

Interview with Terry Causey
Solomon Islands, 2005

[Tr. 2]

Carlos: On the Gershon 2, introducing Terry Causey.

Stephanie: So anyways, tell me our name and where you're from.

Terry: Well my name is Terry Causey, and I was born in a little suburb of L.A. I was probably up near Flintridge, is where I went to high school. But I spent a lot of time near Balboa Island. And that is where I learned to sail.

Stephanie: How old were you when you learned to sail. When did you first set foot on a sailboat?

T: The first was when I was five years old, was when I learned how to handle dinghies. And then later we had a small boat called a Kite. It was about 14 feet with an 18 foot mast. It was a cat rig, so it just had the mast in the very bow. And I would sail it all over the bay. Back and forth, we would tip it and race and up and down and—

[1:41]

Stephanie: You were five years old, so somebody obviously was teaching you.

T: When I started to sail I was older, so I was more like 13, 14.

S: Who brought you on the boat when you were five? T: MY dad.

S: Was he a sailor?

T: No no, he liked to fish. He introduced me to fishing. And when I start first started fishing I fished off the pier, the public pier. And later on we'd go out in this little boat and then it just uh – we just moved on from there.

S: So, what made you decide to learn how to sail?

T: I didn't really get in to serious sailing until I moved to Hawaii. And it was the first time that I was someplace with so much water around, ocean around me, that I didn't have access to a boat. And there was an ad in the paper, by Nancy Griffith, advertising celestial navigation. And I thought, that's interesting, so I took that course from her, and she also...And finished that course – but then she had a sailing course. And she was teaching sailing lessons. But it was like \$150 for quite a few 2 hour lessons. It was very cheap. So, I just jumped on board.

3:07

S: And when was that – what year did you do the celestial navigation?

T: I think that was around '79, '80. That's when I first met her.

S: Tell me about Nancy. What was it like when you met her? What did you think of her?

[Noise starts here.]

T: I liked her right off because she was direct, she was up – she had an openness to her, that was fresh. It was not coy, it wasn't it wasn't, uh – but she was just, she was just very open and direct, and easy to talk to. And she was she had a strength about her that I liked – she was strong. I like to see that in women. I like independent women. Because it shows it shows character.

S: And so, after you took sailing, the sailing course from her - then what?

T: Well, we got along and became friends, and she asked me to start crewing for her. She was working for the oceanic society and doing charters, and along with Steve Kornberg. And she just asked me to come along and crew.

S: What's the Oceanic Society?

T: I couldn't tell you too much about it – I didn't know too much about it. It's just a group of people I guess that are interested in ocean related activities, and it also offered exposure in different ways, involving ocean activities – especially sailing.

S: And so, where did you go on these charters?

T: The first - one of the first charters I did with her was to Manele Bay, on Lanai, which was just across the channel. And I thought it was just great. Actually, that wasn't the first - that was the second. The first one she wanted me to help her deliver a boat to Kaua'i, to Nawiliwili harbor, which was all across the state. So, she and - she had another crew Daniel - who got the boat ready - and they and they were pretty exhausted getting ready for this charter. They were going to pick up a family in Kauai. And take 'em out to watch some solar eclipse, some celestial observation. That - they - was going to be about 300 miles I think, north of Kauai, that they wanted to do. And they were preparing the boat to get there, and -

S: I just don't want you to move your hands, because I don't want it to interfere with your speaking, that's all.

T: alright, ok

S: So anyway

6:15

S: Go ahead, I didn't mean to interrupt you.

T: And so, she asked me for some help to crew, and I said great. I love going out on boats. I love being out on the ocean. And I'd never been across on the ocean in Hawaii. So, I hopped on board. And it was great we left at night. We crossed the Alenuihaha it was wild, it was stormy, it was squally, there was rain, there was wind, there was - I felt like I was in washing machine - [laughs]

S: Were you scared?

T: No, it was exciting. And Nancy instills a lot of confidence. She has - she had a lot of experience. And she was so happy being where - doing what she was doing, that it was just enjoyable being there with her.

