

Steve Kornberg and Terry Causey Talking about Nancy Griffith  
Australia 2015

Terry: Well, I first met Nancy when I took her celestial navigation course at Big Island Marine, and I really liked her and then I started taking sailing lessons from her. Although I knew sailing, but she had offered a course on her boat the Nelly Bly, a 42 foot wooden ketch and it was 6 two hour lessons for \$150 so it was such a good deal. And I really wanted to get out on the water that I went out. Anyway, we became friends and she asked me to crew for her on some charters that she was doing with the Oceanic Society, that she'd been doing together with Steve. Steve had been doing them also on his boat the Gershon 1, and Nancy had been doing them on the Nelly Bly. So that's how I met Nancy and over time we just got along, she was a great, inspiring, enthusiastic, and interesting lady. And so eventually I wanted to get a sailboat, I was looking at a Choy Lee, a 35 foot, this old Elvis boat that had been in Blue Hawaii. And I'd been negotiating with the people for months and months, so, from July to October. And I finally got them down to almost half of what they were been asking. And then Nancy calls me up and says she has this boat she wanted me to go in on with her, so that's what I did.

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T: I changed my mind and went in with her on Goodewind and at the same time Steve also had an interest, came in and had an interest in Goodewind, so then we started doing projects. Nancy had been able to get a contract with the University of Hawaii doing their blue water marine lab program. We also advertised trips to Fanning Island, about 1000 miles south of Hawaii and so that was the beginnings of a great friendship.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, so, I mean, both of you told me that Nancy's so inspiring. What is it about her?

Steve Kornberg: She had sailed with Bob Griffith for many years, and Bob was just a wonderful sailor, very, you know, what's the word I'm trying to think of... He could make something out of nothing, and they were very low-tech. They wrote a book when I first met them they were just finishing their book *Blue Water*, which is still a wonderful book on how to do low-tech sailing. She just, I mean 'can't do' was not in her vocabulary, and she was even in her fifties when I first met her. She could climb the rigs, stand up on our bos'n's chair, just could do anything and had this love of life and love of sailing and just totally kept up with creative ideas. And 'course they had just the life-long anecdotes of all their sailing adventures. Three circumnavigations in the 60s and early 70s. Just really inspiring. Inspired me to get my license and then she and I started Blue Water Cruising, a little sailing school for about three years in Kona and I got to sail with her a lot and the more I sailed with her the more I admired her, and 'course became close friends and we stayed friends all the way through the rest of her life.

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STEPHANIE: Yeah, so did the three of you ever sail together?

T: We did. We did. We enjoyed sailing together. And of course, eventually we were all captains and we had our opinions and but we respected each other and we enjoyed each other's company. And we did, we did like to sail together.

STEPHANIE: So, tell me about one of your sails together.

SK: Well, let's see, you know, Nancy also ran a shipping company down in the Cook Islands and she first started with Edna, which was a sailing ketch and did cargo between the northern Cooks, and Fanning, and Christmas, and those areas from Hawaii. And then she had a motor freighter Avatapu, that she ran out of Rarotonga, and I was fortunate to go with her on deck a few of those

trips, which was great. But let's see, some of the trips with Nancy. We did the Blue Water Marine Cruise for a whole year and we had a great fun with that. The three of us were sailing together a lot, and we just took turns who was captain but it didn't hardly matter and we would take all the school kids out from port to port throughout Hawaii. And then we even sailed with some of the star students, we took some down to Christmas and Fanning I think on a trip.

T: Yup.

SK: And then one time we picked up Nancy in Tonga, no in Rarotonga and sailed to Tonga with her and that was most wonderful. I think the best trip we ever had was the trip from Australia to Lord Howe to North Island. The three of us, and two other sailors, was just a really hard core crew and we left Australia got to Lord Howe just enjoyed Lord Howe a lot. And when the wind came up, which means we had to leave north Lord Howe in the south westerly, and then we had a romp of Gershon really sailing hard and all of us really enjoyed it. And it was just a great, that may have been her last sail, but anyway we all had a wonderful time.

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T: Yeah I think that was her last sail. But what a sail that was.

