

**Our Ocean Backyard — *Santa Cruz Sentinel* columns by Gary Griggs, Director, Institute of Marine Sciences, UC Santa Cruz.**

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**Five Years and 130 Columns**

Five years ago this week I wrote my first Ocean Backyard column, thinking at the time that it might last six months or so, and then I'd probably run out of things to write about. One hundred and thirty columns later, the topics seem to still keep jumping out at me from the keyboard, NPR, talks with friends or emails.

Once I get started on an article I've discovered that it's easy to get carried away. The editor has asked me more than once to shorten my columns. While this is good discipline, it's also difficult at times to contain my word flow. Benjamin Franklin once said, "If I would have had more time, I would have written a shorter letter". So I try to obey the editor. It just takes a little longer to write a shorter column.

As a way to mark these five years of articles, I thought I might do something different and write a more personal column. I realize when I read an editorial or column, I've often wondered who is this person?

Well.... In contrast to many scientists, who are quite comfortable within their own discipline, talking and exchanging ideas with colleagues who study similar things, I've found communicating with non-scientists or the public to be just as interesting and perhaps even more challenging. So I do a lot of that.

This is my 45th year of teaching. I was made aware of how long it had been about 10 years ago when a young student came up after my first Oceanography lecture of the quarter to inform me that her mother had taken my class. It's happened a number of times since then and I've come to see it as a badge of some honor.

My ocean interest really grew out of two things: 1) a lot of time spent outside as a kid, camping for a good portion of every summer, and living on a farm in Oregon for several years, which led me to develop an interest in the natural world; and 2) surfing, which drew me more to the ocean part of the planet.

I was quite impressionable as an undergraduate student at UCSB in the 1960s, changing my major five times before graduating in geology. A poster of

oceanographers working off the side of a ship in the North Pacific and some encouragement from my professors led me to apply for graduate work in Oceanography at Oregon State University. I wrote letters to a number of other oceanography graduate schools, much better known at the time, like Scripps and Woods Hole, but as I was a bit broke at this stage in my educational career I opted for the school with the lowest application fee - not usually a good idea.

It turned out to be a good decision, however. I spent a lot of time at sea and found the oceans to be even more fascinating. I managed to finish my degree in three years, and was within a few days of accepting a job in Houston, working for Exxon in offshore oil exploration, when I got a call from the newly opened University of California campus at Santa Cruz. The Earth Sciences Department was looking to hire the university's first oceanographer. I said yes and my entire career and life changed. Yes, it definitely was a good decision.

While I'm not sure how much longer this series will go on, I thought I might take this opportunity to ask you all to please take a minute and send me an email letting me know what you might like to read about in the columns ahead. Thank you for the last five years.