7:08

S: And so -

T: And so, we, we, sailed all the way to Nawiliwili - it took us about 48 hours. And it was a lovely trip - it was squally, it was windy, it was calm but you got to see all the islands, and the lights of the islands, and I thoroughly enjoyed it.

S: So, describe the sail - I mean, not everybody would know - going from Kona to Kauai means going up the whole Hawaiian Island chain.

T: You go - you go past all the inhabited islands except Ni-ihau. You-

S: You start in Kona

T: You start in Kona, and you head across first channel which is Alenuihaha, which is between the big island and, and, Maui. And also, below Maui is Kahoolawe, which was uninhabited. And also, at that time it was being used as a bombing range, as a bombing target. And at times later before they stopped the bombing they would be bombing at night when you'd be sailing by and you'd see these explosions.

8:28

T: But we sailed by Kahoolawe in Maui, and the next island would be Lanai, and you'd go across. I forget the name of the channel - it's between Lanai and Molokai, it's forget the name of the channel, but then you leave, you go under Molokai. We sailed under Molokai, and then you cross the Kaiwi Channel, which is the Molokai Channel, between Molokai and Oahu. And you sail under Oahu. And then you sail 60 miles between the across the Kauai channel to Kauai.

9:11

T: And it just gives you all this beautiful scenery to look at. And it gives you quite a variety of winds and changes of weather, and it was, it was just a lot of fun.

S: What a great introduction to sailing in Hawaii – sailing the whole chain.

T: It was being dropped into the – one of the nicest nicest sails – my first - it was my first interisland, and I've loved it ever since. And I've tried, I've made two, I've made more sails to Kauai. I've made two sails to Kauai to Hanalei Bay. To Niihau. And then back, Port Allen, and then back to the Big Island. And then many many, many, sails around Molokai.

10:07

And many sails to the other islands – it must have been over a hundred sails interisland. It just uh – but it was – I didn't start out with baby steps. Laughs I started out with one big step right across the state.

S: Amazing. To me it sounds like – it's always sounded like Hawaii has sounded like one of the most challenging places to sail. I mean because of the channels. And because where there's no channels, it's the big wide pacific ocean. I mean, has it seemed that way to you? Out of all the places that you've sailed is it particularly challenging?

T: Well if anything happens, yes, you're out in the middle of the ocean. We rarely if ever see another boat. We do run across – we do see the tug and barges that deliver goods between the islands.

11:01

T: And sometimes we talk to them if we're close. We – but we rarely see another boat. So if anything happened – if things broke, if we had problems, you are, you're in the middle of the ocean, and a lot of people think it's just, just, little gunkholing. Like they say, like they do, in the Caribbean where you go from little port to little harbor to little place and it's just a little short sail and you just take a sandwich and a beer and that's it. You have to provision the boat, you have to have plenty of water, because if anything happens you might be out there a week before someone can recognize that you're gone, or find you.

11:51

S: I wanted to, you know I wanted to maybe think... I wanted to backtrack and ask you, in the courses you took, both the navigation courses and the uh, the uh, sailing courses that you took with Nancy. Were there, what was, were there things that she taught that you think were unique, that you think you might not have learned from someone else? What did you learn? I mean you don't have to tell me everything, but, I just want to get a sense of how you learned what you learned.

12:27

T: I learned – I think mostly what I learned about from Nancy is her attitude towards sailing. And how enjoyable that challenge can be. And celestial navigation is something that gives you, it gives you a tool so that you can go out there and cross an ocean and find an island, and do it on your own, unconnected with the rest of the world. But basically it's Nancy's attitude, her enthusiasm, and her connections with the local people that that made sailing in Hawaii so much nicer than just learning how to cross a channel or cross an ocean with somebody else.

S: Is there a particular anecdote about Nancy that comes to mind? That makes you think, oh yeah, that's so Nancy. Any of the experiences you've had together? It just seems like you've told me so many stories about: "this time when I was out with Nancy this happened." And I just wondered if any of those stories came to mind right now.

