



Bob Gallagher: My name is Bob Gallagher. I'm a big fan of the Town Creek Foundation, and happy to be here today.

Eve Austin: Okay, Bob, why don't we start by having you tell me a bit about your environmental career? Some of the work you've done over the years.

Bob Gallagher: I still think of myself as relatively new to the environmental community, even though it's been 15 years. My wife and I have had a house on the Bay since the mid '80s, and when I started thinking about retirement and what I wanted to do in retirement, it seemed logical that I could look for something that would involve improving the water quality in the Bay and its tributaries. I looked around, I got a captain's license. I don't remember now whether I had actually applied or not, but the Chesapeake Bay Foundation had a brand new oyster boat to go out and restore oysters. It was in my mind that that would be something that would be fun to do.

But a good friend of mine, a retired journalist who was friends with the Kennedy's, was invited to host a fundraiser for the Waterkeeper Alliance in Washington. Bobby Kennedy, at the time, was I think, president or chairman of the Waterkeeper Alliance. He came back from that event and said to me, "Forget about working in oyster restoration. With your background, you need to be doing something like this." He explained to me the concept of the Waterkeeper movement. I did some research and there were then two or three other Waterkeepers around the Chesapeake and I went around and spoke with them. I concluded he was right.

I started the West/Rhode Riverkeeper Program in January 2005, I guess. Bought a boat, started cruising around the rivers, talking to people, trying to get a sense of what they thought the problems were and what could be done about that. Within a couple of years we'd raised a little bit of money, hired a first employee and later this part-time employee. By the end of the third year, I had someone who was ready to take over. It was always my plan to be able to exit in five years. Hired a young fellow from the NR who was just terrific. Later turned out to be elected to the county council. He built the thing up substantially, and last year it merged with a local, larger watershed group that had been around for a substantially longer period of time. That continues to go on.

As I worked my way out of it, working through these problems, it became apparent to me that we weren't going to solve the problems that had so challenged us by raising money and doing restoration projects here and there. What was really key was stronger laws and better enforcement. And the only way to get that is through advocacy and through the county legislative and executive offices. County council and the county executive. Another friend who



was engaged with another watershed group had the same idea, so together we decided that we wanted to start a new kind of non-profit.

Typical non-profits that do restoration work are qualified under section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, and they're not allowed to get involved in politics. But there's another kind of non-profit under 501(c)(4) of the code that is allowed to do political work. Contributions to (c)(4)'s are not deductible, so fundraising is more of a challenge for that. We came up with a plan to do that, and I mentioned the plan to ... The model was what the Maryland League of Conservation Voters had been doing for 30 years at the state level. Identifying good candidates, helping to get them elected; once they're in office, hold them accountable, let them know what issues are important, what they should be voting for and voting against.

That's what we wanted to do, and I went to the Maryland League of Conservation Voters to tell them we were going to do that and see if we could get some advice from them. They said, "Let me get back to you," and a few days later they came back and offered to host us within that organization. We saved the hassle of actually starting up a new corporation and going through the tax qualification nonsense. Started an Anne Arundel County Chapter of the League of Conservation Voters. And that has been a primary focus since.

But in connection with that, I've met all these other wonderful people and wonderful organizations that have led me into tributaries of the movement, if you will. The land trust movement and other things. It's just been wonderful.

Eve Austin: That's a nice retirement.

Bob Gallagher: It's a second career that I didn't know I wanted, but that I found fascinating, and I've probably worked just as hard as when I was being paid in my first career.

Eve Austin: You're not being paid for any of this?

Bob Gallagher: No. It's wonderful when organizations can raise enough money to pay people. And you couldn't get these great young people we have working in them because they're starting families. But I didn't need to do that anymore, and it saves me the issue of somebody challenging my motivation based on financial incentives.

Eve Austin: I'm interested when you said, it wasn't Bobby Kennedy, but it was the person connected to Bobby Kennedy, came back to you and said, "You don't need to do oyster restoration with your background, you need to do these other things." Tell me more about that. Tell me more about your background and why is it that that's the direction for you?



