



TALES *from the* DEEP

Audio Narratives from the Scientific Ocean Drilling Community By Laura Guertin

I think when someone goes on an [ocean] expedition...no one really remembers the quarantine as what stands out. But it's part of what we did so that we could make the important parts happen.

— Maya Pincus, Tales from the Deep
Listen to the [full interview](#) recorded on September 8, 2022

This quote is from an online conversation I recorded with Maya Pincus when she was about to join *JOIDES Resolution* as the onboard outreach officer for International Ocean Discovery Program (IODP) Expedition 397T (Return to the Walvis Ridge Hotspot, September 2022). I was comfortably sitting in my university office in Pennsylvania (USA) with complete freedom to come and go, while Maya was isolated in a hotel room in Cape Town, South Africa, for a one-week mandatory quarantine period before boarding the drilling vessel.

Why record a conversation on precautions and procedures required before heading out to sea during an active time of the COVID-19 pandemic? The motivation is similar to that for recording the anxiety young scientists

may feel before joining their first research cruise, or how someone handles the news of the loss of a family member while miles offshore. Although the scientific research conducted at sea is fully documented, where are the stories collected about living and working at sea? As Maya mentions, there are additional preparation, activities, and emotions involved before, during, and even after expeditions “so that we can make the important parts happen.”

I am a university professor with a background in marine geology and geophysics. With part of my research focused on geoscience education, like Maya, I was attracted to the idea of sailing for two months as an onboard outreach officer on the scientific ocean drilling vessel *JOIDES Resolution* (JR). Taking responsibility for

posting on social media, authoring blog posts, and conducting live ship-to-shore video tours with classrooms and community groups across the world sounded appealing, so I applied and was accepted to sail on IODP Expedition 390 (South Atlantic Transect 1) in April/June 2022.

Using an iPad to facilitate the live video satellite connections, I thoroughly enjoyed each of the ship-to-shore sessions. I would talk to remote audiences while walking around the ship, sharing my iPad screen to show everyone freshly collected core material and the view from the ship's bridge. I would also conduct live conversations where scientists could discuss their research. I was prepared for this educational responsibility. But what I was not prepared for was the flood of questions I received during and after the remote ship tours that had nothing to do with our deep-sea investigation. No matter what the ages of the groups I connected with, individuals and classrooms were asking: Do you need to know how to swim to be an oceanographer? Is it easy to make friends at sea? What if your birthday happens on the ship? And more.

One question I received made the biggest impact on me and really led to the development of the audio narrative collection *Tales from the Deep: Stories of Scientific Ocean Drilling*. During one of

my tours, a fourth-grade girl walked up to her teacher's computer, leaned into the video camera, and asked "what if you have a food allergy?" The student quickly walked away from the computer, but I was gushing with excitement to respond to her inquiry. I explained that I have a food allergy to tomatoes, a very common ingredient in sauces and condiments. But the Camp Boss (the head of the ship's galley) and the entire kitchen staff worked with me immediately when I boarded the ship and made sure I was included in every meal with non-tomato items to choose from.

I reflected on that young student's question quite a bit during the remainder of my expedition. I realized that she was potentially viewing a food allergy, possibly her own, as an invisible barrier to participating in an ocean expedition, or perhaps even pursuing a career as an oceanographer. There are websites that have profiles of scientists that describe pathways to becoming a professional in the field. There are also websites, conferences, and journal articles that disseminate the scientific outcomes of analyses collected on deep-sea samples. But so far as I could tell, especially in the scientific ocean drilling community, there was no collection of personal stories from onshore and offshore scientists and staff related to living and working at sea, along with the support necessary to carry out



There's a team of people around the world who are working on these materials to try and uncover new information that we think matters.

— Melissa Berke, *Tales from the Deep*
Listen to the [full interview](#) recorded on April 17, 2025



At our science crossover meetings, if you went over your 5 minutes, you would get oinked at by the [Secret Santa] pirate pig.

