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*Jennifer Stock:* You're listening to Ocean Currents, a podcast brought to you by NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary. This radio program was originally broadcast on KWMR in Point Reyes Station, California. Thanks for listening!

(Music)

*Jennifer Stock:* And welcome to this month's edition of Ocean Currents, a show where we talk about the blue part of our planet, the ocean. We talk about natural history, conservation, research, exploration, and ways for us land-based folks to learn more and get involved. My name is Jennifer Stock and I bring this show to you from NOAA's Cordell Bank National Marine Sanctuary, one of three amazing and unique marine sanctuaries off the central California coast here off of Point Reyes. So, let's get to it. A few months back, my guest today appeared in Point Reyes Station as a guest at a showing of a film that really touched me deeply. Riki Ott is a marine biologist and author and activist and she talked about her experience living in Alaska and surviving the long legacy of the Exxon-Valdez oil spill in 1989. She not only survived it, but led her impacted town out of it's most trying times. Riki is featured in the film called Black Wave that brings attention to what really happens during these dark days.

Riki was a commercial salmon fisher-ma'am and while living in the devastation of the oil spill on many levels, she chose to do something about it and that she did. Ott retired from fishing and founded three nonprofit organizations to deal with the lingering harm from the spill. During the litigation, she kept Exxon on their toes as they were keenly aware of the fight she and others would put up. She has written a few books and her books on the spill are Sound Truth, Corporate Myths, and Not One Drop: Betrayal and Courage in the wake of the Exxon-Valdez Oil Spill. So, I'm so pleased today to welcome Riki Ott and Riki, you are live on the air. Thank you. Thanks for joining us, you're live on the air on KWMR and we just did a little introduction, which you probably didn't hear talking a little bit about your experience with the Exxon-Valdez spill and being an author, writing some incredible books about your experiences. So, thanks again for joining us.

*Riki Ott:* Well, thank you for the invitation.

*Jennifer Stock:* I don't know of many marine scientists that went into commercial fishing. How did you find yourself in Cordova, Alaska to start?

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*Riki Ott:* I think it's all sort of this random choices that maybe aren't so random and after graduating from the University of Washington, I have to look it up, it was like 13 years of "higher education," and I thought, "You know, a career will wait. For one summer I just want to take one summer off. I'm going to go to Alaska. I've always wanted to go to Alaska and just have some fun," and I got a job on a commercial fishing boat, which might not sound like fun, but it sounded like fun to a marine biologist. So, I totally fell in love with the lifestyle and with the area, I crewed in Princeton Sound in the Copper River Delta, a little community of Cordoba just bustling, a beehive of activity and I thought, "This is the right place. I'm going to stay," and what's a marine biologist to do?

So, I just thought, "Heck, I'm going to buy into the commercial fishing," and that's what I did and that summer between...well, it's going on 25 years now.

*Jennifer Stock:* Reading your book, Not One Drop, I couldn't put it down for not one minute, practically. It was a very gripping account of your experiences and describing the landscape and the marine ecosystem prior to the impact of the spill was just rejuvenating hearing of such life and the spill came in 1989 and you have been involved since then, completely, whole-heartedly in dealing with oil and companies and corporations too. What drove you to recount all of these experiences and memories in your books recounting from your time with the Exxon-Valdez?

*Riki Ott:* Well, there's a couple interesting things there. One is that that spill didn't just affect us as individuals. It effected us as a collective community and what the people wanted was we wanted our story to be told and there's, I think there's a name for this, when a collective is traumatized, like us. We were reaching out to other humans saying, "This is what happened to us," and we talked with a lot of media, different people, and the media just never really captured our story and, of course, Cordova became a case study for a disaster trauma. It's now the longest-running study in history on what happens when a community is smashed like this and how it can rebuild. So, it doesn't necessarily have to be Cordova and an oil spill.

Our story is now pretty important for some good lessons for other communities and the rest of America. So, we really wanted our story told and I thought, well heck. I tried once with Found Truth and I interviewed over 60 people for that book, but that book became more of the biological impact to people's health and the environment from oil and it didn't really tell the town's story. So,

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people were like, "Riki, you've got to try again. You didn't really get it." So, I thought, darn it all. So, I wrote "Not One Drop," and I will say that the first manuscript was completely different and Chelsea Green is the one that said, "Look, this is supposed to be a book about emotion and trauma. Where's the emotion?" So, I rewrote it and framed it on my relationship with my girlfriend, Linden, and her family, who...she has a two year old and a four year old by the time of the oil spill and they were my godchildren and pretty much, it's what happened to us. There's not a scene in there that actually didn't happen.