Bob Gallagher: Well, during my legal career, especially in my early days doing civil rights and working with legal services, clients, at that time, most of my practice was litigation. A lot of lawyers don't like it because of the contentiousness of it. I don't particularly like that either, but I realized I was pretty good at it. As I got older, I'd say, well, to choose to do less of it, but that's what advocacy is about. The kind of aggressive advocacy that the Waterkeepers do. I mean, you have to be willing to go to politicians and saying, "You're doing a bad job, you got to do better." You got to be willing to go to polluters and say, "You've got to stop this or ultimately, if we can't resolve it, we'll have to sue you."

There's a shortage of people who are willing to work in that branch of the environmental community, because by nature I think we like to avoid conflict. That's reflected in the funding community. There are many, many foundations around that fund all sorts of wonderful environmental work, but there are precious few that will fund organizations whose principal operations are advocacy. Tanner Creek was one of those and God bless them for that.

Eve Austin: I mean, myself, I'm not an environmental activist or a lawyer, but I'm an environmentalist. An environmental message of conservation is a much more palatable thing for people to talk about and hear and feel good about, I guess.

Bob Gallagher: And importantly to raise money.

Eve Austin: And to raise money.

Bob Gallagher: If you go to the people that have the money, especially corporations, they don't want to get near controversy. They want to do feel good things. It's relatively easy to raise money for restoration and education, and much, much more difficult to raise it for advocacy.

Eve Austin: Do you think that it usually requires an attorney as someone who's legally trained?

Bob Gallagher: No. Some of the best advocates have never been near a law school. It just requires a lot of commitment and a personality that can do that.

Eve Austin: Can you think of any particular over the years, I know you've been involved in so many different projects and so much advocacy, even though it's been relatively short number of years in this group, of a particular challenge that you can talk about? A particular story, situation that sticks with you?

Bob Gallagher: Well, the earliest example was one of the frustrations that led me and my friend to decide we wanted to start a (c)(4) was, the environmental community in the



county had been trying for close to a decade to get the county council to pass a bill that would provide a mechanism for funding remediation of the damage caused by storm water. Creeks being hollowed out and that sort of thing. We were spectacularly unsuccessful. Even the members of the county council who could usually be counted on to vote for a good environmental piece of legislation, year after year would find an excuse not to be willing to vote for this.

It was the development community, which provides the bulk of political contributions for offices at all levels, including the county, was adamantly against it. Our motivation to start the (c)(4) was, the only thing that's going to get these guys to vote the right way is public accountability. That's what a (c)(4) can do, and that's what we did. Within two years they passed the bill. Well, it's always been clear, and it's still true that the biggest single contributor of pollution to the Bay is agriculture. Although we don't have a lot of agriculture here on this side of the Bay or in this county in particular, it's affecting what we do.

The amount of nitrogen in this little creek that's right behind us out here, depending on the weather and the season, is affected as much by agriculture, not only upstream in the Bay, but upstream in Pennsylvania and New York. A number of the organizations I've been involved with, most recently in the last five or six years, have been focused on the pollution from agriculture problem, and that's where the organizations I've been working with have had the closest connection to Town Creek. Because Town Creek identified that at some point as something that they really wanted to focus on.

- Eve Austin: Going back to one thing you said, the only thing that you figured out, the only thing that's going to hold the polluters or the developers accountable is the (c)(4).
- Bob Gallagher: The politicians.
- Eve Austin: The politicians, sorry. The politicians is the (c)(4). Can you explain that to me? I'm sorry if you already did.
- Bob Gallagher: Because we can endorse them in elections. The two election related things that we do are make endorsements, make public our view on which candidates are the best ones for the environment. And between elections, we'll publish report cards that tell you how each one of your legislators is doing on the environment. Typically some do very well and some get F's.
- Eve Austin: That's helpful.
- Bob Gallagher: And that's the accountability. Eventually, in the beginning people didn't take much notice of us. We were up and running in time to participate in the 2010



election, and the number of candidates who were interested in applying for our endorsement was a relatively small number of all the candidates. In the 2014 election it went up and the 2018 election, it was probably 80%.

Eve Austin: What's going to happen in 2020?

Bob Gallagher: God, I wish we knew. It's very different at the county level. We won't have another election in the county until 2022. Our election results in 2018 were better than I dared imagine. There was a green wave, a blue wave and a pink wave that went through those elections. It was just terrific.

