began to realize, "Well, shit. I can make a whole lot nicer newsletter for Fish News. It was supposed to be totally verboten – "You can't do that. It's not secure." Well, hey, everybody needed that. All of a sudden, my thing became *THE* platform, and I started to play with Fish News and figure things out, being able to insert pictures, links, etc, and then pulled over an assistant to help me do that. She made it even prettier because she's younger and understands how to do such things more than me. We just recently, in the last couple of years – three years ago at least, because I think it was two years before my retirement – shifted over to the current platform that we're on now. It's become much more sophisticated. So that was the change and the evolution and really grabbing those opportunities. Everybody around the agency ended up utilizing Constant Contact. When I

left, they all started contacting Fisheries to see about adopting the new platform—once again, Fisheries is taking a lead on a new tool. So it pays to not ask for permission. [laughter] Maybe that's the fifth golden rule. You got to be prepared to pay the piper if they catch you.

MG: Yes. How were you gathering material for Fish News? Was it nationally representative? How were you generating content?

LB: The initial part, again, came from federal register notices. So I had to totally focus in on that. If it was in the federal register and it was something we were doing, I could put it out. Then, things began to evolve more than just meetings – if there were publications, and – "Oh, we're putting out the fisheries of the US." So I started to incorporate and get more and more people to understand – see, these are things that we're doing that we can tell people about. Oh, we're going to be having a public meeting, or the meeting of the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee [MAFAC]. So that was how I did – when I was really able to expand, it was a matter of just mining the websites of our science centers and regional offices and our own program offices. Really, by the time I left, not only would we get the notices of a new publication in the federal register notice, but we mined our own websites around the country for fresh content. Our website is now getting more and more consistent throughout because we've done a whole website redesign so that everybody, every region, science center and program are all on the same navigation. In addition, it is recognized now, unlike it was when I first started that. Content is king. It's a hungry beast, and you need to always be developing it. It doesn't have to be lengthy and long. It just has to be informative and timely and link you to other information. That's something I'm really proud to have been part of building that capacity and that cultural change within the agency. Whereas, when I started out, I literally had people [say], "Don't tell them. Then they'll know how much we're doing." That was the attitude when I started. But quite a change over time, quite a change.

MG: I wonder if the program I run, the Voices Oral History Archives, was inspired by Fish News. This was founded to build transparency and a connection to stakeholders. We wanted to interview fishermen and document their perspectives.

LB: Yes. In fact I remember being contacted by one of your predecessors, Susan Abbott Jamison to talk about process and purpose. And it is important to really get the stakeholders and fishermen to understand, "You are part of the investment and the partnership that's putting this on top." This does not need to be an acrimonious relationship. We need each other. This investment's worthwhile because yes, you want to use a resource, but you want to sustain that use over time. You don't want to do boom and bust. That's what we did for decades until we finally got the Magnuson Stevens Act. Really, '76 to – well, God, the first twenty years of implementation, we were still not ending overfishing. It wasn't until '96 that we finally started putting, "Thou shalt end overfishing, or we will do it for you." It took time for that to evolve. There were some interesting things. As I mentioned earlier, one of my positions over the years, was serving as the federal designated officer for our advisory committee, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee. When I inherited that, Rollie Schmitten was the administrator. I had it from 1997, when I began work on the strategic communication Tiger-Shark team reports, to the end of 2007. So I had it for ten years. But at the time that I took it over, it had been – a couple of things had happened. Number one, you had the Magnuson Stevens Act that got implemented.

Now, the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee was established through the Magnuson Stevens Act, and it was a very important advisory body. You literally not only had the administrator for NOAA attending; you actually had the Secretary of Commerce attending at the time because that was the committee that advised on how do you set up eight regional fishery management councils. We don't know what this animal looks like. Magnuson Act was very visionary, but it didn't come with instructions. What do they look like? Who comprises them? What are their operating procedures? It all sounded very nice, but now you got to actually implement it. This was the advisory committee that did that. They became very central. They were very important. The secretary actually came to their meetings. You flash-forward to 1997, a year after its second reauthorization, and the councils were working by then. The MAFAC committee was no longer important at all. The whole operation was increasingly getting decentralized, and even in terms of policy and regulatory, we were decentralizing more and more to the regions and the science centers. Here you had this committee that was made of everything from high-priced lobbyists to – and a lot of them were fishermen. It was like a disgruntled ninth fishery management council. Number one, why would you want another fishery management council, let alone a disgruntled one that had no power, and nobody was asking anything [inaudible]. Essentially, the meetings had devolved into putting together three-inch three-ring binders of printed out PowerPoints and talking to them for three days. Just blathering and talking, frantically looking around – "Who wants to give a PowerPoint? Tell them where you are on producing this report and what it is." That's literally what it became. Now, on the committee side, they had devolved into the point where any kind of committee report that they did, they weren't providing consensus at all. Anyway, when they come out with it, there's five different opinions. That is not a consensus opinion. That's like something that the secretary of commerce is going to throw away because clearly, "That's so contentious. I'm not going to touch that." So I was able to get Rollie Schmitten to spend a little extra money, and we did strategic planning on reorganizing the committee. He also didn't have staggered things, so you'd end up with half the committee rolling off because they didn't have staggered terms. So half the committee was done in three years, had to roll off, and they had no institutional memory. So it was a real rejiggering of how can we get this committee to start strategically operating, and it meant both in terms of the way the committee was structured, the way they managed themselves, what they operated on, coming up with consensus positions that get written. What the agency had to change was – you got to start asking them for advice. They're an advisory committee. You don't go talk to them and present them unless you want them to advise you on something. Give them the working knowledge that they need and ask them the questions. The other part that has now, I think, really come to fruition – I pushed for it from the beginning, and this was all part of my initial work when I got this communications job. Part of this communications job was taking on MAFAC as the federal designated [officer]. So I was doing a lot of research. One of the things I did was go around to other agencies and other line offices, even within NOAA and interview the federal designated officers. One of the most profound interviews I had was the federal advisory committee to Fish and Wildlife Service, and they call themselves the recreational fishing and boating committee or something – now the Sport Fishing and Boating Partnership Council. They are very well-oiled. They do not fill the committee with anything other than high-level CEOs [chief executive officers] of industry – the maker of bass boats or Outdoors or Cabela's. That's who they're filling it with. Then, they actually have enough money that then they have a bit of staff that actually staffs those meetings so that those people don't have to be the experts. It's the staff that develops all of the work, and then these big pooh-bahs fly into Washington, DC, have a

meeting with the Secretary of Interior or whatever, and write-off or consensus on, "Yes, this is what we think." So it's a very, very different thing. Whereas we literally were putting fishermen and recreational fishermen and maybe the occasional environmentalist on the committee. It was not anybody that had influence or anything. It was all this inside baseball bullshit. So I started that process of changing it. It took a while. By the time I left and handed that over, we were getting a few industry people on there that were bigger that had chops and visibility, but not that many. By the time I left, it's high-level academics. There are some recreational folks, but they're recreational folks that – more from a business angle. I still think there's a lot of work to do, but we have a lot of industry in terms of seafood production and aquaculture production, and that's money. One of the things I argued to Rollie and the others is you need people that represent an economic sector. That's when you have an advisory committee that has chops. I guess my last influence was working with the designated officer there and really talking about the US seafood council or something that would elevate US seafood and help us overcome this misinformation and mythology and really get support. She really did her homework on the old National Seafood Council from back in the late '80s, early '90s. We presented it to the committee over a year ago, and they took on. They said, "Yeah. Let's do this." They have worked it, and my influence was supporting them to get going on that idea and connecting them with industry throughout the country and the original drafters and historians engaged in the seafood council effort back in the late 1980s. When I looked at the report – they finally produced the report a couple of weeks ago. [Editor's Note: Ms. Bryant is referring to "Establishing a National Seafood Council: Report and Recommendations from the Marine Fisheries Advisory Committee."] I read it. It's fabulous. Most of the writing was done by a MAFAC member out of Florida, and she's fabulous. But the staff had really done a good job, too. I looked at the people that they – it was like, "Oh, it's my Rolodex." [laughter] So it's fun to have seen that and that the agency now has embraced this opportunity. I've been arguing for years – seafood, it's your entrée into everyday life. This is your entrée, an opportunity to speak to the public about something that they may care about, and that's food on the table—literally table talk. That's something that has a story. We are an integral part of that story because we have rebuilt our fisheries. The phoenix has risen, and we really need to celebrate all of us and the importance of this mission and the importance of the fishermen that have implemented and partnered in that mission. Anyway, it was a great high note to end a career on, in terms of narrative and the focus of the agency. Now, Fish News comes out every week, and there's a whole national seafood campaign. It's like, "Yay." Kind of fun.