The conversations happened, I mean, it happened around campfires, it happened around making Christmas cookies. It happened just as a matter of going snowshoeing or hiking with each other. This oil spill trauma just, it hung on for 20 years as we worked our way through the legal system and I was in the position of...the kids were very interested in this growing up...how do you explain this to a four year old and a six year old? A ten year old and a twelve year old? So, it kind of became me trying to explain to them, them getting very interested, especially as they got older. Can you come to my school and explain this? You know, that kind of thing.

It really is a 20 year snapshot of our lives and the interesting thing is that when I finished that book, that was actually a catharsis for me. It actually healed my own oil spill trauma so that for the first time, really, I was able to leave and leave...not...leave the town physically, but I felt like a letting go of the oil spill trauma and people in town...the schoolchildren read the book first and they said, "Now, I understand what happened to my family." And the town pretty much said, "Ok. This time you did it." So, it kind of is our story, even if it's just Linden and I.

*Jennifer Stock:*

Well, I definitely captured that. I think attaching to a family and people and emotions and really, it drew me in and I'm sharing this book with colleagues because it is gripping to experience what you were experiencing then. Can you describe Cordova, Alaska? How big is this town and maybe describe a little bit about the background of the community and the thriving economy that was there prior to 1989.

*Riki Ott:*

Cordova, Alaska is about 2,500 and about half the town is directly engaged in commercial fishing. So, directly going out to sea making a living catching fish: salmon, herring, halibut, cod, I mean, pretty much...I think salmon and herring were the bread breakers with money...fish for Cordova. The other half of the town

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then is supporting the fishing industry. So, pretty much everybody in town benefits when there's a good season or if we have a bad season, we all tighten up our belts. We're not buying food at the restaurants. So, a good season, everybody celebrates. A bad season, everybody suffers.

There's a good portion of the town, 18 percent when I got there in 1985, who are the original inhabitants, the Eyak people and they have a subsistence lifestyle. So, their culture is very connected to the environment. They celebrate, they harvest, they share wild food. In total, the town, according to the Fish & Wildlife service...or, Fish & Game, the state agency, we collectively eat about 400 pounds of...well, wild food, so, counting seafood, counting moose, deer, birds, per household, per year. 400 pounds.

So, we're very much connected whether we're native or not to emotionally, spiritually, our well-being is connected to the well-being of our environment of Prince William Sound in the Copper River Delta. It's a very...what attracted me was that everybody is a doer. Everybody who fishes is their own businessperson. So, there's...it's not very much hierarchical business structure like in most other communities. I mean, everybody is their own businessperson who fishes. So, you're making decisions, it's a very self-motivated, self-directed people. We're isolated. We don't have a road in. That give us sort of like an island mentality. We have to take care of each other. So, it's a very close-knit community.

We're all fishing in the summer. It's very dangerous, people die all the time and it's a hard life, but it's very much alive. You're very much alive and that was what I liked about that community was how everybody was connected to the environment, to each other, and really, it's just a constant celebration of just being alive.

*Jennifer Stock:*

And living a quality life. Now, you came to Cordova. You had your background in marine toxicology and coming to this vibrant community, you queued in immediately to oil. When did the oil pipeline get built in Alaska and were there any standards for safety that needed to be adhered to? It seems like this is a big launching off point of the pipeline and where we've come today based on a lot of your work and when was it built? You immediately got involved in the safety standards around that.

*Riki Ott:*

That is actually a good part of part one, I cover about 20 years of history in part one of Not One Drop, which is all relative to the questions you're asking. What about the pipeline? And oil was discovered in 1968 in Perdoe Bay on the north slope and the

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oil men immediately looked south. The Port Valdez was the closest ice-free port and it was 800 miles south across three or four mountain ranges and a few hundred rivers and, big deal, let's just build a pipeline south. So, that took a couple acts of Congress to sort out who's land it was and make the authorizing legislation and the community of Cordova pretty much became the sole opposition point because the fishermen were worried about a big oil spill in their fishing grounds. The fishermen's lawsuit was nullified by Congressional action that enabled the trans-Alaska pipeline to be built in 1973. That legislation went through.