13:50

T: I wish, um, there's probably, there's plenty of stories, and I wish I could come up with something now. I was telling Carlos about a trip that we had. We had a charter – after on, after knowing Nancy for a while we went in together on a fifty foot steel boat, an old boat that was built by the German navy on 1928. And we took her, we used her commercially, for different various charters. One was for the University of Cambridge. And we, this was to take scientists from Tahiti out to Henderson Island, which is about 1400 miles to the east of Tahiti. So I delivered the boat to Tahiti, and Nancy was to meet the boat down there, and do the first leg out to Pitcairn Island and back. But Nancy – this is an old boat, and this boat leaks, and it's not cushy and comfortable and deluxe. It didn't have refrigeration, and it didn't have any of the comforts of modern yachts. But just sailing with her always made it fun.

15:33

T: And everybody that sailed on it always seemed to come through it with good stories, with good feelings about it. Whereas I think without Nancy's force of will, without her personality, without her enthusiasm, I think a lot of people would sail – be sailing on something as basic as the Goodewind, and not and come away with not the same feelings.

S: How long did you crew for Nancy?

T: Well I crewed with her, till about '83, when we got Goodewind.

S: And then you owned a boat together–

T: And that's when we bought Goodewind. And owned it together.

S: And you did charters with Goodewind? What did you do with Goodewind?

T: When we first – after we got Goodewind, and I was pretty innocent and ignorant of rules and regulations and about the Jones act which covered commercial activity for yachts. And Goodewind was a foreign built vessel. And foreign built vessels and foreign owned vessels were prohibited from doing commercial work in the United States, except there – except for there were three exceptions. One was oceanographic research, or voyages to nowhere, which is where you go out past the three mile limit and come back to the same port. Or you do foreign voyages where you go from a US port to a foreign port to a US port.

17:22

T: So ,the first thing we decided to do – or Nancy suggested that we do – is we go to a foreign port. So, we looked on the chart, found the closest foreign island, and then advertised and we went there.

S: And what was the port?

T: It was Fanning Island.

S: And how far was it from Hawaii?

T: It was about 1000 miles, south of Hawaii.

S: Had you ever been there before?

T: No. Neither had Nancy. [Laughs]

S: And?

T: And, but Nancy knew a lady, Annie Vitusik, who had who had been stationed there during the war. And so, and Annie was a sailor and Annie agreed to go with us to introduce us to Fanning Island.

S: Why, she had been there during the war but she was American?

T: No she was British.

S: Oh I see.

T: Fanning Island was a British cable station, and various places were protected, or you know had people stationed on them during the war and she was there. So that's where we went, but

first we had to go to Christmas Island to check in with the government, because Fanning is a part of the island nation of Kittibus. And Kittibus became a nation in 1978, and before it was a coconut plantation, owned by a British firm. But now it was a possession of Kittibus. So, Christmas Island, about 150 miles away was a port of entry. So, we went to Christmas Island first and the government talked to us and asked us if we would pick up their parliamentary ministers from Fanning and Washington Island. Which, because they hadn't been out to parliament in two years.

19:30

S: Because there was no boat.

T: Because there was no access to boat. They were lucky to see one of the government boats from Terawa once a year. And they, they, just they didn't – there wasn't always room to take these people, and they didn't – rarely did they go to Washington Island. Those people are pretty isolated. There was no anchorage. It's a round island with no harbor, no place for a boat to stop – they would just have to stand off and get long boats. And they weren't always ready to do that.

20:09

S: Does that mean that they were basically - they must have been just --- they must have been pretty self-sustaining – is that right?

T: They were, yes. They were totally self-sufficient. And they had wonderful foods you know. They would grow some taro, they would grow some papaya, they had fish, and lots of coconuts, and they did the best they could.

S: That must have been, was that the first time you had ever seen something like that? A place like that?

T: Yes. [Laughs]

S: What was it like? To be there?

T: It was – it was rather beautiful, it was a beautiful island, and the people were so kind, and we were we were happy to be there and they were happy to see us.