MG: Yes. It's a very impressive and positive legacy.

LB: Yes, it's been a lot of fun. I certainly have to give Alan credit for the fish part because he really turned the Office of Sustainable Fisheries around into a well-oiled transparent machine that has standardized things and made things super transparent and easily understood. They're starting to tell their stories, too.

MG: You had started to talk about the BP Oil Spill. I forget what it was in relation to. Was that something that was on the radar of this committee? I know you had stepped off by then.

LB: That was 2010, wasn't it?

MG: Yes.

LB: So, I was no longer on the committee. I'm sure the committee looked at it. I wasn't attending the meetings at that point again. But my connection with the BP [oil spill] was coming out with the communications. Its connection to Fish News was that was when I kind of "illegally" – knowing that the server was falling apart in the Alaska Science Center, I had about twelve thousand names on it. So I took that list, and I got myself an "illegal" Constant Contact [account] and started using that as the communications platform, not only for BP, but then starting to put together a nicer-looking Fish News and learned how to do that. So that was the second iteration for Fish News and really got it to a higher level. Then this last two years ago, when we really redid it and moved it over to a government-certified platform that does a lot of websites and a lot of newsletters and listservs for the government. For every person that subscribes to it, they go, "Oh, you might want to check out these other government listservs or news products." So we have now benefited from – if people go to Fish and Wildlife Service or they're going for some other thing, all of a sudden, it's going, "Hey, you might be interested in Fish News." So I think it increased more than three-fold in the first year. I think we launched it in September of 2017. I think before the end of that first year, we were up to thirty-thousand. Again, I think by the time I left – I don't remember – we were in the sixties or seventy [thousands] in terms of subscribers.

MG: Can you tell me about Fish Watch, how it came to be, and its evolution under your tenure.

LB: Well, the idea came back in 1998. There was a very successful campaign called "Give swordfish a break," and it was launched by – I can't remember the name of the group. The woman that was the head of the group, actually, she and I became very close friends, and I am in touch with her to this day – a very smart lady, and she realized the use of market mechanisms. We had that conversation earlier. It was a very successful campaign. What it didn't take into account is that the United States – and swordfish were very depleted. But swordfish are also a shared international, what they call, a highly migratory species, a pelagic species. They live out in the high seas and in international waters. Through the years, our fishermen became much more receptive and acknowledging of, "Hey, we need to start slowing down on hitting this resource. But we're not the only ones. You've got fishermen from Europe and from Spain and Portugal and Africa; they're all hitting this resource as well." With our commercial fishermen's help, we really pushed to get a lot of conservation measures in. Those efforts continue to this day. But they didn't get acknowledged by then. So, all of a sudden, here are our fishermen, who are actually following through with conservation requirements and actually ended up rebuilding swordfish, our Western Atlantic stock. They actually got penalized because chefs throughout the country refused to sell it. It gave it a big black eye. It became such a well-oiled campaign and so public that it really hurt our US fishermen who were doing the right thing. So the market mechanisms that you want to work, to encourage good behavior and dissuade bad behavior, sadly, the behavior of our US fishermen was doing the right thing, and they're the ones that got hurt. But the point that I'm trying to make is that's what got me going, "Geez, if we had something that people could go to, and see the US fishermen and the US management system and what we're trying to do, wouldn't that be nice?" That's where the genesis, the idea, and the first thought of Fish Watch came from. That was 1998 when I started pushing for it. The first Fish Watch iteration did not get put out until 2007. So it took a long time to get enough people

in the agency that had some budget. The first iteration was very different than what I'd imagined. It kind of got taken over by some other folks. I was on detail at the time, a detail to another organization, and another part of NOAA. The person that took it over didn't get where I was trying to take it, and they kind of made it like an outreach piece, but it didn't really have a mission. It had all sorts of mixed messages, and it had recreational fishermen in there and pictures of NOAA employees. It was like, "What's the purpose of this?" So when I got back, that person had moved on by then, and I started to reengage and say, "Let's review this, and let's take a look at this." That's when the second iteration got done, and it really did become seafood-focused, US-managed seafood, not recreational fisheries, but fish as food. That was the second iteration of Fish Watch that really got us going down that road. Then we did a third iteration that is what you see today, based on a lot of input and a lot of feedback from actual constituents and retailers and commercial fishermen, harvesters, processors, etc. So the iteration that you see right now, I think we launched that particular [version] – probably 2014 is when we got that launched, and that's what you see today. I suspect, as they continue on down with modernizing our webpage, which is going all Google, I think – Fish Watch is totally separate. It's on a separate server. We did that because we wanted to move forward with it, and we didn't want to have to wait for everything else. And we wanted to be able to maintain it ourselves. Not to get down in the weeds with technology there, but we made it a separate part that we manage, that we have control over. But now it's a little bit separate from our new Google-driven website, and I think probably if there is the fourth iteration of Fish Watch, that'll probably get more integrated with our new Google search approach. So that's kind of the evolution and the genesis of it.

MG: Did the purpose of FishWatch change over those intervening years? Or was the idea the same and the look was different?

LB: That first iteration, it really was kind of a mess. It didn't at all follow through with what I had originally envisioned. Once I returned from my detail, the push that I made was for FishWatch to be an electronic, public accessible interface to our very complicated annual report to Congress on the status of the nation's fish stocks. To me, FishWatch was an opportunity to really – for those fish stocks that are seafood – it became that interface. It became that way to educate people. "Look what we do every year." So finally, when the Office of Communications got established, I believe, in 2011, one of the first things we did was take that very complicated report, that's just data table after data table, no story, and instead, [we'd] look at it as an educational piece. All the data and all the tables went online, and then we took what really happened to this last year with the stocks, what's rebuilding, what's not, what might be struggling with some environmental-caused issues. It really gave us that platform and let us drive people – "For more information on the status of this stock, you can go to fishwatch.gov." So that's what the Office of Communications really did, allowing us to get much more strategic and pull these products together that really do tell a story about the United States investment in our ocean resources, including seafood.

MG: Can you tell me about the staff involved in putting this together?

LB: I think I would give a shout-out to the second iteration where it actually went seafood and actually became what had initially been envisioned was a gal that I believe she'd been on a Sea Grant Fellowship, and we hired her. Her name was Katie Semon. She really started to reach out

to the culinary world and build some key relationships for us. I was still working for big NOAA, at the time, dealing with the BP oil spill going on in the Gulf and all the communications and outreach around that. So she really took that on, and she established some really good relationships with some chefs. She started to really build a database of seafoodie people. I was building the database of seafoodie people on the food marketing side, on the retailer side. Together, when we finally were able to start working together on that, we were really able to move that forward and give it a look. The other person that I'd really give a shout-out to is the current deputy director of communication*s* Rebecca Ferro. She's the megastar and force behind the whole Google-driven web redesign. She's remarkable. She's the one that really got behind Fish Watch. She loved it and could see its potential as an educational tool and an informative tool for the public. So that current iteration you see that's so beautiful, so simple, well -written, keeps things understandable in plain language, that was Rebecca who was really behind establishing the professional standards for content development and maintenance. I would say part of the evolution in this last iteration was actually pulling on board the Office of Sustainable Fisheries, which is the one that does and produces that Status of Stocks report. That Status of Stocks report is based on the science side of the house and all of their updated stock assessments. So, all of a sudden, if you think about it strategically, Fish Watch became a product that not only benefited and was being fed data-wise by the science side of the house, then reviewed and put together by the management side of the house, and then went into an outreach report, and all that data was being updated on Fish Watch. So Fish Watch was getting updated all the time and routinely and has now become this integrated program that between the Office of Communications, Office of Sustainable Fisheries, and, to a certain extent, Office of Science and Technology, they're all integrated, and they get it now. That never would have happened in 1998 – not at all.

