

## Key Information:

Name: Chris Brooks

Age: 43

Current Cabin: #76

Date of Interview: February 12, 2017

Interviewer: Griffin Marieb [Puget Sound]

## Ethnographic Preface:

Chris and I sat down in his living room in Cabin #76 on Sunday morning on the 12<sup>th</sup> of February. The room is big and open, consisting of a living room and kitchen and big open windows that let a lot of natural light in. His dog and cat are clamoring for attention. In this interview, Chris discusses the work he has done on his own cabin as well as many others in the community. He discusses cabins #92, #1 and many others that neighbor his cabin. Our discussion spanned topics and stories from the 1990s until the present. The topics that came about during the conversation were Chris's beginnings in Salmon Beach, cabins he has rented in the past, his current cabin and its history, his work on other cabins as well as Salmon Beach and its interaction with the city of Tacoma and other groups in the area. Chris has a lot of great knowledge and stories.

## Transcription:

GM: I guess the first thing I wanted to ask you about was how did you end up here?

Chris: In this house?

GM: Not even at this house, just at Salmon Beach.

Chris: I was a UPS student back in, I think it was probably 1994 or 1995, when I first came down here to a party. Another UPS student was renting a house down here. I think it was a Super Bowl party and I decided "Oh, that place was cool, I should probably live there." It was more than twenty years ago and I'm still here.

GM: So did students used to live down here?

Chris: Oh yeah. There used to be a lot of rentals down here. In fact, when I moved down here, there was probably ten or fifteen UPS students living down here.

GM: Very cool.

Chris: Yeah, it was fun. It was a big party.

GM: It sounds like you were out of the way, doing your own thing down here.

Chris: Tough to get to class.

GM: I can imagine.

Chris: It's changed a lot though. There aren't a lot of rentals down here anymore.

GM: It's mostly permanent residents?

Chris: Yeah, owner-occupied.

GM: So then, were you in this house the whole time or did you make your way into this one?

Chris: No, I've lived in seven or eight houses down here. I first moved into Cabin 38 on the North end, I don't know if you have ever been down there. And then into 39. Then I lived for a few years in 87 down here, and 64  $\frac{1}{2}$  and then 54 and a couple other places temporarily. This house was foreclosed so I had an opportunity to buy it.

GM: Were you just renting in those other places?

Chris: Yeah, those were all rentals.

GM: So, this is the first one you've ever owned. Did you just buy this because it was the cheapest option?

Chris: I had been looking to buy a place down here and I had always been intrigued by this house. Actually, this house was empty for years. For probably ten years while I lived here, this house had been vacant. The owner, I don't know the whole story, but he somehow ended up in jail in Morocco and cocaine was involved, so he never came back. Well, he did come back, and he died shortly thereafter and the house was left vacant. So it was always called the Pigeon Palace because it was never really finished. There weren't windows upstairs and it was just full of pigeons. It was a big empty house.

GM: Andrew was telling me you did a lot of work on this place. Did you basically like overhaul it?

Chris: Pretty much. When we bought the house, there weren't stairs, there weren't really windows. There were windows but they weren't really good windows. It was a mess. It was in a big state of disrepair. I did quite a bit of work on it. I actually bought it with a friend of mine, Scott, who came up the stairs. He and his wife own a different house down here, 56. When this place was foreclosed on, it had to happen really fast, so he was just like, "Yeah, I'll go in on it with you," so we split it. There's an apartment downstairs, so they have now rented out their house and they come down and stay in the apartment sometimes.

GM: And you added the apartment as well?

Chris: Yeah, it was there but it wasn't really an apartment, but now it's got a kitchen and it's own deck and everything. It's kind of cool.

GM: So how did you learn how to do all of this stuff?

Chris: When I was at UPS, actually, I started working down here for a guy named Ed Fahnoe, who is an old timer down here. He was an old shipwright. He's been down here for forty-five, fifty years and he's a really good carpenter, and he basically built most of the houses down here. I started working for him, and I actually worked with him for maybe fifteen years down here doing carpentry and stuff. I learned quite a bit doing that.

GM: What was your approach to redesigning [the house]? Because you basically did it all.