So, the pipeline was built over a series of years and the first oil was shipped in, I think it was 1978 and along the way there were a few...oh, there was the great Congressional hearings over the ?? falsifications, the pipeline definitely, I mean, what we know that there were was a bunch of promises that the oil companies made. They promised to do state of the art, build state of the art pipeline. They promised to have state of the art traffic control systems and they promised to have double-hulled tankers to reduce the risk of a spill in Prince William Sound. They promised to have a balanced water treatment facility to treat the polluted water, seawater, that came up in tankers so it wouldn't just be dumped back into Prince William Sound and of all those promises, they only one that actually was put into law was the balanced water treatment system, which then immediately when I began working on this issue, it actually wasn't until 1987 because it took us two years to figure out actually how to fish.

We came pretty close to dying several times, but anyway so 1987, I started saying, "Okay. We have to repay our good bounty, our good luck for the sea. What do I have to repay?" And I was like, "Well, I have an education, so I guess I can put that to use." So, the fishermen were very worried that there was chronic air and water pollution from the tanker terminal and it turns out it took us like four or five years to prove that, but that's when I started working on these issues and, indeed, it's like having a giant, giant gas station in your back yard and that's the pipeline loading onto the oil tankers and this was around the peak. So, it was about 2.1 or so billion barrels a day.

It was a lot of oil and they weren't doing the practices that they said. So, in fact, they were dumping oil both into the water and not incinerating it. So, it was actually going into the air as well. So, that was how I cut my teeth and that was before the oil spill.

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*Jennifer Stock:* For those just tuning in, this is Ocean Currents and my guest today is Riki Ott. She's a marine biologist, she's an author an activist and we're just discussing the Exxon Valdez oil spill and the long legacy that it's left and what we're learning from it. Getting to the spill, that was one of the things that impressed me in the book. The spill was one event, but there were these other events prior of chronic pollution. Describe the scene on March 24th, 1989. What was happening for you and how did you get notified about the oil spill and what happened?

*Riki Ott:* Well, I had given a talk the night before, March 23rd, to the community of Valdez. It was the mayors ad-hoc committee and they were looking at the benefits, plusses and the minuses of having the oil industry in their backyard. What were the things that they needed to be wary about and to be aware of and I gave a talk literally as the Exxon Valdez was being loaded with oil at the dock in Port Valdez. I tele-conferenced from Cordova and said, "Gentlemen, it's not a matter of if, but when there's a big spill. The communities and the fishing people, we will not be adequately compensated because the laws are not there to guarantee that we will get...be paid for all of our losses." And literally the Exxon Valdez was pulling out of the dock as I went home. I turned off my phone so I could sleep in the next morning and heard a huge pounding on my door at 7am. I just like, leaped out of bed and go rushing downstairs and I lived in a house that was, at the time, the highest elevation home in Cordova, and there was no way to drive up in March. It was just under...the road was snowed in.

So, it had to be an emergency. Somebody had to hike that extra half-mile to get to me. I opened my door and there's the acting director of the fishermen's union standing on my porch and I'm like, "What the heck?" And he just says, "We've had the big one." And instantly, I mean, this is what we all lived in fear of and here it was and I remember just this shock, just this huge surge of adrenaline and anger and then it all, like, whooshed away and I just started thinking, "What can we do?" And that's pretty much the mode that all the fishermen were in for about the first five days or so before the fishermen just realized that the oil industry had absolutely no idea how to clean up a spill this big and we, as I said, were a community of doers and we're just not good at sitting around, I mean, we waited for the oil industry for Exxon and actually, all seven companies at first to tell us what to do. No direction...four days in we had a big planning meeting at midnight and we just decided we were going for it and we loaded boats and started defending the hatcheries, trying to deflect the oil from

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where the salmon were being reared and meanwhile, I was assigned to work on legislation.

So, to use my head and my computer. That's what I was told.

*Jennifer Stock:*

Well, it seems that Exxon was mostly focused on their appearance to the media during this entire time while everybody in Cordova was looking for a way to defend the habitats and fisheries and the coastline. Was there any attempt at any type of prevention, any type of cleanup at all besides what Exxon put in front of the media as what they thought they were attempting to do?

