

Diana Talley – March 2023

This is Maritime Voices - I'm your host Jim Heumann. In this interview I will be speaking with Diana Talley. Diana believes that she may hold the world's record for throwing up at sea after getting pregnant on a 106-day engineless non-stop voyage from Panama to Port Townsend, in a boat without standing headroom. She's been a shipwright, an offshore fisher, a racing sailboat captain, and is now a writer as well as a bit of a rabble rouser with a penchant for getting things done. Diana grew up in Vancouver, Canada, and on Lake Washington in Seattle. She also spent time in Sausalito, California in the 70's, where she first got interested in boats, but then went back to Washington and settled on Bainbridge Island, where she designed and built her first boat. She earned a living as a commercial fisher, sailing a boat she built herself (and it included a bathtub!) In 1990 Diana moved to Port Townsend where she became a full-time shipwright. In this interview we talk about the "funky boatyard," what it was like being a woman in the marine trades, racing sailboats, commercial fishing, what Port Townsend was like in the 90's, offshore voyaging, and more. Here's the interview.

Jim:

Where were you born? Where'd you grow up, and how did you get to Port Townsend?

Diana:

I'm a Seattle girl.

Jim:

Oh, okay.

Diana:

Yeah, though, born in Seattle, and then when I was one year old, I moved to West Vancouver, BC, and lived there for nine years. My family moved up there to work, so I always pretended I was Canadian,

eh. Then, we moved back down, and grew up on Lake Washington for a good part of my life. Never saw boats. There were plenty there. I just didn't see them. I was fishing off the end of the dock. That's what interested me.

Jim:

Really?

Diana:

Yeah.

Jim:

Just when you were a kid?

Diana:

Yeah, young girl. I'd rush home from school and grab the fishing pool, go out there, and catch, what are they? Bullheads. Oh, geez. It was just thrilling. Then, how'd I get here? Oh, boy. Oh, boy. Somewhere along the line, I think I just needed to leave home, so when I was in my very early 20s, I decided I wanted to move to San Francisco, because that's where everyone was going in the early 70s.

Jim:

Yeah. When were you born?

Diana:

'52.

Jim:

Me too.

Diana:

It's a good year.

Jim:

Yeah.

Diana:

And so I moved to San Francisco just to experience that time, which was pretty grand, actually, but I hated San Francisco, and a girlfriend was living in Sausalito, and she said, "Move over here. There're places to live," and so I did. I just immediately packed whatever I had into my little car, drove over there, and found a horrible place to live, which suited me. It was a cardboard, no. Not cardboard. It was a plywood box on the back of a flatbed truck, right on the waterfront.

Jim:

The original tiny home, huh?

Diana:

Yeah. Had a door, no windows, couldn't stand up. It was crawl in, sleep, and get out.

Jim:

Really?

Diana:

Yeah. It was modest. \$6 a month though in Sausalito, California. Of course, I was right on the waterfront, and then all of a sudden, I noticed boats, because that's what it was, just everything was boats. The story is, I was walking around my neighborhood one day, and there was a shop with a door open, and I looked inside, and there was a boat being built. It was so beautiful, and I'd never even thought someone actually built boats. I was so stupid and young, and this lightning bolt hit me, and I decided that I wanted to learn how to do that, and it was Ray Speck's shop.

Jim:

I'm not familiar with Ray. What?

Diana:

Oh. Well, he's quite the legacy boat builder. He was in Sausalito. He built about 35 boats in Sausalito as a young man, a one-man shop. Then, in 1983, he moved to Port Townsend and went to boat school, even though he didn't need to go to boat school. Maybe 8 years later, he started teaching at the boat school, and he taught there for a very long time. He's an incredibly inspirational person, let alone boat builder.

Jim:

And is he still with us?

Diana:

Oh, you bet. He sure is, and we're still really close friends.

Jim:

Wow.

Diana:

Yeah, all these years later. A lot of us moved here, because this is a great maritime town if you're a sailor or boat builder. It's a long story how I got here, but I ended up in Bainbridge Island, bought my first couple of boats on Bainbridge Island, and that's where I actually learned how to build boats, was on Bainbridge, and built a boat or two. We'll say I was married, had a child, and went offshore sailing, did quite a bit of offshore sailing.

Jim:

But how did you learn to build boats? Did you just learn on the job?

Diana:

There was no job. I just did it in my own shop. Right.

Jim:

Okay, and what kind of boat?

Diana:

Well, wood. I started with skiffs. I designed my own skiff, which was really not a bad first design. I read a lot of books, talked to a lot of people, walked the docks, went aboard. I was smitten and driven, and there were plenty of people, older men, who saw my interest. I was kind of an anomaly, a young, beautiful woman who actually wanted to learn something that they were so good at, right? Because usually it's not a chick magnet kind of thing, and everyone was just so amazingly generous with their teaching, rigorous sailors.

Jim:

That's great.

Diana:

Yeah.

Jim:

I mean, it was a positive, being a woman back then?

Diana:

It was, yeah.

Jim:

Wow.

Diana:

Yeah. I wasn't doing it for a living, right? Well, I did actually build a few skiffs and sold them once I learned how to cut wood. What is it that one guy said? A really kind of a big time mucky-muck designer was by one day. He looked at my work, and I was a little embarrassed, and he said, "Oh, good there's room for Bondo." I mean, it was some of my first work, but I was so thrilled because I was actually completing projects, and there was a market for them, right? Of course, I was partnered up with someone, and he was one of my biggest teachers, though I was very independent, and I needed to do things for myself. He and I designed and built a rather large traditional sailboat, a big offshore sailing fish boat is what it was. Well, it wasn't that big. It was the smallest tuna boat in the world.