Chris: The structure, all the posts and beams, from what I understand, was built in the 1980s. When Mount St. Helens erupted, people got permits to go salvage logs out there off the volcano. Harry, the guy who built the house, got a permit and he got all these logs and milled them and built it. Everything in this house is big wood, big lumber, so I've kind of been sticking to that theme. We have a saw mill so we find big logs and mill them. All the wood you see we milled with chainsaws. Nothing has really come from the store.

GM: And you were building this with the people you bought it with?

Chris: Yeah, with Scott downstairs and a lot of help from some other friends down here.

GM: Is that kind of a thing? People in Salmon Beach will just come and help you with construction and stuff like that?

Chris: It's very much a community down here and when there's big projects, people are always willing to help. It's kind of a barn-raising sort of thing. Same happens when there's disasters down here. We have disasters, landslides, stuff like that and whenever something like that happens, everyone comes out and it's pretty cool.

GM: Is there any way to prevent those, or do you basically just have to take them as they come because of where the houses are?

Chris: People will try. People will build walls and big bulkheads and try different erosion control plans like planting trees. You just can't stop it.

GM: It's just inevitable.

Chris: It's just a risk of living down here.

GM: How is this house different from the other ones you've lived in?

Chris: All the houses down here are in varying states of disrepair. Most of the ones I've lived in, because they were rentals, were in pretty bad states of disrepair. I mean, there were houses with holes in the

floor, holes in the roof, and sketchy rotten deck boards that people would fall through. This house, now that I'm pretty much done working on it, now that it is totally livable, is in much better shape than the other houses I've lived in. It's also the tallest house on Salmon Beach. It's actually six or eight feet taller than the city ordinance, and when it was built they told him he had to tear six feet off the roof. Somehow that went away with the city. It's definitely the biggest house I've ever lived in. It's way bigger than anything I've wanted to live in. I guess it just makes you get more shit to fill it up.

GM: It's all cool stuff. It all looks good.

Chris: I got a lot of weird stuff, I guess.

GM: Are there rules, not just citywide, but with the community, or is everyone cool with it?

Chris: As far as building?

GM: Yeah.

Chris: Obviously, the bulk of the rules are from the city and from the state as well as the Department of Ecology and the shoreline master plan that limits development on the shoreline. Within the community, every house has a footprint, the amount of area it covers over the beach. Places where there aren't houses are community-owned land. In fact, the community owns all the land. I don't own the land under my house – the community does, so I guess I do, but not directly. All the places where there aren't homes is community-owned and people are pretty protective of that land. If I start to build a deck over the community land, somebody will say something like, "You can't do that." So there are limitations. Other than that, everybody just kind of does what they want down here and we've had a long history of not being able to build because of limitations, so most of the structures down here were built without permits from the city.

GM: I feel like there is this kind of rebellious attitude of Salmon Beach.

Chris: There kind of is. I don't know if you have walked all the way down here.

GM: I've walked down to the mermaid but that's as far down as I've gone.

Chris: If you keep going down to the end, there's a lot down there that was a deck only, and this guy back in the 90s from South Africa bought this deck thinking that he could build a house there. He tried for fifteen years to get a permit to build there, the city would never let him build it. He was trying to do it legitimately because he was afraid if he just built it and got caught, he would get deported. There was never a house there and the lot had been bought and sold a number of times and everybody figured out they can't build a house there. Just recently, this guy bought it and he realized the city wouldn't let him build a structure so he bought this 40-foot boat and yarded it up on the deck and lives in the boat.

GM: That's amazing.

Chris: There is that kind of stuff going on. A "screw you" to the city.

GM: That's a cool kind of vibe to have.

Chris: Yeah, it is. We very much have our own thing down here. It's always been like that. This started back during Prohibition, this was all moonshiners down here. They had this system with flags and the kids would know when the feds were coming and they would raise certain color flags. It's been like that, it still kind of is like that.

It has been gentrified. Since I've been here, I've really noticed that there has been a change in the type of people here and the types of buildings. People are spending a lot of money. Until twenty years ago, we didn't even own the land. It was just leased. Before that, it was just squatters so nobody really wanted to build a nice house here because they didn't know what would happen because they didn't own the land. Once the land was actually purchased by the community, the houses really started improving. There was some sense of permanence here.

GM: What's your favorite thing you've built for this place or designed for this place?

Chris: I don't know. I don't know, man. Probably my urinal. Seriously, I think every house - you want the tour? Maybe we should do it after-

GM: We can do it after, I am definitely down to.