*Riki Ott:*

Pretty much, the industry was completely unprepared. They were supposed to, according to their statements, federally approved contingency plans, be on scene within six hours with boom, response equipment, response personnel and be cleaning up, working to contain the spill and that didn't happen. It just didn't happen. I mean, the boom that they had was low-quality grade. It didn't hold up. The response barge was buried under snow and offloaded. The dispersants weren't even in the state, really and it turns out, nothing that really worked on....still to this day, nothing...no dispersant worked in a cold-water environment with north-borne crude. So, basically I think ripe here for a fraud lawsuit brought against the oil industry that they cannot make good on what they promise still to this day. They cannot clean up a spill.

So, it became pretty much an on the water response was taken by big storm and the oil crashed into our beaches. Half the oil that spilled landed on the beaches of Prince William Sound. Very toxic reaction and it just got buried and it's still toxic and almost in tact oil to this day, almost 21 years later. It's still there. So, we had an on the beach cleanup instead of on the water and that was pretty much make it up as you go. The high pressure, hot-water wash that I'm sure a lot of listeners will remember, actually bounced the oil off the rock into the air and people breathed it.

It made thousands of people sick. I uncovered Exxon's own data showing that 6,722 cleanup workers, which is pretty much 2 of every three people who were out on the beaches, complained of upper respiratory illnesses, which Exxon waved off as Valdez crud and it turns out, in hindsight our worker safety laws don't really distinguish which chemical induced illnesses. In fact, if it's a cold or a flu, the filler is exempt from reporting them. So, Exxon basically claimed 6,722 cases of colds and flu, didn't report them and a lot of these people are still sick to this day. I mean, it was pretty much a second disaster on top of the first one.

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*Jennifer Stock:* Right. We'll talk a bit about the litigation process in a little bit, but I want to talk a little bit about the healing of the community and you're definitely like it's still an impacted community in terms of the ecosystem and before it was thriving with salmon and herring and how is it today, 21 years later in terms of the fisheries and the habitats as well as the community morale?

*Riki Ott:* Well, there was a delayed ecosystem collapse in 1992 and 1993 and that's because our pink salmon spawn on the beaches. So, the beaches that were oiled, the young of the year, in 1989, either, in the case of herring, completely failed to survive or in the case of salmon, their reproductive systems were dinged and there was a huge hit of the eggs and embryos. So, it took a while for...we were waiting for the young fish to grow up and come back as adults and when they didn't come back as adults, we realized, "Uh-oh. What happened four years ago is impacting us today." So, pink salmon fully came back, the herring has not and that's a huge problem both for the ecosystem and the community. Herring are a basic forage fish of the ecosystem. So, without herring, really, the whole ecosystem has to kind of re-equilibrate and find a new center. Scientists are saying they have no idea when herring will recover.

Basically we have 15 of 24 species or habitats that have not fully recovered, so two-thirds 21 years later have not. That is to say that the herring fisheries is closed indefinitely. So, there are herring fishermen who had \$300,000 permits that can't fish them and probably never will be able to again and they incurred incredible ballooning debt from the bank not being able to pay off their loans. So, this really dragged everybody down and Exxon really...we had talked about litigation, but basically we got paid ten cents on the dollar in 2008. The good news is that it's over and everybody is just gave this big sigh of relief. It's like, "Ok. Let's get on with our lives." But the big lesson here is that...and this is in part what I'm doing now. I'm on the road and what we've learned in Cordova was that our laws are not protective of public health, worker health, the environment.

Exxon said we will make you whole. That was Exxon's promise. We learned that Exxon had no intention of making us whole. It had every intention of going to the court system and fighting us on every claim that we raised. A lot of our claims were thrown out as non-economic damages. The fishing with our children, the quality of life, the native cultural claims, non-economic damages, they're tossed out. Well, that was part of what made us whole was working as a community, as families.



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So, we realized that the laws are not set up to hold, especially big wealthy corporations accountable to the people and in realizing this, we thought something was fundamentally wrong with the legal system, but it turns out it's a deeper problem, ok? So...

*Jennifer Stock:* Let's get to that bigger problem. I want to talk about that a little bit more in a little bit. We need to take a quick break. So, please hold your thoughts there because I think I know where you want to go with this and I'd like to do that too. So, I just need to take a quick station ID break here and we will be back in just a minute with Riki Ott to continue discussing the process of claims with the Exxon-Valdez. So, Riki, I'm going to put you on hold really quick. Please stay on the line.

