

TRANSCRIPT

INTERVIEWEE: Carole Allen

INTERVIEWER: Jen Corrine Brown

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Jen Brown [00:00:00] Well, gee, this is Jen Brown. It is January 30th, 2017. And I'm on the phone with Carol Allen. And we're here to talk about her involvement with sea turtle conservation.

Jen Brown [00:00:15] Do I have your permission to record this?

Carole Allen [00:00:18] Yes, you have my permission.

Jen Brown [00:00:19] OK, great. Thank you. So perhaps I can have you go back then and tell me about your early life.

Jen Brown [00:00:28] OK. I grew up in Illinois and when I was about five or six, my brother had gone fishing and brought home a little red-eared slider, a little water turtle. And I was fascinated with it. I thought it was the cutest thing I ever saw. And I tried to keep it, and, and others, over my childhood years, and I wasn't successful.

Carole Allen [00:00:58] I lived in a little bitty town and nobody knew much about them. So my mother had written to the St. Louis Zoo and told them I was trying to keep turtles and not having success and they'd get sick and die, and what they'd recommend.

Carole Allen [00:01:14] So, then, of course, they told me that they needed a special diet, special light, and all those things. So she suggested that I instead of trying to keep real ones, that I collect turtle things. So I started this monstrous turtle collection that has lasted years, years, years, so that my house is full of them, my yard, I mean, I buy shirts, you get a lot of turtle items. And of course, everybody any birthday, Christmas, you know, usually will get a turtle.

Carole Allen [00:01:53] So, I married another Illinois person, and, uh, Bill and I (he was a geologist), is no longer living, but he was a geologist and we ended up in Houston.

Carole Allen [00:02:10] So, I saw an article in the paper about the National Marine Fisheries Service had two thousand hatchlings, sea turtle hatchlings.

Carole Allen [00:02:20] And of course, someone that likes, loves turtles was very interested in this. So, I went to Galveston and I live here in Houston about an hour and something from Galveston, but not that far. So, I went down there and I saw these hundreds of little Kemp's ridley hatchlings. And there were a lot of people around. Everything looked good, successful.

Carole Allen [00:02:48] And I learned that they were quite endangered and our government was working with Mexico to try and increase their numbers.

Carole Allen [00:02:59] So I went back home, and a couple of years passed, I guess, and I decided to go back and see how they were doing. So, when I went back, there weren't many people. One of the staff told me that, that they, they had received a grant to raise the little turtles, but that money was running out and that the project was probably going to be over.

Carole Allen [00:03:31] So I asked the lab director, Dr. Ed Klima at that time, "What?" I just, I couldn't stand the thought of them not trying to help this turtle that was going to become extinct, which it was going to, with the Kemp's ridley.

Carole Allen [00:03:52] And he said that, "Well, he normally couldn't say anything about raising money or anything else." But he says, "The main thing here is that the turtles do not have a voice. They don't have a constituency because working for the government there's a limit to what he could say or do."

Carole Allen [00:04:16] So I said, "Well, you know, I'd like to work on this. I want to, I don't want these turtles to be extinct."

Carole Allen [00:04:26] And so I came back home. My daughter was in Oak Creek Elementary School, which is now Reynolds School. But she had a principal who was very interested in kids getting involved in things. So what happened first was a field trip on a Saturday to anyone, for anyone that was interested in the turtles and seeing them, to go down to Galveston.

Carole Allen [00:04:59] Well, the lab director didn't think anyone would show up, but they did - it was like a couple of hundred people, kids, their parents. And so, we had just a great turnout.

Carole Allen [00:05:14] And after that, the principal called a meeting of students who were especially interested in the turtles and they got together and they formed a group and they named themselves, "HEART - Help Endangered Animals - Ridley Turtles". That was the beginning of HEART.

Jen Brown [00:05:34] And what year was this?

Carole Allen [00:05:36] Yes. Yes. Oh, yeah. I was right there.

Jen Brown [00:05:39] Oh, I mean...

Carole Allen [00:05:39] And yes, go ahead.

Jen Brown [00:05:42] I'm sorry. What year was this?

Carole Allen [00:05:45] Oh, what year? OK. This would be 1980, let's say 1982, right in there.

Carole Allen [00:05:55] The, the Galveston project had been started by the government in 1978 and it maybe had four or five year life. And so I came in with the HEART, the interest of the kids and people, at the end of their budget year.

Carole Allen [00:06:16] So, at that time, he said, Dr. Klima said, "If you want to help", he said, "We could use some letters to you know, for lobbying, to your senators, your representatives, to the president. The turtles need a voice. And the other thing that could be done would be to raise the money and feed the turtles and help with the budget."

Carole Allen [00:06:46] So for five dollars a turtle, a child could sponsor food for one of the little turtles for like a year. I mean, it's cheap. It was Purina Turtle Chow.

Carole Allen [00:07:03] And it has to be, has to be special, because it has to float on top of the water in their little buckets, their little containers, so they can eat it.

Carole Allen [00:07:16] So anyway, oh, the kids jumped on that. Loved that idea, started raising money.