MG: In these earlier iterations of Fish Watch, which office was it under? The Office of Communications hadn't been stood up yet.

LB: It was a real strange structure. I think that was part of the struggle that we went through in evolving it. It actually was a division that got taken out of Management and Budget maybe. That was where I started. Then it got put under Sustainable Fisheries as partnerships and communication, and kind of run by folks that didn't really do partnerships and communication. They were more management and things like that. So that was part of our evolutionary struggle, as the agency was grappling with, "What does communications mean?" The current office is really a legacy of John Oliver that, before he retired, he reached out and pulled together the key communications folks around the agency, one in each region, one in each science center, myself, Kate Naughten – we really came together and advised John on, "Hey, this is what this structure could look like and how it could operate." He was the one that stood it up as a separate entity, an actual office, under the front office where the Administrator sits. The Office of Communications reports directly to the Deputy Administrator for Operations so it is strategically placed to give communications a seat at "the" table. The front office is all of those things that manage up to the administrator or the director of Fisheries. So that really gave us some space and some real estate, if you will, within the agency. Man, we took off. We made that calculated decision. We're looking at strategic communications. We're not taking over everybody's communications job, and we really set up what are the products and services that enable and guide and train and get the agency to think strategically about its communications and its public face. What are those

things that we need to set up? Some of those things, I had already set up, whether it's exhibits, Fish Watch, Fish News, database of external partners and stakeholders—that the office of Communications has further built on and grown. So that was my contribution. Then, through Kate and Rebecca pulling in those web resources, getting people who can write, making certain that we can produce products, written materials, and videos. I think really you have to give Kate Naughten the [credit for], she took the opportunity and had the vision to establish the agency's video production capacity and the high standards of professionalism it operates under. There was a video production capacity that was kind of orphaned by another line office in NOAA and was located in one of the regions, and I guess John Oliver came to her saying, "Hey, we've got this. Do you want to keep it? Is it something we let go of?" And she's going, "No, no. I'll take it." She turned that thing into a well-oiled machine, and that's why we have these fabulous videos produced. We have standards. We have scriptwriting standards. We have strict archival standards and better business practices. It's not ugly gorilla footage out there. These are well done, and they are there to help educate the public and also inspire the public, I think, with what we're doing and what's going on. So it's been a lot of fun to watch that, and I'm really proud to have been a part of that communications leadership team. They're just rocking and rolling, even during COVID. A lot of it has had to slow down, obviously, but they're still there, and they're doing an excellent job. I think they've really set a standard for communications coming out of NOAA in general.

MG: Are they measuring or talking about ways that COVID is impacting stocks and sales and marketing and all those things?

LB: I know that that is going on. I wouldn't know specifically what that is. But it is interesting how some seafood has been horribly impacted, particularly the fresh, because the restaurants weren't buying it. "How do I get it into the marketplace?" Especially the smaller level fishermen – not the huge guys, not the big harvester/processors. So they got impacted. Yet, sales of canned tuna and canned seafood, that was skyrocketing because it was protein, it has a stable shelf life, and all of those things. So the other side was kind of blowing up. I think another impact – sadly, the ability to go out and survey certain stocks and get that data, which is so critical to our management process – what's going on in the water? What's that stock looking like? What's the recruitment? Where are they going? Are there environmental problems that we're seeing? Do we need to back down on the amount that we're taking from the ocean? Or are we increasing? I don't think that's hit every fishery, but I do know that it has definitely impacted some of those surveys that management relies on.

MG: Can you remind me what the detail was when you left for a year?

LB: I actually did two details. I did one to the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation, and that was the 200th anniversary that I worked on with Cheryl Oliver. So that was one. I did it just for a year. It certainly exposed me to different viewpoints and also allowed me to build some new relationships for the agency to move forward with because the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation does a lot of education and outreach, and that's something that, at the time, we didn't have at the agency. You're talking 2008-2009 when I was doing that. In 2009, I went to assist the External Affairs Director for big NOAA. So I really helped manage his relationship with fisheries and the outreach, and some of the things that were going on that big NOAA was dealing

with, and I became that interface for them – understanding fisheries and fisheries stakeholders. So that was a lot of fun. Again, new experience and a different exposure. I returned back to Fisheries in 2010 and began to introduce the newly appointed Administrator, Eric Schwaab, to key stakeholder groups. On a trip out to the Northwest regional office and science center to meet with staff and leadership, the BP oil spill happened and the rest is history as they say.

MG: When the Office of Communications was stood up, were you its first director?

LB: I was not. The first director was a gal that came from the outside. I think she only stayed for a year, and she went over to the National Science Foundation. Then Kate Naughten stepped in as the director. I always had that external affairs portfolio, and it was a real strategic decision for me at the time. By then, my husband and I were talking and making plans to retire. My thought was as much as I would love to have maybe gone through that directorship, it's training. It's a lot of investment on the part of the agency. Knowing that I would be leaving in less than five years and retiring, that just didn't seem quite right. So I didn't do that. I, instead, really was excited about seeing the programs I had stood up, from exhibits to Fish News to Fish Watch to stakeholder outreach, and more importantly, seafood, which was my real passion before I left. I was much more interested in standing those things up within the Office of Communications. I made the right choice. I feel really good about that choice. But yes, Kate Naughten, within that first year of the office being stood up, she came on as director.

MG: I'm not clear on the relationship or structure of External Affairs and the Office of Communications.

LB: External Affairs falls under the Office of Communications. It's a division, and I WAS the division, along with some of the people that were engaged in my various programs, whether it was maintaining Fish Watch, whether it was pushing out Fish News. So I pretty much was a division of one. But the reason why we came up with my title as Chief of External Affairs was because big NOAA has their web folks, and they've got their media folks, and they have their external affairs folks. So we were looking to reflect big NOAA so that we have those same key components. We chose the title of chief because, at the time, the divisions within an office in Fisheries are referred to as chiefs. So it's chief of a division within the Office of Communications for Fisheries.

MG: How difficult was it to create these new offices and titles? Did it involve a lot of strategic planning? How did it all work?

LB: With the Office of Communication?

MG: Yes.

LB: It really worked with John Oliver identifying us key communications folks. So we had a small group of us, but we were all professional communications people, from writing to media to interviewing, to strategic communications, which was really my big bailiwick. Through that process. I had done a lot of legwork previously, years before, on where we had been at one point and all of the capacity that we'd lost. So we really put together a plan and an outline, and this is

how it would work, and this is who would answer to who in the Office of Communications. We had to deal with structural issues because you're not going to take the communications people in the regions and the centers, who answer directly to their bosses, the regional administrator or the science director. They're not going to want to all of a sudden answer to somebody in Washington, DC. That wasn't going to work. So it really became a structure of coordination, and then allowing our office to actually provide services that would assist the outreach and communications capacities in the regions and centers, and headquarter programs and offices, which still are evolving, and some have really good capacity and others do not. Some have really good web support; others do not. So it's still a bit uneven. But with the creation of an office at headquarters, we really were able to help support them and get communications at the table. What are those priorities? What are the standards that need to be set? What are the resources you need? So that was how we got started. That's what really got us going.

MG: I have in my notes that when you were in this position, that your focus was really on fishery stakeholders. You've talked a little bit about this already, but can you just say a little bit more about who they were and what the relationship was like?