Jim:

How big?

Diana:

Well, it was 38 on deck. It's pretty small for an offshore fish boat. But fat. It was fat.

Jim:

Yeah, and who was your partner?

Diana:

Paul Svornich, third-generation Yugoslav purse seiner. I also learned commercial fishing too, being in the family.

Jim:

In the family?

Diana:

Well, the Svornich family. Paul was a fisherman. What was he? God, he's still here too. He brings his boat here every year. I would say he

was really a sailor first. Then, a fisherman, and then a boat builder, I would guess. He is an amazing single-hander. He still now goes out on the boat by himself for three weeks at a time and catches fish offshore, and he loves it. He's really the only person I've sailed with offshore, but he's an amazing seaman.

Jim:

Okay. But you were in Sausalito. How long were you there?

Diana:

Oh, gosh. You know I can't remember.

Jim:

Well, just guess.

Diana:

I want to say three, but it was off and on. I'd go down, and I'd spend time there, maybe six months, and then be so frustrated, and then come back to the Northwest. Then, I'd go back down, because there was this draw in Sausalito that was almost like a drug. It was so interesting, but there were some problems there.

Jim:

Problems in the Bay Area in the early 70s?

Diana:

Yeah. I was there on and off for three years, I think. Gave me my first inkling that this is what I wanted to do with my life, which was grand, but then I had problems. The reason I came back to the northwest was I could not get a date in the Bay Area. I could not get a date. I know. I couldn't figure that out either, and so I moved back to the Northwest, where it was never a problem. Then, I had to set about trying to find a way to enter the industry. It was before boat school, and I had very

little skills, no real skills, just a huge desire and a handful of rudimentary skills, and so nobody would hire me. There was no place I could work.

What I had to do then is learn on my own, in my own shop, and build up my skills that way, and with help from people like Paul, Dick Golden, and Dave Ullin, and, oh gosh, Kurt Ashford, all these people that entered my life then that said, "No, what are you doing it that way for?" It was really great. I did it on my own, I guess, with help from a lot of people. Then, when I went through what I guess you could call a divorce, I decided to move to Port Townsend. A guy here in town had a boat shop, and he knew my work. He owned this pretty big shop that worked mainly on commercial fishing boats, and he said, "Why don't you move to Port Townsend and work in the shop as an independent contractor?" Once again, I was on my own working for myself, which was really satisfying. I mean, I tried to do everything a shop would require of you, but I was really my own boss, which I think I've always wanted to be.

Jim:

And this was still in the 70s when you came up here?

Diana:

No, no. When did I move here? I moved here, I remember, January 1st, 1990. Yeah, is when I finally moved to Port Townsend.

Jim:

And did you come up here? Were you hanging out here at all?

Diana:

No. No, though Paul and I had a commercial sailing fish boat, before the boat we built, that we used to fish out of Port Townsend. I remember, I was thinking about this just the other day, I was here on my 30th

birthday, so in '82, we were in the commercial basin, kept it there, and then fished out in the straits. We couldn't make a living.

Jim:

But you still could commercial fish in the straits back then?

Diana:

Well, no. Not really. I mean, it was a joke. It was really sad. Fish & Game was trying to put people like us out of business, so they'd closed down all the areas where there were fish, and then said, "But look, we're giving you this space." And we said, "Well, we can try it," and there were no real fish, the areas where we were allowed to fish. We tried it for a while, so then we decided to build an offshore fishing boat where we had less regulation.

Jim:

That's the 38-footer.

Diana:

Right.

Jim:

So you're building it for yourself?

Diana:

Oh, yeah. Yeah, always. Never for money. I was never in this for the money. Good heavens.

Jim:

And what was the name of that boat?

Diana:

Ocean.

Jim:

Ocean, and is it still around?

Diana:

Yeah. Yeah. She comes here. I just talked to Paul the other day. He's hauling in May this year. He comes here to haul every year. When I had a shop here, he'd bring it to the shop, which was a wreck, because you have to keep in mind, he's my, we'll call him my ex-husband, and he'd bring his boat to the shop. It was so funny, because he'd say, "I need some help," because we built the boat together a million years ago, and he'd say, "I need some help. Will you help me?" I'd go, "Okay," but it was different then. All of a sudden, he was a paying customer, and so I actually treated him differently than a husband. I was actually nicer to him. Don't tell him I said that.

Jim:

It's being recorded.

Diana:

It's all right. I don't care. Yeah, and we're all good friends.

Jim:

But you went offshore, then, before you moved to Fort Townsend?

Diana:

Oh, yeah.

Jim:

And where offshore, and so this was then in the 70s, 80s?

Diana:

Yeah, so the beginning of my sailing, Paul and I were fishing out of a 14-foot wooden rowboat. I know. See, money was never that important to

us. It was all about romance and pain. Seriously, and it was probably the coldest winter on record at that time, and we had never discovered things like gloves, and we were hauling in a beach seine, and it was coming in frozen in saltwater, right? And we looked at each other and went, "You know, we need a vacation." That particular year, what year was that? That was 1980. On the cover of Wooden Boat Magazine, January of 1980 was this amazing photograph of sailing fish boats in The Bahamas, Bahamian sloops. They're traditional.

