

## From: Stan Stephens

Stan has been going through papers – in cleaning out of our office – and came across pages of notes from a “journal” of sorts he kept during the first part of the Oil Spill “Clean-up”. It makes a bit of interesting reading, and can help us, who were not there, understand some of the passion behind the frustrations in dealing with the clean-up and all of the issues since then. Some things have not changed, mostly attitudes, although great strides have been made in other areas. It is nothing you have to keep, but for me, it was good to go through it. Mary Helen

### Record – Oil Spill

March 24, 1989

Exxon Valdez

This record is from notes kept since day one when the Exxon Valdez rammed itself into Bligh Reef. With all the modern electronic equipment, updated charts, Coast Guard surveillance and pilot controlled area, the tanker was still three miles off course. There is absolutely no reason for anyone on the water to be drunk let alone on a tanker. It is hard to believe the guard at the Alyeska gate didn't know this guy was intoxicated, also hard to believe the pilot didn't know. I suspect that this is such a common operation to see the people on the tankers this way that they take it for granted. Alaskans and PWS people must learn from this experience and never let it happen again. I hope here that I can record the feelings and attitude of this whole awful event. There is no reason that we cannot have oil and protect our environment. The problem is that oil companies need a change of attitude. They seem to think that all they have to do is sweet talk with a tongue as slippery as their oil and they can solve their PR problems. The oil companies, our federal legislators and our president are definitely oil people first. We can develop amazing technology in the use of oil products that make a profit, but fail to use the same technology to protect the environment because in protection there is no profit.

On the morning of the 24<sup>th</sup> of March I was awakened by a loud knock on the door by a protection officer from the city of Valdez. He informed me that at about midnight, the Exxon Valdez had hit Bligh Reef and was spilling thousands of gallons of oil in to the Valdez arm. He asked me to call Alyeska emergency services, which I did. I was asked to get the Vince Peede ready for immediate deployment to pick up workers at Alyeska to go to the spill site. I expressed my feeling about not wanting to destroy the Vince Peede with oil, but they informed me they really needed it, so we went to get the Vince Peede ready. We could have moved on the spill early that morning but were not dispatched until 6:00 that evening. Tim (Jones) was operating the boat and Pete (Fellman) and I were crew. Our job with the Vince Peede was to make crew changes at the skimmer. The first trip into the oil mess was quite an experience. I couldn't believe how thick the oil was, how bad it smelled. What was really happening to Prince William Sound was just starting to sink in. Once we progressed far enough in the oil to the recovery barge and tug PathFinder to change crews, the air became very bad. I was surprised to see people working the area without lung protection. The oil was so thick that when you flushed the heads, solid (only) oil came into the head – the head pickup was about 18 inches below the water line. As we started to exchange passengers, it was obvious that the VP would be trashed. Not only was the hull solid black with oil, but the inside of the boat also. On the evening trip with the VP we had to travel in the dark through the ice field of icebergs from Columbia Glacier. There was a large amount of ice in the area. The temperature was cold enough so that the VP was also icing on the hull – quite a sight, black frozen ice on the hull. The VP continued this operation but I left this project

and got the Glacier Spirit ready to help the effort. On March 27<sup>th</sup>, we stocked the Spirit for a crew to head out in the Sound, the weather was cold and icing so we waited until the morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>. At this time I still didn't have a contract with Alyeska on the VP or with Exxon for the Spirit. I was hearing that the oil was already on Naked and Smith Islands and wanted to get going to see how we could help. We were dispatched with three other boats, the Cory Ann, the St Michael, and Rivers Unlimited. The morning of the 28<sup>th</sup>, we departed Valdez at 0800 for Eshamy Bay. On our way to Eshamy, we started to see oil on the West side of Naked Island. We entered Eshamy Bay through the small passage way between Crafton Island. We saw no oil. There was one boat deploying a deflection boom at the entrance to the bay. We went across the bay to a small cove off of Pt. Navell. Here we anchored up and deployed the small boats to set boom across the Eshamy lagoon. While we were doing this, the Glacier Queen with 65 people aboard showed up and anchored or tied up alongside us. They did nothing but come all the way from Valdez, tied up to us and then after a couple of hours, returned to Valdez. The boom we had to deploy at the entrance to the bay was small boom and two different kinds that weren't compatible and were not expected to hold. We stayed this evening at Eshamy Bay in calm winds. Other boats like the Alinka B were also anchored here tonight. We were told that the next morning we would proceed to Ester Island, Lake Bay to put boom across the bay to protect the Esther Island hatcheries. This was a fairly easy job and the boom was light, but would probably do this particular job. They need to drive piling around and near the hatchery so that they can deploy boom immediately. Saw Mill Bay also needs some permanent moorings for boom to be deployed immediately. While we were working at Esther we sent the Papa Max with boom to give to Fairmont Cannery. I also felt we should have boomed the Oyster farm on Perry Island. While at Eshamy and Esther we were constantly listening to the skimmers trying to trap the oil outside Herring Bay at Knight Island. The boats were working around the clock to try to do the impossible.