*Riki Ott:* Okay.

*Jennifer Stock:* And for those of you tuning in, this is Ocean Currents. My name is Jennifer Stock and I'm talking with Riki Ott, marine biologist, author, and activist and was very involved with the Exxon-Valdez oil spill and is working hard to help us understand the role of corporations in our lives and we're going to talk about this a little bit more in the second half. So, please stay with us.

(Music)

*Jennifer Stock:* And Riki, we're back live on the air. Thanks for holding on for a little bit and for those tuning in, this is Ocean Currents and we're talking about the Exxon-Valdez oil spill and we're just starting to talk about the role of corporations and Exxon and how they got away with what they did in terms of the litigation and the community basically earning ten cents on the dollar from the disaster, but you say that Exxon, the disaster is a fundamental threat to US democracy. How does a corporation like Exxon have individual human rights?

*Riki Ott:* Okay. I do want to back up a little bit because I never answered your question about how the community healed. That is a huge window into the problem with corporations...

*Jennifer Stock:* Great.

*Riki Ott:* ...because what we realized was what we valued was more than about money. So, in our community, we sat and we did an exercise that's now called community unity exercise and it's posted on my website [ultimatecivics.org](http://ultimatecivics.org), but basically we asked each other three questions. What is it that we value about our community? What do

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we want our community to look like in 20 years? What action steps would we take to make those changes? And this exercise is really about identifying shared values and kind of creating a common vision and then taking collective action and as you can imagine when we lost our fisheries in '92 and '93 we had no economy. So, suddenly we had nothing. So, it kind of looked like America, October 2008 with the economic meltdown. The good news is when you lose everything like that, you're free to create something completely new.

I mean, you can try to recreate the old as well, but actually that's a pretty pivotal crossroads and you can make decisions for a different future and what we decided was, well, as long as we have to rebuild anyway, why don't we try to bring in businesses that match our values as opposed to just any businesses and as you can imagine, part of, I mean, people had no income, ok? So, people were pretty desperate and there was a good fraction of the town that wanted to clear-cut log because we have a lovely forest on the Delta. People wanted to strip mine and get the coal. People wanted to build an industrial-scale tourism and deep water port, a road, lots of infrastructure, but all of this stuff would have gone across two hundred and thirty eight salmon spawning streams and rivers and we said, "You know, let's think about this." We decided we wanted to rebuild our community as a fishing community.

So, we wanted to bring in businesses that were compatible with that. So, we sat down and I've done this exercise now in 28 states over the past six years and I've even done it in 5th grade on up and when you give people like a minute or two to write, even if they're fifth graders, they come up with a pretty compelling list and I'll share the list from like 5th graders in Santa Barbara, ok? So, it's like, best friends, my mommy and daddy, my cat, dog or animals, oceans, mountains, air, rivers, peace, surf board, that was one, candy. So, and adults like things like retirement security, a living wage, affordable healthcare, healthy food, not necessarily candy, ok? But still, the environment. So, clean air, clean water. The point is that these things can be grouped. Like I asked the little kiddos, "Ok. So you go into the store to buy candy and it comes with a price tag. Do your best friends have a price tag?"

And the little kids all giggle and, "Does your mommy and daddy?" "No!" "Does your surfboard?" "Oh, yes." "But does surfing, does the act of going out and having fun with your friends. Does that have a price tag?" "No."

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So, pretty much adults, kids, everybody gets it that we can group these values into social values like peace and health and playing with our friends and visiting with our neighbors and environmental health, which are about healthy soil, water, air, and then economic wealth, the things that we do need: a home, a job, but in a democracy these three values, types of values, all count. You can't dismiss them as non-economic...that doesn't matter. This is a quality of life that matters to humans. So, what I'm building up to here is that really what we're talking about, human values versus corporate values. We have a clash of values.

What are corporations in business to do? You look in a democracy, human values count. In corporate capitalism, what counts? Making money, right? And even the fifth graders get that. So, what happened to social wealth? What happened to environmental wealth? Well, our gross domestic product actually consumes social and environmental wealth in order to grow larger the way we currently measure it. So, for example, the Exxon-Valdez oil spill was, yes, an environmental disaster from our perspective, but really, from the state of Alaska's perspective. It boosted the entire gross domestic product of the state of Alaska for the summer of 1989 because it generated 2.5 billion dollars of economic activity in terms of a cleanup. So, literally, when I went to lobby as a volunteer for strong oil-spill prevention and response measures, the subsequent three years after the oil spill, I went in to every state legislators office and I was told in a number of them, "Why should I listen to you? My constituents actually went and made money on that spill."