We said, "That's what we need. We need to get out of the rowboat and get a traditional sailboat," and so we just immediately booked a flight, we went down there, and actually met the guy who owned that boat that was on the cover and begged him to sell us his boat. He, of course, just laughed, but we couldn't find anything in the Bahamas. The Bahamian sloops were a higher quality construction than we could afford, but someone said, "Go to Belize." I'd never heard of Belize, and so we went to Belize. They were not the same quality, but everyone sailed and fished, the entire fleet. There couldn't have been more than five power boats in the whole country when we were there. We went and looked at every single boat in the country. It's a small country. We got around, and we found a boat that was for sale that we could afford. We bought it, slapped some bottom paint on it, and sailed it home. That was in 1980.

Jim:

Through the canal then?

Diana:

Yeah, so sailed down to the canal, and then that was three weeks where it was our little shakedown cruise. That was my first offshore experience, and it was, "Oh my God. Are you kidding me? Let's keep going." It was really exciting. Then, when we went through the canal, we thought we knew what we were doing. We made a few mistakes,

went offshore. We had everything we needed, we thought. It was 106 days from Panama to Port Townsend, and the main thing about that is, two months before we hit land, we ran out of fresh water. I know. That's sort of the funny part of the story.

Jim:

This is 106 days without making landfall?

Diana:

Right.

Jim:

Holy moly.

Diana:

Yeah. It was quite a trip on a boat you couldn't stand up in, crawling around. I lost a lot of weight. I looked really good when I landed. The thing about the water is we made a still, and we just happened to have what we needed on board. We didn't plan it. We just happened to have everything, and we lived. We lived.

Jim:

Did you fish for food, or did you have enough?

Diana:

Yeah. Here's another funny story about that. Confidentially, I got pregnant on that trip. Don't tell anyone, and so I think I hold the Guinness World Book of Record for having thrown up at sea more than any other woman on the planet, because from the minute I got pregnant, I just, anyway. And so, towards the end of the trip, we didn't have much food, and it was depressing to eat it and lose it. I wasn't eating a whole lot. We caught fish when we could, but fish aren't everywhere.

Jim:

Yeah, yeah. So you must have gone way out?

Diana:

We did.

Jim:

But you didn't go all the way to Hawaii?

Diana:

No, we did not. We thought about it. Halfway up or somewhere along there, we said, "Maybe we should go to Hawaii," but I think we'd just have to get back on the boat and come back, right? So we made the decision. We followed the sailing directions, the old sailing directions. We went south first, and then out, and then up, so we avoided the winds off of the coast.

Jim:

106 days!

Diana:

It's a bit of time.

Jim:

Without making a landfall in a boat you couldn't stand up in.

Diana:

Yeah. And we didn't have much on board. I mean, it was-

Jim:

So you were navigating with a sextant then?

Diana:

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Yeah. It was very old school. I mean, it really was. It was so romantic, Jim.

Jim:

Did it have an engine?

Diana:

No, of course not. Nor water.

Jim:

Wow. What an adventure.

Diana:

It was an adventure. It was really grand.

Jim:

And what year was this again?

Diana:

That was '80. And my daughter was born in '81. Funny, that. We landed, here in Port Townsend in September. When did we leave Panama? I think it was in right around my birthday in May. Well, we were three-and-a-half months out, is how long we were out. We made a few mistakes, and we lived.

Jim:

Did you see many other boats at all out there?

Diana:

No. And so remember, this is a traditional, wooden boat, Caribbean boat, and there's all stories of pirates and whatnot. I remember, maybe a month out of Panama, we saw a yacht. I mean, it was right there, and you never saw a boat. You'd see freighters, of course, but you'd never

see sailboats. We saw this yacht right there, and I remember going, "Oh my gosh. People," and I ran down below and brushed my teeth, because I wanted to say hello. It's not like they were going to see my teeth, but that's what you did. We tacked to try and meet up with them, and I'll bet someone somewhere is telling their people, "Oh my God. We almost got killed by pirates," and they just booked out of there, turned their engine on, and left. They wouldn't let us get close to them.

Jim:

So what mistakes did you make?

Diana:

Well, we didn't take enough water. We didn't take enough food, and the food we had was the wrong kind of food. I learned things, like there's different kinds of plastic. There's food-grade plastic, and then there's plastic that, if you put food in, it ruins your food. I didn't know that.

Jim:

Did you get in any storms?

Diana:

Uh-huh, but in the North Pacific, there were some pretty good winds and waves coming when we finally turned right to go to the coast. It was all exhilarating, but the watchword of that trip was calms. There were three separate calms, which is why it took so long. One was the Bay of Panama. I think that was three weeks, where we were essentially becalmed, just drifting with the current. Oh, gosh. The other one was the Equatorial Countercurrent, and I think it was another three weeks out there of just going backwards, a little frustrating. Then, the North Pacific High, which was six weeks. I mean, you're right there, and you're like, "Oh, geez," and there's nothing you can do about it.

Jim:

Well, and you didn't have grib files or no other way to get weather probably?

Diana:

No, no, no.

Jim:

Did you even have a radio?

Diana:

We did. We had a short wave, so we could pick up the time from Greenwich, so we could do our navigating.

Jim:

Okay, using the sextant.