The afternoon of the 29<sup>th</sup> we left Esther Island for Sawmill Bay, Evans Island. Here the crew went right to work setting a deflection boom. The San Juan hatchery drew a lot of attention, and a lot of confusion. Before I had left Valdez I had arranged to have a raft that I had bought, to be sent by air to Valdez. We ended up with the shipping ticket but no raft. Everyone looked all over for the raft, they knew it arrived in Valdez, but no one could find it. We worked late that night on boom in Sawmill. We were anchored in Crab Bay in front of New Chenega. The next day, the Bartlett arrived with many bodies for beach cleanup. As they started to unload, I noticed my raft – I knew it was mine for there are few rafts this size. I told them the raft was mine. It had VECO's name all over it. I asked them not to use it cause it was my raft, but they continued to use it. My raft had my name all over it. They took it, put their name on it and were disturbed when I tried to take my own raft back. We later proved the raft was mine by serial no. but not before they trashed it. Finally they gave the raft back to us. I considered it Grand Theft, but I guess big companies can steal if they wish. I also see other problems I fail to understand. Every Coast Guard regulation for boats for hire has been broken by VECO. When you hire a boat, its operator must have a Coast Guard License. When you put more than 6 bodies on the vessel, it requires an inspection. When do we go by the law and when do we ignore it? We stayed right at Sawmill Bay for a good part of a week, helping to protect the bay from oil. The crew worked long, hard hours with very poor booming equipment and many different kinds of boom, which wouldn't marry up. This was another sign of poor planning. Exxon had a number of buyers and all getting boom

wherever they could, but no one matched boom before it was sent out, consequently many of the jobs failed for poor booming, too small of anchors, and inexperience.

The skimming operation ended up almost a disaster. The pumps were wrong, couldn't pick up the oil. The pumps they needed, like screw pumps, they didn't have. Many times the booming would be done and the skimmers would be full and couldn't pump off or couldn't pick up from the booming. Coordination was impossible. Being tied up here and not able to get back to town, I am unable to complain about things that shouldn't be going on, many unsafe practices. I try not to think of what has occurred here, I try to block out the past. I often think of the first time I experienced Prince William Sound. It was like a dream – I didn't think anything as perfect and untouched as this existed. Until the seventies, PWS remained unspoiled and untouched. I was really worried when they decided to move oil through PWS. The oil companies ensured us of protection in many ways. The oil companies have learned that having smooth talkers like George Nelson saves them from spending money on protecting the environment. All they have to do is smooth talk the gullible public.

April 5<sup>th</sup> – It is two weeks since the Exxon Valdez hit Bligh Reef. Since then it has been day after day of mistakes by the oil companies and this still continues. Alyeska, who claimed they could respond to any spill, couldn't have responded to a spill two miles away. The equipment they had was outdated, too small and not ready to deploy. Once Exxon took over they were not ready for the logistics, currents or tide differential. No one was really in command for days. As small as the skimming response was, it was at least something. They even pulled this operation away from in front of Saw Mill Bay in order to move the tanker. The tanker took priority over PWS. Even with all the equipment they had only recovered 1 percent of the spill in two weeks.