[00:07:21] And one of the parents, I believe, worked for The Houston Post. We used to have two big papers here, The Chronicle and The Post. Well, the Post reporter came out and talked to the kids and wrote a big story about it, what they were doing. It was a good news story. They were working to help the sea turtles.

Carole Allen [00:07:46] And after that, I was contacted by, I was contacted by a lady with Exxon. And she said, "Can you take donations? Are you tax deductible?"

Carole Allen [00:08:01] And I said, "No. We're just a group of children and me and the principal."

Carole Allen [00:08:09] And so after that, I began to think that people might donate if we did have the income tax status. So in 19, no, that was '82. Shortly after that, HEART was adopted by a nature club in Harris County, which is still going strong, the Piney Woods Wildlife Society. And we were, and still are, a special committee of the club. And so we had the 501(c)(3) status. And after that, we could, if people gave money, they could take it off as a tax write-off.

Carole Allen [00:09:03] Well, we didn't, we didn't receive that much, although I think Exxon might have given \$5000 and we were able to print some literature, some brochures about the turtles and what was their problem.

Carole Allen [00:09:21] And the more I learned, I learned the problem was that they were being drowned in shrimp nets in the Gulf of Mexico. And at their nesting beach, where most of them nest, which is in Mexico, on the north east beach on the Gulf, that people were taking all their eggs and eating them and selling them and all that.

Carole Allen [00:09:48] So between the two problems, the eggs being taken and the turtles, the adults, being drowned in the south, in the Gulf, we were in dire straits.

Carole Allen [00:10:04] And in about '85, I guess, the number of adult nesters at the beach in Mexico were, it was just in the hundreds. It was very close to being extinct and not having enough turtles to continue the species.

Carole Allen [00:10:25] So, probably the greatest thing that I did in all of this, is build public awareness, because people did not know about the turtle. They didn't know about the species. They didn't know what trouble it was in. They didn't know what was causing the problem.

Carole Allen [00:10:49] And so, this was really where I started with, with education.

Carole Allen [00:10:56] And children love to raise the money for the turtle food. And this spread to other schools very rapidly because I was a volunteer. The money that was raised,

bought the food or bought educational materials and went directly to saving the turtles. No middle man, no overhead, nothing. It was directly to the turtles.

Carole Allen [00:11:24] So this got bigger and bigger and bigger. And we had, what we called, any school that raised, you know, maybe 25 dollars, they were HEART Council, and I issued homemade, nice little certificates. So we got to the point that we had 200 HEART Councils all over the United States and we had one at an American school in Saudi Arabia. So, that was very interesting.

Carole Allen [00:11:59] And all of this, I have to remind myself, I did not have a computer. All of this, all of the writing, all of the letters, everything else, was on a typewriter. So, and then get copies made at a store or something.

Carole Allen [00:12:17] But I did not have the Internet that I have, you know, today.

Carole Allen [00:12:22] So over the years, we we raised, oh, way over one hundred thousand dollars from donations from individuals and kids and a few companies. We bought the turtle food for way over 10 years. We bought - they needed at the Galveston lab, they needed a P.A. system, an answering machine, an electronic scale. We bought that. We raised forty thousand dollars to build a new turtle house down there.

Carole Allen [00:13:01] And there, of course, the camp in Mexico received very little money from the Mexican government, the nesting turtle camp down there. So, we were able to buy them a generator, a four-wheel ATV and what else - a Zodiac, oh, a boat and a motor, and all sorts of things for them.

Carole Allen [00:13:27] We also helped a couple of students [excuse me], one at College Station, and just worked very hard to get this story into, into the media and into every place that we could get it.

Carole Allen [00:13:50] And of course, as all of this developed, I realized that we had to, we had to have a law about the shrimp industry. And so that got to be extremely difficult.

Carole Allen [00:14:08] That was '86, about in there, 1986, and I received word from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that they were very interested in what I was doing. And they needed help. They weren't going to get, and National Marine Fisheries Service, they were not going to get anything done about the shrimp industry unless they had a lot of backing.

Carole Allen [00:14:39] And of course, we had, starting in 1973, we had the Endangered Species Act, and the turtles were included, but nothing really was being done.

Carole Allen [00:14:52] National Marine Fisheries Service was working on a device they called, "the turtle excluder device". In the beginning, it didn't work really well. It was very heavy. It was set into the shrimp trawl. And then when the turtle got caught in there, they would have a way to get out.

Carole Allen [00:15:16] But it was, it didn't work very well. The shrimpers didn't like it. And the word got out that this thing wasn't any good, and it cost money and the shrimpers didn't have to do it.

Carole Allen [00:15:29] So we had not a good receipt, you know, from the shrimp industry. Well, you know, that was too bad because the sea turtles belong to all of us, not just the shrimp industry.

Carole Allen [00:15:47] And they are able to go out into the Gulf and catch shrimp and make a living. And the turtles didn't have a chance. They, they get caught fairly easily in shrimp trawls.

