

BERNICE RICE, interviewed by Glenn Blackburn on January 3, 2009. Bernice and her late husband, Bill, were deeply involved with the Stump Sound Shellfishermen during the conflict with developers over Stump Sound and Permuda Island that lasted from roughly 1983 to 1987. The Rice farm borders on Stump Sound. Bernice said that she and Bill supported and educated seven children by farming and fishing in Stump Sound. Bernice grew up in the Stump Sound area and has lived there all her life.

Bernice said that she and Bill were deeply involved in the struggle with the developers. Bill spoke at a number of regulatory hearings, and Bernice hosted dinners on their farm for visiting politicians and regulators who wanted to see Stump Sound. Large events included neighbors who attended and provided covered dishes, but for small gatherings the Rices provided the food.

She said that most of their neighbors around Stump Sound were involved in the Stump Sound Shellfishermen organization. They all worked together to raise money for attorney's fees. They organized bake sales, donated things for auctions, etc. Bernice said that she often sold flowers to help finance the effort, and some people called her "the flower lady."

She and Bill attended CRC meetings in Wilmington, where Bill spoke against the development of Permuda Island. There needed to be somebody present at these meetings who would counter the arguments of the developers. And, the Stump Sound Shellfishermen organized busloads of people to go to Raleigh to talk to legislators.

As for Todd Miller, Bernice said that he constantly encouraged the Stump Sound Shellfishermen. He "spurred" them on. She said that Todd had a "dream" to preserve the coast. He made the arrangements for the bus trips to Raleigh, and he also attended a lot of the hearings on Stump Sound and Permuda Island. He was the one who asked Bernice to host the dinners for visiting politicians and also for the county commissioners. Orrin Pilkey once brought one of his classes to visit the farm. The idea was to get all the influential people to actually see Stump Sound, and the Rice farm was where they came to see it. They were making Stump Sound known to the world.

As for Stump Sound today, she said that there is still good oystering there. However, she said that she is noticing sea level rise at their farm, as some of their land on the sound is being washed away.

She mentioned the restoration of Morris Landing as one of the important achievements of the Coastal Federation. Before it was restored, Morris Landing was being torn up by drinking parties, pick-ups spinning their wheels, etc. The Federation has saved a lot of places over the years, she said. Other important activities of the Federation include the canoe trips that show people around coastal areas and the oyster shell recycling program. She added that in the future we need to work harder to save the waters.

When asked whether there is any connection between people's religious beliefs and their environmental concerns, Bernice said that she thinks there is a connection. People volunteer to support the Federation because they want to save the natural world, and she thinks that many of these people understand that nature was put there so that we have a way of making a living. People don't talk much about a connection between religious beliefs and the environment, but many people feel this connection.