April 10<sup>th</sup> – Anchored in Sawmill Bay, waiting weather and direction. Since the 27<sup>th</sup> of March, we have accomplished very little. Very poor direction, no one can do anything without orders from Exxon and Exxon is not capable of handling the logistics. There has never been enough or the right equipment since day one. They have mostly wrong boom, wrong pumps, inept ability to move, absolutely no supervision or leaders in the field to handle the job. They send us to survey an area and they don't even ask us for the survey. It is a very frustrating experience, everyone wants to get something done faster but no one will move without Exxon direction. From the first day, when Alyeska woke me at 5:30 am to get the Vince Peede ready for service, we have spent many hours waiting. The first morning we had the Vince Peede ready at 0600 hour for service, but wasn't called on until 1800. Our first run on the VP was hauling troops out to the spill. When we arrived on the scene, we traveled through a half-mile of foot thick oil, sickening smell, to the skimming barges. There we made a crew change and back to Valdez. I continued this operation until we put the Spirit into operation on March 27<sup>th</sup>. At this time without anything but a verbal contract we went to work with Ridel environmental services with our first stop being Eshamy Bay. On the way out to the bay we saw oil almost everywhere, especially on the West side of Naked Island and Knight Island passage. We arrived at Eshamy Bay about noon. There the crew started to lay boom back in the lagoon. The boom was very poor for this operation. The chance of it holding was very slim. We stayed in Eshamy Bay this evening of the 28<sup>th</sup>. The next day we headed for Esther Island. At this time Marty was helping me. We went to Esther to lay cable across Lake Bay. When this job was completed we headed for Evans Island and Sawmill Bay. Up until this point I felt we were helping and accomplishing something.

At Sawmill Bay we attempted many times to boom off the Bay but because of the heavy current and unfit equipment we couldn't hold the boom. At first Exxon thought the oil would all go out to sea (out of sight, out of mind) but it didn't. It started to damage island after island, suffocate bird after bird, otter after otter and now we have already heard of two whales.

It was obvious after the first couple of days that Exxon couldn't begin to handle the logistics. They didn't hire Alaskans with knowledge of PWS currents and winds and extreme depths. They brought in oil people from the south that had no idea the size or logistics of the Sound. They sent little boats where they shouldn't have, dispatched boats from one area when it should have been from another. Boats were constantly out of water, food and fuel. At Sawmill Bay after two weeks, everyone was still trying to boom and divert the oil. At the mouth of the bay, in Sawmill, in front of the hatcheries, the booms were holding. In the heavy tides, in currents from Bettles Island to Crab Bay it was impossible to hold the booms. The Coast Guard cutter Iron Wood also attempting to help. They decided they needed 15,000# anchors, but some guy from Exxon said 3000# anchors would be satisfactory. In this whole operation, people who know the right thing to do are overridden by those in higher position who don't. When they moved the tanker to Outside Bay on Naked Island, they pulled some of the skimmers off the job so they could use the Kavich and Barge at Outside Bay. This was right when the oil was the heaviest between Evans Island and Latouche Island. If they hadn't done this, they could have stopped some of the oil from heading towards Seward. Here their thinking was the same as earlier—they thought once it got out in the Gulf it would disperse. But instead it did its destruction between PWS and Resurrection Bay, right down to Gore Point, and by now, maybe Kodiak.

The oil companies must never be allowed to forget the tremendous devastation they caused and failed to help. Day after day it is error after error as more destruction occurs. Today we were dispatched from Sawmill Bay to Outside Bay on Naked Island. Today is the 11<sup>th</sup> of April, almost three weeks since the accident. We went to inspect the booming around the Exxon Valdez. The tanker was anchored on the outside edge of Outside Bay. The boom had broken during the night but has been repaired. Our run was an unnecessary run like many we have made in these weeks of confusion and non-direction. The tanker driver of the Exxon Valdez was not the only confused Exxon employee, they all are. This same day we were dispatched to Port Nellie Juan, the same bay that I was sent on a wild goose chase the week before. Here we went to McClure Bay to set boom across the bay to protect McClure Bay Cannery — a cannery destroyed years ago. We were here I guess because someone was trying to sell Exxon on this spot for a fisheries, so we were dispatched to protect it.

While we traveled today, we saw and talked to boats everywhere doing nothing for days, waiting for orders. In Sawmill Bay there were skimmers but there was no place (for crew) to sleep. We informed Exxon and told them the Vince Peede could sleep and support them all but were ignored and when we left they still didn't have good support. Boats are dispatched and don't even know what they are supposed to do. I never in my whole life have seen things so screwed up. All kinds of good people wanting to help, wanting to save what they can of PWS only to be frustrated and held back by Exxon. We must never allow oil companies to do this to us again.