— Stephen Phillips, *Tales from the Deep*
Listen to the [full interview](#) recorded on November 25, 2024



What I hadn't experienced is actually how we collect that [ODP and DSDP] data...

— Andrew McIntyre, *Tales from the Deep*
Listen to the [full interview](#) recorded on October 4, 2022

the science, aside from 10 short stories contributed by shipboard scientists that were included in the December 2006 *Oceanography* special issue on [The Impact of the Ocean Drilling Program](#).

I have been integrating audio storytelling assignments into my university courses for over a decade, where students generate audio narratives about our course content. After sailing on *JOIDES Resolution*, I was motivated to start a collection of audio conversations focusing on the people involved with scientific ocean drilling. Titled [Tales from the Deep: Stories of Scientific Ocean Drilling](#), the collection contains the voices of scientists and staff who have sailed on the various scientific ocean drilling vessels and platforms over the years, along with tales from those who work in land-based support offices. The collection currently has over 50 recorded conversations and is freely available online through the StoryCorps Archive. The independent nonprofit organization StoryCorps is then preserving these recordings for continued public availability at the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

Most of the conversations have been lighthearted. [Jeffrey Ryan](#) shares what happened after he saw his shredded luggage come off on the belt at Japan's Narita International Airport right before joining *JOIDES Resolution*. [Tracy Quan](#) talks about the ship-wide search for a new watch battery after her battery died only two weeks into her expedition. [Yi Wang](#) describes sharing a cultural birthday celebration with those on board. And [Chieh Peng](#) and [Etienne Claasen](#) noted that crossing over the International Date Line had them work the same day twice, but only get paid once.

But some of the conversations strike a more serious note. [Suzanne O'Connell](#) discusses the three medical evacuations she witnessed sailing on three different expeditions. [Keir Becker](#) describes joining *Glomar Challenger* just as the Iran Hostage Crisis began, and [Tim Bralower](#) describes being aboard *JOIDES Resolution* during the collapse of the World Trade Center towers in New York City. [Aidan Leetz](#) spoke with me from the same ship right after they received the news that *JOIDES Resolution* would no longer be participating in the International Ocean Discovery Program.

Importantly, these conversations capture the roles of so many unsung people whose efforts have always been critical to conducting scientific ocean drilling research. You can listen to the voices of [Sidney Hemming](#) and [Priyank Jaiswal](#) as they describe how drilling in international waters may never have happened without the behind-the-scenes work of such individuals. You can also learn about the roles TOS Executive Director [Jenny Ramarui](#) and Director of Publications [Ellen Kappel](#) played in scientific ocean drilling—both worked in the Joint Oceanographic Institutions office and tell not only how the office operated in the earliest days of the internet but also how the Joint Oceanographic Institutions office was the starting point of The Oceanography Society. Both also had quite the experience related to a [helicopter getting lost on its way to the JR...](#)

Do you have a story related to scientific ocean drilling to contribute? Maybe it is a similar story to that of [Patty Stranding](#), who first learned about scientific ocean drilling through an undergraduate research experience. Or you may have a reflection like [Larry Krissek's](#) as he details how, despite the advances in technology, core descriptions will always need a human eye. All individuals and topics are welcome, especially from non-US scientists and crew who sailed on *Glomar Challenger*, *Chikyū*, and mission-specific platforms, and those who have also played shore-based roles in support of scientific ocean drilling. Whether it be a one-time connection to scientific ocean drilling, or discussion of a 24-year career such as [Kevin Grigar](#) reflects upon, your story is an important piece of the history of scientific ocean drilling.

Please contact me (guertin@psu.edu) with any questions and if you are interested in scheduling a 30-minute online conversation. All recorded conversations go through a round of editing and are sent back to the speaker for approval before being uploaded to the StoryCorps Archive.

AUTHOR

Laura Guertin (guertin@psu.edu), The Pennsylvania State University - Brandywine, PA, USA. Laura was the TOS Geological Oceanography Councilor from 2022 to 2024.

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