

Roy Pascoe: "If I wasn't fighting for my life, I'd be fighting for the river"

BY ERIN GOODLING
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Roy Pascoe was born on July 31, 1962, and grew up mainly in Bremerton, Wash. He fished, swam, sailed, and worked on the docks in Puget Sound. He also worked in food service on naval ships and submarines. In 1995, he moved to the St. Johns neighborhood, in Portland. Over the years, Roy worked various jobs along the Columbia and Willamette Rivers, including his favorite job: operating a forklift at Georgia Pacific, just north of downtown. In 2010, he got laid off. When he could no longer afford his rent, he moved outside, down near the Hawthorne Bridge.

In 2014, Roy moved to Right 2 Dream Too. A few weeks later, he learned about the Portland Harbor Community Coalition (PHCC) at a Right 2 Survive (R2S) meeting. Roy was a committed member of R2S and PHCC until he passed away on May 15, after a year and a half-long fight with cancer. Roy is survived by his partner, Loretta Pascoe; his mother; and many beloved friends and relatives.

Roy spoke at length about his life and activism in a film that PHCC produced in spring 2015, as well as in an interview with me, a fellow PHCC member, in summer 2015. Excerpts from both are below.

Excerpt from "A People's View of the Portland Harbor" (www.ourfutureriver.org):

Roy: We lived on the river for quite a while. It had its many challenges: the river goes up and down with the weather. We had the rain to battle with, the snow; the police, the parks; our stuff being stolen. And then we found out a year or so ago that the river is completely contaminated. There's a lot of pesticides, lead, mercury. I've fished out of these rivers, I've eaten out of these rivers. I just recently beat cancer; I don't know that it (getting cancer) wasn't because of that. ... There are a lot of cancer-causing agents that are in these rivers. Once we found out that the river was contaminated, we found it more complicated. We had to move further away. And it made it harder because I knew I couldn't fish and we couldn't really eat out of the river.

What I'd like to see is for eventually the river to get cleaned up. And for people who, in the past and in the present (polluted the river), to be held responsible for the contaminants. There are many companies, manufacturers and corporations that I still don't think are doing their part. (We need to hold them responsible) so that one day we'll have a clean, safe place to call home along the Willamette River.

Excerpt from an interview with Roy, July 2, 2015:

Roy: Talking to other people, listening, going to the events has made a big difference in being able to learn and

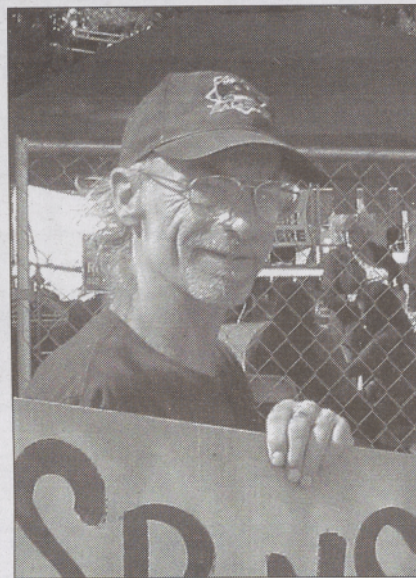


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By spring 2016, Roy's illness forced him to slow down. A month before he passed away, Roy said, "If I wasn't fighting for my life, I'd be fighting for the river."

understand just what the cleanup is about and who is involved. That surprised me how many different organizations are involved. We are all working together for the same thing. It reminded me a lot of home. I know just how polluted it is back in the Puget

Sound area. We used to do fishing, boating, swimming - everything everybody does right here. ...

[I was] homeless [after getting laid off], and I am [now] part of Right to Survive and Right 2 Dream Too. I lived out on the streets. There have been times in my life when people helped me, and I'm just giving back what I used to get. So many people that live along the river, they need help also. A lot of those people don't even know what they are living in. There is just not enough communication and openness to educate everybody about what is going on. I've gone down to the river with other PHCC and R2S members to actually talk to people, do interviews with them, hand out pamphlets and stuff to help them understand the dangers of the river, the fish and the banks they are living on.

People are living in contaminated soil, [and there's] contamination in the fish they are eating. I've been up and down the river for miles. I know there are people living on boats, living in houses, everything they grow - it soaks up the river, children play there. Not only are houseless people (impacted), there's also housed people. There are people that swim, there are people of all different cultures that fish that don't know what they are eating. I like helping people.

LOVE

PEOPLE.
PLANET.