

Interview with Norma Grier on Friday, April 10, 2015

Interview conducted by Marla Walters, Hope Tejedas, Emma Sloan

Norma Grier (NG): I live here at Royal Blueberries, it's right on the edge of the West Eugene wetlands and that's such a blessing, you know. These are a world famous wetland restoration projects and it's completely changed the animal life, birds especially in the neighborhood. I just think it's delightful and it's really fun seeing people using the wetland bike trail. There's a lot of walkers, there's a lot of bird watchers, bicyclists it's the access to all the long the more mild bike runs that people make, they all come out the West Eugene through the West Eugene wetlands then hit the roads for 40 miles bike trips. So sometimes we see them on their way out and sometimes we see them huffing and puffing on their way home. How was that?

Interviewer (I): That was great. Do you want to talk about a specific moment that catalyzed your involvement in this issue? What really got you motivated to be an activist and start NCAP?

NG: I was active in the pesticide issue before NCAP but not long before NCAP. I was living about 130 miles south of Eugene in a community in Douglas County, which is the county south of our county. It was in the mid 1970's and at that point all of the forestlands were being clear cut and then sprayed and a lot of the private industry lands were also being sprayed. We were on the edge of both US Forest Service and private industry forestland in Azalea Oregon. And we had a very small farm in kind of a forested watershed and learned that the Roseburg Lumber Company was going to spray the property just upstream from our house and at that time the forester or silviculturist it's called, he managed the clear cut areas after they were clear cut came and visited us in our kitchen and explained what they were going to do and they wanted to spray a chemical called 2, 4, 5-T which in combination with 2, 4-D was Agent Orange in the Vietnam War and in the 1970's a lot of 2, 4, 5-T were being used on forested watersheds throughout Oregon, Washington, California actually the Midwest, even Maine and the horrors of war were brought back to peacetime uses in forestry here in Oregon and so he explained that that's what he was going to spray and he was going to use 2, 4, 5-T and I was already pretty familiar with these issues because a group in the Oregon coast range called CATS: Citizens Against Toxic Sprays had been doing a lot of work already and they were marvelous at they printed a newsletter it got widely distributed and so people that were interested in this issue, this is pre internet so you can't Google but activists have always had methods of helping each other find each other so there was some access to information and some support and this networking was really uh flourishing and I knew about it some because my watershed if you crossed over the ridge into the next watershed there was a woman who lived there who had been sprayed, you know a property near her home had been sprayed as well by Roseburg Lumber Company, the same lumber company, they sprayed 2,4,5-T and her water source was actually on a spring very close to their property and she had horrible health effects from the residues that were in the water she had uncontrolled bleeding, vaginal bleeding and she would get so weak that she would leave the area, have no trouble, come back and the problems would start again. And she came to visit one day and over my kitchen table told me her story and I was just profoundly moved by her story and what had happened to her and so when Roseburg Lumber said they wanted to spray behind me my land partners and I were very concerned and we told Roseburg Lumber that we didn't agree with their idea of spraying and that we would do what we could to just make sure that everything was done right. So at that time there was a regulation in the

Oregon Forest Practices Act that said if a company was going to spray 2, 4, 5-T they had to print in a newspaper two weeks ahead of their spray operation so that people were notified that 2, 4, 5-T was going to be sprayed so we kept watching the local paper, which is the *Roseburg News Review* and sure enough in February, right around 1st of February, was the legal notice in the news review that said that Roseburg Lumber was going to spray 2, 4, 5-T and they listed all these properties and the property near ours was on the list so we knew it was going to happen. We had two weeks before they could spray and right around Valentine's Day you know they had a thumbs up and it rained, and it rained on the 15th and it rained on the 16th and it rained every day until the very last day of February and the headlines in the *Oregonian* that we got on March 1st was: 2, 4, 5- T use was canceled, suspended, so that was the first non-rainy day. They can't spray when its raining so the first day that they could even consider spraying the EPA had banned had stopped the use of 2, 4, 5- T for forestry use, throughout the country so we didn't get sprayed with 2, 4, 5- T but about 10 days later they did come with the helicopters and sprayed 2, 4-D instead and we had made such a stink that the Department of Forestry was there and they took a water sample before the spraying and they took a water sample right after the spraying and 24 hours later and you know there were a bunch of water samples that were taken and Roseburg Lumber knew that the Department of Forestry was taking all these samples so they were extra careful, they buffered the streams they had their helicopter, you know not just cut across the watershed but they went up to the ridge and up the ridge to keep it out of the water. They buffered all the CAT trails, the logging roads that are made by the caterpillars and so all these extra precautions were taken and when the sampling was done by Department of Forestry there were residues, they weren't high residues but the stuff gets in the water and the drift is the drift happens.