21:06

T: When we, when we first, we left Christmas Island to go to Washington Island first to pick up the Tetake, the first parliamentary minister – we got to the island, standing off, and the official comes out in a small launch, little outboard, comes up to the boat, wearing a pareo, and his official coat and hat, welcomes us to the island, and says that they are happy that we're there, that they welcome us to Washington, and but he needs gas to get back in to his island. [laughs.] They're so short of supplies. But after we, we gave him fuel and he went and he started to bring out Tetake, Tetake had his wife and his son. And then there was the – we ended up taking 11 people, and their goods. Their metal suitcases, and their stalks of bananas, their– and food, and they just all piled on the boat, and we had not the heart to say no.

22:26

S: how could you?

T: And so, we and we were – you know it was so enjoyable being involved in this experience - and to be useful, to be helpful, be to these people. And um they were so kind, so kind to us. And the same thing happened – we took a couple of them got off on Fanning Island when we reached there. And these are not easy trips because going from Washington to Fanning back to Christmas is to weather and against a current, so you have to make long tacks and be fairly accurate and at that time we were only using a sextant, so we, we had to take readings every morning and every evening if we could. Although that first trip was so squally we had squalls all the time – we had cloudy skies, lots of rain and it was a very wet trip.

S: How did you do your navigation?

T: Well we just did it when we could when we could get sites. You can just send sites during noon. At noon time to get a fairly accurate position for latitude and longitude but you had to be exact. And you did it out of a nautical almanac. And when we could, we would take star sites at dawn and at dusk where you had a 20 minute window to take these readings, to take these sites. And then you'd do your calculations, and hopefully come up with fairly good lines of position. With star sites you want to take at least three or four or five, and then they intersect and you get a small triangle that tells you about where you are.

S: And I guess it worked.

24:28

T: Well, Nancy had sailed around the world three times and lived to tell about it. Laughs. And you know, so she was a good navigator, and of course she taught me, and I had fun doing my sites too, and we, it, it was not hard. People had been doing it for a few hundred years.

S: How far was it in bet – it was Washington to Fanning to Christmas? Was that the order?

T: That's right.

S: And how far was it?

T: Not too far. It was only about 150 miles between Christmas and fanning, and maybe another 120 miles between Fanning and Washington. So sailing between Christmas and Washington is only about a 24 hour trip, but sailing from Fanning back to Christmas is a three day trip.

25:28

T: 'Cause you have to make long tacks, and it just, you just going dead against the weather. The only way to do it is in a very powerful boat but still you're beating into the waves into the wind into the current, and so even then it's not an easy trip going to weather.

S: Just in the short amount of time I've had to get to know you, I am just so impressed by what seems like a huge passion – for many things, but particularly for sailing. Am I close to the mark on that?

T: Sailing maybe in particular but in general just the ocean. I just love it, I, I remember I used to go fishing a lot. I used to go on albacore boats when I was a kid and my dad had a good friend and that's all he did, he just went out after albacore and marlin and he would do it commercially – he would go out and we would go out miles and miles and miles and we would go out for days. We would, would catch, oh quite a lot of albacore and we would bring it in and turn it in to the cannery. And – but I happened to be on one trip down to the Sea of Cortez when I was 14, and I remember waking up one morning, and there was a cook, and he was cooking Spanish omelettes, and I was lying in my bunk, and I realized, "this is what I would like to do for the rest of my life." I just love it, I just love it. I just you know, I love being here, I love doing this, I like I just love the whole thing. I just. It's never, that enthusiasm, that love has never changed.

27:28

S: Why do you, what is it? What do you love about it?

T: It's there's a freedom, there's a freshness, there's a cleanness to it. There is - it's constantly changing, it's constantly challenging- it's constantly different. It's always – it's always something new. And yet, it's familiar.

S: How does it feel when you are on land for a long while. Do you miss it?

T: I can as I get older now, I can be happy playing by the seashore. [Laughs.] But I still love getting out there. I still love being on the ocean. It's so comfortable. I just I love walking around on a tossing boat. [Laughs] It's like [laughs] – it's like an acrobat – he just loves walking the wire. And it just some balance to it too. There's some connection.

There's some cosmic connection that makes you feel like you're all of a sudden plugged in harmoniously with the rest of the universe, that you just don't get for me in other places.