LB: Sure. I would tie it back to my experience on the Hill, not only with my experience on the Hill as a staffer in the House of Representatives but also my period working in NOAA's Office of Legislative Affairs. Through both of those experiences, you realize staff and members are responding to stakeholders. They're the ones that are rattling the cage and being the squeaky wheels on various issues. Members and staff can be very vulnerable to only one viewpoint if they don't have others. I realized that at NOAA Fisheries, there was nobody working with stakeholders. As I said, when I mentioned the Marine Mammal Protection Act, its last reauthorization toward the end of '94, there was an awful lot in there that was really driven by enormous amounts of frustration on the part of stakeholders that had no idea what we were doing, because the only communications we were doing was publishing a notice in the Federal Register, and possibly, maybe sending out a press release. But you know what? Fishermen are not looking at the Federal Register, and they're not getting press releases. So unless they were part of an association, unless they were a big group that had lobbyists or something, it was very, very difficult. Unless there were communications with them on the docks, it became very difficult, and it became really disjointed. So, not to be increasingly long-winded, it was that lack of capacity that I realized that we really need to reach out to those stakeholders. You need somebody doing that constituent work and figuring out how do I communicate with them? How do I give a heads up to them? How do I make certain that our folks are talking to them before a decision is made? Or, that if we're going to have a proposed rule, that we're really making certain, "Hey, you may want to take a look at this and chime in." Just as important, were the stakeholder relationships that were supportive of the agency's policy or position on a topic that would benefit from amplification and ensure congressional folks weren't hearing from just one side of an issue. So all of that work was really not being done in the mid-'90s. It's kind of interesting because when I did get that first communications position in '97 when that position was created, and I was able to compete for it, one of the first things I did, and I mentioned this earlier, is I did a lot of research. I looked at those reports that had been generated, those team reports on branding and exhibits and communications and outreach and what we need. Looking back, I realized that the agency, years earlier, when we came over, when NOAA was created, the Fisheries came over from the Department of Interior's Bureau of Fisheries. Bureau of Fisheries

is very much dedicated to essentially assisting the industry with catching and processing and selling seafood. We even had test kitchens. The scientists were on the docks all the time. We had a tremendous interface. As NOAA was established, all of a sudden, that mission went from assisting industry and catching fish and seafood to much more of a conservation mission. That was important at the time. We needed conservation at that time. We were hammering our fisheries pretty strongly, and we had a lot of them going in the tank. But the outreach and communications, when you're shifting a mission, and you need to get your stakeholders on board with that, we lost all that capacity. My understanding is that big NOAA, who was trying to figure things out at the time and they didn't know what they were doing, within just a couple of years, they took forty positions that were all education and outreach within Fisheries, and they pulled them up into NOAA. They said, "We'll take care of the communications." Well, they never really did. Those positions got absorbed elsewhere. I don't know. It was way before my time. But, as a result, you move forward twenty years, and twenty years of change in a mission, and you're setting up councils, and you're only relying on those fishery management councils and Federal Register notices. We really lost the connection with the stakeholders that we really needed to understand and benefit from the mission of sustaining the resource, sustaining the use of the resource. So that's where we were in the '90s. That was where my whole approach and the importance of stakeholder – get to them. Don't have them just screaming and yelling at your members of Congress, "NOAA Fisheries sucks. They're awful, and they don't know what they're doing." You need to work with them. You need to get their input and their guidance and have them be our eyes and our stewards on the water. I think if I made any big impact at all at fisheries, maybe it was building that welcome mat for those people and really building the tools that let us reach out to them and for them to reach into us and get them engaged and involved and knowledgeable and maybe not so mad – [laughter] a little more supportive.

MG: Was there anything else you wanted to say about Fish Watch or something I forgot to ask about?

LB: No, I don't think so. I think the agency will continue on. I think the communications within Fisheries is really in good hands, and there's lots of expertise there.

MG: I want to make sure I'm not missing anything related to your career up to this point.

LB: I don't think so, Molly. It was the protected resources and then leg [legislative] affairs, and then taking on that first communications position. I probably took that on in '97 when I got that – '97 or '98 at the latest. Then that was when I really started Fish News, and then conceiving of the Fish Watch idea, which took over ten years to get anybody to invest in. Now it's a whole program. But it sure took a lot of – lots of me talking to lots of people who had control over budgets. Then, seeing the Office of Communications get put together.

MG: Can you talk more about that? In my notes, I have that you were the first communications person hired at headquarters. I don't have a great understanding of NOAA's structural organization. So you may have to explain it to me.

LB: No, that's a good question, Molly, because I'm assuming you know nuance, and I'm not being very clear. Remember when I told you – again, this is about '97 – I had finished my stint

with legislative affairs, and this position came open. This position, along with five others – I think there was one for each region and science center if they wanted; it was up the regional administrator and the science director for each center to decide whether or not they wanted to extend money on a position. But the positions were created if they wanted it. Not all of them took advantage of it at all, to get a communications or an outreach person, including this one position at headquarters. All of that was done through that whole tiger shark team process of strategic planning and coming up with an agency's strategic plan. That had never been done before. That was all under the leadership of Nancy Foster that did that. So when I came on in '97, one of those results of those strategic tiger shark teams was you need to have a communications position in each region and science center and headquarters. Again, this was done through a contractor that helped put these things together. I actually worked with that contractor for a number of years thereafter to help implement this. So that's where my position came from, and thus began researching on what do we mean by outreach, what is strategic, what do federal advisory committees look like. I had so much learning curve to do the first year and a half, two years. But where I was buried was in the Office of Management and Budget. That was where the position was housed. Now, if you're coming from the outside, looking for a communications person, is that where you're going to go? So you fast-forward now, from '97, to – I think we were established – when did our office get stood up? Maybe 2011 is when our office got stood up. So almost twenty years later, we now have an Office of Communications that takes care of the web strategic – and even that has been a huge process because before everybody's doing their own thing and they had their own web, and sometimes it was important, and sometimes it wasn't. By delivering on strategic products, by delivering not only on reactive press releases and everything, but instead, proactive stories, a lot of which I enjoyed having to do with, particularly when we knew something negative was going to come out, and it was misinformation, and it was being driven by a group with an agenda. I could work with people, and we could get public meetings. We could get stories crafted. We could get the real facts out there ahead of time. We didn't have that platform before, nor did we have anybody that would even support it. I think one of the last ones I did, it was trying to go after the whole hatchery programs, and it was everything from animals rights to anti-farming and a movie that was really tugging heartstrings, [but with] no fact, no nothing. We found out about it ahead of time, and with my contacts and relationships with diversified communications and their webinars and working so closely with the writers in the science center and in the regions over on the West Coast, we were able to put together a whole series of webinars and web stories and everything. We got way out ahead of the curve. It's fun when you get to do that. There was another one that was going to be attacking our trawl fisheries in Alaska, saying that they were harming coral and that they were just ripping up the floor of the ocean. That's not the case. It's all on soft bottom, which doesn't have hard corals. We'd already closed off all the hard coral areas to any trawl. So we had done our job, but this was a group doing fundraising. It was a lot of misinformation. They had really stuck their hat on this. Working in advance, I was able to contact all of my seafood buyers at Costco and Wal-Mart and (Aramark?) and Sodexo, and really put together a couple of webinars for them, and PowerPoints and they could talk to the scientists. We broke it down, the final results. We pretty much stopped it in its tracks. That, to me, is what strategic communication and outreach can do for the agency. Twenty years ago, I remember the deputy administrator asking, "What is outreach?" [laughter] He was a scientist. I said, "I can't tell you what it is. But I can tell you what it should do." Anyway, it's been a lot of fun. And I'm not the

key number one talent behind all of this. There were tremendous talented women that I had the honor of working with in the Office of Communications.

MG: So when was the website redesign work done?