Diana:

Though, we took a wave once, a saltwater wave, of course. Just a couple drops hit the radio, and it stopped working really early in the trip. It was like, "Oh my God. Now what are we going to do?" Because we didn't really have a timepiece, and I think it was two weeks later, and I was just being me, and I was out on deck, singing at the top of my lungs, old show tunes. I don't know why, and I remember Paul said, "Oh, God." There's got to be something better to listen to than this, and he went and turned the radio on, and it worked. So see, I saved us.

Jim:

So you moved to Port Townsend, when you sailed the boat here? No?

Diana:

No, no. We made our landfall here. We're from Bainbridge Island, and we took it back to Bainbridge. Oh, she almost sunk with worms. She

had worms in the scribe line on the boot top, at which no one had painted the scribe line, and the worms got in. It's just amazing that we didn't sink, because when we got home, we started rebuilding her, and we found that the worms had come in and hit the 20 years of paint on the inside, and then said, "No, we aren't going through that." It was like the paint was keeping the boat afloat, so we had to replace the water line, which as you know, isn't just one plank. So we put her on the grid, got her ready for fishing, and we had a really successful fishery that we did ourselves. We were the only pot fishermen in Puget Sound. Not crab pots, fish pots.

Yeah, I know. It was state of the art, old school. And we caught lots of fish, marketed it ourselves, got insurance, and did everything we were supposed to do, and we're selling them to the Chinese restaurants in the international district. You know, you'd bring in these fish that were jumping in five-gallon buckets. It was a very successful fishery until someone complained about us, because we were fishing off of Bainbridge Island, and there's a lot of money on Bainbridge Island. They saw us fishing and catching fish, and they complained to Fish & Game that we were catching their personal fish, and so Fish & Game shut us down, and that's when they gave us the straits. They said, "Well, you can't fish here anymore, but you can go fish at Hein Bank." That's when we said, "Screw this. We're going offshore."

Jim:

Oh, okay. So that's when you had to build the other boat.

Diana:

Right.

Jim:

Well, you'd already done the 106 days offshore with the [current] boat?

Diana:

Yeah, but I think I was looking at things like a heat source.

Jim:

You were getting soft.

Diana:

Yeah, getting soft. Well, I did build a bathtub in it. That was actually pretty nice. I learned fiberglass and built me a bathtub for that boat. I'll say this about that. As I was building it, it was the first piece of furniture that went into that boat. She was in frame. Deck beams and frames were on, no planking or anything, but I had to install the bathtub first, right? All these guys came by and said "That's so stupid, girly." And even Paul said, "Well, it really is a dumb thing." I said, "I don't care. It's the only thing I've ever missed on a boat," and when we started going offshore on it, he spent more time in the bathtub, and actually came to me, not long after, and humbly apologized for his attitude and thanked me for building the bathtub, so there.

Jim:

How did you drain the bathtub?

Diana:

Sump pump. Yeah. It was really cool. Yeah, and the cool thing was, so we had this really crazy engine. It was a single cylinder Hundested. It ran about 550 RPMs.

Jim:

Big prop?

Diana:

Yeah. Variable pitch. And depending on the load, so we had hydraulics, we had refrigeration, and we had the engine, because we were commercial fishing boat. We had a state-of-the-art, high end, freezer

on the boat, which took up most of the boat. Depending on the load you put on the engine, when it was saltwater, it cooled. We had a hose on deck, that the water came out of from the engine, and depending on the load you put on, you could adjust the temperature of the water. If we wanted to take a nice, warm bath, we'd turn something up, and then we'd take the hose, fill up the tub, and get in there. It was really cool.

Jim:

Oh, wow.

Diana:

I know. Kept me sane for a while.

Jim:

I mean, was that your main way of making a living then, fishing, at that point?

Diana:

Oh, yeah. And we had a little girl, too.

Jim:

Oh, right. And did she go fishing with you?

Diana:

Yeah. She was the best deckhand you've ever seen. Bar none. I've never known a better deck hand. We went to Alaska. We went out to Hawaii first. We went out to almost Midway, fishing.

Jim:

Really?

Diana:

Well, we were sailors more than fishermen, right? And our little girl went with us, and that was the first year. Then, we came back for the Albacore season on the coast, and then the next year I wanted to go to Alaska, because Alaska was really more my thing than the tropics. And so we went to Alaska, and oh my God. Have you been there? You've been there, haven't you?

Jim:

Yeah.

Diana:

Yeah. You know.

Jim:

When did you stop fishing then and-

Diana:

And move here? It was after the year that we went to Alaska. We came to irreconcilable differences, and I miss it. We've all gone on and had wonderful lives since then, and we're all still friends too, but it was the right thing for us to do. And that's when I moved here. I needed to get off the island.

Jim:

Okay. And then you get here in '90, you said?

Diana:

Yeah, yeah.

Jim:

And when did you open your shop?

Diana:

Well, I worked for a guy named Jan Watson. He had a big shop right next to Ernie's [Baird]. It was on the water side of Ernie's. The building is gone now, but it was a pretty good-sized shop. He imported me. I was just one of the guys in the shop, and I worked with Steve Langhorst and David Vohs also. It was the four of us in the shop, and he brought in the work, and then he'd just point and say, "Do this." It was so amazing. He never micromanaged. None of the guys did. It was really an amazing opportunity for me, because I had never been paid to do the work, right? I had only built boats for myself. All of a sudden, I'm charging, which actually puts a pressure on you. You actually have to perform in a reasonable amount of time for a reasonable amount of money. But apparently, I guess I did. I think I worked for him for almost three years, and then he decided to leave town and move. Steve also went on to something, and David Vohs opened Lee Shore Marine, so the shop disappeared.