Wed. April 12 – We are sitting in McClure Bay waiting for more boom. They sent us to boom an area then didn't provide us with the equipment or material to do the job. This is a beautiful bay, calm and still this morning. The sun is starting to hit the snow on the hills. Looking out from the bay you can see Applegate Island and the fantastic Culrose Passage. I sat here the last two hours soaking in the beauty of this country, when I realized that something was wrong. In two hours I haven't seen a bird, an otter, seal, or any living animal, bird or mammal. This would have been unheard of three weeks ago. Kind of like a nuclear attack, the cities still standing but not a living soul to be seen. PWS, not really ours, it was the home of bird and marine life, man had no reason to destroy it. What we are not willing to do in the name of profit! We can build all kinds of things to use fuels and things to make out of oil, but we can't spend money, oil money, to protect the environment. Profits - - - the name of the game, even if it destroys the world! Exxon has done almost nothing to help the mess they made. Even if it is impossible they must be made to clean up every rock and every beach. Here at McClure Bay we waited for boom. When it arrived, it wasn't the same as we already had. Will be very difficult to marry up. Some southern hotshot in an airplane flies over and tells people what to do, but do not provide the equipment to do it with. They couldn't find another boat to help with skimming until 11:00. Once they did, and the one skimmer got full, they had no way to pump it off. In the meantime, the oil was getting by them so it could go ashore someplace. It is just one goof after another. I've seen no supervisor on this project who really knows how to handle this kind of situation. They are still shipping us junk stuff to work with, three weeks after the accident.

April 13<sup>th</sup> – Now sitting in Outside Bay, trying to determine what we can do to make the boom work better around the tanker. Three kinds of boom around the tanker. Found out during the night that the boom we put in McClure Bay didn't hold – the boom was three different kinds, some of it in poor condition. Harold predicted it wouldn't work. Absolutely no coordination or directions in booming. No one is matching up boom. They seem to think all boom is compatible and can be matched, but the stress points vary from boom to boom. We haven't had the same kind of boom for any job we have worked on the last three weeks. Last night, again, they couldn't find enough rooms to sleep people, and all this time the Vince Peede is sitting at the dock in Valdez. Valdez dispatch has no real idea what is going on in the field. This has got to be the greatest fiasco of any attempt to help a major disaster. A boat hit a rock last night. Also about 2000 last night, a boat called for directions heading for Green Island – they were lost. Dispatch has no idea of who they are sending where. Here at Outside Bay, we sat waiting for orders all day. I guess we are supposed to be here to help the booming on the tanker. Harold suggested they get all one kind of big boom to surround the tanker. One thing about this whole frustrating affair was the good weather. This evening we are sitting here watching a group of sea otters eating herring with light oil skim all around them.

This is Friday, April 14<sup>th</sup> – Awake at 0600, heard the Aurora and everyone are heading towards Northwest Bay. Listening to the radio, you can't believe the mass confusion. I heard today that they are not using the VP because he talked to the Press. I don't know if this is true, but they sure could use the VP out here. They have hired a lot of boats just to give them something to do, and they can't even keep track of all of them. The VP was used in the heavy, thick oil and then used it to make daily round trips to the end of the Sound. Then when conditions get better, they no longer need it. We are sitting out here in Outside Bay watching the tanker. They are still doing a survey job. Took a raft trip to the north of the island to the Glacier Queen. There is a lot of oil in the water and it really

smelled bad. I wonder if they'll ever get rid of all of the oil. It is possible to have oil and a clean environment. It is just that the oil companies don't want to spend the money.

