

This recording is an interview with Tara Bangs, a current interpretive guide on the *Samson V*, who has worked and lived in New Westminster for over a decade. The main themes of the interview are Bangs' work history, the *Samson V* as a museum, and changes to the New Westminster waterfront.

Interviewer: Pamela Stern

Date: 13 May 2014

Date Range: 1980s – present

Sound recording length: 00:48:03

Tara Bangs grew up in Surrey, and moved to New Westminster in her twenties. Since approximately 2002 she has had a connection to the *Samson V*, either through personal work or friends. The *Samson V* is a steam powered paddlewheeler boat that after its retirement in 1980 as a government snagpuller was transformed into a museum, now located at the New Westminster Quay. Bangs shares her experience being a guide at the museum, and the interpersonal experiences that occur on any given day. The visitors range from families from the area, old crewmembers, and once, a steamboat enthusiast from Sweden. As someone who has worked at the *Samson V*, the *MV Native*, and the *1865 Irving House Museum*, while seeing the changes to New Westminster, she contemplates the difference between the old and the new, and the importance of preserving history. Central to her story is also her friendship with Mark McKenzie, one of the main restorers of the *Samson V*. The *Samson V* is referred to as the *Samson*, and the *MV Native* as the *Native* for the duration of the summary.

Section 00:00 – 02:38

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about how she began working on the *Samson* 12 years ago, through a summer student work opportunity with the Hyack Society. She had no previous maritime experience, but observes her father used to work on a tugboat and reminisced of those days during Bangs' teenage years. The year she started was also the year that Mark McKenzie was working on the upper deck restoration work, and the boat was therefore only partially open.

Section 02:39 – 04:14

In this portion of the interview, Bangs describes McKenzie's approach to the restoration of the boat. Over the years, the boat had been taken care of by different programs, but with little continuity and McKenzie would tell her that their work was not up to "maritime standard" or how the original shipwrights would do it. Tara herself did not do any restoration work, but helped her partner Louisa Bertok¹ get doing restoration with McKenzie.

Section 04:15 – 05:59

In this portion of the interview, Bangs describes working seasonally and weekends for five years on the *Samson* before leaving for a period, and currently is in her second season after returning. She discusses the differences in the way that the museum is operated by the City of New Westminster compared to when the Royal Agricultural & Industrial Society of BC operated it.

¹ Bertok, who works for Paddlewheeler Tours, was also interviewed for the ReClaiming the New Westminster Waterfront research partnership.

Section 6:00 – 09:42

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about what she loves about the *Samson*. She states that McKenzie was the person who made her love the *Samson*, both in terms of his enthusiasm for the history of the boat and as a long-time friend. The interaction with, and stories from, the people she has met throughout the years continues to make her job pleasurable. She appreciates being outdoors, seeing an odd seal, and sharing the history of the city and the Fraser River with the visitors.

Section 09:43 – 11:39

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about her work outside the seasonal work on the *Samson*. She provides guided tours at the *1865 Irving House*, works at the sales office for Paddlewheeler Tours (referred to here as the *Native*), as well as various jobs within the hospitality industry. She likes the flexibility of the work, but prefers the sales office of the *Native* as she is preparing to go back to school to become a receptionist, possibly for a health care provider.

Section 11:40 – 14:56

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about her typical day on the *Samson*, which is highly dependent on the weather and therefore how many people they will be seeing. Bangs works with one other guide, and they aim to invite people for a tour from the boardwalk, as well as making sure everyone is safe and comfortable to ask questions. She provides occasional advice to tourist, and the conversation turns to local beer and wine.

Section 14:57 – 18:58

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about children's involvement with the museum. In previous years they had tickets for school classes that included the *Native*, the *Samson* and the Fraser River Discovery Centre, but they have not seen any school classes on the *Samson* this year. She states that she enjoys it when the kids interact with the history of the *Samson* and the river, and the boat itself. Bangs stresses the necessity of planting a seed of interest for the history of the maritime industry in the digital age. The children that visit the boat are interested in the stories about the people who worked on the boat, and some about the mechanical elements. Bangs tells the story of a student from Chilliwack who came back with his father the following weekend after his initial school visit.

Section 18:59 – 22:27

In this section of the interview, Bangs talks about adults' interaction with the museum, and how people are surprised that the boat operated for so long. Adult visitors include couples on romantic outings, as well as 'old-timers' who have stories about the boat to tell Bangs. She compares the visitors of *Samson* to those of the *1865 Irving House*, and states that the *Samson* is a place where people come to reminisce and often share a strong personal connection to the boat. She shares the story of Councillor Betty McIntosh's connection to the boat.

Section 22:28 – 29:13

In this portion of the interview, Bangs shares her experience being assigned to interview and former crewmembers of the *Samson* when she was a summer student. She talks about how she

felt unprepared and somewhat intimidated at the time to interview them, but that McKenzie was very helpful. From what she remembers, they all were happy to be recognized for their work on the boat and for being brought together.

Section 26:14 – 29:15

In this portion of the interview, Bangs shares the story of how she got her current job on the *Samson* after being away for a couple of years. She states that she is happy she ultimately was hired for the job, as she thinks that “there are few people as enthusiastic as me” about the *Samson*.

Section 29:16 -34:04

In this portion of the interview, Bangs describes her while working on the *Samson* and the accessibility of the boat for its visitors. She wears her *Samson* t-shirt and a windbreaker, and sometimes brings her sweatshirt that the Hyack Society gave her, as well as running shoes with grip. She describes how visitors with restricted mobility receive a tour on the front of the deck, and how that brought people in who walked by. She observes that people often mix up the *Samson* and the *Native* thinking that the *Samson* will be going on a cruise.

Section 34:05 – 39:19

In this portion of the interview an incident with a group of teenagers with a video camera initiates a conversation about how the New Westminster Quay has been transformed and cleaned up over the years. Bangs talks about how the atmosphere of the area was different with presence of drug users and bars on the quay. She states that she misses the funky New Westminster from the time she moved here, and that at the time there were more independent businesses in the area and a stronger community feeling. She shares how her dad took her to the *Windsor* pub at 19 or 20.

Section 39:20 – 42:40

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about how New Westminster is trying to hang on to its history. She discusses the restoration of the Salvation Army building, the old interurban station, as well as a debate around changing the official logo for the city of New Westminster. She closes this section by talking about how there are no washrooms on the *Samson* and how they solved this.

Section 42:41 – 43:51

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about her relationship to the Fraser River. She connects the conversation to the *Samson* program “Living Working River,” and how she observes the elements of the river, but tends to take them for granted.

Section 43: 52 – 48:03

In this portion of the interview, Bangs talks about her work on the *Native* with Paddlewheeler Tours. She has been working there casually for five years, and remains on the roster. She started out in the galley [kitchen], and liked to work the buffet lunches on her own. Her favourite cruise is with on the smaller *Beta Star* catamaran to Pitt Lake, due to the beauty of the trip. She closes the interview by talking about how the *Samson* almost sank in the mid-nineties and how this shows that the boat itself has a history as a museum which visitors are also interested in.