I had some experience and a resume, and people had seen my work, though what I learned, Jim, and this was funny, people will see your work, but they only see what they can see. You might be planking a boat right in front of them, and they'll go and tell their friends, "Wow, she's the best painter I ever saw," which was a frustration for me, because it's like, "What? Didn't you just see me hang a plank?" "You're the best painter. Blah, blah, blah." I mean, that was interesting, because see, I'd been living in a bubble with my shop mates when I went to work.

Jim:

Oh, okay.

Diana:

They saw my work, but they treated me like a human being. But when I left that bubble, and went out and faced the real world, maybe, not

very many people could see what I was capable of, and I wasn't happy with that. I interviewed several shops. They say they thought they were interviewing me, but I was interviewing them as well to see if I could move into one of the shops in some capacity. It was so clear that they wanted me, but I would be relegated to reefing seams, sweeping, and making coffee.

Jim:

Really?

Diana:

Yeah, and I said, "I don't want to do that. I'm a little beyond that," so my alternative was I just started my own shop, which was really hard. I learned. I had some experience with business management, because I'd been a commercial fisherman and done all the business angle there, so I knew all about staying legal and all that stuff, but you have to come up with a customer base when you have your own shop. I was still connected to the yachting fleet and the commercial fleet, and so to get going, I love people. I love our boat owners, our sailors, our fishermen. You call them, and you say, "You know, I need a job." [and they would say] "Oh, I have some work you could do."

So bit by bit, it took me, I want to say, a good year-and-a-half, maybe two, before I felt like I could pick and choose my customers. I think the first year or two, I was working for people that were assholes. A lot of them, not all of them, but a lot of them, because I was desperate. I was a single mom too. I had to take care of my daughter and feed her, and so I accepted work from people, but I learned how to do stuff. But then I finally reached a point where I went, "Oh, guess what? I don't want to work for you anymore." It was really nice, because it was just all part of learning.

Jim:

Yeah, so this is now the mid-90s, where you're starting the business?

Diana:

Well, let's see. Then, I met Rick, so yeah. I started my own shop probably '93.

Jim:

And before we get there, Sean Rankins, I talked to him a few weeks ago. He talked about what he called the Funky Boatyard.

Diana:

Yeah. That's where I had my shop.

Jim:

Okay. And tell me more about the Funky Boatyard.

Diana:

Oh, man. It was so great. So you know where Haven Boatworks, where Ernie Baird's shop was, just to the water side of that, where the bathroom is now? You know, there's a public bathroom That whole area, at the head of it, it started about where you would enter the Larry Scott Trail, all along the berm was an incubator space that the Port rented out to people either just getting started or whatever. Dave Thompson was there, right? Van Hope was there.

Jim:

Yeah. I was going to ask you about Van.

Diana:

Yeah, it was amazing. I mean, all these amazing people were there, and gosh, Brian Hayes was there. I bought the shop. It was the coolest shop. I paid 200 bucks. I know, top dollar. 200 bucks for this amazing wooden shop that had belonged to Moose, if you have ever heard of Moose,

Eric Wilson and Randy Purdue. They were shipwright corks, and they had this had built this shop, and they weren't using it anymore. They said, "Well, you can have our shop for 200 bucks."

So I moved in, and I had no tools, right? Because I'd always been working out of someone else's big shop. All I had were my hand tools. Then, someone, like a guy named John, who was a friend from Bainbridge Island, a commercial fisherman, gave me my starter tools. He gave me the bandsaw, the table saw, and the joiner. It was like the original 1940s shop tools, and that's how I got started, tooling up and had a bench. It was just the coolest place, but there were quite a few of us there at the Funky Boatyard, and it was a great way to get started.

Jim:

And the train tracks were still there then, right?

Diana:

Yeah, yeah.

Jim:

So were they on the water side of the train tracks? Was that where the Funky Boatyard was?

Diana:

No, just on the inside of the berm. But where my shop was, so cool, Jim. It was right next to the berm on a high tide, massive southerly the waves would crash over the berm and hit the windows of my shop, and I was like, "Whoa, this is living." It was really, really great, and I can't remember how long I was there. Oh, not long. A year or two. Then, some bad business mistakes were made by the guy that was in charge of the Funky Boatyard, and he started letting people in there that weren't doing business, were just living in campers. It totally changed the culture of the area, and the Port didn't like it, rats moved in, and it

was awful. And so the Port shut it down, and so then I had to get a different shop, which I did.

Jim:

And is that the one that you had then for many years?

Diana:

No. Had another one. Yeah. I think that's probably about when I met Rick, and he'd been working for Edensaw, and had gone to boat school, and wanted to enter the fray down here in the Boat Haven. And so we immediately fell in love, big time. Oh my gosh. Really bad, and we decided to marry our fortunes together, and we ended up buying Taku. Do you remember Taku?

Jim:

Uh-huh. Yeah.

Diana:

We bought Taku for a dollar, a Canadian dollar, and it came with a shop. And so we started tearing it apart and rebuilding it, because it was a total rebuild, the boat was.

Jim:

Oh, I didn't know you had a boat named that as well.

Diana:

Oh, you didn't know the boat?

Jim:

No, I didn't know the boat. I just knew the shop.

Diana:

Well, Taku, it was one of the original sailboats in town that was owned by Margie and Glenn Abraham, who, along with the Daubenbergers, started The Yacht Club.

Jim:

The Daubenbergers started The Yacht Club?