LB: Rebecca started that three years ago. It's a four-year-long project. Then I think it will probably be revisited in terms of its impact. Already it's a staggering performance at this point. She adopted, through a lot of customer research on web interface and use and a lot of survey work from our own constituents and people coming to our website – how did they use it? What are they looking for? How did they find it? Blah, blah, blah. Through all of that very data-driven process, we determined that we really needed a Google-based, searchable website. That's how people do things now. They don't do it because they know that this report is produced by the division seven in the Science and Technology office. That's how we were structured. If you didn't know anything about it, you're not really going to care about it. This was a real way to not only keep the users happy because they know where they're going and what they're looking for. It's maybe a matter of training them to search it. But more importantly, it was a way to grow exposure for the agency, what our mission does, what we contribute. So that's how that started. Every one of the websites looked different before. They were organized differently. Not anymore. I don't know if you've played around on the Fisheries website, but it's pretty beautiful. Anyway, the use and the hits have just skyrocketed, kind of like my shifting over from Constant Contact to GovDelivery has skyrocketed. So that was a really good strategic move for us. Constant Contact was becoming a problem, too, because it more and more looked like spam for some folks. It would crash. There were just things that were going wrong with the Constant Contact platform, particularly for a government agency that you got to control and secure any personal information. So I'm glad we got our way with Constant Contact all the years we did. [laughter]

MG: When and why did exhibits become part of something you did?

LB: It was one of the original – remember I mentioned those tiger shark teams and those recommendations. One of them was – we don't even have an exhibit to go and pop up somewhere or be a part of professional forums or shows or trade shows or anything. We just didn't have anything. So a program or two did. I think Habitat did. But again, they weren't representing the agency; they were representing Habitat. So that was why doing exhibits and really approaching it more from a corporate standpoint, representing the agency and its many services and products, but doing something that's holistically-branded and allows anybody, whether they're from Habitat or Sustainable Fisheries or Protected Resources, to be able to go and participate in something. Then, as I got my legs under me more and more, particularly in 2010, is when I started on my seafood jag and realizing, "Wait a minute. We just hit a milestone in terms of ending overfishing." There was a story to be told. It was an anniversary year. All of those things lined up. That was my very first – I wrote an article from the administrator celebrating that and really peeling back and connecting the dots on where we were, where we've been, and it actually became very influential in the last reauthorization in terms of even getting the ENGOs to come on board and celebrate US Fisheries. We've come a long way. Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater here on this reauthorization. This is working. So it was really fun to even get Pew [Research Center] and Greenpeace and Ocean Conservancy and everything

to sing the praises of what the US had done. That was a really fun strategic project to work on. And it worked. I started with the campaign phrase of "Turning the corner on ending overfishing," to we've ended chronic overfishing. Anyway, that was a lot of fun. That journey started in 2010. That's when I really started to hook up with the seafood industry, and it was my relationship with SeaWeb who'd gotten to know me and trust me, and they were part of an advisory committee to the Food Marketing Institute, which represents ninety-five percent of the nation's retailers. This was their seafood committee. The only people advising them in that room were all the ENGOs – Greenpeace, Oceana – all of them. They didn't even know that there was a National Marine Fisheries Service or what we did. It was my contact with SeaWeb … it was my connection with them. He called me. He said, "Laurel, you need to get down here. You need to be a part of this." So I grabbed the chief science officer, and we put together a PowerPoint that day and night. We got down there, and we did a dog and pony show. That's where he kicked off the phrase, "Turning the corner on ending overfishing." From that point on, I was in their Rolodex. Whenever they had trouble, and Greenpeace was going to threaten to put a dead whale on their roof or whatever, they would call me and say, "What the truth about this?" So I became a source of information and reality check.

[Tape paused.]

MG: If you're ready to pick back up, I think I'm good for another forty-five minutes, and then my daughter Charley will be home.

LB: And don't feel like you have to fill it, my dear. I don't know that I have anything interesting more to say.

MG: I think we could talk forever. But what I wanted to pick up with was the NOAA 200th anniversary celebration and your involvement with that. Was that where you hooked up with Cheryl Oliver and worked on the Ocean Hall exhibit?

LB: So I did work with Cheryl, I guess it was on the NOAA 200th. That was the whole Thomas Jefferson/geodetic survey bit. I knew Cheryl a little bit before then, but I had not really worked with her. So that was the first time that I really had an opportunity to work together. I didn't work with her on Ocean Hall. I don't know. I'm sure she probably had involvement in Ocean Hall because I can't imagine she wouldn't have, but I don't remember who the – oh, I remember. The NOS representative at the time is somebody that's now retired, but his name was Tom LaPointe, and he was the NOS rep [inaudible] somehow. But the Ocean Hall was awful fun to be a part of. It's fun to go there and still see the legacy today. There's two or maybe three – I've got one, two, three, four elements that I was very involved in terms of influencing the content and everything. One is the right whale that's there. There's a right whale that's a life-size replica of a female right whale. Her name is Phoenix. When we were talking about doing that, she is the iconic mascot, if you will, of Ocean Hall. She hangs in the center and was really the ambassador story of fisheries and man and our impacts on ocean resources – one of the ambassador issues or stories that are there. We had some really interesting discussions going through that. I remember saying, "Okay, you go down this road. Just remember she might be dead by the time Ocean Hall opens. You need to be prepared for that." I brought a lot of reality to the conversations. A lot of them [Smithsonian staff] were very much influenced by specific

agendas that didn't always deal with science-based policy and data. I'm not saying that those are bad organizations. I am saying that they're organizations that rely a lot on fundraising, and they do it with a lot of provocative and loose facts [laughter] and emotion because that's what works. I don't begrudge them that. It was interesting. Just the overfishing and this and that, getting the Smithsonian Ocean Hall team to understand – they wanted the most devastating and/or provocative story—like bluefin tuna is so valuable that it pulls in five-hundred thousand dollars per fish. I said, "No, no, no. That is not representative. That happens once a year in the Tokyo market, and it all has to do with macho men marketing themselves and their business or product." We could do the same thing with the first Copper River Salmon that gets ~~got~~ landed and which restaurant is the first to carry it that season. It doesn't mean that the fish is worth that much. Anyway, I did a lot of educating in that process, but still really exciting and fun to do. I think one of the things I wanted to mention to you that I forgot about – again, part of that new communications, that new branding – I actually took on the web. I don't know crap about doing the web. All I know is at the time – they were talking 1997, and it still was awful. If I remember, our webpage essentially was a webpage with nothing but red hyperlinked titles of documents. That's what it was. So I really pushed, and I finally got my way that I asked to get a web person, and they would redesign the web. I didn't do anything else beyond that. How they decided to do it and what they did, that was IT [information technology] folks. But one of the things that I wanted to do was at least brand it and have a way of utilizing that brand in other formats. I had this epiphany that [inaudible]. After Gary Larson retired and all the cartoons went away. There was an artist named Ray Troll. One of my favorite t-shirts – it was all around campus at the University of Washington because, of course, it includes a fisheries school and everything's about salmon. I even have a tattoo of a salmon totem. Anyway, one of my favorite t-shirts was "Spawn Till You Die," and here it was two naked Adam and Eve with the crossbones and then sockeye salmon all the way around. He has all sorts of funny visual puns – "no such thing as a free lunch," and the one fish eating a smaller [fish] eating a smaller, right down to the man eating a tuna fish sandwich. Anyway, just fun, but very into fisheries. So I found out how to get ahold of him. I wrote him this letter – "Since Gary Larson retired, you are the saving grace for any agency that's involved in biology, particularly fisheries biology." I said where I'm at and what I'm doing. I said, "If I could get the money, would you be willing and interested in doing artwork if we could commission some artwork. I'd love for the artwork to be electronic so that we can use it in a lot of platforms." So we started up this dialogue, and I was able to secure some funds to ~~e~~ommission artwork to help us visually brand, engage and educate the public. He came over to Washington, DC. It was in the summer. I wanted him to do a presentation of who he was, but then also to query and work with staff from around the agency to get their input and their ideas. So I put together this – I got this big room, and I did this thing in a brown bag, and I advertised it – marketed it for weeks. I then actually used his drawing – "There's no such thing as a free lunch, so bring your own, but ~~do~~ join Ray Troll for lunch for a brainstorming on agency branding." Anyway, he came. He arrived in DC, and there was a huge thunderstorm. As you know, this happens on the East Coast, and he didn't get to land until after 2:00 AM, so they had given his hotel room away already. So he had to go find another one. So he drew on my whiteboard – because he doodles all the time. So he doodled all these big fish, and then [wrote], "To Laurel, Sleepless in DC," because he knows I'm from Seattle – *Sleepless in Seattle*. He lives in Ketchikan, Alaska. Anyway, it was very successful. We started this iteration. He came up with some things. I don't know if you've ever seen it, but it produced this artwork that is a series of concentric circles, and in the center is a pair of hands holding a fish.