Chris: The decks out front are kind of cool. I've got a sliding boat ramp that I can lift my boat up and slide the deck out underneath it. I thought that was cool because it saved a lot of deck space. The stairs - like I said there were no stairs in here - one of the first big projects was to build the staircase. It involved bringing in that huge timber that's in the middle of the stairs. It goes all the way down to the floor and all the way up. It was a major feat to do that. We had to lift it up the front of the building and bring it in the door and then lower it down. That was fun.

GM: Is everything coming off the water that you're bringing in? Because I can't imagine using the stairs.

Chris: Nothing comes down the hill except for groceries, really. So what we do for wood, for firewood and also for a lot of the building wood, is find it on beaches.

GM: Just like driftwood?

Chris: Some of them come down the rivers - big trees - but a lot of it falls off of the logging ships and washes up on the beach. You just go out there and grab it. Sometimes logs just float by and you go out in the boat and tow it to the shore and then pull it up and at low tide, mill it on the beach. If you are buying wood, the lumber company, Gray Lumber on Sixth Avenue, they will bring it over to Point Defiance and dump it in the water and then you can tow it around. Everything comes in by water. We have a little barge that we can put sheet rock and stuff on.

GM: What do you do for a living?

Chris: I kind of do a lot of stuff. Mostly, right now, I teach. After UPS, I went to the Peace Corps. I was in South America for three years and then I came back and I got a Masters degree in renewable energy.

I design and install solar systems and I teach internationally. I go around the world to teach people about solar system design. I'm also a carpenter and I'm a licensed electrician so I do electrical work, too, kind of on the side. Right now, I'm teaching - I teach online and in person - so this week and the next couple of weeks I'm just here teaching online.

GM: So you use this space for work, then?

Chris: Yeah, I just don't leave.

GM: So do you have a workshop?

Chris: I've got an office upstairs where I can just sit and do it. Downstairs, there's a wood shop.

GM: So that's where you're building all the - because I know you did Andrew's new countertop?

Chris: His island? Yeah. You've been over there?

GM: Yeah, we went over there a week or two ago.

Chris: He said he was going to have some students to make dinner. I've worked on probably every house down here in one way or another.

GM: Just fun projects or you just helped out?

Chris: From building the entire house to doing stuff like I did at Andrew's, you know, little finished work projects. I'm really familiar with all the houses down here. There's maybe one or two I haven't worked on.

GM: Do you have a favorite house you've been in that's not the one you designed?

Chris: I really like Andrew's house. That place is cool.

GM: Yeah, it's a cool spot.

Chris: I think my favorite house down here is cabin #1, Joan Rutherford's house. It's the last, well, the first one and it borders the park. So she can walk out and it's just beach, it's a protected beach, and she can walk all the way around the point. It's really pretty and the house itself is really cool. You should walk down there and check it out.

GM: Yeah, I should. Do you just help out or are you getting paid to do these things?

Chris: Like I said, I was working for this guy down here for years and worked myself so for probably 15 years, my entire income was just working down here, working on these houses.

GM: So it's not THAT good of a community, it's not like communist thing [laughs].

Chris: [Laughs] We have a lot of community work parties and these are all my friends so I'm always willing to help people out. In fact, the people next door, well right next door is Emily Peine, she's a Puget Sound professor as well.

GM: I heard she lived down here.

Chris: Yeah, she lives next door and then the next house, it was my UPS roommate freshman year Scooter. I've known him for 25 years. A few more houses down is another - it's funny, a lot of these people who were UPS students have now bought houses down here. We've been here for a long time. We all help each other out. They are actually getting ready to remodel Emily Peine's house next door. She's just trying to get a permit which doesn't look good but ...

GM: I'm sure you guys will find a way around it.

Chris: This summer, for example, I had to put a new roof on my house and there's no way - I'm scared of heights - there's no way I was going to do it myself, so a lot of people came over and helped. It was cool, we got it done. That was just people being nice.

GM: Did you utilize the help a lot when you were doing everything in here or was it mostly you?

Chris: There's a lot of stuff like moving around big stuff like that and putting in piling, structural work under the house, that takes a lot of people to do. You have to put all those pilings in by hand. Dig holes and rig up ropes to lift everything up. That's definitely a group project every time.