Diana:

Yeah, with the Abrahams. Way back when, in the 60s, I think. I'm probably lying, but it's close enough. They had owned the boat forever, and then Glenn got sick, and they had to sell it. We didn't buy it from Margie, but we bought it from someone else, and by then, the boat was just a mess.

Jim:

And what kind of boat was it?

Diana:

Was it? Oh, Bill Garden, 1947. Yeah, Bill Garden. It was really fun, just like the way I got started in boat building for myself, right? So between jobs, because we're still trying to build our business, Taku Marine. We decided to name it after the boat. We're still trying to build our customer base, so we had a little extra time, and we had this project. And so we really refined our skills by completely rebuilding this sailboat, which was then a great business card. You could come to me and say, "Can you do it?" And I'd say, "Well, let me show you what I've done." It was really a smart way to continuing education. Then, gosh, I don't remember how long we had that shop. It was a really cool building, but the Port didn't like the look of it. They said we had to dismantle it, and perhaps I've been fighting the Port for as long as I've been here, and that's part of it. I mean, there was a feeling in administration of the Port, where they just weren't pro-business. That's what I say. They won't say that. Anyway, so we had to dismantle that

shop. Just coincidentally, the little shop that we ended up with on Port property came available, and we grabbed it, and we were there for, I think 18 years. I can't remember. It was great. It was perfect. We shared the shop, but we never, ever worked on the same project together, because that's not what husbands and wives do, Jim.

Jim:

Really? You never worked on the same things?

Diana:

Probably not.

Jim:

Wow. Do you remember when I came in there? God, it must have been 2009ish. I was looking for something, or I needed something. I either needed a big piece of plywood cut, and I couldn't do it myself for some reason, or I was looking, anyway, I was looking for a little help from somebody, and you were the least intimidating of all the shops.

Diana:

I was?

Jim:

Or somebody said, "Go talk to them," and I went in there.

Diana:

But we always said yes to anybody.

Jim:

Well, you did. Yeah. I appreciate it.

Diana:

Well, that's how you get along, isn't it? Building friendships, right?

Jim:

Mm-hmm.

Diana:

Well, thank you for that. That's sweet.

Jim:

Yeah, so were you still sailing too then?

Diana:

Oh, yeah. Not offshore though. It's like when I moved here, I retired from that, which is a sadness, but I did other things, right?

Jim:

Yeah, you can't do everything.

Diana:

You can't do everything, and so I moved here. Oh, I left this out. I moved here, needing a place to live. This is before I met Rick. Well, of course, I'm going to live on a boat, right? And I looked all over, and I found this horrible boat that was such a mess, but it was 38 feet, and it was only \$4,000, and I had like \$3,900 in my bank account. I bought it, and brought it to town. It was a K38, a Kettenburg 38. It was 38 feet, but it was 8 feet wide. It was pretty small, and I spent 6 months rebuilding it, which was so fast. Got her in the water, and my daughter and I lived aboard, but she was a racing sloop, Jim. I didn't know anything about racing. The pressure here is if you own a racing sloop, my gosh, you better be out on the water, right? There was a lot of people that said, "You ought to come out." I'm like, "I fucking hate racing. I'm not doing it." Well, anyway, I finally went out and I thought, "Oh my gosh. Not only am I having fun, but I'm winning races," and it

wasn't me, of course. It was the boat, right? I did win a few races, and that, oh my gosh, talk about building competition.

Jim:

Now, was this part of the big, wooden boat series that the Mariners Regatta was part of?

Diana:

I was always in that, yeah. It was really fun, because back then people came from all over the region for that two-day race. Then, there were other races, regionally, that I went to, because I had that bug. It was kind of fun, because I always said, "I don't like going out on the bay and sailing. I want to go voyaging," but there is some fun to that. I did that until my very last race, which was on Lake Union at the Wooden Boat Festival down there. I found myself screaming at my crew, and I went, "Oh. I don't want to be this way," but I won that race, Jim. I have my name on a big trophy down there. So I did that. I did racing, and all the while we owned Taku, and were rebuilding it, so we had 2 38-footers. When we finally got Taku in the water, then Rick and I used it all the time. I mean, we'd go out for the Shipwrights' Regatta, but we went voyaging regionally, we went up into Canada. We really used it for what she was built for. It was really satisfying. We had a lot of fun.

Jim:

All right, so you were living on the boat and working at the new Taku shop?

Diana:

Oh, no. I wasn't living on the boat then. No, no. Rick and I, remember I said we fell in love? Boom. I moved to shore, a long time.

Jim:

And what was Port Townsend like when you moved here in the early 90s?

Diana:

Boy, it seemed there was more room for people that didn't conform. I guess that's one way to put it, so many nonconformists that could just be here, without people saying, "No, you have to get a license. You need insurance. You can't do that." You know what I mean? There were so many of us that just lived without the burden of rules and regs, I guess.

Jim:

And was the town pretty quiet? Sean told me that it would be hard to find a restaurant that was open in the winter.

Diana:

Well, I think that's true. It was much quieter. I can't remember what year it was, but I remember I'd always eat at the Landfall, which was in Point Hudson, everyone's favorite restaurant. Somewhere along the line, I remember thinking, "Oh my gosh. I never ever want to drive downtown ever again, because there was so much tourism all of a sudden, and it hadn't been that way." The only way I would go downtown was on a bicycle, where you could actually get around, but I can't remember what year that was, but it wasn't like that when I first moved here. You always could find a place to park or something like that. It was different. I think a lot of people were squozed out.