So, what we have here is on one hand, we have democracy, human values, and a living economy, when you can grow one form of wealth without the other two. This is how you get to a sustainable future and what author David Corton calls a living economy. On the other hand, we have corporate capitalism, corporate values, and a suicide economy, which is about using up the planet. Our gross domestic product is not just oil spills. It's war that drives the economy. Half of our trade is arms. It's private prisons that drive the economy. It's sick people that drive the economy because sick people have to buy medicine and healthcare. So, we...I mean, nobody says, "I want to be sick." Nobody says, "Give me war." These are not our human values.

So, I began to realize that, "Uh-oh. How come our values don't count? What's going on?" And what I found, alarmingly was that there are actually two types of persons. If we go all the way back to the American Revolution and when we wrote the Declaration of

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Independence and ultimately the Constitution and Bill of Rights, it uses the word person 34 times and certainly back then we intended as a fifth grader said when I said, "Who are 'we,' 'We the people?'" And these little kids looked at me like I was nuts and one of them says, "We! We! Real people." But under law, there's actually two types of persons that are recognized. One is the 'we,' the real people, and the other is artificial people such as corporations and other legal entities that are organized for the purpose of doing business. The Constitution and Bill of Rights never, for example, mention the word corporation. Never, but as we brought distance from the sort of the heat and the fervor of the American Revolution, we lost our wariness of these big corporations and the Supreme Court in 1886 actually conferred the 14th amendment, which is about equal protection and due process for African American men. It transferred that over to corporations. So, suddenly now, back in 1886, we lost the distinction...corporations are just like people. They're sovereign. They have rights, inalienable rights. They're private and this is, I believe, never what our Constitution intended.

It turns out there's two ways to amend the US Constitution. One is the way the people or Congress has done 27 times through what I call the front door, the Congress, basically, and then there's the back door, which is through what Thomas Jefferson called the "engine of consolidation," the federal judiciary and the corporations have quietly and stealthily gone through the back door through the federal judiciary, time and again, and have usurped, actually, a great number of rights, inalienable rights, that were granted through the Constitution and Bill of Rights and certainly never intended for fake persons.

*Jennifer Stock:*

So, how did it get to that point? How did the US...how did we as citizens miss that, historically?

*Riki Ott:*

Because it wasn't out on the streets. It wasn't civil rights movement. It wasn't the suffragettes. It wasn't the trade union or the populist movement. It wasn't the in your face, on the street activism. It was through the supreme court.

Well, who pays attention, really, to what the supreme court is doing except lawyers? So, lawyers have basically changes the rules, the operating rules of our country without 'we the people' really being aware that that happened until citizen's united, I think.

*Jennifer Stock:*

Now, we have about five minutes left here and it seems that through the whole process of your trying to defend the needs of the

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community and deal with Exxon, there were times where you were definitely paid attention to by Exxon according to your book there, but you have now seen this whole bigger picture that we're really fighting against and what are you now doing to help people realize the situation in terms of the way the government is set up and corporations rights, what are some of the things and tools you have developed that can help people to become more aware and get more involved in helping to deal with this?

*Riki Ott:*

Well, what I realized is that as I have been around the country touring, and actually, through the 20 years of the oil spill, is that really, these big corporations are afraid of organized, educated, involved people. They really are afraid of us. So, they try to dumb us down through the television and kind of brainwashing, but the thing is, we the people, really shiver their timbers, so to speak. They're really afraid of us. So, on book tour, I kind of went around the country and said, "Ok. Look. What we need to do is amend the US constitution." We started our country with people are property with African Americans and women not having the right to vote and all that and that didn't go down very well and now, the pendulum has swung to where property is people and that is not going to go down very well either. Both of them are going to need constitutional amendments. Well, we already did the other one, but now we're at the point where we need to affirm that only human persons are entitled to constitutional rights. Alright, that's a big deal.