STEPHANIE: You mean that was Nancy's last sail.

T: Yes, that was Nancy's last sail. She was having problems with her knees and she was so afraid of having an operation on her knees because she thought it would disable her. But then she continued having problems with her knees and walking and keeping her balance on board the ship. So, it just made it very difficult for her to get up and down the companionway and to get around. And so I think she sort of resigned herself to a more land based life and she fulfilled that by getting into her coffee farm and selling organic coffee and actually winning an award for her coffee. So, she was fully dedicated to almost any project, or endeavor that she was focused on. She had wonderful focus and determination and persistence. And, so, it just wasn't in sailing, it was in most matters of her life that she was dynamic, you know, forthright, honest and, but, you know, persistent in terms of her goals and but she was always respectful of everybody else. She was always respectful of other people's opinions and their motivations. But, she was a, you know, she held her own.

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STEPHANIE: So, tell me about the sail from Australia to Lord Howe, to oh no, from New Zealand to Lord Howe to...

SK: No, no, from Australia to Lord Howe to New Zealand.

STEPHANIE: OK

SK: Well from Lord Howe to New Zealand we probably had 25 to 35 knot SW winds. The Gershon was reefed down, her wind vane was working, we were probably doing 7 to 8 knots trade I think we did the trip from Lord Howe to around New Zealand, on the east coast in 5 days. We were probably...

STEPHANIE: How far is that?

SK: Probably about 800 miles or 900 miles or something like that. We were probably doing 160, 170 miles a day. And what was so fun was in those rough conditions. Sometimes you'd have crew problems, there'd be weak crew, people wouldn't feel good. But this group was so hard-core that everybody was having fun. We'd be singing, they'd cook food standing on their head. And it was just so great to sail with five people, everybody was having a hootin-hollerin time with this great sail, that it just made it very enjoyable for everybody.

T: It was great. And, you know, you could know that no matter who was on watch you would be comfortable sleeping, you wouldn't have to worry about what was going on up on deck, and –

but it was a great sail. It's wonderful to sail with people who have the experience and the knowledge and also the mental attitude to enjoy and be happy to be out there. They don't have any reservations about what they're doing and the conditions. So, and especially – and that's something Nancy always taught me too. You know, how much, no matter what the conditions were you just found something in it, that it was just so great to be out there anyway, so, so, it, you know, she never complained. But that trip was great, that was one of the last great sails that we had with Nancy and it was terrific.

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STEPHANIE: And so, tell me about the Edna, were you two at all involved with the Edna?

T: I wasn't involved in the Edna, but I got involved with her second cargo boat the Avatapu, that, it was a – she had found through one of our partners, Masa, had found a Japanese fishing training vessel, a longline training vessel, in Yokohama. So, they went and they looked it over and they went ahead and bought it and then they fixed it up, and then they put a whole bunch of used cars on it and sailed it to Tonga, and, where they sold the cars, of course to some of the objections of the bureaucracy there. But anyway, then they eventually got it to Rarotonga where she ran cargo like she had been doing with the Edna before. So, I'd been connected with her in different ways in different projects and always enjoyed and trusted and, you know the service that she did, didn't make a lot of money. But it serviced these people out there in the Pacific that she just loved, that we all love. They're just wonderful, it's just a wonderful culture and because in our small way of trying to help these cultures survive, you know, in the modern world, and bringing goods and stuff that I think supporting that was important to her and to us.

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SK: And like, I first knew Edna because I just happened to be back in Hawaii when Brad Ives, the guy you're going to go sailing with on Kwai, sold Edna to Nancy. So, I actually go to do the transaction for him and help them do the paperwork. And I never actually got to sail on Edna 'cause I was off sailing on Gershon, so I actually never got a chance to sail on Edna. But some of the crew on Edna have become some of our closest friends over the years; Q and Pahoia and David Jamison, who does yacht help up in Fiji and we're still close with him. So it's a little family. Then she did, on Avatapu, all her crew were Palmerston Island guys, that all came from this little island Palmerston, and she would like educate them, teach them to read. One of them became a licensed captain. And everybody she dealt with in the islands just loved her. The islanders looked forward to her ships coming. She did everything cheaper than the other shipping companies and so they were a little bit you know aggravated that she caused them to be competitive. And you could just tell, every place they went, they loved Nancy, they told stories about Nancy and she was greatly respected in the whole Pacific region there.