Jim:

Were what?

Diana:

Squosed. Squeezed out.

Jim:

Oh. Let's step back a little. Tell me about Van Hope.

Diana:

Oh, man. What a guy. I can't really speak too much about his history, but I met him before I moved to town. Somehow, I would come up here and look at boats, meet people, and stuff before I moved here, and Van was building the scow schooner Patricia, but he had also built, oh, shoot. He and Patricia had built their little, I think it was a Bill Garden also. He and Bill were friends. I know that. He was a very well-known builder, but also sailor, cruiser. His wife, Patricia, died of cancer, and he was building this scow schooner, maybe one last hurrah for him. Here, I am. I'm pretty old too, but I don't remember how old he was when he launched Patricia.

That was being built at the Funky Boatyard. I remember I showed up for the launch, or just the day before the launch or something, and I said, "I want to help." Anyway, the whole community was helping getting it going. And so Van and Carol Baker were partners. Carol Baker is the longtime librarian here in town. She's still the librarian for the Northwest Maritime Center. He launched Patricia, and I was here by then. That summer, no. It was May. I remember, when the old gaffers race goes on up in Vancouver Island. Where is it? Oh, crap. I can see it on a chart. Anyway, it's a big, wooden boat race. Old gaffers.

Jim:

Is it still held?

Diana:

I would think so. And Van decided to put together a group to go up to the gaffers. This was his first year on the water, and somehow I got invited. I know. It was like, "Okay." It was amazing, and it was so weird, Jim, because I didn't know anybody on board, except Doug Humes, who

helped build Patricia. He was my friend on the dock. He had invited me. I can't say how many people there were, but we were crammed in that boat. I had never met these kinds of people before. I was not a drinker, and these people drank, sailed, and knew how to have fun.

I'm lying, but it seems like we took three days to get from here to there, because Van, he wasn't into speed. He was into, not quantity, but quality. He knew every anchorage in the San Juans, and we'd stop and go swimming. It was really something. It opened my eyes to a different way of doing things, because I'd always been go, go, go, go, go, right? Van taught me that you don't have to do that. You can just enjoy every moment. It was really quite lovely. He was inspirational to a lot of us.

Jim:

That's what I keep hearing. His name just keeps coming up and up and up, as a mentor to a lot of people here, and just a great guy.

Diana:

He was. He was really deep and wasn't afraid to show the things that he'd done in his life that he was sorry he'd done. He wasn't afraid to talk about that kind of stuff. He was very open.

Jim:

So you ran the business for 18 years?

Diana:

I guess? Oh, I could figure it out. I don't know. I think someone recently asked me. I believe we had to close shop in 2016. Rick was really sick, and I had to close shop.

Jim:

Okay. And did you mostly repair boats?

Diana:

Yeah. I built a couple while I was there, little boats, skiffs. Really, there's not a lot of boat building going on here in Port Townsend. It's all restoration and repair, though some of the projects are practically rebuilding, but really it's all just restoration and repair. It was so grand, Jim, because every day was different. It was never the same. Even if you were planking for a period of time, every single plank was different. There was nothing routine about boat building.

Jim:

And after a while, did you, being a woman, did you get shit for your whole career?

Diana:

No, I did not.

Jim:

No?

Diana:

I don't think so. Well, remember I said, in the beginning, I did, and I allowed that to happen because I was desperate for a paycheck. There're people called bullies. I worked for bullies, and I thought about it afterwards. I realized I was attracting a certain kind of person, and they're all from out of town, okay? They weren't from here, who had worked with the men in the big shops and couldn't do that, because they were bullies, and the men wouldn't put up with it, right? So they had probably a string of previous contractors work on their boats, who had said, "I don't want to work for you anymore because you're an asshole," and so all these people found me because, as you said, didn't you say I was the least intimidating?

Jim:

Mm-hmm.

Diana:

Right? So I was very accessible and compliant. I was raised a girl, and I think, as a girl, we're taught to get along with people, which it's a double-edged sword. I mean, I want to get along with people, but don't piss me off. But in the beginning, that was the kind of person who I worked for until I realized that I had enough other people that were treating me with respect. When I finally came to that in my own head and in my own heart, then I never put up with any shit from anyone. I mean, if someone gave me pushback, I wouldn't take it. And so people either respected me or they avoided me, right? And it all worked out. I have a few friends.

Jim:

And you've still got your fingers in a lot of stuff now. I mean, you did that thing with the women in marine trades, the big picture, and all of that.

Diana:

Oh, the forum. Yeah, yeah.

Jim:

How'd all that get going?

Diana:

Oh, gosh. Jim, that's funny. These days, everything I do is something intuitive. It isn't something I think about. Someone will say something, and I'll go, "Oh. We ought to do that," right? It's never my idea, but I'm a great, little organizer, and because I was a woman in the industry, and I did face challenges that were different than men, not to say men don't face challenges. They faced the same ones that I did, but when I had my shop, I hired every woman that walked in the door, because I wanted to support women and give them a chance to get ahead, if that's what

they wanted to do. And so now that I'm not working anymore, my heart is still there, I still want to support and back up women, especially young women getting started, whatever.