How do we amend the US constitution? Well, we certainly don't do it just with one or two of us running around the country. So, I formed a little organization to try to figure out how to coalesce all of the interesting people and groups that I met across the country as I was touring with Not One Drop. People were outrage over loss of their retirement security, of their IRA, loss of their jobs, loss of their homes. When I shared what happened in Cordova, we connected the dots. It's these bigger corporations. Where's the language for amending this constitution? Let's just do this, get it done. So, I want to coalesce all these little groups with the citizens united case, that case has saved us years, decades, really, of organizing. People get it. This came out blatantly that, basically, it's legalized corporate bribery of our elections and people get it.

80 percent plus of Americans say that corporations are not persons and this is crazy and we need to fix it. So, it's kind of like what's gone on for the past 120 years is now kind of out on the laundry line, right? And everybody can see it. So, I'm now part of a larger national movement, which involves...we are the most

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geographically, ethnically, and racially diverse coalition that has responded to Citizen's United. The Nation called us the clearest and boldest call to action and we're across the country. We're all the civil rights, a growing number every day. We're civil rights activists. We're social justice activists. We're democracy activists and others, people who aren't affiliated with any group. We have on our website, [movetoamend.org](http://movetoamend.org). tools for people, study group ideas and Thomas Payne called study groups sea beds for political activism, ways to amend ordinances and resolutions, ways to do candidate surveys so that the politicians that we're voting into office, we can ask them to take a stand saying, "No, I don't think corporations should be persons."

Direct action ideas, rallies, street theatre, you can do, and basically, the idea here is to build a community by community, county by county, and ultimately, state by state reaction, pushback, to overrule of the court, all the way back to 1886 and say, "No. Corporations are not persons." And there's a frequently asked question...I mean, this is about we have to educate ourselves as to what we lost and what we can gain back by taking this action and David Cobb and I currently are touring. I'm going to be touring, I was out 252 days last year. 5th grade on up, just helping people organize their community to overrule the court. This is kind of like the reaction to the Patriot Act, but on a much bigger scale, not just write your own local ordinance that says, "No, this community believes in civil rights, right?" The idea is to get this to the state level and then force it back to Congress. If enough states do this, half a dozen or so would probably be enough to force it to Congress to then take...do the amendment process of the constitution. There's also an initiative process, I think that we can use through the state.

So, we have a couple of different options here, but the idea is grassroots first. We're not...we the people need to do this from the bottom up.

*Jennifer Stock:*

Fantastic.

*Riki Ott:*

MoveToAmend.org

*Jennifer Stock:*

Great. Did you ever think you'd be doing this when you came to Cordova, Alaska the first time?

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*Riki Ott:* I never thought I'd be doing this ever. I mean, I was interested in science and here I am transformed into a democracy activist, but the bottom line, the commitment that I made on March 24th, 1989 after I flew over all this oil in our fishing ground, I was just totally traumatized and I popped into Valdez and I asked myself, this question just popped into my head. "I know enough to make a difference. Do I care enough?" And I think that's the question that we as American people need to challenge ourselves right now. We cannot get the healthcare we deserve. We cannot get a safe energy future for our children, not even our grandchildren, our immediate children. You know, Wall Street's going to go down again for sure. We need to build resilient communities, we need to ask ourselves, "We know enough. We know corporations aren't persons. Do we care enough to devote some time of our lives to fixing this problem?" And we've got about a quarter of a million people that are saying, "Yes," right now on our website. So, let's build the movement.

*Jennifer Stock:* Fantastic. Riki, thank you so much for that overview. I've looked at your two websites, ultimate[civics.org](http://civics.org) and [movetoamend.org](http://movetoamend.org) and to let folks know, the tools on there are user-friendly and extremely enlightening. Just thinking about the reaction I'm having, I feel like we're all just ground down to the ground in terms of working and getting to work and we have so many responsibilities and we really all need to take a slow down and realize what part of that is that in the bigger picture and where are we going in our lives as well as our future lives with our families?

*Riki Ott:* And why do we work so hard. I mean, leisure time is our right? What happened to it? So, you know, we all don't exist to be consumers or workers. That's not our higher purpose. So, we need to push back here.

*Jennifer Stock:* Fantastic. Well, if there's anything positive that came out of that tremendous spill, this is an amazing way to get people reunited about what's really pushing down on us and pushing back a little bit. I want to ask you one more question and as far...back to more oil and gas type of questions, but there were so many lessons learned from the disaster. Do you think we are in better shape in terms of response and safety with oil and gas tankers moving around the planet, coming in, fueling up and going in and out of ports. Do you think we're in better shape now than we were then?