T: There weren't many women that were captains running cargo boats out there and so she was an anomaly. And so it was just inspiring for them to see that here's a lady, you know, a nice person, that's actually out there running this ship and doing the things that they thought only men did. But she did it gracefully and as best she could, and so I think that was inspiring to them and probably to a lot of the ladies on the island as well.

STEPHANIE: Yeah, to see a woman show up running their boat.

T: Absolutely yeah.

STEPHANIE: How did the men on the island deal with that?

T: They, most of the men, respected her because after dealing with her they realized that she was forthright and honest and she had nothing to hide. So, they felt like she was fair, she was, they were dealing with someone earnestly, and not duplicitously, and so I think they respected her in

terms of that. I don't know how they thought of her as being a woman in that role. But, she certainly was accepted as, in that role, because she continued until she couldn't to run the business.

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SK: She would be like, she was forceful, she could take command, but she didn't have a male ego, so it was a great combination to have all the positive parts. She could be very domineering and I guess that some people might have gotten offended by that, but since she had the knowledge and experience to back up what she was controlling. People like Terry and I, just, you know, had no trouble working with her at all. She was a wonderful person who helped everybody in her life. You know, she just was a helper. She would help these island guys, always help the women. She'd take hats and, like we say, none of those business made much money, but it sure was interesting and it really helped those islands get in their supplies and having enough food and having enough fuel. And that was her main concern, she just was in love the whole romantic view of that life.

T: One thing that, a little aside, in terms of my reference to her – after she found that it was very difficult for her to go sailing because of her knees, and that she was working on the coffee farm. Well she got very involved with the other coffee farmers and in fact with a lot of the ladies who were involved in the coffee farms she put out a calendar of nude women including herself discreetly covered by plants and different things out for promotion and of the coffee farmers, and so, it was a very clever way of promotion and she was very sharp.

STEPHANIE: So, radio works really well when you get little stories, so can you think of a sailing story?

SK: Yeah like what?

STEPHANIE: With Nancy, or with...

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SK: Well when Nancy was younger and sailing with Bob they were going up the Red Sea. This was back when Nasser was dictator of Egypt, and they got wrecked on a reef in the southern part of the Red Sea with the original Awahnee. And they had their young son Reid, a nurse for Reid (a caretaker), and Bob and Nancy, and so they realized they had to go get help. So, Bob took Reid and the nurse on a passing ship. They flagged a passing ship, it's a whole long story of how they got out there, and the dinghy was falling apart and they flagged a ship down with a mirror, finally got a ship to stop. Got this little dinghy out there, it's really windy, and then Nancy said well I'm going to go back and I have to guard the boat while Bob and – the captain didn't want to let her off the boat. But Nancy insisted, got in the dinghy, rowed back to the wrecked Awahnee and guarded this boat during all the time that Bob had to go up to Alexandria, put Reid and the nurse in an apartment, get supplies and then arrange for the Navy to bring him back down to, with two frog men to help repair Awahnee on the beach down there on the reef. And so meanwhile, Nancy's watching pirates like take off on the far shore to come get here. And she stands guard with a shotgun alone for weeks. Meanwhile, it's a great story, Bob is able to secure some supplies and these frog men and they get down, convince the Egyptians wanted them to go down and mess with Yemen so they came back down, dropped the frog men and these materials off, they were able to repair the boat enough. And Bob knew how to do dynamite. Anyway, they dynamited a hole back through the reef. Got back out, sailed back to Alexandria. Meanwhile Nancy, you know, kept the whole thing together that's the kind of woman she is. And the story goes on from there, a really fun story of how the chief of police of Alexandria tried to get at the nurse and she reported him and they had a big court marshal and they were involved in this huge

long court proceedings in foreign language. They didn't understand anything. But finally got Awahnee fixed enough to proceed on their circumnavigation. They were circumnavigating in the 60s, so it was a much different pre-GPS, pre-AIS, much more fundamental type cruisers and that's how Nancy became such a good sea person, seaman.