GM: Would you say that's the biggest difference between working on a house on Salmon Beach versus anywhere else? Would it just be the accessibility to things?

Chris: Yeah, I think that the accessibility, the logistics of working here is definitely different than anywhere else. Just because getting materials here is so difficult. The other difference, of course, is just the issues. We're working on a tideland. If you have to work under the house, you've only got a limited window during the day when the tide's out to do that. A lot of times, if you have to dig a deep hole, you dig for a few hours, cover it up, the tide comes in, the tide comes out and you dig it out again. When I put this pole in - I don't know if you can see it but there's a big pole over there - it goes all the way down to the beach. It's what I use to lift my boat, it took like four days to dig that hole because of the tides. I probably had ten people help me put that thing in. That was a big project.

GM: How long from when you bought it to when it was like this? How long did that take?

Chris: I've only lived in this house for five or six years. So I've been working on it. I'm always dinking around, building. I just built this bookcase in the last few months, I guess. It's probably been six months now. I'm always doing little stuff. I'll probably going to remodel the kitchen - kitchen cabinets for here and the tile and stuff, a lot of that I want to tear out and redo. The wood stove, I just recently this last fall put that in. There's always little projects going on.

GM: So was it just these beams that were here before basically that you left?

Chris: The posts and beams were here. Between these four posts, there was nothing, it was just a hole in the floor all the way up and down. There was quite a bit here. The doors and stuff weren't here, there was just kind of a weird opening there. There were no decks on the house so I built this deck and then two decks upstairs and then the downstairs decks. But there was tile in the kitchen and that was there, which was kind of weird. The bar was kind of there, but there wasn't a top on it – it was just a half-built cabinet thing. No bathroom or anything like that. This wall wasn't here. There was a hole over here, too, and there were no stairs.

GM: Was there a lot of weather damage to the original stuff too?

Chris: There was pigeon shit everywhere. Not really weather damage, because there was a roof. There was a wood shake roof, but since there weren't windows, you can still find it. If you look on top of these beams and stuff, there's still pigeon shit up there.

GM: Were they coming in when you were building it before you put in the windows?

Chris: No, but there were times when raccoons would come in. God, they still come in. They come in the cat door. In fact, this year I've just been at war with the raccoons. There's a UPS student whose doing a study down here.

GM: I saw the sign on the way down.

Chris: Yeah, so I've got these raccoon traps and she set up this camera out back, so I've been trapping them. I haven't set the traps lately but I've caught a few for her. She comes down and takes hair samples.

GM: That's cool.

Chris: I've had them coming through my cabinets and up on the countertops.

GM: No good.

Chris: No. Otters, otters have come and just shit all over the deck. They're river otters, actually. I had a neighbor who had a seal give birth in his boat. That stank. You sure you don't want any coffee?

GM: I'll take a little.

Chris: So there is always interesting sea life going on around here.

GM: So when are you going internationally again?

Chris: Next week. Well, I'm going just on vacation, though, so since I've been – do you want milk or anything?

GM: Nah.

Chris: Good, we don't have any [laughs].

GM: Glad I answered the way I did [laughs].

Chris: Good answer. Yeah, I'm going to Mexico. Since I'm teaching online, I can pretty much work from wherever, which is awesome. Since you're into teaching, I highly recommend doing a little bit of online teaching because it gives you a lot of flexibility. That's kind of the way education is going, I think, right now. The classes I teach are pretty much all international students. This class I'm in now, it's mostly from the Middle East and North Africa, which is really cool.

GM: And you are teaching them renewable energy stuff?

Chris: I'm teaching them design and installation of small solar systems. The idea is that they're trying to work in their countries to develop rural energy and rural electrification projects.

GM: So do you have solar energy?

Chris: I do, yup.

GM: Cool. And you learned all that in your Masters or your undergrad as well?

Chris: No, so I studied biology at UPS and English. I learned a lot about it in my Masters and also, I work for a company here in Tacoma that does solar installation, so I work probably maybe ten hours a week doing that in Tacoma. A lot of solar in Tacoma, if you've seen it, we have probably installed it. There are a number of companies who are doing it now, so I do that as well locally.

GM: But you probably spend most of your time down here still? Is that your goal?