Saturday the 15<sup>th</sup> – After breakfast we headed for Bass Harbor to boom it off to protect a small spawning lagoon. They had housing problems again last night. Yesterday I rolled ashore in Outside Bay to a small bite off in the bay. I couldn't see oil on shore from our anchorage, but once ashore, there was a lot of oil on the rocks, and the kelp was soaked in puddles of oil. I walked across the bite and noticed heavy concentrations of deer signs. I came over to a small inlet starting to fill from the tide. The inlet was full of ducks. No oil here. Thousands of birds feeding on herring. Many bald eagles. Here was a place free of oil and full of life, also many sea lions. Its tough to look at this scene and know eventually the oil will work its way here. Only a few miles away you can smell the stench of oil. I know now this whole event has changed my outlook on life. Right now I cannot do anything, but in time I will. We must work together with the oil companies now to gain what we can in the Sound. Here at Bass Harbor we did about an hour's work and now are waiting for a VECO rep. There are four boats on contract here, with VECO, that are not doing a thing. This whole mess is not only disorganized but is a bloody crime. Across the island, there has been a boat with people waiting for hard hats, gloves and boats – totally disorganized. Three weeks and no improvement. Here at the bay there are five boats waiting to put one piece of boom in. They have been there two days – never put boom in before. We were there to direct them. Once we left Bass Harbor we came back to Outside Bay where the crew went to help with the boom around the Exxon Valdez. The Northern Girl, for the past three days, was towing a piece of absorbent boom around the tanker, accomplishing absolutely nothing but still just keeps doing it 15 hours a day. Many people feel as if they are being paid to do nothing. A real act in futility.

Sunday, April 16<sup>th</sup> – A tug with 11 people on board called about not having showers, hot food or berthing for its people. All this time the VP is sitting at port and could handle all these people. They are putting people on shore without proper equipment. They are using unlicensed boats for hauling passengers. They have people and boats without food or fuel. Here on the Glacier Spirit they have taken from us two more crew. Talked to the Glacier Queen today – they were putting people ashore without proper equipment and also overloading boats and were not meeting Coast Guard regulations on boats. I am becoming increasingly concerned about VECO. I think they are out to make a mint off this project and I think a lot of Alaskans who need some kind of income will be let go. I don't trust VECO and think the State needs to keep close eye on them. Alaskans out here on the job are getting increasingly disturbed with VECO management.

The Coast Guard was put out to help, but we have six man boats with 10 or more. Heard on the radio a British group coming in to one of the Cruise Ships, cold and wet with 18 on board. The people from Britain have really been getting the run around. I sure wish how I knew when the Coast Guard regulations get turned off or on.

Here it is April 17<sup>th</sup> and many boats are unable to work for they have no fuel. One of the Cruise ships is still trying to get gloves for its people. They let one of the most efficient operators go today on the Alinka B – Tim R – I felt (he was) the most confident and getting things done person here. I don't trust VECO. People take chances and are untrained. Going on the fourth week and still confusion. Will we ever get the Sound cleaned up? People are losing interest because of the confusion. I feel really frustrated

because we were assigned to the tanker. I would like to be doing more, but when I listen to all that is going on I would probably be more frustrated elsewhere. PWS Community must devise their own system and no longer depend on outside contractors out to get rich off a disaster.

April 18<sup>th</sup> – Today is absolute confusion. They found a lot of oil north of Perry Island in Wells Passage. Equipment is starting to break down. So there are less and less skimmers working. The oil is getting so spread out they cannot handle it. Here is a whole month gone by without a real understanding of those in charge how big PWS really is. I'm dedicating the rest of my life and spare time to the protection of the environment. We must not let the oil companies soft talk us out of this one. We also must get rid of our federal representatives who couldn't even come to Alaska to PWS. Instead they make statements about how it's going to help the economy. If Frank Murkowski is going to run for Governor, we are in real trouble. It is obvious he is an oil man. We need someone who is not afraid of the oil companies and will look to protecting the environment. Maybe God can forgive the oil barons on what happened here in PWS. I cannot.

April 19<sup>th</sup> – Strong diesel leak around the tanker inside of boom. Everyone worked to clean up. Leak was from the salvage boat pumping fuel into the water. Salvage crew doesn't really care about contamination, just the survey of the tanker. This kind of attitude needs to change.

Thurs, 20<sup>th</sup> of April – We had a lot of oil come into Outside Bay. We asked for a skimmer but couldn't get one. We boomed the oil but couldn't get rid of it. Everyone needs skimmers. Many booms full, many skimmers full. One month since the spill, still utter confusion. Boats are also having trouble getting paid – VECO is backing off on contracts.