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STEPHANIE: So, any of you guys have any stories where you were actually on the same sail that you can tell me about with Nancy, you told me about Lord Howe and..

SK: We did a lot of interisland sailing and the channel between Maui and the Big Island, is the Alanouehaha channel is quite rough at times. And in my sailing with Nancy I was able to see her climb the rig in very rough conditions, do things out on the, one time she had to tighten the triatic stay that went between the mainmast and the mizzen mast. She would do things that I wouldn't do.

STEPHANIE: What's the triatic stay?

SK: It's the stay that goes between the top of the mainmast and the top of the mizzenmast and it kind of holds them parallel, and she would just, she was fearless. I sailed with her quite a few times in very rough conditions, and we'd be up there on the bow together, waves breaking over us, and she was just as tough as you could want. There was no sea person I would go to sea with, that I would feel more comfortable as a mate than Nancy. And then she'd come back and crack jokes, we'd cook, you know, coffee or whatever and just love every minute of it. She just loved the ocean and was just a very competent sailor, women or men, notwithstanding.

T: She was great, sailing with Nancy, although I, she wasn't well known for her cooking [laughing]. And she loved to make pancakes, she loved to make these pancakes. She would pass these pancakes up, she'd be down in the galley, and she'd be passing these pancakes up and they were like little lead saucers, and we would use them as saucers and then fly – them off the deck into the ocean because they were just so heavy and thick and hard to eat.

SK: She wouldn't use Bisquick because she thought it was squandering funds to buy it all mixed together. So, she would insist on buying flour, and baking powder and a little salt or whatever separately. But I think she just never became a good cook, because she didn't want to ever be put in the traditional woman's role of having to cook, so she just wasn't a good cook. Pancakes was one thing, she knew how to burn rice really well [laughing].

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T: It might have been a way of her encouraging other people to get into the galley. And I certainly, I loved to cook, so I spent a lot of time in the galley especially in defense of trying to keep her out of it. And I loved to do the cooking and I loved to do the provisioning and she loved – she liked me to do it too, because it wasn't something she cared about. Although she, when we were getting ready for a trip one time, she insisted that we take our paying passengers to the store to help to the provisioning, so I assigned one guy to go off and get a five pound box of chicken thighs. So, I thought that's pretty simple directions, and so he came back and brought this what looked like a five-pound box of chicken thighs. And so we paid it, loaded it up and brought it to the boat. Well, Nancy, on her way down, she was leaving on a trip. I wasn't sailing with her that time but I was helping her to provision the boat. And as she was sailing down, we didn't have refrigeration on the boat, we just had ice. And the ice would last about 5 to 6 days or so you had to use your frozen stuff. So, about the fifth day she was going to use these chicken thighs. Turns out they're all chicken livers. 5 pounds of chicken livers. She never forgot that. she never forgave me, but she cooked them up and they ate them and they had a.. I love chicken livers, but I don't think they cared for them that much.

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SK: Let's see what else, she had a wonderful romance with Abe Loukella on Lanai, which we went to often as part of our interisland trip after crossing the channel to Lapruse bay in Maui. Then we go to Manelli Bay, this magical place that Terry was talking about yesterday. And one of the people we met there was Abe Loukella, and he was Gaby Ponue's nephew, and was just a marvelous musician, could play guitar ukulele. And we would go couple of times a month and hang out there and she fell in love with Abe, and they eventually got married and it was quite, it was for a long time, it was quite a wonderful love affair, and ... we just, we went through so many magical times with them, both the Blue Water Marine crews, I think the three of us really enjoyed that a lot, taking out all those kids all the time and interisland sailing and then my charter work with Nancy. She just taught me everything I know about going to sea really. And then for years afterward we all became friends and so our families are intertwined. Her son Taino went with us on Gershon's first trip to the Marquesas from Hawaii. And we still are involved. I first met Taino when he was six and he's like 42 now and so we are still together as a family and all that stuff.

STEPHANIE: Bruce is here...