

## My memories of March 11, 2011 Tsunami

Suzie Howser, Dockmaster Woodley Island Marina - now retired.

On March 11, 2011. I received a call at about 1 or 2 am from my Chief Executive Officer who was in Sacramento. He asked what I was doing. My answer was "looking at the insides of my eyelids, why". It had been a long day, so I had gone to bed early and had no idea of what had taken place. My CEO told me what had happened in Japan and we were expecting a tsunami. After a brief discussion, he was on his way back to Eureka and I was heading to Woodley Island.

Before leaving my home, I contacted the US Weather Service at Woodley Island for verification of event, projected timetables, and called senior staff members to advise them of the situation. All hands were needed to begin evacuation procedures.

Once at Woodley and as staff began to arrive, we started with notification of tenants. Staff went boat to boat, dock to dock to wake up any tenants that may be on board and advise them to evacuate the Island. Staff also checked and added additional lines to boats that needed them. Other staff were evacuating emergency equipment and supplies to an alternate location in Eureka.

A security guard was posted at the entrance to Woodley Island with his vehicle and barricades to prevent people from entering. Tenants and emergency personal were allowed through.

The weather at the time was extremely rough and boats could not leave Humboldt Bay. I believe we had 16–18-foot breakers on the bar and a storm was approaching the coast. Boats on the breakwater, like the Coral Sea, were advised to move and get 'in-line' with the current. USCG Cutter Barracuda put on extra lines, some fishermen moved their boats to the outside slips and the tug Captain was on his tug with the engine running.

Bar Pilot, Captain Tim Petrusha and I stayed on the Island and we were listening to an FM radio for updates, checking the tsunami buoys on the computer, fielding telephone calls, and answering questions as best as we could.

Two Sheriff deputies were stationed on Table Bluff as lookouts. They called us to say the surge was beginning. We then notified boaters who were on Woodley Island, boaters docked along the Inner Reach and the City of Eureka Marina that the surge was beginning.

Once the surge began, you could see people's faces change from smiles to that of concern. We had no idea what to expect. As time went on, we watched the surges grow in intensity. Some individuals ran down the dock to a piling and made a mark when a surge would top out and then run down the dock again at the bottom of the surge to make another mark.

In the background we heard the radio station say that Crescent City had been hit hard and their docks were destroyed. Suddenly, our phones were ringing off the hook, Crescent City boaters were calling. Boats that could make it, were heading our way and some boats were heading to Brookings. Remember, we had a storm approaching the coast. Our neighbors needed our immediate assistance.

Captain Petrusha and I took boat names and numbers, how many boats were in that group and sizes. We contacted City of Eureka Marina to find out their slip availability. Once we had slips figured out, we would call back the designated boat in each group and gave slip assignments for the boats. The Crescent City radio station called us to find out who to call to arrange for slips. We told them to tell their boaters to call us, but get those boats heading our way now we will figure it all out. Wives, girlfriends, boat owners and family in Crescent City were calling us to arrange for slips. We let them know what we were doing for the boats and tried to reassure them that the boats just need to get inside Humboldt Bay, and we would figure out the paperwork later.

We contacted Humboldt County OES Incident Command and told them what was happening with the Crescent City boats. They understood but US Coast Guard was concerned. The Humboldt Bay Bar was rough, and they were not sure boats could make it across, but they also understood. The Crescent City fleet had no other place to go. We received word that Brookings Harbor took a hard hit as well and knocked out one of their piers. Some boats who were heading to Brookings now turned around and were heading to Humboldt and others who were too small or did not have enough fuel had to wait outside Crescent City Harbor for the surges to slow down so they could anchor in the outer harbor to ride out the storm. Depending on your boat and sea conditions it can take 10-12+ hours to get from Crescent City to Humboldt Bay.

We kept a guard at the entrance all night to keep people out and told him what was going on with the boats from Crescent City and to let Crescent City family on to the Island.

Lots of boaters had my cell number so I continued to receive calls in the evening after I left the Island. If I did not have a slip assignment to give them, they were to just find an empty slip and park. We would figure it out in the morning. Our boaters were aware that surges were going to continue for at least the next 24 hours and that Crescent City boats were heading our way.

A friend called me that evening from their home on Humboldt Hill. They could see the entrance to Humboldt Bay. They said that they could see groups of boats. One boat would come in and sit in the turning basin then the rest of the boats in that group would come in and follow the first boat up the bay towards Eureka. They watched this as other groups arrived. What I found out the next morning is that some Captains had never been to Humboldt Bay before so the experienced Captain would come in first and guide the others. We also found out that some boats were in such a hurry to leave Crescent

City they were running single-handed. As boats arrived and docked, crews would run over to another boat to assist with lines.

By morning we had 50+ additional boats inside Humboldt Bay. Some at the City of Eureka, Englund Marine, Pacific Seafoods, Caito Fisheries, and Woodley Island. I was happy to see one boat in particular. The last boat that made it out of Crescent City Harbor was sitting quietly in a slip on F Dock. Fishing vessel Amanda B. I called Rich Young, CEO of Crescent City Harbor District and gave him an inventory of the Crescent City Boats, told him we would keep him up to date and offered any assistance we could.

Humboldt Bay was incredibly lucky that the surges took place during low tide. Had the surges began during a high tide, who knows what would have happened to our marinas, docks and other waterfront infrastructure.

According to different monitors within Humboldt Bay, the energy from the tsunami surges continued to bounce around Humboldt Bay for over a week. Which was a surprise to everyone.

One a personal note, my thanks go out to the Harbor District staff and security, all our tenants, the City of Eureka, Humboldt County Sheriff's Department, the Crescent City radio station and to the countless number of boaters who helped each other through this stressful time.

I want to especially thank Captain Tim Petrusha for staying on the Island and working with me side by side. And to Dan Larkin OES and Troy Nicolini NWS for always answering my phone calls and calling me with updates..... and to just check in.

We learned a lot from this event, and I hope we are all better prepared for the next.

Suzie Howser