Eve Austin: How did that leave you feeling?

Bob Gallagher: Wonderful.

Eve Austin: I guess, it makes me want to ask you, of the work that you've done, what are you most proud of?

Bob Gallagher: Well, I'm proud of getting West/Rhode Riverkeeper off the ground and on to a self-sustaining basis, because I think it's important, particularly close to the water, to build water quality as part of people's sense of place and their identity with the place they live. And that has worked out well. I'm also on the board of Waterkeepers Chesapeake and we had about four or five maybe when I started that program. Now I think we have 20 Waterkeeper programs around the Chesapeake. That's working well.

I guess I'm proud of the results that we've accomplished in the successive elections with the League of Conservation Voters. But on a more subjective level, I think one of the organizations I've most recently been involved in is ... well two actually. Even though we have these accountability organizations, it's still very hard to strengthen laws against pollution from the ag industry at the state level where the regulation is. Counties really don't regulate agriculture at all. Banging our heads against the wall year after a year in the legislature and making a little bit one step forward, one step back, two steps forward, one step back.

I concluded and I think folks at Town Creek concluded, that you need to try some other approaches as well. You can't stop doing that, you have to keep the pressure on. Two other approaches, one is called the Delmarva Land and Litter Challenge. Where just a bunch of people from the chicken industry, it's about poultry litter pollution, and environmentalists and academics and some from government have gotten together and meet regularly to see if there are ways to improve things that everyone can agree to. That's been a really interesting experience.



My personal experience with that is that I found a lot of common ground with the farmers. The guys who are actually out there in the fields with their tractors and have their whole families working on the farm, growing grain or out raising the chickens. Less so with the companies that buy the chickens, and to my surprise, even less so with the government agencies in charge of agriculture. It seems like they are standing in the way of finding agreeable solutions rather than helping. But again it's the executive director of [inaudible 00:23:48]. I'm proud of the fact that with those farmers we are able to build relationships with them, talk to each other about the problems. That's something that doesn't get a lot of attention.

The other alternative approach was to try to bring pressure on the ag industry through consumers. It's not something that I started or anyone around here started anytime recently, but for years we've had groups talking about food and health and trying to change the food system. But we realized that there are natural allies in what we want to accomplish. At Waterkeepers Chesapeake, we started a program called Fair Farms. A large portion of the funding for that came from Town Creek. We go out and we recruit progressive farmers who are trying to protect the land and the water, consumers who care about where their food comes from and don't want pesticides and things like that, farm to table restaurants, organic markets, and getting into some larger food distribution systems. This is happening across the country in different ways, this is the way we've done it in Maryland. The results we've seen in Maryland and across the country, which we can only claim the smallest part of credit for it, but it's still gratifying.

I'm not sure the data is still good, but a year or so ago, Walmart was the biggest distributor of organic produce in the country. Purdue, the big producer of chickens that used to be full of antibiotics and arsenic, has dropped those things. And beyond that, they're asking their chicken growers to convert to organic operations as quickly as they can. It's quickly enough that that's probably the fastest growing part of their business. It's outpacing the ability of local farmers to grow the organic grains to feed the organic chickens. They have to bring in a lot of the organic grains from South America.

Eve Austin: Ironic.

Bob Gallagher: I mean, they're doing it for business reasons, but I don't care why they do it.

Eve Austin: I mean, in this culture, that's what it takes.

Bob Gallagher: Exactly.



Eve Austin: That's great. Like you said, it's gratifying. It must be gratifying to see that. I'm wondering, just now to step back, I mean, you told me a little bit about just your growing up, tiny bit of on the water. I was just wondering if you could talk about your identity and how your background has led you to where you are now?

Bob Gallagher: Well, I grew up in suburbs of Philadelphia-

Bob Gallagher: ... until I went off to college. We had the occasional trip to the beach, we didn't take many vacations. But when we were there I loved the water, and my little brother and I always wanted a boat. For years we would empty my mother's purse of her change every night and throw it in a cigar box until we got to the point where we could afford to buy a \$150 boat. We were in our mid teens, I guess. It's been in my blood ever since. When I moved to Washington for college and law school, we were close to the Potomac, I had a little boat on the Potomac.