Carole Allen [00:16:05] So this started the battle, which really was very difficult. There was a, let's see, I guess it had to be federal and state also, because the Endangered Species Act is federal. So a law, a resolution, went forth from Marine Fisheries Service and also Fish and Wildlife Service. And there were hearings all over the place on the Gulf.

Carole Allen [00:16:39] Now there are shrimpers on the East Coast. And we were not just talking about the Kemp's ridley. We were talking about the other species being caught in shrimp trawls and they're drug along and they drown, because their oxygen-breathers like us. And so it applied all along the Gulf Coast and on the East Coast.

Carole Allen [00:17:04] Now, the, for some reason, the East Coast found much better cooperation from the shrimpers there. And there was one man in particular who invented a turtle excluder device that worked better than the ones the government had. His name was Sinkey Boone. And I was able to meet him at a meeting. And he was just an ordinary guy, a shrimper. And he didn't think that the shrimpers would have to drown turtles if they would, you know, get with the law, get with the turtle excluder, and save a lot of turtles.

Carole Allen [00:17:45] So I testified about this. I wrote letters. I got the schoolchildren to write letters, all the nature clubs, write letters, and support the resolution.

Carole Allen [00:18:03] And it was, it was very hard to get it going. The shrimpers simply did not, you know, they denied the fact that they caught turtles, and it was just really incredibly tough.

Carole Allen [00:18:21] I spent like eight-hour days, you know, working on it. My husband was, you know, working full-time and my daughter was in school. So I felt like this is something that needed to be done.

Carole Allen [00:18:37] So we kept working on it. And we had hearings and everything else.

Carole Allen [00:18:44] And it was a federal law, so the shrimpers went to their representatives and senators. Most of them, their biggest friends, were in Louisiana and Mississippi.

Carole Allen [00:18:58] And we had a very good friend in Representative Kika de la Garza, who is in, he still, let's see, lives down in south Texas. And he was well known for protection of wetlands and also did a lot of legislation in the fields of education and the environment. So he was very helpful.

Carole Allen [00:19:32] And somehow we managed to, I think he helped a lot, get the budget extended for raising the turtle at Galveston. So that was a big, a very big, victory there to keep on, because their numbers were declining, until we get some laws going, protecting the turtles

from the shrimp industry, then we need to keep trying to do whatever we can to prevent them all from being drowned.

Carole Allen [00:20:03] So this went pretty much on and on.

Carole Allen [00:20:07] And the National Marine Fisheries Service unfortunately decided not to raise them anymore. I don't know. There was competition then, as there is now, for various budgets. And, and so they were going to quit raising them.

Carole Allen [00:20:27] And I made a personal trip to Washington to lobby for continuing this program, because it was such a tremendous educational program. We had educated the country about the Kemp's ridley turtles and, and this whole generation of children.

Carole Allen [00:20:49] But, you know, they couldn't see it. So they stopped with raising, you know, a couple of thousand hatchlings, which Mexico gave us every year. It was a gift to the people of the United States.

Carole Allen [00:21:03] So that was a difficult, a difficult time.

Carole Allen [00:21:09] But we did get the legislation through Congress.

Carole Allen [00:21:13] Now, about the time it went through, the shrimpers were putting up a really big fight about it. And they proposed that the installation of the turtle excluder would be postponed until a big study would be done by the National Research Council.

Carole Allen [00:21:35] So, the good thing that happened in Congress was that they said, "OK, we agree there should be more of a study", although there were so many studies then, it was crazy. I mean, the Marine Fisheries Service had put observers on boats. They knew, I mean, they knew they were drowning the turtles.

Carole Allen [00:22:00] But anyway, the Congress said, "Well, OK, we could do that study, but we're not gonna wait. We're not going to wait to put the turtle excluders on the nets."

Carole Allen [00:22:11] So that was a big, big victory. And they got on with the study. National Research Council did a very, very detailed study. And that was in 1990. And when they released, they printed a book, and when they released the findings, it was incredibly true. It stated in no uncertain terms that the greatest threat to the existence of sea turtles was their interaction in being caught by the shrimp trawls.

Carole Allen [00:22:50] Well, of course, then the shrimp industry got all uptight about that again. And they knew, they knew they'd lost, but they weren't ready to put the turtle excluders on.

Carole Allen [00:23:02] So when, at the time they were supposed to do that, then there was a big protest. Something like we are seeing across the country today. But this was only the shrimp industry and they blockaded the Houston Ship Channel. And also a similar, they did the same thing down at Corpus Christi.

Carole Allen [00:23:29] But the Ship Channel, when they did that, it cost millions of dollars. They stopped these huge ships from coming in from all over the world for two, three days.

And it cost millions of dollars. And the Coast Guard was out there. I think in Corpus Christi, somebody fired a gun up in the air.

Jen Brown [00:23:52] So they were they were out there, in their shrimp boats blocking the channel?

Carole Allen [00:23:56] Yes, yes. Blockaded here and down in Corpus also.

Carole Allen [00:24:02] And that, that did not do them any good because they lost millions of dollars for the shipping industry and the Port of Houston and they broke the law. The law was, put that the turtle excluders on, and to get out there and, and shrimp.