Chris: Yeah, this place just sucks you up and it's hard. When I first came down here as a student, I didn't think I'd be here in 25 years. I am and I'm totally glad, but for me, I've tried living in other places or going to places to see if I would want to be there and I'm always thinking, "Nah, I want to go back to Salmon Beach." It's mostly, I think, the community. It's funky and it's different but it's really the people down here who make this place awesome.

GM: Had you ever experienced anything like this before? Is this kind of your first -

Chris: Well Salmon Beach is really unique and so I haven't - well, there was a place in Alaska I stayed that was very much like Salmon Beach, called Tenakee Springs, a community on stilts. It was also geographically isolated but it was different. It was more of an older crowd. People would go there to retire and it was much more of a wilderness-kind of location. I couldn't go up the hill and go to Safeway. It was more ... people there were subsistence fisherman, so it was a totally different scene, but similar, I guess, in the way the community was laid out. I haven't found anywhere else. There's places that exist but this community is so strong. There are people down here who hate each other but still get along [laughs].

GM: Are there any things you don't like about Salmon Beach? It seems like you are pretty positive about Salmon Beach.

Chris: What don't I like about Salmon Beach? I don't like the direction I see it going. I don't like seeing all these huge houses being built. I shouldn't talk, I have the biggest house down here, but that was by default. There's people who are buying two or three small cabins who are tearing them down and building big houses and then only coming down on weekends. That kind of sucks, because I like to see people who are permanent residents and engaged in the community living down here. One of the greatest things down here is that there are people of all ages. You go to a party and there's two-year-old kids and there's 80-year-old women. And it's fun still, which is weird. Every year, we have this dance. We get like an old time band or a bluegrass band or something and we have this big dance and it's just so much fun because it's a whole mix of crazy people who you wouldn't normally be partying with. So that's always fun. There's a lot of events like that. The 4<sup>th</sup> of July is a big one down here, where the whole community kind of parties together.

GM: Yeah, Andrew was telling us how that's kind of the big one.

Chris: New Years also. Yeah, there's a progressive party that moves down the beach. It's kind of like the Rail, did you ever go to the Rail?

GM: No I don't.

Chris: Really? Maybe they don't do it anymore at UPS. The Rail was this crazy Halloween party where - I think they are trying to get away from it because it kind of got out of hand - but it was usually like -

GM: It was like house hopping?

Chris: Yeah, it was like five or six houses and they would sell tickets and every house would have a different theme. The parties were just crazy and of course, this was 25 years ago so I'm sure things have changed. Sounds like it doesn't even exist any more.

GM: There's something like it that happens at the end of every semester where there's like some party or art thing happening at like six houses. You go around and there's like a different type of drink at every house or something.

Chris: Yeah, that was the way it was back then. Or drug, for that matter. I think maybe UPS tried to put a kibosh to it.

GM: Do you make your way over there at all?

Chris: To UPS?

GM: Yeah.

Chris: Sometimes I go there if I'm working around that neighborhood, I'll go there for lunch or something. I have a lot of friends who work and teach at UPS so I've gone over occasionally and speak to a class or something. Or I will meet someone over there for lunch. I haven't been too engaged as an alumnus.

GM: No judgment, I'm just wondering.

Chris: [Laughs]

GM: You said you don't like how original cabins are being torn down. So are most of these built up off of those original cabins that were here?

Chris: Almost every cabin down here. Well, that's not true anymore, but I'd probably say 75 percent of them still contain original pieces, whether it's walls or foundation pieces, from when they were tent platforms in the early 1900s. Originally, these were tent platforms and people would come down here. They were fishing camps. Eventually, people built little cabins on the tent platforms and a lot of the houses, a lot of the older ones, you can go underneath and see that it was a tent platform. It's been added on to and everything, but a lot of those original parts are still there.

There were also - there's a train tunnel down here, the train comes along the Narrows and out at Ruston Way - when they built that tunnel, they had all the form boards, the wood from the concrete, and so a lot of the houses down here were built from scraps from the tunnel, and from the bridges as well. When the bridge was built, a lot of the form boards and scaffolding ended up turning into houses down here. Even with the new bridge - it's not that new anymore - but the second bridge they completed in 2007, we got a ton of wood. There would be storms and all the wood would blow away and just float right up here. A lot of the material, big planks and stuff that's been incorporated into houses, has been salvaged from the bridge for different construction projects.

GM: Was it important for you to maintain some of the original elements? Was that intentional or is it just practical?