The whole line is "Sustainability is in our hands. NOAA Fisheries," blah, blah, blah. So we turned it into a poster. He did an ink drawing. Then he had his partner color it in electronically, and then every little piece he pulled out separately so that you could use individual fish. So there was all this different layering. Then that became the branding. We got all these posters. I was hoping that for NOAA 50th – I kept pushing and suggesting, "Why don't you reprint this? And instead of doing it on black, do it on white paper, so it really pops. Then do different sizing and everything." But with COVID, everything has gone out the window. Anyway, in the poster, if you look very carefully, he's got boats that have names. At the very top, if you look at the name of the boat, it's the Laurel B. So I'm in there forever. [laughter] He actually had a relationship with the Smithsonian. There's a number of his pieces there. He's gone on to do a lot of work with NOAA and do murals on the sides of a number of NOAA Fisheries' buildings. Just one thing I forgot to mention.

MG: That's so neat. [laughter] Can you talk about when sustainability became one of your focuses?

LB: For me, it really was in 2010 when the Magnuson Stevens Act – its last reauthorization – gave us a period of time to end overfishing and put in catch limits for every fishery to have an annually-determined catch limit. It didn't have to be determined annually, but it was an annual catch limit. Not every fishery is going to be surveyed every year. It doesn't make sense to do that. They prioritize the ones where there was active overfishing going on. Those needed to be done first, and then everything else. Well, those I think hit in 2010. I think it was also the thirty-fifth anniversary. So '76, '86, '96, 2006, and then five years later. So it was the thirty-fifth anniversary, and I just thought, "Let's grab this." Because you really looked at – we're turning a corner. It naturally flowed from there. More and more, it gave me a platform to push not only externally to folks and getting that narrative going, but more importantly, internally. One of the things that we had been doing for a number of years since the last reauthorization in '96 – we had to produce an annual report to Congress on the status of the nation's stocks—I mentioned this earlier. Well, rather than – again, no communications office, no strategic communications, 1996, the first year they publish – what is it? It's nothing but attorneys and scientists producing this report, so there's no story; there's no context. It, honest-to-God, is charts, which means nothing, certainly nothing to a congressional staffer, who is the one that wanted you to report on the status and make it understandable. So what did that do? It allowed every organization with an agenda to interpret that data and tell their own story the way they wanted to tell it. I referred to the Status of Stocks after a while as the "spank-me document." It's just like, why don't you walk in bent over and just have people start spanking you now because you are letting them do that. I fought for a very long time, and it was under Administrator of Fisheries, Bill Hogarth, that finally got them convinced – "Will you please let us at least draft an executive letter? An executive summary letter from the Administrator that at least tells a story about data and what this report tells us this year. Tells us why it's important and why you should care." That was the first step. When we got our Office of [Communications] – and the only other communication that was ever done on it is NOAA's Office of Communications and their public affairs person writing a press release and then sending that out. That was the extent of the communications on this incredibly important report. So I finally get the executive summary done, a letter from the administrator, a first step. When we finally got our Office of Communications in Fisheries set up. That was the very first thing we did. The woman that managed the Status of Stocks report,

who worked for Office of Sustainable Fisheries. She came to me, and we decided – "Let's do a real report." So we did. It had pictures, and it focused on a couple of the species that were noteworthy. Then, you could link to all the data and all the tables and all of that, and link to them online. That report has been one of the biggest anticipated reports every year ever since. It is a storytelling document, but it's completely backed up by data, and everybody waits for it. So that was a lot of fun to do that. It was fun to see people that deal with data and science get lit up about being able to tell that story – something they really care about and they're only looking at it in the weeds, but then all of a sudden, to see them – "Oh, my god." We were able to actually deliver. So that was one of the first things the Office of Communications at Fisheries did. The partnership with the office that does the data and all of that, sustainable fisheries – that partnership really continues and [has] gotten stronger. Now, we just pretty much help edit the document and lay it out. They're telling us stories. They're doing that. So as exciting as it is to get that information out and tell it publicly, it's almost more thrilling for me to see the fact that we really are building that capacity internally. More and more, people are seeing that part of their job is communications, and it's not being forced down their throat. Instead, we're enabling it because we've got the tools now that we can back them up and give their ideas some legs.

MG: You've talked a little bit about some of the big issues at the start of your career, and so I want to talk about the bigger issues towards the end of your career. One of those I imagine was climate change. I was curious about how you tackled and talked about that.

LB: We always talked about it in terms of changing oceans conditions. We've come a long way in our science for fisheries. We've done a really, really good job. Fisheries are complicated enough as it is. Now throw climate change on it. All of the parameters and variables that are being influenced and changed and changing relationships within the ocean environment that we still don't even maybe understand. So I think we talked about it in those terms. That it makes our science collection all that more important, not only to monitor the changing ocean conditions but hopefully be able to respond or understand them and be able to monitor our own behavior. So, in terms of that, it did. It's certainly the biggest issue facing the planet, but again, I feel like I've come full circle because here we're watching an administration dismantle some of the very laws that have put us in this very strong position that have made our country beautiful with clean air and increasingly clean water. Yes, we have bad spots. There is no question. Flint, Michigan, can we say? [Editor's Note: In 2014, the city of Flint, Michigan, changed its water source from Lake Huron to the Flint River without applying the proper corrosion inhibitors, leading to elevated levels of lead in the water and causing a public health state of emergency.] Can we say losing wetlands in the Gulf and oil spills? There's no question. But oh, my god, we are so much farther along. There are fish back in the Cuyahoga River. It's strange. I feel that if I were to take on a new communications project, and maybe I will – I don't know. I'd love to hook up with a group that would have the resources, and maybe I could be part of the time – but almost tell the stories of looking back. Look where we were. Look where we are. This is why it's important. We have two generations removed now that just don't even – they don't know. They haven't seen the issues. To see big business and big oil start gaining so much influence to – "let's go in and drill the last bit out." They're lifting the moratorium on drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I didn't think I'd ever see that. It's like, "Why?" I hope nobody applies for a lease. I know there's one guy that's applying to leases left and right in Bears Ears [National Monument]. What is the other one? Grand Staircase-Escalante [National Monument]?

He may not ever use them, but he stepped in just in case. Just in case it became profitable again. I really hope that alternative fuels – I hope that's the way forward and that all of this is just not going to really come to fruition.

MG: Good. I want to ask you about your decision to retire. But, first, am I missing anything up to this point?

LB: No, I don't think so. God, Molly, don't let me think of anything else. Good lord.

MG: Were there any overarching issues or challenges in NOAA's history during your tenure in Fisheries that's important to note here?

LB: I've always worked pretty much with the front office. Every new administration brings new challenges, some more challenging than others. But it's been pretty consistent. I think once we got over – once things started to get more routine, I feel like Alan and I were very much a part of watching the agency grow up and get more strategic. A lot of that I think is really founded on and based on the fact that we are a science agency and the scientific process of data collection and fact, not expectation. It's so much more objective. That really influenced and colored a lot of our approach to regulation. So I think you just have an agency that we want to stand by our work. It was in 1996 when that Magnuson Act got reauthorized. I think one of the biggest challenges I saw happen – the law changed, and what it did was make everything vulnerable to lawsuits. All of a sudden, there were these new deadlines, and it opened up the agency for the environmental organizations to really come in, swoop in, and sue. I think, at one point, we had two-hundred-and-twenty lawsuits going on. I know that they bought extra copy machines. This is back when everything had to be printed, right? I'm talking the late 1990s. We literally burned through one or two Xerox machines. There were people there – because, for each case, which was thousands of papers, there had to be so many copies of each. So you literally had staff working on the weekends to print all of these things. It was an awful struggle, but what it did, in my opinion, and I am not the expert by any means, but watching from the side, what it did was force the agency into a high level of professionalism in the way we do things – what and how and all of that, from the National Environmental Policy Act following through, to everything to make it airtight. Twenty years later, we don't lose that many lawsuits anymore. We keep it pretty tight. It's based on science, and it's transparent, and we can go back, and we can find those records. It's not a loosey-goosey organization at all. So I think that would be the biggest challenge, but I think the agency learned a tremendous amount from it. We learned to frontload, do it right up front, do it right the first time, and when we don't see something right, and it's not being done, we know it's a vulnerability, and it generally will get addressed. Now, whether or not this administration [Trump administration] pays attention to that and prioritizes that, that's where every administration brings in their own challenges. But yes, I would say that was a big one. Again, another Magnuson Stevens Act. It's a cornerstone law. It really is.