Carole Allen [00:24:20] So it was a very difficult time right in there. It was, well, let me see, it was around the '90, '91, '92, and they really were not cooperating either.

Carole Allen [00:24:37] So we had to get to work to ask the state and the federal government for more law enforcement. They had to go out and, and stop the shrimp boats and see if they had the turtle excluder installed. And even if they did, they had figured out how to close, how to like sew the hole shut where the turtle was supposed to be able to get out.

Carole Allen [00:25:08] So this was very contentious, very difficult.

Carole Allen [00:25:13] And in 1994 - I recall that date because it was such a bad summer. There were like hundreds of dead turtles found on the beaches of the Gulf - Texas all the way down, dead turtles.

Carole Allen [00:25:31] And, and so, what was really, an organization which I ended up working for, the Turtle Island Restoration Network, and also other groups, filed a lawsuit against National Marine Fisheries Service for not protecting a species covered by the Endangered Species Act.

Carole Allen [00:25:56] So, at that time, the state then called in every warden, every law enforcement person, they could get, to board boats not only in the water, but when they came into shore and see if they had a turtle excluder and if it was installed right.

Carole Allen [00:26:19] So, as you can imagine, that was a very difficult time. And when all the law enforcement came, and when the shrimpers were being checked, then the number of strandings, or dead turtles, immediately went down.

Carole Allen [00:26:35] So they proved right there, this is again, that this is a problem. And that the shrimpers have to be regulated. They have to be, there has to be law enforcement or this isn't gonna work.

Carole Allen [00:26:52] And it's probably the same thing today. There have to be, there has to be law enforcement. It's just like people speeding: if there is not a DPS officer out there somewhere, they're going to speed.

Carole Allen [00:27:05] And this is the same human body of people. They're going to, you know, break the law if they can, which is too bad. But that's what was going on.

Carole Allen [00:27:16] So by then, HEART was extremely well known, and so was I. I made a lot of enemies in the shrimp industry. But there were a number of fishermen that understood that they can't expect to make their living from the Gulf of Mexico and then not cooperate in protecting an endangered species.

Carole Allen [00:27:44] So, that was a very, you know, a very difficult time.

Carole Allen [00:27:50] I did get a lot of awards from the government, from other groups. And I think it would be difficult to pick my favorite. But I think some of the best awards, I guess they're awards, are letters from children across the country who wrote to HEART and wanted me to protect the turtles. And I have a lot of them and they're treasures.

Carole Allen [00:28:25] And then I remember one day the mail came and here's a little envelope and it had a little piece of paper in it and on it was taped like a nickel, a dime and a penny. And it said, a little boy signed it and it said, "Please help the turtles". So that's one of the best things that I, that I received.

Carole Allen [00:28:48] And I also was able to work with a lot of very, very outstanding people who helped so much. The HEART organization - well, one reason I'm glad to talk about it, well, probably, you know, it's kind of fading away. I want people to pick up the work that I have done.

Carole Allen [00:29:16] But when we, when it was most well known, Dr. Dave Owen at A&M at College Station was extremely helpful. Dr. Andy Landry at A&M at Galveston, also Dr. Charles Caillouet, who was with National Marine Fisheries Service, and Donna, Dr. Donna Shaver who's with National Park Service, and also Dr. McKinney, Larry McKinney, who's now at the Harte Institute, but he was with Texas Parks and Wildlife then.

Carole Allen [00:29:56] And, I think they recognized that there was a very big need for public attention to the problem of endangered species, and particularly endangered sea turtles.

Carole Allen [00:30:13] So I appreciated, you know, I appreciated their help a lot. We had to have a lot of help.

Carole Allen [00:30:20] Had a lot of teachers, a lot of science teachers, I might say. And other organizations - the Sierra Club.

Carole Allen [00:30:33] You ask about the, working with the Coastal Bend folks. There's a very strong group with the Sierra Club on the Coastal Bend. And they also realized, even though, for them, they're living, you know, among the shrimp industry, which is more difficult. I live away from the coast about, you know, 50 miles, but they were very, very helpful.

Carole Allen [00:31:02] And then, of course, I don't want to forget the Ila Loetscher, the lady who first, I would say, brought attention to the sea turtle issue on the Gulf Coast, and she lived in way south Texas. And she was on, appeared on television with a little green sea turtle. She was on Johnny Carson's show and she had this little turtle and he had a little sombrero on, and a little serape.

Carole Allen [00:31:42] And everybody saw this little turtle, and her, and they said, "Gee, you know, that's a neat little animal. We don't know about them."

Carole Allen [00:31:51] And she gave educational programs at Port Isabel for years and years. And I really admired her. And I thought, you know, if she could do this, she could do her work living right there with the shrimp industry. I mean, gee, she's certainly no chicken. So I knew I couldn't be.

Carole Allen [00:32:18] But anyway, it has been, it's been rewarding.