NG: I've never been someone who has felt that sprays have harmed my physical health but I know these chemicals get where we don't want them to go. They get in, they move through air they get in the water they run off in water they affect wildlife, they affect plants that we don't want harmed, they affect human health and its it's motivating when you have an experience that feels that so close to home so that's kind of how I got networked in with a bunch of people but that experience was a very profound experience for me.

NG: I'll tell you a sequel to that which was you know the EPA announced the stop of the forest uses of 2,4,5-T and this was I think in late February of 1979 and the EPA then was still a pretty young agency they assumed the responsibilities for pesticides in 1972 I think it was, and so they didn't have a whole lot of experiences yet, but they boldly said that they would undergo cancellation hearings for 2, 4, 5- T and they worked to determine whether they should stop those uses and NCAP was founded in 1977 and the Northwest Center for Alternatives to Pesticides and one of the responsibilities that NCAP took on was to make sure that the voices of the you know, residents that were affected by 2, 4, 5- T were involved in that those voices were heard during the cancellation proceedings at EPA and under the National Pesticides Law, an administrative law judge hears all the testimony but its kind of like a legal proceeding with attorneys and you know a process that's very formal and NCAP was, did a marvelous job making sure that the voices from the Northwest got heard in Washington D.C. when they were considering the cancellation and I was able, my affidavit was part of the cancellation proceedings because I could argue that it had been 2, 4, 5- T it would have been 2, 4, 5- T in the water instead of 2, 4,-D and the intent was to spray 2, 4, 5- T until the emergency suspension happened and so the EPA at one point actually held field hearings here in Eugene and they were held at the University of Oregon Law School not in the current building in the old building and it was such the only people they cross examined

the attorneys for DOW Chemical cross examined some of the residents that had submitted affidavits the only ones they cross examined were the ones that had claimed they adverse health effects so the women that shared her story at my kitchen table she was one of the people who had cross examined by the attorneys in their three piece pinstripe suit you could spot them from a mile away they did not look like they belonged in Eugene, Oregon I think it was really powerful that NCAP was able to enable all those voices to be heard, it took till 1985 but eventually DOW gave up on keeping, their pesticide, on 2, 4, 5- T registered they said they were going to just stop the registration so there was no decision by the EPA that it was harmful it was mostly the manufacturer said that they did not want to hold up the registration anymore.

NG: So to follow up on your question Emma, if people who were harmed by pesticide felt engaged beyond their own self interests. I think it varies. There were some individuals who just couldn't take on uh bigger battle and then a lot of people do feel enraged and connected to others who have had I mean NCAP, CATS and others worked hard to network folks together and then you feel like its not just my problem and I think you do work hard to make sure that other people don't have the same experience that you had that made you uncomfortable, upsetting.

I: What advice would you give to people who have been affected and don't know why they are sick?

NG: Well its you know its hard to prove sometimes that the that your health outcome that you're experiencing is directly linked to the exposure that you had and sometimes that window of opportunity you had for proving it scientifically in terms of a urine sample or a blood sample or uh even a doctors visit sometimes the effects are like flu like symptoms its really not easy to make sure that the cause and effect are linked so sometimes people are able to get the right things happen and they are able to document the problem, in terms of a health effect in my situation yes water got contaminated but there was no health effect that anyone was trying to prove and I've never personally felt an adverse health effect from pesticide exposure. I think the goal then is to then mobilize that concern and energy that people have, the passion, the fire in the gut that comes out when people feel violated and direct it to some type of solution or some type of campaign or program that can help move this in this case the pesticide issue forward and you know just like any social justice issue or political campaign I think that it's important to set reasonable, doable goals, winnable ones, things where people can put energy into and actually walk away feeling like they've made a difference and contributed. And you know in the full picture these are really complicated issues umm and they're very entrenched in our society you know the folks that have power have a lot more wealth they have political access they have a structure like the pesticide industry has salespeople and you know all over this country and their they the representative for DOW Chemical may be the third son of your friend at church and so then it gets, that type, of personal structure that the pesticide industry has all over this country is something that the activists can't match so I think its really important to try to think of a campaign or an outcome that is strategically smart, is doable, is winnable and you know will contribute to this fight and its I got to work for 30 years every day on pesticide issues and at the end of it you know its I think the pesticide industry is not anything but still amazingly powerful if not more powerful. They have amazing access politically and regulatory. The deck is stacked in their favor a lot in terms of how pesticides are registered and regulated in our country. They have a lot going for them but the one thing, I can, when I look back on my 30 years in activism I got