When I changed jobs, after my first job out of law school, I had the unbelievable good fortune to become the managing lawyer in a neighborhood legal services office in Palau. Which was then part of the Trust Territory of Pacific islands, 500 miles east of the Philippines. Spent a couple of years out there where the job came with a boat so I could visit my clients on other islands. My wife went with me and we got into scuba diving and everything you can do in the water. We'd camp on a beach every weekend, so that's how it just got into my blood.

I came back and got another job in a law firm and everyone knows that's a ridiculously punishing thing to do, but by the time, I had been in the firm long enough that I was able to make my schedule a little more manageable. We bought a place on the water and I started getting involved in Wednesday night sailboat races. It's an institution in any little town on a big body of water.

Eve Austin: Really?

Bob Gallagher: People leave their jobs at 3:00 in the afternoon, and the races start at 5:00 or 6:00. You race until it gets dark and have a beer at the local bar when it's done. That infected me, and then I was 50 years old. And then I became interested in serious long distance offshore ocean racing. I started doing races out to Bermuda, up to new England, down to the Caribbean, and eventually across the Atlantic. Now I don't, it's too expensive for me to afford my own boat to do that. I used to get lots of invitations from owners, but they seem to be inviting younger people now. They invite me to help them bring the boats back from the race.

Eve Austin: Well, not quite as exciting.



- Bob Gallagher: But fun.
- Bob Gallagher: You go to any port city, go down around the waterfront and ask, who runs the Wednesday night races? How can you get on a boat on a Wednesday night race?
- Eve Austin: All right. Well, you mentioned young people, so I'll use that to ask you, when you think about the future of working on the environment, what do you think are the challenges that younger environmentalist are going to face? Any advice or thoughts about what's going to be important for the next generation of environmental advocacy?
- Bob Gallagher: Well, you're not old enough to figure this out, but one of the challenges of growing older is finding things to be optimistic about. The thing that, for me, is the greatest source of optimism as I get older, is the young people. Part of the reason I think I thrive on doing this work is that most of the people I'm working with day to day are younger people. They're bright, they're committed, they're willing to work for very low wages and often very frustrating conditions. But they're so good, they're so determined. I mean, there are lots of huge challenges, but they're going to face the challenges and we're going to win. Can't say exactly how long it's going to take, but we're going to win.
- Eve Austin: I just have to say, when you said they're working for low wages, my first thought is because they're living with their parents.
- Bob Gallagher: A lot of them are. A lot of them are in group houses.
- Eve Austin: What a lot of young people have to do now. But you still have optimism.
- Bob Gallagher: More and more, the bigger organizations are realizing that it's not really in their long-term interest to pay the lowest wages they can get away with, and their salaries, I think, are a little more generous than they were a decade or two ago. But still, most of these people could go into industry jobs and double their salary.
- Eve Austin: Are you seeing enough younger environmentalist's heading in the direction of the advocacy and policy work as opposed to conservation, that you were saying is so necessary?
- Bob Gallagher: Yes. They seem to be less adverse to confrontation where they think it's necessary. And that's great, they do it. I mean, the right way to do it is in as civil a way as possible. You don't have to go out calling people names. You just have to point out where they're going wrong and why they should fix it and what's going to happen if they don't fix it.



Eve Austin: That's good. Well, thank you. Is there anything else that we didn't get to that you want to say or talk about that I didn't ask you about?

Bob Gallagher: No, just how grateful I am, as I said, for the support of Town Creek, and these various, different things for supporting advocacy work. It's hard to get money to take on the ag industry and they've been willing to do that. Their home is right in the middle of the ag industry, so I'm sure it hasn't been easy for them to do that. I'm sure their board of directors has taken enormous heat from their friends and neighbors and the local industry. But without them, we'd be years behind where we are now.

Eve Austin: That's good, thank you. Well I'm going to sign us out. We're finishing up this interview and again, it's September 24, 2019. This has been an oral history interview with Bob Gallagher, and we are talking today in the offices of the Chesapeake Bay Trust in Annapolis, Maryland.

Bob Gallagher: Thanks, Eve.

Eve Austin: Thanks, Bob.

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