Carole Allen [00:32:22] And I think that it'd be the two things: it was public awareness. We had to have public awareness and education, or we weren't going to get a law to get the turtles excluders on the shrimp boats. And I think that was my, legislatively, my, my greatest accomplishment that I'm very proud of, because I was the only one on the Gulf.

Carole Allen [00:32:57] The other organizations - National Wildlife, um, let's see, the Center for Environmental Education - they were on the East Coast, the Audubon Society. And the Sierra Club is on the West Coast.

Carole Allen [00:33:12] So when a newspaper writer, an editor, wanted a story, they always want both sides. And they could, they could talk to, they could call, you know, the Sierra Club or someone with one of the big organizations. But, I was the one on the coast. I was easy to talk to. And they could call me up and, you know, talk about the sea turtles and what we were doing and why and, and all of that.

Carole Allen [00:33:44] So I worked on, directly with HEART. It was still, you know, a volunteer group until, let's say, 2002. I had gone to work because my husband passed away, and I was working for the Harris County Juvenile Probation Department. I was their public information officer.

Carole Allen [00:34:09] So I learned that the Turtle Island Restoration would like to have a representative on the Gulf Coast. And I, I jumped at that. So I became the representative for them on the Gulf Coast. And I just took HEART with me, all the people and everything. And I just, and I said, you know, HEART is HEART. And we're all interested the same thing. We want to save the endangered sea turtle.

Carole Allen [00:34:44] So it is still known, although, you know, the longer it goes, it may not be. So, that's why this recording is so important, you know, to point out, this was truly a grassroots organization of children, parents and the public. And they did a tremendous job in pointing out, look here, you need, you need a law, you need laws to protect these turtles and you certainly need to have enforcement of the law.

Carole Allen [00:35:26] And so that's, you know, that's where it went.

Carole Allen [00:35:28] Now we have an office in Galveston. Now there's a very wonderful, hard worker. Her name is Joanie Steinhaus. And she's down there. And, she is now very much involved with patrolling beaches. [Excuse me.] She gets volunteers together and every year they get out and they look for turtles on the upper Texas coast because they do nest up here.

Carole Allen [00:36:00] And if, if there's any disappointment in my work, it's the fact that the government is not flexible in trying anything new. We would like to keep the eggs that the Kemp's ridleys lay on the upper Texas coast and have them hatch out up here. Let the turtles go down and get in the water. So maybe we can build a bigger nesting group of turtles on the upper Texas coast.

Carole Allen [00:36:37] But the Fish and Wildlife, and Dr. Shaver with the National Park Service will not, at least up to now, they will not even allow a program of any kind to, even a pilot program, to try that. And that's been very disappointing. I've tried to work on that for a long time.

Jen Brown [00:37:04] But do you know what their reasoning is for that?

Carole Allen [00:37:08] Well, the main reason is that the plan, the recovery plan, for the, for the turtle that was written in 1978, they pretty much maintain that that has to stay in place. And it does not recognize the fact that we could have more turtles up here and have a population. And they just simply won't give it a try.

Carole Allen [00:37:46] And I love Dr. Shaver with all my heart, she dedicated her life to saving the ridley, which she just won't hear of it.

Carole Allen [00:37:57] Dr. Landry - he emphasized that if we could do this, we could build another population. Depending on climate warming and all this, it would not hurt to have another population of Kemp's ridleys.

Carole Allen [00:38:17] And especially, you know, we just took this big hit from the Deepwater Horizon. We don't know for sure what is the long-range effect of that. It covered, we lost, nobody knows how many turtles we lost right there, covered with oil. The food supply was covered with a dispersant, with oil. We don't know the long-range effect of it.

Carole Allen [00:38:52] And why not give this a try? You know, keep the eggs up here. The people would love it. The people in Galveston always have wanted to keep the eggs up on their beach, maybe the Galveston County State Park. Release the turtles. Allow kids and students to go down and watch the turtles go.

Carole Allen [00:39:17] And yet we can't, we can't get anywhere with it. So it's, that has been extremely, extremely disappointed. And, you know, after you work on something for a long time, people just seem to give up. I really haven't. But I don't see us, I don't see us progressing.

Carole Allen [00:39:40] And the people of Galveston, their city council, their county commissioners, they all would like that. But the Fish and Wildlife Service doesn't. They just, they won't try it, or Dr. Shaver.

Carole Allen [00:39:53] No, all the eggs have to be dug up, and driven down to the National Park Service down at Corpus Christi, on the national park down there.

Carole Allen [00:40:09] Now, it isn't exactly good for eggs to be moved, either. And we object to that because if you bounce them around very much, it'll ruin them. They won't, they won't hatch.

Carole Allen [00:40:21] And she has hatched out a number of the ones that have been moved. But I think it's a risk that is taken unnecessarily to move them.

Carole Allen [00:40:33] And, but as I say, we, we haven't, we haven't gotten very far.

Carole Allen [00:40:39] There's one project that, maybe the last thing I mention here: that I think that Galveston needs a more public show of what they've done down there for years, not just the Marine Fisheries Service, but the support of the public too.