Chris: I think it's just more practical. For example, most of the houses down here have cedar shake siding. It looks cool and it's kind of historic and stuff but it's also really practical. One, because there is a lot of cedar here and you can make the shakes yourself but also because this is a pretty harsh marine environment, and if you paint your house down here, it's not going to last. You are going to have to paint every five or ten years. Cedar shakes are a really awesome siding. They are easy to get, they're practical, they're easy to make, you don't have to paint them. Something like that - it's pretty easy to stick with what was here, what is here.

GM: Would you say there was good original things to build upon?

Chris: Yeah, this house, I mean the structure is super beefy. The beams and then the floor, which is the ceiling and also the floor, these boards are almost 3 ½ inches thick and they are double tongue and groove. They've been milled to have - I don't know if you know what tongue and groove is, but it's a type of wood where they mill a slot in one and a tongue in the other one and they fit together, so that's what these are but they've got two slots and two tongues. This kind of wood was milled for railroad cars, for the bases of railroad cars, so it's super heavy duty. This place is pretty bomber. It's amazing, it moves a lot in the wind. In fact, even when people go up and down the stairs, they can feel the house moving. When there's big waves it moves a lot. I think a lot of that is because being on a piling foundation - on stilts. Sometimes it's scary how much it moves.

GM: I was going to say, because you said you were afraid of heights, so if you are in your office and it's moving -

Chris: Yeah, I've had parties here and I've been upstairs and the whole ... plants are like ...it's crazy.

GM: That would freak me out.

Chris: It's kind of weird.

GM: Is there anything else that you haven't talked about the house that you want to talk about?

Chris: I don't know. I wish Roger Edwards was here. He's the historian down here and he could tell you anything about any of the houses down here, historically. I don't know, it's just a fun project.

GM: Do you view it as an ongoing thing? Like it's never done?

Chris: Yeah there's always things. There's always stuff to do. There's no house down here that doesn't need work done on it. It's true. A lot of people can do a lot of the work themselves but some people can't, so if you live down here you have to be willing to do shit. Otherwise, your house is going to fall in.

GM: I bet that's kind of fun for you because it's what you do.

Chris: Yeah, it is. It's fun. I like it.

GM: So you see yourself being here a while?

Chris: Probably. I mean, I can't think of anywhere else I would go. Unless the political climate gets any worse and I might split the country altogether. For now, this is a pretty good spot.

GM: I feel like this would even be a sanctuary from all that stuff that's going on out there.

Chris: From Armageddon?

GM: From all the terrible things.

Chris: Yeah it kind of seems like it but we are still right in the city. We are just 300 steps away from being in the middle of it. It is nice to be able to kind of leave everything up there behind and it's kind of quiet and there's no cars or traffic. I get to fishing or whatever.

GM: Would you say there's a lot of interaction between Salmon Beach and the rest of Tacoma? That's something I haven't been able to grasp.

Chris: There's a lot of people who have lived in Tacoma all their lives and don't even know Salmon Beach exists.

GM: Really?

Chris: Yeah, I'm baffled sometimes. They will be like, "Oh yeah, I think I went to a party down there once in the seventies." They would say something like that. Or maybe they have crossed the bridge and kind of seen us over here a little bit. There has been more and more conversation between our community and the city because we have a bill in the state senate to try to change the Shoreline Management Act, which will enable us to legally work on our houses down here. Right now, we legally can't get permits to do anything. We are trying to change that in Olympia. We are trying to do it legitimately. We've been working with our congressperson and we've been going to Olympia to the legislator and going to the city council and stuff. There's been a lot more talk with the city lately than there has been in the past.

GM: When you say "we" are you a part of a group or is it the community as a whole?

Chris: The community as a whole. We have – I'm no longer on the board – but we have a nonprofit homeowner's association that kind of governs the community, makes decisions and then deals with whatever things needs to be dealt with. That group right now is doing it and I've been involved with it as well even though I'm not on the board any more.

GM: How long were you on the board for?

Chris: It's like two year stints.

GM: Do you rotate or apply or something?

Chris: You either get strong-armed into it or you get elected. It's an election but nobody wants to do it because if anyone has a problem down here, it goes to the board. If you're a board member, you are dealing with everybody's problems and a lot of people don't want to deal with that.

GM: How often are there problems?