It's just something that I love, right? It speaks to me. Apparently, there's other people that feel the same way in this town, and what's so interesting is, I think it was a couple of years ago, maybe was it last year? I think it was. I looked around and went, "Oh my God. There's so many women working in the trades," that I had never noticed before, and it was so exciting to me. I decided to put together that photograph. Well, it wasn't my idea. Someone said, "You ought to do it," right? It wasn't my idea. Because I know a lot of people, and I have the ability to organize, not with emails, but by walking around and talking to people, and people are generally nice to me, I managed to organize that group photo.

I want to say this about that. It was such an exciting event, and upfront, so many of the women I spoke to, mostly the older women, women I know and respect, said to me, "Oh, no. No, no. I haven't really done much in my life. No, no. I don't deserve to be in this photo."

I convinced almost all of them, "No, you really do. This is our opportunity to look at ourselves and recognize ourselves." And every one of the women that came that had said that to me, once they got there and looked around at the other women standing with them in that group, went, "Oh. I do belong." It was such an emotional and beautiful moment. It was really lovely.

Jim:

Yeah. That's nice.

Diana:

It was. We have to celebrate ourselves.

Jim:

Did you ever have a license, a captain's license?

Diana:

Yes, I did. Yeah, you bet. Because I had a lot of sea time. When I moved to Port Townsend, I realized that it was an opportunity for me to possibly use it commercially. I never did, but I went to the effort of getting it, and it's not an easy thing to do. It was just another part of my education, and I'm glad I did it.

Jim:

And when did you get that?

Diana:

Oh. It was before I met Rick, so it was the early 90s.

Jim:

Early 90s. Okay, so that was pretty early on for a woman to be getting a captain's license.

Diana:

Well, yes and no. Look around. Isn't Port Townsend known as, anecdotally anyway, the town with more women captains per capita than any other town in the world?

Jim:

Is that right?

Diana:

Yes. That's what we say. I mean, look around. It's shocking, and it's exciting.

Jim:

But was it hard getting the license, just because you were a woman?

Diana:

No, not at all. I took a class here from Jeff, oh, shoot, I forgot his name. The class was hard, but I was committed, and it is. You make or break it. You either put your energy into it or you don't, and then you go to Seattle and you take the tests, the Coast Guard. And they all go, "You can do this." I'm like, "I know I can." It was great. It was empowering.

Jim:

Nice. In the Funky Boatyard back then, were there no regulations? Was it dangerous? Were people getting hurt? Were there a lot of injuries?

Diana:

Not that I can remember. There certainly weren't stringent environmental regs then. Not at all. I'm sure I made a lot of bad moves in that regard until I started working, as a subcontractor, working for big time professionals, and them teaching me how to be protective of the environment. But in the Funky Boatyard, I don't think we even had to have a business license. I'm not sure I did. I don't know that I did. In fact, don't tell anyone. I'll never forget, there was a wonderful, young woman who worked for the Port, and she came around one time and said, "Oh. I'm checking on a couple of things, but don't worry. We know you have a business license." I went, "You do?" And I went out that day and got me a business license. I was chagrined, because nobody checked. Now, I think things are different now.

Jim:

Yeah. I was going to ask about who your mentors were, but you mentioned a whole bunch of them.

Diana:

Oh, there's more. Heavens. All guys. Amazing, experienced sailors, boat builders, corks, designers, riggers. I don't know how I happened to meet them all. I met Bill Garden on Van Hope's boat.

Jim:

Oh, really?

Diana:

Yeah. We went up to Canoe Cove. That's where we parked the boat, and that's where Bill lived and, of course, Bill and Van were friends. But when I started, so in the 80s, a lot of the old timers were still alive. It was really nice.

Jim:

And I always ask if you have advice for young people. Particularly, getting into the trades.

Diana:

Yeah, advice for young people. Well, the first thing I'd say is buy yourself a boat. If you really want to be in the trades, you should own a boat. That's what I think. That's how I got into it. That's how everyone in town, when I moved here, everyone owned a boat, and I don't see that anymore. But everyone owned a boat, and there were almost all sailboats. And so we were sailors first, and then boat builders, right? That's what I would recommend, but these days, maybe it's harder to own a boat, or more expensive or something. One thing I would say is there are people like me, like I had. I had all these old people that were just so happy to give advice, and I think it'd be nice if young people sought that out as just additional, continuing education, right?

Jim:

All right. Well, I guess we can call this good.

Diana:

Thank you for asking me, Jim. It was really, really kind of you to reach out like this. Very nice.

Jim:

No. I think it's fascinating. I mean, it's just so interesting. As I've talked to Karen about this, you meet somebody, and you pigeonhole them right away as to what they are.

Diana:

Oh, yeah.

Jim:

Like, you. You were a boat builder. I thought you were a boat builder. I had no idea that you did 106 days offshore and-

Diana:

Commercial fisherman.

Jim:

Commercial fisherman.

Diana:

And racer.

Jim:

And racer and all that stuff, and it's just so fascinating to hear the rest of the story.

Diana:

I want to say this about that, because this is a topic of conversation that's come up recently with a really good friend of mine. There's a thing that I've noticed called a public persona. People have a public

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persona image of everybody, and it's limiting to both the person you're thinking about and yourself. So many people have said to me, "Oh. You're so imPortant," but what I'm saying is people do that. They pigeonhole someone as being above them or below them, not an equal or whatever, and it limits their ability to see them for the whole human. I'd love it if we could get away from the public persona so much.

Jim:

All right. Well, I guess I'll turn this off unless there's anything? All right.

This interview was done for the [Maritime Voices](#) podcast/oral history project. It will also (eventually) be available through the Jefferson County Historical Society.