The afternoon of the 20<sup>th</sup> of April, oil, thick and heavy, a month from the accident, came pouring into Outside Bay. Oil is showing up everywhere, not enough skimmers, not enough storage, and not enough garbage scows. Still is a badly run, mixed up operation. It looks like we will be here in Outside Bay until the tanker leaves. I'm having a hard time understanding the continuous mass confusion still going on. There is oil almost everywhere. Whenever the wind changes, people chase it relentlessly. This morning we had oil boomed at Outside Bay and had a skimmer, Cape Douglas, almost to them to suck it out, when he turned away and was called away. The chances are all our boomed oil will be lost. There is no real organization. I hope next time this happens, the people from PWS can direct it. I feel so helpless and sick, and still find it hard to believe that the destruction to life and shore continues. I tried to understand the confusion the first two weeks, when one night I was sent on a hundred-mile round trip to pick up some skimmers, which had already been picked up. I was able to understand that. Now when things continue to go wrong, not enough skimmers or storage, oil still hitting virgin beaches, it is making me almost unbearable to be around. I can't explain the emptiness since this accident, but why do we have to continue one month later to pollute new area.

April 22<sup>nd</sup>, not really recording past happenings like I wanted. Today another great fiasco. I cannot believe what I see. We boomed up oil coming into Outside Bay then called for a skimmer. Instead they sent 2 LC's with tanks and pump. It has been three hours now, and they are still trying to clean out the first boom. At this rate it would take

10 years to clean up the oil in the Sound. The scientific advances made by oil are unbelievably great, but they are still riding the donkey in environmental central.

April 23<sup>rd</sup> – Eshamy boom broke. They have oil all the way back in Eshamy Lagoon. If they had the proper boom this never would have happened. Also, they are now pulling all their resources to Eshamy, leaving everything else to do whatever. One month, and still only a fraction of the resources available to handle this spill. Also, I'm upset with the Coast Guard – when is a law a law? They waived a 6-man license requirement, but how can the waive 6-man boat regulations. We have seen 6-man boats with 30 people on board. If a law on boats is for safety, then who has the right to ignore it unless it is a real emergency? The Coast Guard is wrong in waiving safety requirements when it comes to boats.

Because of weather, not a lot was done today; they just don't have enough resources for skimming. Maybe this storm will do for the oil companies what they wanted all the time – for it to disperse in the Gulf, out of sight out of mind. I feel very guilty about not being able to yell and scream about this whole fiasco! A lot more could have been done, but Alaskans haven't been given the chance to direct it. I feel I have really learned a lot and I hope we can plan a civilian plan free from the oil companies to defend from another spill. We must put the clamps on Alyeska and not stand for slick, sweet talk anymore. We need a committee to oversee what the state and oil companies are doing. We need mooring buoys throughout the Sound with boom already on shore to put out. Tankers should have automatic booming on board in case of trouble. We must demand millions of dollars be spent in case of another spill. We must elect state and federal representatives who are not padded by the oil companies. We must develop an economy free from oil, an economy that will stand on its own. Oil companies and oil company cronies are already two-toning this whole mess. We must never let ourselves forget what happened here and what is happening around the world in the name of progress. To damage to such a beautiful spot is unforgivable. We must do our best to clean up the Sound, but we can never forget or let up on the oil companies.

The second week we were still working around Sawmill Bay and Evans Island, setting out deflection booms and monitoring the oil flow. Pt. Helen was unbelievable – like a paved, asphalt highway. What a mess! Snug Harbor was wide open to receiving a lot of oil. Everyone worked pretty hard here to skim it up. There was constant mix-up here. The day they moved the tanker they pulled a hard working skimming crew off to help with the tanker move. I feel if they hadn't done this, we could have kept a lot of oil from going to Seward. That night, or morning, I had to pick up a skimmer crew at Mummy Bay and haul them into Valdez. We left at 2100 in the morning – a 4-½ hour trip. This same day they quit using the VP, I guess because he talked to reporters too much. Oil companies think everyone is for sale. That trip to town was the only time I got to town since March 27<sup>th</sup> and only for two hours. The only positive thing about this whole mess is I hope I can help the future. The past is gone – though I keep hoping this is a dream. I am slowly facing reality. In spite of all the great people who know that the Sound will recover, a lot of us know it will never be the same. The day I got back from town, I picked the crew up at Mummy Bay. That night they sent me on a wild goose chase looking for a skimmer crew that had been picked up earlier.

(There are no more pages past this date and entry.)