active in the mid 70's and it was not that many years after they uh EPA had banned DDT and people thought that they pesticide issue was sort of taken care of and you know you get rid of DDT and you substitute all these organic phosphates which are really bad neurotoxins and I know that when I first stepped into the circle the public's attitude I think was that the pesticide issue was taken care of because we had got rid of DDT. And that's what had been in the media and I would say today that a lot of parents think that pesticides could harm their kids and the industry hasn't changed enough. There is still drift, there is still unacceptable exposure there's a lot science that shows there are problems. Even though I've realized that it takes a lot of time for change, real structural change to happen, you don't win these things over night, you don't get rid of you know racism or discrimination overnight and you don't get rid of pesticides over night but I think the public attitude is in our favor now and that's a pretty important change. And you know I feel that the work you know NCAP and all the amazing network of people that have put efforts into pesticide issues here in Oregon and around the U.S. and around the globe have helped create that what I think is the truth that pesticides are harmful.

I: You spoke a lot about change in the pesticide industry and change in the public eye. What would meaningful change be to you; at least in your lifetime?

NG: You know I think that question about what meaningful change is, I think I've adjusted that somewhat the more years I've worked on some of these issues you know at first it felt like when I got involved the focus was 2, 4,5-T and forestry and it was you know we were successful we got 2, 4, 5,-T uses stopped but you know some of the thinking that went behind why people felt they needed 2, 4, 5-T none of that changed. I mean there's people in Gold Beach getting sprayed still for the same uses of these chemicals that were present because back in the 1970's. What I've come to sort of rely on more in terms of the types of outcomes that are important they are very much value based they're about making sure people have the right to know about what's happening in their communities, what they're being exposed to in terms of toxins that they have access to information and that its solid information and not just industry propaganda you know I think that we have to be careful not to just people who want household pests dead for example, cockroaches, mosquitoes. People take action sometimes from lack of knowledge but I don't think it helps if we're really judgmental when someone is wrong. The right to know and access to information is important I think considering alternatives you know people say 'Oh well you have to do it this way'. Society needs to ask 'well, what else is available; what else can get us to where we want to go?' That's where I think that the trying to change the thinking about: well are we doing forestry in a way that just encourages the alder or the unwanted plants on these sites, are we practicing agricultural in a way that just is obviously problematic? Do we need to sort of rethink how we are practicing some of these? I mean we all rely on fiber and food and I'm not saying we should stop those things or but I think that we can apply a lot of smartness to how we conduct these things like agriculture and forestry and step back and sort of rethink it and as we choose policies that will help promote the step back and rethink it maybe emphasizing alternatives that will lead us to the same outcome but won't poison the water, won't harm people's health and sometime those alternatives have other drawbacks. You have to weigh all those things and its not black and white, but I think that if we can target some of those actions we can promote campaigns or outcomes that we are interested in, to fundamentally make sure that the values that we hold very strongly - of the right to know- and consider the alternatives. Those types of things are, they will go far in just helping to create some of the change.

NG: You know one of the things that I've tried to think when a group of people is thinking about the kind of change they want to happen I think its important to think about okay 'if we promote this activity what are the consequences of that'? I'm troubled by banning aerial applications of herbicides or pesticides for example I know drift happens - that's how I got involved in this issue and drift is unavoidable in my opinion. But, if you don't also work on you know changing some of the ways that forestry is practiced and you're not saying there should be an end to all spraying you're just saying there should be an end to aerial spraying, what happens is the sprays end up in backpack sprayers on the backs of workers, and a lot of those people don't speak English, and they even have less of a voice than the people who have homes and are impacted by drifting chemicals. I have spoken with forest applicators who have worn leaking backpacks and they are out there for hours and hours and the stuff is leaking down their shirts, soaking their pants and its causing rashes, because it is acidic stuff some of it and I feel like we need to be very careful about making sure that aerial applications don't just get transferred to backpack sprayers - who are in less of a position than English speaking irate individuals - to make sure that those folks are protected too. It's hard sometimes there are unpredictable outcomes but often that's not the case. You know if we aren't challenging how forestry is conducted and we are not trying to put an end to clear-cuts that encourage these aerial applications then its going to end up with some individuals that are exposed very heavily.

I: So what would be your most ideal solution?

NG: In the forestry issue?

I: In the whole issue.

NG: In the forestry issue especially?

I: Yes.