MG: Yes, we lot of material dedicated to it in the Voices Oral History Archives.

LB: Yes, I bet.

MG: I wanted to ask about this last year of your life, where you've retired from NOAA, moved, and then how you're managing during the coronavirus pandemic?

LB: God, COVID. I don't know if Cheryl included you in on this. She sent a funny graphic yesterday, and I actually posted it on my Facebook because it was so damn funny. [laughter] So it's the number thirteen and then the little speak bubble that says, "I'm the worst number." Then the next one is 666, and he goes, "No, I am the worst number." Then the next little one is 2020, and the little bubble says, "Bitches, please." [laughter] So yes, COVID, 2020. Well, Alan and I, our journey – this is really Alan's choreography that got us here at such a young age. He's only fifty-seven. I turned sixty in March. Alan is just an incredible manager in all respects. The decision to get here was a long process, where we wanted to go. I'm a city kid. As I said, I love DC and would love to live in a fabulous two-bedroom condo near the Smithsonian, preferably and a Metro stop. But it's super expensive, and Alan's more of a country boy. He comes from southeast Colorado, and he got so exhausted from the driving. He hated the traffic. It would ruin his day to have a bad day in traffic. It just undoes him, and he's done with it. So we knew we couldn't stay there. So we wanted to live someplace special. We wanted to get up in the morning and not be in some suburb or whatever. We wanted to wake up every day and go, "Wow, I cannot believe I'm here." So as we talked about it through the years, this place just kept coming up. I'd been coming here since 2004. He surprised me on our honeymoon in 2009 and brought us here for a week. There's a spa that's just up the road called Red Mountain Spa. It's fabulous. Anyway, that's how we chose it. The last year was really interesting. I don't know if people anticipated me to have difficulty giving things up. By the time you make that decision to go on, I was ready to hand it over to people who are younger. They're going to take things in a whole higher different direction and make it their own. I felt really good about the foundations, really good about the programs and the trends and direction that I had helped establish that I had no trouble in just pulling back and letting them – I was focused in on drafting all my standard operating procedures and who I knew and where the Rolodexes were and what the issues are, and blah, blah, blah – got all of that done working with staff who I knew would have a part of either carrying it on or whatever. So it actually was enjoyable. It was fun to just relax and let other people walkthrough. Then I was there for whatever Kate needed me to do or Rebecca – whatever they needed to plug me in on. I let them take vacations. I let them do that. We didn't go anywhere in 2019. Alan and I, we sold our house at the end of 2018, moved into an apartment building right across the street from NOAA in December of 2018. So we were right there and could easily get there. Then, of course, the furlough hit. So that was interesting. I can't remember when we went back. Was it end the of January of 2019 or February? It was like five weeks or something. [Editor's Note: The 2018–2019 United States federal government shutdown lasted thirty-five days, from December 22, 2018, until January 25, 2019.] So 2019 got off to a rather strange start. It was a fun year. I enjoyed it. It was fun to see younger staff to take things on, and really let some of my things – I'm glad that the seafood has become so big. I didn't know if it would, but it was fun to see people get excited. They even created the special advisor on seafood issues, now a whole new position, completely reliant on our office and the MAFAC folks. But I guess it shows what a priority it had become. I left on a good high note and ready to leave. I cannot imagine going back into that. I definitely want to do something different.

MG: I am curious about what is next for you. I know things are tricky because we're still social distancing and living through a pandemic. But what do you hope to do during retirement?

LB: We've got a lot. First, it's getting the house done. Our house has consumed us. We've only been here for six weeks. But I'm anxious for the weather to get a little cooler. We love to hike, but you don't hike when it's ninety-nine degrees and up to a hundred-and-nine last week, a hundred-and-eleven in St. George. But we love to hike. I think once the house gets settled and all the workers are done and everything, really get back into a good physical routine. We want to put a gym together. I'm enjoying reading. There's a painting class I'm interested in taking. I am starting to look around to find a piano teacher. I want to take piano. Both of us bought little guitars, and we can do a mean "Mary Had a Little Lamb" right now. But we're really enjoying that. Alan's interested in some woodwork. We're both interested when COVID gets over, maybe auditing some [university] classes. Alan may be interested in taking a master naturalist course. I'm really interested in maybe putting together a narrative of the geology around here. The geology around here is spectacular, and it's like looking at the primordial bones of the planet. It's three enormous ecosystems that literally, you draw a ten-mile arc and all of them are here. It's the Colorado Plateau. It's the Great Basin. And it's the Mojave Desert. They're all crashing in right here. It's amazing. There's such a neat story. So I'm curious about learning that story and maybe becoming somebody that takes people on hikes for hire kind-of-thing, and maybe get Alan to be part of that or maybe him doing some fly fishing and looking at some places like that.

MG: Can you tell me a little bit about your son Nathaniel? Can you tell me a bit about him, his experience in school, and what he's doing now?

LB: Oh, my goodness. So he was born at the end of 1994. I came on board at NOAA Fisheries in February of '94. I had to have surgery that winter. So knowing I was going to be hired and starting in February, I quit the US House of Representatives, got that all taken care of, started up, and I think I mentioned this – I had no expectation of being pregnant because I hadn't ever gotten pregnant in years ahead. All of a sudden, *boom*. I pregnant within the first three months there. I had no maternity leave, nothing. So when I took off – he was born December 5, 1994. I came back to NOAA in 1995. I remember my very first day back. I think every mother goes through this: dropping off your child at daycare. I was smart enough that the day I got pregnant – I found out on a Sunday. I did the little pink test, and it was like, "Oh my god, I really am." The next day, I went to the daycare that was downstairs, and the waiting list was over a year long. Well, fortunately, I got on that waitlist in April of '94. By the time I started in April '95, there was an opening. I remember rolling him up the hill and taking him in. Every mom goes through this. You absolutely bawl your eyes out. I was still breastfeeding, and fortunately, I was able to go downstairs and see him. I think the context that you might understand is, it literally was just days after the Oklahoma bombing in which the daycare had been completely blown up, and all sorts of babies were killed and died. So I am this nervous parent already having the emotions of leaving your baby, then going into a federal facility. They were checking every car that went in, and you saw the bomb sweepers. It was just not the best of times. So that was the beginning. He went with me every day on the metro until he was, I think, probably three or maybe it was two and a half. No, it was three, three and a half. It was a wonderful daycare experience. My son was extremely precocious. He was talking in full sentences and paragraphs

by the time he was thirteen, fourteen months old. He was crawling at five months. He was walking – yes, I know. One of my favorite stories of him was waking him up, and he's in the crib. He always was ready to go, especially when he learned how to ride a trike at the daycare. He was just kind of sitting there. I could tell. You know how you can tell your kid is sick. I'm still a new mom, but I'm putting things together. He was old enough. He was over a year by then. I'm looking at him, and his eyes looked a little glassy. I said, "So don't you want to get up and go ride your trike with the big boys?" And he just slumped down, and he looked at me and goes, "Mommy, I'm little today." I thought, "You know, out of the mouths of babes." That's pretty smart. If I don't feel good, and that means I'm big. Well, I am little today. I always loved that. My other favorite story of him when he was little – he was probably about two and a half or three years old. His father and I were redoing the porch out front, screened-in porch. We were scraping it, getting ready to repaint it, and blah, blah, blah. We turn around, and he's climbing up the ladder. We went, "Oh, no, no, no. Sweetheart, you can't go up. See this yellow sticker? You can't go any higher than that. Your feet cannot go on that yellow sticker. Only your hands. Do you get that? He's like, "Uh-huh." He shakes his head. We turn around. We go back to scraping and scrubbing or doing whatever. I turn around, and the little fart, literally has peeled the sticker off and moved it up. It was at that point, I thought, "Wow, I have got to be one step ahead of this kid all the time, all the time."

