## A LOOK BEHIND THE CURTAIN AT
# *TALES FROM THE DEEP: STORIES OF SCIENTIFIC OCEAN DRILLING*

In this issue of *Oceanography*, Laura Guertin describes her inspiration for launching the audio narrative project *Tales from the Deep: Stories of Scientific Ocean Drilling*, and she provides links to many of the conversations she has recorded with shipboard and shore-based participants. Projects like this are not new in the ocean sciences, but the recorded oral histories are often done with senior scientists and compiled as historical documentation by individual institutions—Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution, Scripps Institution of Oceanography, and Lamont-Doherty Earth Observatory, among others, have such oral history archives. Transcripts are often the only thing available for many of these oral histories, and several have restricted access. One of the great things about *Tales from the Deep* is that the stories provide varied perspectives, from early career scientists to senior scientists, and from folks who sailed on the various scientific drilling vessels and platforms over the years to onshore support staff and program managers. Some of the narratives contain funny stories while others are more serious. The recordings are all openly accessible to anyone with an internet connection.

Thinking that others might be inspired to launch similar projects after reading Laura's essay and listening to some of the recordings, I share below Laura's responses to a series of questions I asked regarding how she went from an idea to a much-accessed web page of recordings that are archived in the US Library of Congress.

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**Your essay talks about how your scientific ocean drilling storytelling project was an outgrowth of student-generated audio narratives you assigned as coursework. How did the scientific ocean drilling project come about? Did you need to seek some help from others to launch the project? Did you first line up several conversations with people you sailed with?**

In just days after I returned home from my *JOIDES Resolution* (JR) expedition, I headed to Washington, DC, for the Advancing Scientific Ocean Drilling IMPACT workshop (June 2022). The workshop focused on increasing broader impacts for scientific ocean drilling, and I remember being in a breakout session on storytelling. As I had recently disembarked from the JR, many of the questions asked by schoolchildren and museum audiences during ship-to-shore virtual tours were still swirling around in my head—questions about living and working at sea, for example. There was

one other former JR onboard outreach officer at the IMPACT workshop, and I asked her if she wanted to be a part of this project. Before I even finished explaining my idea, she said "count me in!" I then reached out to one other former outreach officer, and the three of us were an organizing board that discussed what the collection would look like, attended virtual training through StoryCorps, and then launched our first episode on November 21, 2022. Most of the early conversations were with people I sailed with on International Ocean Discovery Program (IODP) Expedition 390, as well as with other former outreach officers. I still use the first two outreach officers from the beginning of the project as an advisory board and run ideas by them. Just like the incredible community that develops among the scientists who sail together, the outreach officers are also committed to continuing education and outreach post-expedition and work together on new and continuing projects.

### How did you come up with the logo for the project?

The small life ring logo and the overall graphic featuring *JOIDES Resolution* came from my association with an introductory-level physics course at another institution in the area (Drexel University). In the course, students were required to complete an interdisciplinary, real-world project that related their major to an area of physical science. I knew I wanted some branding for *Tales from the Deep*, so I became a "client" for a pair of students in the course. I provided potential design ideas and overall information about this audio narrative project. After several email exchanges, I could not be more pleased not only with the design but also that it came from students.

### Did you know about the StoryCorps project when you started?

I learned about StoryCorps several years ago when my Penn State campus adopted a common read book for the entire student body titled *This I Believe*. The book was a collection of personal stories from a cross section of individuals who represented different locations, social status, and careers, and there was a short corresponding audio series on National Public Radio (NPR). I invited my students to generate their own This I Believe stories through audio, knowing that audio can add a more personal and emotional component to a narrative than just reading text. In looking for examples of personal audio narratives online, the StoryCorps website quickly appeared in my search.

**How did you decide to place the *Tales from the Deep* collection on the StoryCorps website?**

There were several features that attracted me to the StoryCorps website. First, it is an existing collection with a large audience of listeners. By adding our conversations to this online archive, people beyond our scientific ocean drilling community have the opportunity to discover this unique collection and to learn more about the human side of working in this discipline. The recordings are also freely available, can be downloaded, and have a transcript automatically generated. This means no one needs a subscription service, and individuals, especially classroom teachers, can easily access the audio files. Because StoryCorps partners with the American Folklife Center at the Library of Congress in Washington, DC, to archive their collection, I decided to have our *Tales from the Deep* recordings on this platform.

**How often do you interview people?**

I aim for one to two people per month. I try to be as flexible as possible with individual schedules—for example, the beginning and end of semesters are a very busy time for many involved in the scientific ocean drilling community (including myself), so I do have several weeks where I step away from the recording and editing phase of the project. But I always have email inquiries out there, inviting people to participate and scheduling recordings.

**What kinds of costs are involved with such a project?**

The biggest cost is time. My time is involved with the communications, scheduling, recording, editing, getting the thumbs-up to post online, and then sharing out the new additions to the collection through (my limited) social media channels. For the people participating, I ask them to block off 45 minutes on their calendar so we can test the audio quality before recording, and to leave us enough time to ensure the full story or stories they want to share are captured.

There is no budget for this project, but I do not mind donating my time to capturing these voices and the dynamic conversations around scientific ocean drilling. Because I have so much fun doing this project, and there are no absolute deadlines for when the next audio must be posted online, the flexibility I have makes this project also very enjoyable.

The StoryCorps platform is free, so there are no costs associated with adding our recordings to their collection.

**What software do you need and what skills have you developed that enable you to work on this project?**

Though I look forward soon to starting live face-to-face recordings, to date, all the recordings have been completed through Zoom. I do not keep the video piece of the recording but ask that we keep our cameras on for a more fluid conversation. I only download the audio piece and do a first round of editing in GarageBand, then move over to Adobe Podcast for some final touches.

I have now recorded over 50 conversations, and my skills have certainly developed over the project. I am much better at taking notes during the conversation in order to ask follow-up questions. I also have learned to be patient during the recordings, allowing my guests to share a complete story before I insert comments or laughter. It is still a tricky balance making sure the recording comes across as a conversation and not an interview—which is why I don't send along a long list of questions I am going to ask ahead of time. Although that is a best practice for professional podcasters, I do not want the dialogue to sound so structured and scripted.

**Do you do anything to get the word out? Do you know whether more than people related to scientific ocean drilling are accessing and listening to the audio files?**

I know that people I have recorded are doing their own dissemination of their conversations with family and friends. I have received a few heartwarming stories from scientists who reported sharing a link with family members that resulted in opening the door to unprecedented conversations with their relatives about science and being a scientist.

In addition, I was contacted last year by staff of the Learning and Engagement Department at StoryCorps, who noticed that *Tales from the Deep* is a "thriving community" and wanted to know more about this project, as they found it inspiring, and also very different from the other communities in the StoryCorps Archive. In fact, *Tales from the Deep* has been a Featured Community on the front page of the StoryCorps Archive for over a year now!

I have presented about *Tales from the Deep* at the fall meeting of the American Geophysical Union and at the Ocean Sciences Meeting, and I will continue to spread the word about this unique collection and how it is important not only to our community but also as a contribution to ocean science.

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If you enjoyed reading about this project and listening to some of the recorded conversations, please share the link to *Tales from the Deep* widely. As Laura mentions at the end of her essay, she is happy to answer any questions you might have about the project or to schedule an online conversation about your experience with scientific ocean drilling. Contact Laura at (guertin@psu.edu).

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