NG: You know its not simple, its not simple at all. I think, you know, the I mean sometimes its the solution seems so tangential its campaign finance reform, its the fact corporations own a lot of the private forest land and they need quarterly returns to make sure their stockholders are compensated with quarterly dividends. It is very short terms they are looking at - there is no long view - and forestry is not an annual crop. Its decades and decades before you harvest, you know, and I some of the stuff that needs to be gotten at, means building coalitions with other types of organizations that aren't just working on pesticides and it means you know working with the Oregon league of conservation voters and then you know making sure that environmentally friendly people are serving in public office. You know ways that seem, I mean they're not just about pesticides but they are part of how society fits together in a healthy democratic way and those require... each one of us can only do so much you know its very few of us that get to be President Obama that have the ability to put fingers in too many pies, if we can do one job or have one passion that we fulfill effectively even if its for six months, if we can put our attention to that and do a really good job with it, it adds up. It is a cumulative process that involves a lot of people working towards outcomes that's about an informed engaged community that isn't pushed around by money and influence. It's a really good fight.

I: Is there something that you do on a daily or weekly basis that you feel supports this issue, or pushes something along? You have an organic blueberry farm, that's something.

NG: You know I think that it's really important that each of us takes of herself or himself and if we can maintain stamina and hang in there and not get burned out because we have blown all of our circuits that really valuable, because the knowledge that you gain over time and the networks that are established is rich, rich, rich. For all those years that I worked full time plus at NCAP you know I got up a little extra early and walked a mile or two around the field out here, and I would work to connect with beauty everyday. Notice something that beautiful. And that really helps, you know it's just a small thing but I think it's really essential for our well being, and our stamina. I am a caregiver now, take care of my husband who has some needs; I'm the designated driver in the household. I keep the schedule and you know I really miss a lot of the comradely that I got from being in a work place, and connecting. You know it was such a privilege to do the work that I was doing for so many years because I honor and respect the folks who pick up all the little pieces and run with it - even if it is a short period of time, you know, while their kid is in preschool you know while their neighbor was doing x, y, z. You know I, I think that the things that people can do to maintain stamina are really valuable for the long term. And you know, change is not quick; I thought it was when I was in my twenties. I remember being shocked when I first read Rachel Carson's book and it had been twenty years since she had written it. And I thought all those things should have been taken care of and here we were writing appeals on forest service operations, all the issues that she had raised in her book, and its like 'what is this?' And I, thirty years later now, I get it, these are, these are, really important, it's really important work to do and it is very complicated in terms of all the reaches of our community there is injustice and unequal power, there are voices that need to be heard that aren't be heard. The work that folks do to make sure that happens in all kinds of fascists in our community and our lives. My hat is off to people who put their energies to it.

I: So one of the questions I had was, what are your strategies in the '70's and '80's to combat this issue, and which would still be productive today and which would not work any more?

NG: Interesting. Well you know, public education is just essential and it has to be ongoing. Sometimes it feels like I've said this one hundred times and it here it is again. And it's important not to get bored and that's why I think it's important to have more people help with that in terms with public education. But there's always going to be a lot of that. And I think that means that people learn to be good public speakers and you know good graphic artists and good writers you know its fairly basic stuff but if you can get out of school with the ability to communicate what you know orally and in writing and some visually that goes a long way. Making sure that public education happens. I think one of the interesting aspects to the work in the '70's, the spraying in that time was happening on Federal Forest Land and you know the public has the right to be involved in those decisions and that's not true for private land in the same way. The federal agencies had to follow the NEPA, and NEPA is a really interesting law because it requires that people consider the alternatives and we were able to raise that in the governments face. And I think that is still a strategy that, even on private land is compelling because it requires people to at least acknowledge that there could be a different way to do this. Considering the alternatives is a really important strategy. I think some of the biggest change that happened regarding pesticide use at NCAP was when there was litigation. It's a very structured process, and can be quite expensive and fortunately there are excellent environmental advocacy attorneys and we had some amazing legal help

over the years. But not all laws force change. Like the NEPA law has really good principles build into it, but it doesn't stop programs for very long. It stops programs until the EIS is written or until a change is made in the EIS. You know endangered species act litigation had profound affect changes on pesticide use in the work that NCAP did. I think that public agencies respond to litigation, some media pressure, but they also drop everything if it's a federal agency and congressional representative asks them for something - because that's who their boss is. Their money comes from congress. In a state situation, you know state officials have elected senators and House of Representatives; they can also make inquiries to state agencies.

NG: It's really those are things that are still pretty effective. I encourage people to vote, that they get to know whom their elected officials are, that they work with them and get to know them. That they you know, if they are getting a cold shoulder they work to elect ones that are more representative of their interests. I think it's really important.

