



# Catherine O’Gorman

Michael Lapidès:

This is Michael Lapidès here, going to be sitting and listening to and talking with Cathy O’Gorman who is a volunteer at the New Bedford Whaling Museum. Thank you for coming in, Cathy, today.

Cathy O’Gorman:

You’re welcome.

Michael Lapidès:

Today is, I think, July 27th. It’s a Wednesday. And I think you’re going to talk some about your connection to the ocean and being here at the museum. Let’s see. Why don’t you start by stating your name.

Cathy O’Gorman:

Cathy O’Gorman is my name, and I did some training here pre-COVID. And it was quite a training. I was very impressed and I’m very impressed with the museum and decided to come on board. And love the intersection of science and art and history and culture. It’s a wonderful place to be. Being a certified scuba diver and an educator and an ed coordinator for years, I felt that this would be another way for me to be teaching, educating, and for me to become more educated. So my certification began in 1986, and it just ignited this passion for exploration.

Michael Lapidès:

Can you explain what the certification is that you’re talking about?

Cathy O’Gorman:

It’s a certification in scuba diving and in nitrox certification that gives me the ability to dive with enriched O<sub>2</sub>.

Michael Lapidès:

What have you done with the scuba diving?

Cathy O’Gorman:

I’ve been blessed to be able to dive around here, around mostly Cuttyhunk, but in Westport and Newport. And then a lot of diving in the Caribbean, the Bahamas, the Grenadines, the Cayman Islands, islands that are not really well-inhabited like Saba and that are rainforests with volcanic rainforests. And Bonaire, Curacao, Aruba, Cozumel, lots of different places. Everything with the exception of the Red Sea and Micronesia which I was about to do, but it was a pretty lengthy plane flight. Those international flights can be bad on your back.

Michael Lapidès:

And so you’ve dove around here, you said around Cuttyhunk, and the sea is much different here than in other places. But what about the more local dives maybe is notable? I know you have a passion for the ocean and the health of the ocean. Maybe if you could talk about that connection and relate it to the Whales Today exhibit, perhaps even.



Cathy O'Gorman:

Yes, yes. Well, my diving in Cuttyhunk was wonderful, even though the visibility wasn't the best, but I was able to see some marine life and particularly striped bass. And they were incredible, pretty remarkable to watch. They sort of swim around you when you're diving, and if you take your regulator out of your mouth, they get a little closer. So it was really a wonderful time. I did some underwater photography also, which this northern ocean doesn't lend itself well to. But I did a lot in the Bahamas, in the Grenadines, in different parts of the coast here, Florida coast, protected areas and it was wonderful to see.

I think through my years of diving and doing photography, I've clearly seen a dramatic difference in the ocean, in the marine life and in the coral reef, the system, the whole ecosystem, which is quite beautiful and is being impacted in a pretty significant way. And so I wanted to really do something about that. I feel like as a diver, I've a responsibility to do that anyway, because just being there, having the opportunity to see all that beauty, I think you have a responsibility to protect it and make sure that you're not harassing any marine life, particularly when you're taking pictures. No photo is worth it if you cannot maintain a neutral buoyancy and you are dragging things on the coral reef and harassing marine life to get a picture.

I think my work here, it's pretty lucky to do because I can in some way impart through beautiful, creative exhibits like Jacobs Gallery and Limpit and Turner... Is it called Turner?

Michael Lapidés:

Turner Gallery, the Cultures of Whaling exhibit.

Cathy O'Gorman:

I thought they had developed a different name for it or something. Even something as simple as the whale scavenger hunt has really promoted some interest. It's an icebreaker with some children and a lot of adults like it too, to really explore other things and talk about protecting the waters and conserving and really celebrating all these beautiful, remarkable creatures. That to me is worth it, being here. Again, that intersection of everything else that's going on in this museum has-

Michael Lapidés:

You were talking about diving and the responsibility of being a diver and not to disturb what's there. And you were also talking about your work in the Whaling Museum. So I was wondering perhaps when you're talking with visitors and talking about the conservation of the ocean and the health of the marine life, if being a diver brings anything to that kind of conversation.

Cathy O'Gorman:

Yes, I think in a significant way because I think most people who don't-

Michael Lapidés:

One sec. Could you repeat what you understood as my question and then say the thing.

Cathy O'Gorman:

Okay.

Michael Lapidés:

Yeah.



Cathy O'Gorman:

My ability to make a difference with the people that I meet here and connect with in the Whaling Museum.

Michael Lapides:

Yeah.

Cathy O'Gorman:

And the influence that my diving has given me. Because I see the ocean in a different way, I see it beneath the beautiful blue surface and see what's going underneath it. I think a lot of people who don't get to experience that kind of environment, don't see it for what... It looks great, the tides coming in and out, the water looks beautiful, and they may not really be fully aware of what's happening and what's happening to whales and fish and sea creatures and the coral reef, all of it.

So exhibitions like Limpit and like Jacob, all of those wonderful skeletons and different learning boards there and activities really give people... It's like an awakening as to, "Well, why is that net around this model of a North Atlantic whale?" Just that in itself promotes a conversation about entanglement and about the lobster pots that are set up horizontally right next to it and then have a lift bag. And "Well, why is that there? And how is that able to really help the population of the North Atlantic whales to continue to at least be maintained and hopefully increase?" And maybe I've run into people who aren't aware of the fact that Northern Atlantic right whales are in deep danger of becoming extinct. So this ignites that thought, that awareness of what could be done.

Michael Lapides:

Very good. Yeah, I think that's part of the mission of the museum. And then part of what, as volunteers, you help the public to understand. Sometimes I think public comes and they'll see what they see, but sometimes walk away without understanding some of what's being said. And that's why it's really great to have people like you out on the floor to help bring attention to some of these points in an exhibit like that. Also interesting to hear that, yeah, I know that's your background, the diving and your love of the ocean but you see the museum is filled with a lot of different things, right?

Cathy O'Gorman:

Yes, certainly, yes. The art piece is great. And that was one of my areas of concentration in school and in teaching is art and visual art in education. I think the wide variety of ages and people that we see here are something that, that's what I did in my career. So I, on a developmental level, can approach them in a way that's understandable to them. And it's a fine balance.

Again, the whole history part has recently had me much more excited, meeting people who have connections to San Miguel, like the Rebelo exhibit, and who want to see a boat that their great-great-great-grandfather was on at 14 years of age. And then just the excitement of somebody finding out who their great-great-great-great-great-grandfather was and to see the whaling ship that her father was on and great-great-great-grandfather was on. And then have someone look at an exhibit and see toys that their great-grandfather fabricated, these whimsical, great toys and see some Pairpoint glass that her ancestry was, that's who created it.

Michael Lapides:

Yeah, it's pretty cool.

Cathy O'Gorman:

Yeah.





Michael Lapidès:

Well, this is great. Thanks for sitting down and helping us with Common Ground and telling the story and telling about your connection to the ocean. That's been great.

Cathy O'Gorman:

Thank you, Michael.

Michael Lapidès:

Yeah, and your enthusiasm, too, with... Keep talking about the project and selling the project. That's very helpful.

Cathy O'Gorman:

I certainly will.

Michael Lapidès:

All right.

Cathy O'Gorman:

Yes.