Chris: There's always something. Little stuff.

GM: I feel like it can't be anything huge.

Chris: Well, there are big things too. Usually it's little stuff like there is a big hole in the trail behind your house and it's dangerous and someone is going to fall in it and we are going to get sued. Some people say, "I don't want to fix it." There's little stuff like that and then there's much bigger stuff. One thing the board is dealing with right now is there was a guy down here who put a second floor on his house, illegally, and the city came down and caught him and they gave him a "red tag," a stop-building order. They pretty much told him he needs to tear the roof and the second floor off his house, which is normal. It's what they tell you to do. The community has been receiving bills for this guy's fines and somehow they are coming in the community's name and not his name. I don't know exactly what's going on but there's been a lot of people who are really upset about that for some reason or another. That's just the kind of issues the board deals with.

GM: When you are building stuff do you have to pass everything you intend to do with them or are you just kind of building?

Chris: [Chris discusses building permits and Salmon Beach] If you want to really follow the rules, you have to get a permit and they have to come down and inspect everything. It has to adhere to the building code, which means you are required to do a lot of certain things that you probably wouldn't do otherwise.

GM: How often is the city checking in? Is it more than usual?

Chris: No, they don't really check in. In fact, the city, I think, likes us because this is a historic community. It's a historic district. If there is an issue down here, if there is a complaint or maybe somebody in one of those houses across the way sees construction going on here, maybe they will call the city and say, "Hey, it looks like they are building a new house down there" and then the city will come down and check it out and investigate. That happens. Otherwise, they don't really come down here unless they have a reason to, which is good. There are other agencies, too. It's not just the city. It's the State Department of Ecology. There's a group called the Citizens for a Healthy Bay, which are kind of like a citizen watchdog group for Puget Sound, and it's great and I support what they're doing. They support the conservation of Puget Sound. They'll come by here and they will see creosote pilings, which is the oil that all the wood is treated with and they don't like it because, rightfully so, it's a bad nasty oil, but then they will file a report and now there's an investigation. There's a lot of people who like to stir the turd.

GM: Did you keep a lot of those ecological considerations in mind when you were doing stuff?

Chris: It's hard. One of the big things down here, ecologically speaking, is this area that is considered critical habitat for king salmon. There are rules for how much of the beach can be shaded by an overwater structure. My house pretty much takes up my whole footprint so I can't do anything but a lot of people have either been required or by choice make their decks grading so the sun can shine through. Apparently, that helps the salmon. I don't totally buy it. There's things like that but otherwise, ecologically speaking, I don't know if there is really much I could do.

GM: Are there any future projects you are working on with other people's houses or your house upcoming, or is everything kind of relaxed for you right now because you are going on vacation?

Chris: There's little things. There's a guy down here who's building a little mother-in-law sort of thing. Right next to Andrew's house, I don't know if you saw it or not, he's building a tiny home right next to his house so I've been helping him with that a little bit. The neighbor here has been getting ready to do a big remodel so I've been working - she actually has an architect and everything - so I've been talking to the architect and figuring that out.

GM: Did you work with an architect on this place or is this all you and other people?

Chris: No architect.

GM: So do you do that a little or is something you wanted to do for your house?

Chris: I don't know. The only time you need an architect is if you're going to have plans that need to be submitted to somebody, like to the city to get a permit. Usually when we build stuff down here, it's like a

drawing on a napkin or a figure it out as you go kind of thing. If it's a legitimate new construction with a permit and everything, which hardly ever happens, there has to be an architect because you have to have plans.

GM: Do they like working down here? Is it like a fun little thing for them?

Chris: I think so. There's an architect who lives down here who has designed a number of houses down here. Back in the 90s, we had a big slide that destroyed four or five houses all at once and he redesigned all of them and we built them. I don't think he is particularly, I don't necessarily like his style of architecture but - [laughs]

GM: Not your house.

Chris: Yeah, it's whatever. A friend of mine from UPS is actually redesigning the house next door so that will be cool. Architects have good ideas. The problem with them is that it's different down here and most architects don't have building experience, they are designers. There's a big difference between having a vision and making it happen so it really helps to totally get them involved in the building of it, or if they live down here and kind of know the deal. The architect who lives down here, whenever there's architecture he usually does it because he is really familiar with what it takes to make it happen.

[end]