MG: That's so clever.

LB: He went with me to work on the train every day. We read. I talked him through everything so that he knew his alphabet. He always knew what elevator button to push because of the letter. So it was a lot of fun. I really took the opportunity for us to bond. and for him to be educated. But I finally got exhausted with it because transitions were very difficult for him. I remember one time; it was the final straw. We're up on the Metro. I don't know if you've ever been to Washington, DC, but those platforms get really crowded. They're very busy. Those trains come in screaming fast. He didn't want to have to be in the stroller anymore. I said, "Okay, but you got to hang on to my hand. You can't let go of my hand when we're on the platform." He said, "Okay." We get up there on the platform, and he took off like a shot down the platform. I am like running after him, and I grab him. He starts yelling at me and screaming. I literally get us down to the end of the platform, and I'm literally having to push my knee into his chest to get him into the stroller and strapping him down, and he is screaming mad. You know when a baby arches its back, and they're purple. Oh, he was so mad. So I had to wait for train after train. Finally, he calmed down. So we get on the train. I got on the last car, thank goodness, and the minute we got in, "You were hurting me." I'm just like, "Oh my god." So we get through the whole ride, and I get off at Union Station where I was going to meet his father, and then we drive home. I'm wiped out by then. No, we didn't. I had to go all the way to Braddock Road [Metro Station], so I had to transfer. We transferred at Gallery Place and got all the way to Braddock Road. I'm just wiped out by the end. I remember thinking, "This needs to change." I found a daycare. They had one opening. It was about four blocks away from our house, and I got him in. Two months later, the Washington Post did a whole profile saying they're one of the best daycares in the area. My god, their waiting list went up for like a year and a half, two years. So I got him just in under the wire. It was fabulous. So he was there until he almost was five. Being born in December, he was an older kindergartener, which was great. I recommend that any parent. Don't ever push your kid to go earlier. It was great for him to be an older

kindergartner. By then, we had moved, and he was in a fabulous Elementary School District, [Douglas] MacArthur Elementary, there in Alexandria – just awesome. He had just the best time. It was just a really good start. His father and I divorced before he was out of elementary school, but we remained very amicable. We lived within a mile of each other so that he was still going to the same school, nothing really got interrupted for him, and we always prioritize that. Then I remarried at the end of 2008. Nathaniel moved with us, and that's when we moved to Bethesda. We actually lived in Chevy Chase, Maryland. He went to a private school for his last year of middle school, and then went right into high school, Bethesda-Chevy Chase High School. I think the big thing there was not only did he do well, but he got introduced to rowing. He rowed all the way through high school. He was on a winning boat. It really rocked his world. When he got into college, he went to the Florida Institute of Technology down in Florida, and got on a winning boat, and rowed through college until his senior year. He did what they call an accelerated master's program. So that last senior year was super-condensed, lots of classes, all science. So he quit; he quit rowing then. But to this day, he ~~just~~ maintains the physical discipline and eating healthy, I think he's going to live until he's a hundred, at least. There's no question. So, to this day, he has his master's in chemical engineering, and he got hired a month after graduation, a month or two months. He got hired by United Launch Alliance, and my kid works at Cape Canaveral, shooting up rockets. He's literally "launched" and loving it. He's loving life and super engaged with politics and social justice and a lot of science. My favorite saying that my son said is, "Mom, we engineered ourselves into this shit," meaning climate change, "and we're going to have to engineer our way out." So he is a big proponent of education, number one, as being a great equalizer, and definitely science education. So yes, I'm not going to take the credit for how he turned out any more than I'm going to take the credit if he does something really stupid or wrong. [laughter] He is totally who he is, and I'm super proud of him and the human being he is. I think he has a long rich journey ahead.

MG: Good. He sounds like an impressive person.

LB: Yes, he really is. And he's engaged to be married. They got engaged a year ago, over a year ago. He actually did a surprise proposal, but he wanted her parents there and us there. So we all had to hide for the first twenty-four hours so we wouldn't run into her. I'm super excited. They planned for it for March 2021, and then, of course, in March 2020, COVID hit so they are going to move the date to sometime in 2022.

MG: Was there anything else you wanted to cover in this conversation?

LB: I don't think so, Molly. Talking about myself, I'm surprised I was able to get through, but you make it very easy. I guess one thing that I wouldn't mind covering is just the changes I've seen over NOAA in time.

MG: Yes, I wanted to ask about that.

LB: I would like to revisit that just a little bit. I know I alluded to it earlier in our conversation that NOAA was established at that real pivotal point in American history, where the body politic became conscious of our environment. So much was going wrong with the air to the water to the land to species. NOAA was really a part of implementing those very visionary laws – the

Magnuson Stevens Act, probably the most successful, but I would also say, the Endangered Species Act. I realize there's a lot of people in the industry that get pissed off at it or ranchers because it really impairs their use of some resources. But you know what? Grizzlies are back. Wolves are back. Eagles are back. Bison are back. Gray whales are back. I mean, we've done a good job. I hope that maybe once we get through this very difficult and divisive time in our culture, that we can get back to science, and we can get back to the science of stewardship. This is planet spaceship, Spaceship Earth, and it's really finite. I hope people really, particularly young people, start embracing the science of stewardship. I think the pride that I have working for NOAA is that it's the very agency that literally helps set up the building blocks for the future of science and stewardship. So I hope it continues on. I think we need people looking back to where it was, so people can understand where we are and why we don't need to go backward.

MG: That leads me to ask, what do you think is going to happen with the change of administration? Joe Biden has just been elected president. What do you think is next for NOAA?

LB: Well, I have absolutely no doubt that President-elect Biden will put together a top-notch team. In fact, if you look on his website, which I was on the other day, two people I know are on the transition team. One is former NOAA administrator Dr. Kathryn Sullivan, the first woman astronaut to spacewalk. [She wrote*] Handprints on Hubble*. The other one is Kris Sarri, who I believe worked for the Council on Environmental Quality under President Obama. She is currently president of the National Marine Sanctuaries Foundation, and she has also been named to President-elect Biden's transition team for the Department of Commerce. So I have absolutely no doubt that you're going to have qualified, competent expertise coming in, getting an evaluation, getting the priorities from the scientists, and hopefully getting us back on track, instead of eroding the science and eroding the support. So I think NOAA will be fine in terms of that. I don't know all the damage that may or may not have been done. But I feel very strongly that President-elect Biden will correct it, including the ridiculous executive order that has tried to politicize civil servants. Civil servants join the government based on their expertise and the mission that they are passionate about. I have worked for Republicans and Democrats alike. In fact, I have more republican experience than I do democrat experience. So the idea that you would select and be able to fire and intimidate people unless they are loyal to a political agenda or a particular person is so authoritarian. So I hope that's the first piece of paper he burns on his desk is that executive order, and I will stand by that.

MG: Good. Well, was there anything else you wanted to say about the evolution of NOAA and how it's changed over the years?

LB: No.

MG: Well, I'm sad that this conversation has come to an end. It has been so great to get to know you. I hope we can stay in touch.

LB: I would be delighted, Molly. You're terrific, and you're such a professional.

MG: Well, I've really enjoyed talking with you. I have learned so much, and this has been such a treat.

LB: Thank you so much. Well, I'm shocked that you filled the four hours, but you sure did. You come up with good questions.

MG: And I'm sure there's a lot I left out. So I will follow up after I have a chance to listen back to this.

LB: Okay. Take care. Bye, Charley. Nice to meet you.

MG: Bye-bye.

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Molly Graham 9/25/2020
Reviewed by Laurel Bryant 2/2/2021
Reviewed by Molly Graham 7/30/2021