

CINDY MILLER, interviewed by Glenn Blackburn on December 29, 2009. Cindy is Todd Miller's sister. She lives on Bogue Sound and is a long-time member of the Coastal Federation. She is currently DE (Distance Education) Coordinator and Teaching Instructor in the College of Education, Department of Business and Information Technologies Education at East Carolina University.

Cindy said that both of her parents were extremely supportive of Todd's work in the early days of the Federation. They made many contributions of time, space (using their yard for Federation gatherings), etc. Their mother contributed a collection of note cards with drawings of coastal themes. The note cards were quite popular, and all were sold with proceeds going to the Federation. Sylvia also made many signs for Federation booths at festivals. She was a good illustrator as well as sign painter. Todd did the hardest part of the work, which was getting the funding. He also did everything a start-up business would do -- bookkeeping, secretarial work, long hours of researching, visiting people, etc. (Cindy also noted that in the early days the sign directing people to Federation headquarters in the old house was simply a piece of cardboard with "NCCF" on it.)

Cindy pointed out that the Federation operated on a shoestring budget through the 1980s. They had to be creative to survive and had to have a lot of volunteer support. In particular, a lot of women put in a lot of volunteer time, often cooking for and hosting social gatherings that supported the Federation's activities. Cindy and her sons did a lot of volunteer work during the years, 1984-1990. She said that once they sold food for the Federation at the State Fair. Her sons and their friends bussed tables, carried out garbage, cleaned the kitchen, and collected money, while she was working in the kitchen keeping the food line supplied with fried rice and other stuff. Her sons, some of their friends, and Lena Ritter also staffed the Federation booths. Cindy harvested clams from Bogue Sound, so they could make clam chowder, a difficult thing to sell on a 90 degree day. In the beginning, Cindy said that most people just bought the chowder and might take a free Federation bumper sticker, but they seemed disinterested in what the Federation was or why it was at the Fair. Later, she said, we began to notice some reactions from people and had to come up with something easy to explain what the Federation was doing. They began to describe the Federation as "citizens working together to protect the coast." Gradually, sales of Federation bags and T-shirts at the Fair began to rise, so they eventually stopped making the clam chowder since it was very labor intensive and required health department inspections. One time, according to Cindy, a man with a very belligerent attitude came by the booth and complained that NCCF was preventing him from using his land the way he wanted to. Cindy told him as he walked away that they "were just trying to protect the coast from people like him," but she said that she later regretted making the statement. Cindy and her sons also worked Federation booths at local festivals several times in the 1980s -- the Mullet Festival in Swansboro and the Seafood Festival in Morehead City. These were on back-to-back weekends, so they were very busy for several weeks preparing for the festivals, especially during the clam chowder days. Cindy would cook up a "base" of clams and then heat it with clam juice and water, with no milk or tomatoes. They called it "Bogue Sound clam chowder."

In the early days of the Federation, the driving force was clearly Todd, according to Cindy. By the mid-1980s, an additional driving force was Lena Ritter. She strongly supported Todd's efforts, and as a

local fisher she had many friends who saw the need for what Todd was trying to accomplish. They were particularly concerned with Stump Sound which was being threatened by a proposed development on Permuda Island. Lena really jumped on board and attended many meetings on water quality issues all over the region. Cindy remembered: "I am sure you heard about the time she brought some water from one of the rivers and challenged one of the people on the forum to drink it. Todd was probably ready to crawl under a chair when she did this, as he never would have taken that tactic." Cindy said there were many other volunteers, including family members. She volunteered at booths at festivals, even though she was a single mother with two teenage boys. And, sister Deede donated paintings to the Federation that were sold.

When asked how the Federation has changed over the years, Cindy said that in the 1980s the Federation was very much a grass roots organization with many people making sacrifices to keep it afloat. Today, the Federation increasingly has a new constituency -- wealthy retirees who have moved from other parts of the country. Some of these wealthy people join the Federation so they can keep an eye on it. They want to make sure that the Federation doesn't do something that will interfere with what they want. Cindy added that she doesn't do much volunteering any more. The people volunteering now are very "savvy" and well educated on the mission of the Federation.

Cindy also noted that some people in the local area are very critical of Todd and what he has been doing over the years. Opinion letters appear in local and state newspapers, and these letters are often hostile to Todd and NCCF. She pointed out that Carteret County is very conservative and said: "It is painful to me to hear criticism of Todd. Many of the folks moving to this area find low tax rates and build huge houses for retirement homes. Some are very arrogant, in my opinion, and comfortable not worrying about the future of the coastal regions." They tend to see organizations like NCCF as "meddlers and/or radicals predicting gloom with global warming."

When asked why people value the coast, Cindy said first that she and her siblings were very isolated when growing up on Bogue Sound and they did not realize what a special place it was. She then added: "It was a puzzle to me why it was no 'neat' (a '60s expression) when I went to college and roommates, etc. found out that I was from the 'beach.' It never occurred to me that there was anything about growing up here that was special -- in fact I was quite anxious to move on. I spent about 15 years away and when I resettled here I realized that this was, indeed, a special place and that it was in my interest to help protect it from the changes that had occurred during my absence. Often times, childhood friends will remember this or that about the inlet or the islands around here, sadly watching the area close shell fishing waters and having huge boats knock our kayaks over as they speed by at unbelievable speeds, not even slowing down for sailing vessels, boaters who are fishing or kayaking. The havoc it has wreaked on our shorelines is obvious and disturbing. That was enough for me to volunteer against a herd of people who thought this area was little more than a playground for their speed boats and various water sports, throwing their trash into the water, etc. I grieve for Bogue Sound; while it is still pristine for swimming and shell fishing, it is destined to become an area where we will no longer have the luxury of clamming and fishing."

As for what the Federation has accomplished since 1982, Cindy said: "I am sure the accomplishments are many. One thing, as an educator, I see the outreach with their education programs geared toward our young. I can only hope this will be the long term evidence we need that the mission is important and will work." As for the failures of the Federation, she added that "it is the arrogance of the population that is a failure, comfortable in their large retirements, low taxes, and federal monies." Many people, she said, don't seem to care about the future.

With regard to what most needs to be done about coastal social and natural environments in the near future, Cindy said she would like to see more law enforcement from the state in the protection of the coast. For example, when the "snowbirds" with their yachts head south for the winter and north for the summer, they should be restrained to no wake zones when they use the ICW. As for whether the Federation should become more focused on the impact of global warming and sea level rise, Cindy said that we have to be careful in this country as many people think that this is a conspiracy. In particular, many wealthy retirees think this, and many of them are very unpleasant on the subject. Education is the only way to deal with the global warming subject.

When asked whether it is best to think of the Federation as an environmental organization or a citizen-activist organization, she said that this is a tough question. For many years, "environmentalism" has been a four-letter word for many people. But, "citizen-activist" has a radical bent to it in the eyes of some people. We struggled for years to get away from the "tree hugger" analogy. I recall my sister saying someone was laughing at her bumper sticker: "No Wetlands, No Seafood." I suppose that NCCF has something of the same reputation as the Sierra Club or the Wildlife Club.

Finally, on the question of whether there is any connection between religious beliefs and environmental concerns, Cindy said that she didn't know. But, "I want to believe that more people will take note of the environment around them and include it in their religious beliefs. Religion is a contentious (my opinion) player in the politics of our country and it is quite disturbing to me that the religious right doesn't think of the protection of our planet as the 'next world' and pray for the resurrection of the planet (as opposed to the resurrection of the dead)."