Carole Allen [00:41:04] There's a school, Oppe Elementary, that petitioned the state to, it'd be two years ago, to make the Kemp's ridley sea turtle, the official sea turtle of the state of Texas. And they wrote the resolution. They gave it to their representative and they went to Austin and they got it passed. So, yeah, that was wonderful.

Carole Allen [00:41:33] They had a group called the Green Team, and they still have one. But that particular group works for the sea turtles and that brought more public awareness also. And as a, as a result, I think that Galveston should have a statue, a sculpture of a Kemp's ridley sea turtle.

Carole Allen [00:41:56] So, there is one down at Rockport. And I inquired about it and I found out that the gentleman that, the sculptor of it, would work with us to get another one made (of course it's expensive). But anyway, he'd help us get one made and put on or near the seawall in Galveston. And the mayor likes the idea. I have quite a bit of support for it. We've raised \$10,000, I think so far, 10, 15. And so maybe next fall we'll invite you to come over to the dedication of a Kemp's ridley sea turtle in Galveston.

Jen Brown [00:42:47] Yeah, that would be great.

Carole Allen [00:42:48] Yes, I'm excited about it. It's, the people, the city have supported all this going on. And they support National Marine Fisheries Service. And we used to have an open house every February, around Valentine's Day, because our group was called HEART. And we did that for several years, and we had busloads of students coming from all over the Galveston / Houston / Beaumont area to see the turtles.

Carole Allen [00:43:20] People want to see them. People love sea turtles.

Carole Allen [00:43:24] And, of course, the National Marine Fisheries Service, it's a federal property. And you can't just walk in there and look at the turtles. You've got to get permission and all that.

Carole Allen [00:43:36] But, when we were doing the open house, that was before 9/11. So, it was easier to have groups of people. And then when the Mardi Gras started, it was about the same time, I guess, about now, and we began to have people on their way to the Mardi Gras. So, the competition was too great and we, we quit doing that.

Carole Allen [00:44:04] But they have an open house at the National Marine Fisheries Service so people can go and see them.

Carole Allen [00:44:11] And one of my wishes would be that, there would be, there are several places on the East Coast that have a rehab educational center for people in rehab for turtles that are brought in. One of them is on Jekyll Island, one is Juno Beach. One of them is down in Miami, down in that area.

Carole Allen [00:44:40] And I know that we could have one in Galveston. I know there would be so many people who would want to come and see turtles, or a turtle if it's not releasable.

Just be able to walk in and maybe give a donation, buy a T-shirt or something, and see a turtle, and there would be educational exhibits and volunteers could run it. It'd be wonderful.

Carole Allen [00:45:07] So, I hope that happens one day because there are thousands of schoolchildren in, in Harris County, in the Houston area, that will never be able to get to Corpus Christi and get to the National Seashore because you have to go like the night before, so you can get up early and see the release of the hatchlings. Well, a lot of the kids in the Houston area cannot afford to do that. Their families cannot do that.

Carole Allen [00:45:40] But they would be able to get up early and go down to Galveston and see a release of hatchlings. So there's a lot of potential there, if people would just, I, I don't want to say bureaucrats, but [excuse me, I'm getting a cold or something], if they would just get behind it, and say, "Let's do this." And we can do all sorts of other things.

Carole Allen [00:46:09] But, you know how that goes. The right person has not seen the opportunity to have a turtle facility that is available to the public. The federal one never will, never will be. They can't operate, you know, having the public pop in there. But an educational rehab center, like there are other places, there are several. There's another one, I think, at, near Panama City, Florida. But thousands of people go, "Well, let's go see a sea turtle and let's buy something. Let's get a necklace or whatever."

Carole Allen [00:46:54] But everybody likes sea turtles. There's very few people who don't. So I think there's a lot, really a lot of possibilities. So maybe when they hear me, they'll say, "Oh, maybe we'll go down there and do that."

Carole Allen [00:47:09] Yeah. Yeah. So is there anything that we did not cover?

Jen Brown [00:47:14] Do you mind if I ask a couple of follow-up questions?

Carole Allen [00:47:17] Sure. No. Go ahead.

Jen Brown [00:47:18] What town in Illinois did you say you were from?

Carole Allen [00:47:22] I grew up in Hillsboro, Illinois.

Jen Brown [00:47:26] OK.

Carole Allen [00:47:27] I was actually [excuse me] born in Jacksonville, but Hillsboro, it was in Montgomery County. It's about halfway between Springfield and St. Louis.

Carole Allen [00:47:40] Are you an Illinois person?

Jen Brown [00:47:42] No, I'm not actually. I just wanted clarification for the record.

Carole Allen [00:47:47] OK. No, it's downstate from Chicago.

Carole Allen [00:47:51] Okay. And what year did you move to Houston?

Carole Allen [00:47:56] We moved here in, let's see, 1970. See, I am 81 years old and my husband was with Sun Oil. And then they were bought out by Texas Gulf. So we moved. We

went first to Lafayette, Louisiana and then we moved over here. And that is, that's '70. So I've been here a long time.