*Riki Ott:* I do think we're in better shape because the oil pollution act of 1990 now requires double hulled tankers, as of 2012, and Exxon is the last one to actually...Exxon has more single hulled tankers

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afloat on the ocean than the other top nine oil companies combined. So, one can really wonder if Exxon learned anything from this spill, but the point is that there's a lot of other steps in the process of getting oil, coal, or gas to our homes or businesses. The transportation is just one part and the trouble is the development phase, the pipeline...we really cannot clean up oil once it does spill. These are empty promises, again, and especially now, we are not really weighing...we're not adding in all the costs of our oil dependency and our coal dependency, health problems, environmental problems. We're just not adding those in and we've reached peak oil. It's getting harder to get that cheap, easy to access stuff. The tracking that we're doing now in terms of coal-bed methane, these are...tar sands, these are extremely energy intensive. I mean, basically you're almost putting as much energy in as you're getting out, energy in terms of gas, but you're also polluting the water tables, wetlands, and using up water. It takes for barrels of water to produce one barrel of the ?? from the Alberta tar sands. This is not going to work.

We need to transition off of fuels. We need to break our dependency on fossil fuels and I'm committed to that and I would like to see it happen in my lifetime.

*Jennifer Stock:* Fantastic. Well, Riki. I want to thank you again for your...number one, your passion and what you bring to this planet. You're doing an amazing job supporting people becoming more aware of our role in government and your environmental work that you've done as well and thanks again for coming on Ocean Currents today.

*Riki Ott:* Thank you very much, Jennifer, for this opportunity.

*Jennifer Stock:* Ok. Take care.

*Riki Ott:* Ok, bye.

*Jennifer Stock:* We've been talking with Riki Ott. She is the author of Not One Drop: Betrayal and Courage in the Wake of the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill. Riki is a marine biologist that's turned into a democracy activist, as you've heard, and there's a lot to be learned here and a lot of research to do to learn a little bit more about where we stand and where the government is. So, I really encourage you to check her out online. She's got a few websites to peruse that you can learn a little bit more, I'll tell those to you again. You can go to [rikiott.com](http://rikiott.com) and that's R-I-K-I O-T-T dot com and also the websites she was referring to earlier about democracy education are ultimate [civics.org](http://civics.org) and the national



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movement, [movetoamend.org](http://movetoamend.org). Very interesting and I hope you can spend some time looking at those. Here just to wrap it up here, on the Marin-Sonoma coast, we have not been spared the tremendous impacts of oil. We've had spills and accidents going back in time. In terms of oil exploration and drilling, the 27 year old federal outer-continental shelf moratorium expired in 2008 and was not renewed by the Bush administration.

So, currently our only protections for that type of activity out in federal waters are the national marine sanctuaries here in central California and closer to shore, the state waters, the three miles out. Beyond that, it's wide open right now. So, it's a good time for us to get online and check out these websites to keep informed of how to keep this at bay. So, it's very important. In addition to that, the threat of impact from the ships that come in and out of San Francisco Bay is a daily reminder of...this could happen here and so, it's really important to stay aware. One thing that you can keep up on is the Coast Guard is re-evaluating their shipping lines right now and it's called a port access route study out of San Francisco and they're looking at vessel routing procedures and determining if modifications need to be made. So, that's one way for you to stay posted. There will be public comment periods in terms of shipping traffic in and out, but I will keep you posted on that and you can stay in touch.

We are just about out of time here, but one last announcement is that the Cordell Bank advisory council, sanctuary advisory council, has open seats that we are recruiting for...applications for. We have seats open for maritime activities, fishing, and community at large for Marin and Sonoma and you can visit [CordellBank.NOAA.Gov](http://CordellBank.NOAA.Gov) to find out more. The application deadline is April 15th. You can also visit [cordellbank.noaa.gov](http://cordellbank.noaa.gov) for past radio shows here on Ocean Currents. We have a podcast there and all the shows that I've done in the last few years are up there as well. So, I want to say thank you for tuning in today. I'll be back next month. If you have comments or questions, you can email me directly at [jennifer.stock@noaa.gov](mailto:jennifer.stock@noaa.gov).

(Music)

*Jennifer Stock:*

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