

Not My Fault: Thank you Katie Whiteside for watching over the North Coast

Lori Dengler/For the Times-Standard
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Resilience is the ability to get through a natural disaster with minimal impacts and bounce back quickly. Resilience means understanding the threat, taking actions to reduce impacts, responding quickly and efficiently when disaster does strike, and supporting recovery efforts that builds a community back more strongly.

Every member of the community - including you - is a critical part of the resilience story. No matter what your occupation - business, teacher, fisherman, homemaker, etc. - you play a big part in our survival and recovery. The actions you take now to prepare, the officials you elect, and what you do during and after can make the difference between an event being an inconvenient disruption or a catastrophe.

But it is really hard to reach all of you. You get your information from many different sources and you have concerns that take precedence over preparing for something that might not happen for years. I can't talk to you all individually, but the media can. Print, TV, radio and electronic media sources reach most of you and the challenge is to provide information that is interesting, relevant and consistent with the best science available.

A benefit of the small North Coast media market is the ease of developing personal relationships with broadcasters and print media personnel. Over the 40 years I've been rattling my awareness message, I've been fortunate to call most media folks partners and meet several whose assistance has been extraordinary.

Beginning around 1990, my go-to person was Estelle Fennell ((now 2nd District Humboldt County Supervisor, then the news director at KMUD radio). Like many in the media, Estelle sought me out for on-air interviews after the quakes of the early '90s. But Estelle's interest went beyond just getting out the post-event story. She'd call me after seeing a news story she had questions about, or just to get an update on what was happening during a quiet spell. We developed a personal rapport and I could always count on Estelle for getting the story straight and giving me as much time as I wanted to clarify an issue.

In 2000, John Driscoll became the environmental reporter for the Times-Standard. Like, Estelle, John's interest in earthquakes, tsunamis and other regional hazards went well beyond just getting a story out. Always curious, he would delve around the edges and ask great questions. He was influential in publishing an insert with the first set of tsunami maps for the county and could be counted on to get the facts right. While he left to join Congressman Huffman's staff, the connections he helped me forge continue to this day.

Enter the Katie Whiteside era. I began working closely with Katie in the middle and late 2000s in her role as program director for KHSU public radio. The first North Coast Tsunami Communications Test was in 2008 and we had to make sure everyone listening understood it was only a test. The next year the Great California ShakeOut went statewide and KHSU became a regional leader in playing the ShakeOut broadcast tape during the test. My favorite place to spend ShakeOut was crouching beneath the KHSU studio table with Katie while the broadcast was playing. She was always willing to slot me into a Home Page/Magazine slot - whether to talk about a recent earthquake, an ancient one or an upcoming event. Katie has the ability to make everything you say the most interesting thing in the world. Her enthusiasm made it easy for even the first-time guest to feel comfortable on the air.

Whenever I got wind of misinformation going out on the station, I could always text Katie and know that it would be dealt with quickly. Last year she approached me about doing a podcast series. This became the Shaky Ground broadcasts that addressed everything from how the tsunami warning system works to volcanoes and recent quake activity. After a recent felt earthquake, we talked about the need to develop guidelines for on-air hosts on what to do during and immediately after an earthquake and Katie made sure my draft protocol was distributed.

Much to my dismay, Katie was dismissed from the station about a month ago. I won't go into the details - you can find an overview on the public radio blog <https://acrnewsfeed.blogspot.com/2018/06/khsu-postpones-pledge-drive-because-of.html> and in local online media. It is both a personal and a professional loss for me as Katie made it so easy to get my messages out on the air and help me with the task of reaching through to you. So this is a big THANK YOU KATIE for all that you did to make the North Coast a safer place. And thank you to all our North Coast media people who work hard with limited resources to keep prodding us to prepare.

Note: Shaky Ground podcasts are at
<http://khsu.org/programs/shaky-ground#stream/0>,
archived recordings (along with previous Not My Fault
columns) are at
<https://www2.humboldt.edu/kamome/resources>

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