S: What do you think it is that makes that feeling?

28:58

T: Um, it just, I don't know – it's hard to describe feelings you know, feelings come from the heart. It's not, it's usually, it's a visceral, it's a visceral interaction it's not, its not intellectual. I mean you can make it intellectual, you can try and describe it you can try and theorize about it. You know, but when it comes right down to it its' a gut feeling that just brings you home, and just, you know it just makes me happy.

[Laughs.]

S: So few people are.

T: Well I feel lucky I feel lucky that I have a connection to something that's brought me through all kinds of trials and tribulations. All kinds of pain and disappointment, and there's something always consistently steady and comforting about the ocean. And whether it's because we're also so much filled with water ourselves or what, it– it just, it's just soothing, you know, maybe it's like being in the womb, you know, back where it's safe, back where it's comfortable.

S: I can see that. That's interesting. Because for so many people it's so terrifying.

1:06

It's so it's so really it's so unusual for someone to feel that safe it's as if there in the womb. It's nice. It's very beautiful.

T: I think in a world that has so much pain, and there's so many people hurting, that it's a shame, that people cannot connect to their environment, cannot connect to something that they just love, that isn't just one thing or a person it's an all-encompassing feeling where they can always go back to and center themselves. And you wish more people would be able to find some enthusiasm, some joy, in where they're at or what they're doing, or what they can believe in what they can hold on to. And everybody needs something and everybody has something, but not everybody connects with it.

1:10

T: And I know that some of these realizations that I have about the sea and the ocean and sailing have taken years and years and years of different–

S: Oh, he's telling you to put your hand down. That's the good thing about not being on the air.

T: I gotcha, I gotcha.

S: Anyway, you were in the middle of this very poetic moment

T: [laughs]

S: I'm so sorry to have interrupted you.

T: It it – uh, If I can remember

S: You were saying, oh wait now, let's see if we can reconstruct that sentence. It takes years and years–

T: Ah yes. To, to realize what just what you have, what is there. What is how fortunate, it is to just have a place that you can go back to. I don't know I think I always realized it, like I said. I realized it when I was 14, this is where I love to be and I've always gone back there and I don't know if everybody has found a safe place, where they can return to. And reexamine their life, and maybe help to eliminate the problems and the pain that they encountered. Because you know we get hooked on so many things. And you, it's the one thing I could probably never give up is the ocean, being near the sea. And I realize it's not food, it's not drugs, it's not material things, it's just, it's that feeling. And it's – you wish that everyone could find a safe place.

S: that's great. Very inspiring. Glad I asked you if you had anything else to say.

T: laughs

S: well thanks Terry, I really appreciate that. It's really is very inspiring.

T: well it's almost brought me to tears.

S: good story. Hopefully it will be inspirational for other people too. You're allowed to cry if you want.

T: [laughing and crying a bit.]

T: You know I've been inspired by so many people. Like Nancy. She inspires so many people to go out there! You know, don't be afraid – jump right in there. Take a chance.

5:00

T: And you know, that's the best advice anybody can have.

S: That's true, It sounds like she definitely inspired you. It sounds like she changed your life.

T: Well, among others. But yeah, she was a big part of, of getting out there and sailing, that's for sure. That's for sure.

S: Just quickly backtrack on a factoid moment. How old were you when you took this course from Nancy?

T: I was 29.

S: And how old are you now?

T: I'm 55.

S: So, you and Nancy have known each other for 26 years.

T: yeah.

S: that's a good long friendship.

T: Yeah, it's been steady.

6:01

S: Is there anything else?

T: I, uh, no I'm speechless. [Laughs]

S: well thank you Terry. I really appreciate it.

T: Sure

S: It's been really nice to hear what you have to say.

T: thanks.

S: I know it's really hot too, so boy, it's a bit of a sacrifice.

S: If you want a copy of your tape, or if you want to hear it back.

T: Oh, how embarrassing!

[Laughs]

S: I know that's how I feel when I'm listening to myself on tape. Anyway, thanks again.

T: Oh, you're welcome. Thank you.

S: I mean yeah, it's wrap.

7:06