Carole Allen [00:48:27] But that is why I was able to, you know, drive down there to Galveston, see the turtles. So it was great. It was great. I've had a wonderful experience. I've been on a couple of releases where the Coast Guard released the turtles and I've been all over the place giving speeches. I did go to Chicago to a herpetological club. I went, of course, I've been to California with Turtle Island Restoration, and all over Texas and, let's see just, you know, a lot of places.

Carole Allen [00:49:09] The most concentration in Texas because the teachers want to be part of it. And many of them think, "Well, maybe we can get the kids down there and see the turtles." And there are a lot of field trips that are arranged, you know, to go to Galveston to see them.

Carole Allen [00:49:28] So we just keep things, try to keep things stirred up.

Jen Brown [00:49:34] Yeah.

Jen Brown [00:49:36] You mentioned: did you ever make it to Mexico?

Carole Allen [00:49:38] Oh, yeah, yeah. I forgot about that. I went, I went two times. I went before all this drug cartel thing started. I was able to see a turtle nesting and going back to the water, which was a thrill, and I saw how they remove the turtles from outside. They move them into a fenced-in area where they're safe and rebury the eggs.

Carole Allen [00:50:13] Now, now, they've gotten so many, they have to leave some of them in place. So, I'm sure they, they lose some. But the situation is a lot better.

Carole Allen [00:50:24] But they're still not, they're still not out of the woods. We, we lost a number of them. We, they, the nesting was down the year after the oil spill. And then the next, let's see, a couple of years later, I went back and took my daughter, Jane. She's a pediatrician and she was in high school, I guess. And so we went back and, and saw everything again. I took a couple of teachers with me and then it's, they've received a lot more money. It was very primitive, primitive.

Carole Allen [00:51:07] We built, HEART built a little, um, a little building so we could get in it at night. And we had fans, but it was still terrible. The hottest place you ever were.

Jen Brown [00:51:20] Hmmm.

Carole Allen [00:51:20] Yes! And then, though but after the drug cartel thing started. It's in Tamaulipas state. And it's really, it's, I don't think it's really safe anymore.

Jen Brown [00:51:35] And we're talking about the Rancho Nuevo nesting grounds.

Carole Allen [00:51:41] Yeah.

Jen Brown [00:51:42] Why do you, just kind of shifting gears here, why do you think that the shrimping industry, specifically in the Gulf, was so hesitant to adopt the excluders?

Carole Allen [00:51:56] Well, the early TEDs, they call them a "TED", the early ones weren't very successful. But the later ones are lightweight and worked very well. But unfortunately, there was a man over in Louisiana. He was a shrimp, he was a shrimper, but a shrimp processor. His name was T. John Mihalovich. He started telling the shrimpers of Louisiana, "We don't have to do this. We don't have to, we don't catch any turtles, and we don't have to do this"

Carole Allen [00:52:36] And of course, he was egged on by all the shrimpers and they just got the idea that they didn't have to use the turtle excluder, and then they came over here to Texas. And of course, you know how people are. Here's a man that, "we don't have to do that". You know, we're, we're not going to do that. We're going to fight it. And that's what, he caused really. He's dead now, but he caused the whole thing. Very charismatic and got this huge following.

Carole Allen [00:53:13] I remember when I went, we had a federal hearing at Galveston, in the courthouse. And when I went down there, actually, I got pretty scared because, you know, there were hundreds of shrimpers, and there were a lot of Vietnamese shrimpers at that time. I think there still are. But they had been convinced, "No, we don't have to do it. Don't have to worry about the turtles. We don't catch them", which was of course, a lie. And there were hundreds down there, you know.

Carole Allen [00:53:51] I get up and start talking about it, you know, I was speaking for the turtles and the Endangered Species Act and everything. I know, I remember one where the shrimp started yelling at me. You know, "What does she know about it?" And the man who was running it and he told them, you know, that other people are going to speak and if they want to stay there all night, they can. But everybody is going to talk. So I didn't really enjoy the testifying because, you know, it's not fun.

Jen Brown [00:54:30] Did you have any other...

Carole Allen [00:54:31] And it had to be done. What's that?

Jen Brown [00:54:32] Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt you there. Did you have any other instances where people were saying things like that to you?

Carole Allen [00:54:40] Were mean?

Carole Allen [00:54:43] Well, there were let's see, there was a hearing up at Clear Lake City at the University of Houston. And that was a state hearing. And there were ... I know I took my daughter and there weren't many. There were a few of us. That's the thing. There were always more shrimpers than conservation people. But I know one hearing in Galveston, I got a lot of people that came. They came from A&M and and they came from everywhere to support the turtles, put TEDs on the shrimp trawls.

Carole Allen [00:55:19] But the one at the University of Houston. They, they also started yelling. They just didn't agree to the research that had been done. You know?

Carole Allen [00:55:31] And they just yell in general like, you know, "Go away. You don't know what you're talking to, talking about", things like that.

Carole Allen [00:55:40] I did get a few calls on the, on my phone, and I finally changed my number. I didn't have, my husband's dead then, again, I didn't put Carol Allen and I put C.H. Allen because I was getting too many calls. People, they never, they weren't like awful threats, but, you know, just kind of unpleasant.