NG: So my name is Norma Grier, and I've had the privilege of working on pesticide issues for more than thirty years. I got involved in the mid 1970's when I was living in rural Douglas County, which is the county just south of Eugene. I lived in a forested watershed and it was during the time that forest spraying was happening, as a major issue. So I, my friends and I, got involved in working on this issue. We had a small community group called the Healthy Environment Action League and it was one of the founding member groups of the Northwest Coalition for Alternatives to Pesticides, NCAP. I was the executive director of NCAP for about 27 years.

I: You already covered this but maybe you can reiterate, how did you get involved in this issue?

NG: I got involved in this issue when neighbors inspired me. Pesticides harmed some of my neighbors' health; others just didn't want pesticides to be used in our rural community. And so they didn't like the county doing roadside spraying. I realized this issue reached into all kinds of people in our neighborhood, from the Sunday school teachers to the back-to-the-landers to the logger's. It brought together amazing segments of our community and people were unified at being concerned about the sprays. I got involved at a very local community level.

I: What is your vision of change?

NG: My vision of change is, very much based in values. I think there are core values that we hold as humans that we have the right to know, we have a right to be informed about what is happening to us and to others in our neighborhood, that we have a right to dignity and that power can't be unbalanced. That all of us that a right to be involved in decision making, to speak out, to make sure that we are not oppressing others. Those values are the ones that drive change. People have passion, they get motivated and they work hard on their own behalf.

I: Where do you think you would be today had you not gotten involved with this all these years back. If pesticide spray hadn't affected your neighbors, where do you think you would be today?

NG: Something else would have caught my passion. You know I grew up in a family that was very much driven by values. I am a missionary kid. I grew up in Japan. But my folks worked for a Christian church. And the civil rights movement very heavily influenced my father. Plugged into social justice issues, and that was what we talked about around the dinner table.

NG: My father's work was so interesting to me. Not because of its religious aspects but because he worked hard with a group of Japanese that are heavily discriminated against because of the caste system that was brought over from India these a group of Japanese that, until one hundred years ago were considered non-human. And they did all the work that was the hardest physical labor, all the stuff that gave you bad karma in a Buddhist sense - anything that had to do with health, filth for feet. So they made the tatami mats they worked with leather they did the slaughtering. It's like civil rights in this country. From president Lincoln to now has been many years but we still have a ways to go before we have addressed all the issues surrounding racism. It was around the same time in Japan when the caste system was eliminated. All Japanese were considered human but the discrimination doesn't go away. So the church was very involved in those issues of discrimination. So that sort of passion in me comes from the values that were shared in my family.

NG: The pesticide issue grabbed me and didn't let me go and I care a lot on lots of levels whether its working on homelessness, drug addiction, all of those things are about values. And making sure that people had dignity and basic rights met. I would do something.

I: Do you see those things like civil rights issues and environmental issues linked?

NG: Totally. I love it when it's an area of environmental work that has not had enough emphasis. The cultural work that helps emphasize those values - whether its theatre or song or art, those are really important venues for getting across messages. The environmental movement could do better at building those bridges. Every movement has art and culture and we could do more to strengthen the environmental movements art and culture.

I: How would you describe the issues of pesticides in environmental justice to someone who had never heard of pesticides?

NG: Pesticides are products that you can buy on store shelves and they are easily accessible they are used routinely in the production of our food that goes on our dinner tables, they are widely sprayed in homes, I think it doesn't take long to help people recognize and understand that they have exposure. I think that its science is on our side now too in terms of documenting that harm is done just from routine pesticide use and that there is choices that people make that that are simple. You know I like to get to the daily stuff that all of us have to do. We all have to drink water; we all have to eat food. If we can translate the issue of pesticides to the daily stuff - if it's our kids in school - and then offer very small things that people can do that will reduce their pesticide use. People get it and people want to do it. You can make one change and commit to buying organic milk instead of other milk, that's a big change. And they don't have to go organic on all fronts. But they could go organic on one item or on a handful of items and start there. It isn't hard to help people understand that pesticides touch them pretty intimately everyday.

I: Do you have any advice for us as we begin our work in herbicide issues?

NG: You're hooked? Stay concrete and you know, don't burn yourself out. Like I said. It keeps changing you have to cross your limits to realize you've crossed them. You can handle more sometimes than at other times. I am at a point where I am not handling as much as I used to because there is a lot occupying my time and energy. We keep building on our experiences our whole lives, and so, if you are going to thread one issue though that, definitely make sure you're maintaining stamina.

I: Thank you for giving us part of your day.

NG: Do you feel like you got some good stuff to work with?