Jen Brown [00:56:09] Yes.

Carole Allen [00:56:10] So I never put turtle, you know any kind of stickers or anything on my car when I was driving around because you never know.

Carole Allen [00:56:21] I used to go to Galveston a lot more. But now that we have the office, Joanie does, you know, she does that. And of course, the law is, the law is passed. The law is through.

Carole Allen [00:56:35] And the main thing that we have to do now, every year, like this year, the turtle people need to, you know, make their voice known to law enforcement again. You know, we, we expect too, we want it done.

Carole Allen [00:56:55] They did a good job, boarding boats and in law enforcement.

Carole Allen [00:57:01] We had a lot of difficulties with Louisiana. They fought it and they got a law passed in 1987. They got a law passed when the federal law went through that they would not allow their law enforcement to board boats in state waters. They couldn't have said federal waters. But the state waters go out, not too far, but five or six miles and you can have a lot of shrimp boats in five or six miles, because the turtles are in shallow water quite often.

Carole Allen [00:57:45] So we worked on that for years. And amazingly, the last year, a woman had sponsored a bill that..

Carole Allen [00:57:57] Is that you?

Jen Brown [00:58:00] I don't think so.

Carole Allen [00:58:02] OK. Maybe I did that. But anyway she sponsored a bill, finally, and most of these legislators over there, they were ready to support it, because the, I don't know, there was an organization that brings ... they filed a motion and they red-listed the shrimp industry of Louisiana and that means they're telling people that if you eat Louisiana shrimp, you are hurting the environment, you are killing turtles.

Carole Allen [00:58:18] And did you ever hear of that?

Jen Brown [00:58:18] Uh, no I haven't.

Carole Allen [00:58:40] OK. Well that was very successful, because a lot of the big food producers, there were a couple of big ones, that said, "No, we have people that won't buy that because you, Louisiana shrimpers, you are red-listed."

Carole Allen [00:59:08] And so that was a big, that was a big force to get that passed. The last year she finally got that passed.

Carole Allen [00:59:37] So, it's not been easy because of things like that go on and on and on.

Carole Allen [00:59:47] So every year, I think it does get better for the turtles. So I'm hoping that, though, you know, it does continue. I'm not as active as I used to be because I think, and hope, that people that are picking up, picking up the challenge and then going on with it.

Carole Allen [01:00:10] Turtle Island Restoration Network is very good out of California, and so are, you know, Oceana, Defenders of Wildlife and a lot of good groups. They know about the shrimpers. They know what can happen if the laws are not abided by.

Carole Allen [01:00:30] So, we just, but I keep my eye on it, believe me.

Jen Brown [01:00:34] Yes.

Carole Allen [01:00:35] Yeah. No, you can't walk away from it.

Carole Allen [01:00:39] Well, we were trying to get some money from BP, you know, from all that. But Texas really didn't get a lot of direct oil. But my point was that we lost a lot of ridleys, you know, we, maybe we didn't get a lot of oil. There was some over there. But they didn't get to Corpus, I don't think. There was some around Beaumont, over in there, but not much. But it did kill the ridleys, and the ridleys were migrating over there. So there's that, too.

Carole Allen [01:01:17] Fortunately we don't have any of that more.

Carole Allen [01:01:19] There's a lot of trouble for the turtles. You know, they get hit by big boats. They give hit by little boats. And sometimes killed. And there are still shrimpers that try to find a way not to use the TED.

Carole Allen [01:01:36] So, you know, it's just a constant. It needs to be constant vigilance for them? Now, you can, you can do the same.

Jen Brown [01:01:48] Yeah, hopefully.

Jen Brown [01:01:50] Is there anything else you'd like to share?

Carole Allen [01:01:54] Let's see, I'm looking at my list.

Carole Allen [01:02:00] No, I just hope we have a new administration and we don't know what that will entail.

Carole Allen [01:02:14] I certainly would encourage everybody to belong to a group. [Excuse me.] It takes, it takes a large group that has someone in Washington to go to the representatives and the senators, you know, representing the membership.

Carole Allen [01:02:40] So, I hope not only will people make calls if they need to. You know, we can all call a representative or a senator. We can all do that.

Carole Allen [01:02:50] But also belong to a group that has the funding and has the people in place to go to Washington and to give them a hard time if they're not protecting not only the turtles, but all of the marine life, all of the natural resources, all the federal part.

Carole Allen [01:03:15] I think right now, particularly, we need to ask questions. What, what is the new, the new president's view of all these things?

Carole Allen [01:03:27] So, just be aware and don't ever think that you can't speak up, and you should speak up about things.

Carole Allen [01:03:37] So, I guess that would be, that would be it. I can't think of anything else. My notes, I've done all my notes. So, you know, if you have any other questions or something doesn't make sense? Just call me back.

Jen Brown [01:03:56] OK, great. Well, I appreciate you talking with me today.

Carole Allen [01:04:00] OK.