

## Key Information:

Name: Galen Turner and Richard Turner

Age:

Current Cabin: 64, 69 and the chicken coop

Date of Interview: February 13, 2017

Interviewer: Kanchan Armstrong

## Ethnographic Preface:

I went to Galen's art studio on 6<sup>th</sup> ave on a Monday in the afternoon. His father Richard also happened to be around which was wonderful as the two of them were able to build off of each other and tell the story of their experiences on Salmon Beach together. Richard has lived at many cabins, including 64, which this interview focused on. The pair of them were very open, which made me feel very comfortable with speaking to them. I didn't have to say much; they both had many stories to tell about their time on the beach and their work on the houses (which was often together anyways). I heard information about the cabins spanning back to 1910 until now, even though Richard only moved to the beach in the 1950s. While my questions were often directed with the cabins specifically in mind, the pair of them often told stories of life on the beach and the ways that the set-up of the beach aids the lifestyle of that community.

## Transcription:

Richard: There used to be 111 cabins. Some of them have been knocked down, and some of them have been burned down.

Galen: Some of them, two lots have become one - and with one of them, three lots have become one.

Richard: But aside from that, any of the open spaces that you see now are owned commonly and we want to keep them open for kids to play. Also, there's two different organizations: there's the Salmon Beach Improvement Club which is on the south end of the beach, and Salmon Beach North is on the north end of the beach.

Galen: There's north and south, and cabin 43 and 44 is a gap, and pops is 45 - that's the beginning of South Beach. And there's two different board committees, two different parking lots. There used to be three parking lots back in the day. North Beach has sewer. South Beach has sewer and city water. North Beach is still off of wells on the hillside. Thus two different board committees, and middle beachers have more fun!

Richard: I was called the other day and told we're in Cheapskate Row.

Galen: Ok, well Dan Anderson's right in the heart, so of course we are!

Richard: And Ryan is a cheapskate, Susie is a cheapskate, we're a cheapskate.

Kanchan: What does that mean?

Richard: We're stingy – we don't want to spend any more money than necessary on anything

Galen: If it ain't broke, don't fix it.

Richard: We don't like improvements, nope! Want things to stay the way they were.

Galen: Yeah, creatures of habit, everybody hates change, just like death and taxes, but it's inevitable and we will fight it tooth and nail even if it's for the better.

Richard: Yeah, that's us.

Kanchan: So are there different cultures between the middle, the north, and the south? Do people not get along?

Richard: Not so much anymore, but it used to be that the Republicans lived in the North End and the Democrats lived in the South End.

Galen: The north end free box is WAY better than the South End free box! The stuff you get in that box is way different.

Richard: Yes, there are more wealthy people on that end of the beach.

Galen: I've gotten a never-been-used \$240 Filson jacket there. In the other one, a damp and wet VHS tape of Crimson Tide. But it's also changed a lot in the last 10-15 years, the kinds of people who are buying houses. It used to be alcoholics who are running away from their families, now its people moving there to start a family.

Richard: A lot of young people have moved in.

Galen: A lot of young people, and a lot of kids. A lot of babies being born.

Richard: When Galen was born there were 5 other boys born in the same month or two. But a couple of years later he was the only one left on the beach. A lot of parents when they have a second or third kid are like, "might be time to move up the hill make this a little easier." It's changed a lot.

[checking recording]

Kanchan: So you grew up on Salmon Beach?

Galen: Born and raised, my daughter is actually the first and only 4<sup>th</sup> generation Salmon Beacher ever.

Kanchan: So you were born there too, Richard?

Richard: No, but my aunt and uncle actually owned a cabin down there years before and then I bought a cabin there when I was 19.

Galen: For how much money, dad?

Richard: \$44. 50 cents!

Galen: And how did that get in your hands?

Richard: Well I had about 15 bucks from my mom, and, uh ...

Galen: But why was this person selling you - a 19 year old - a cabin for that cheap back then?

Richard: Well he was in the middle of a remodel on his house down the road, and wasn't really doing anything with the cabin. His name was Warren Anderson, and he was the premier photographer for the Tacoma News Tribune years and years ago. He was a pretty straight shooter, but he secretly wanted to be a hippie or a beatnik, so he bought that place in Salmon Beach, probably for that reason.

Galen: You told me that he won it in a poker game and that was the cost!

Richard: Nah.

Galen: It came out of your mouth at one point!

Richard: That poker thing is not true - I never said it.

Kanchan: What was it like when you first bought it?

Galen: [laughs] Rough.

Richard: No running water, no electricity, and there a was a bum - our famous salmon beach bum - Cotton-top was sleeping in the corner of one bedroom covered in old rags and overcoats, and crapping in a hole in the corner which I thought was pretty lowlife, seeing as the outhouse was right next door. So anyways, Cotton-top had to move when I bought it. And he went down the beach to Elsie Paulsen's front porch and spent the winter down there because it had a roof over his shelter - sort of shelter.

Anderson said, "I'll tell you what, let me go see what the back taxes are and you can have it for that," that was back when we didn't own the land, we were squatters. So he came back on the phone and so he says, "well, according to taxes, you can have it for \$44.50," and I was like, I guess I can handle that, and I got off the phone hooting and hollering.

Kanchan: So back then that was very cheap?

Richard: That was the cheapest price I have heard for a cabin on Salmon Beach, but at that time in history, Salmon Beach was going through really hard times. There were abandoned cabins, and there were cabins that never got used even though they were owned. You could have owned any number of the cabins for under \$100 bucks.

Galen: When you were renting down there didn't someone come and say don't tell anybody cause then everyone is going to try and pay less?

Richard: No, when I was renting Irma Haffer's cabin for \$30. Yeah, I really blew it. I was paying waay to much. When I moved out of there I found a cabin for sale and I figured I could live there for the winter. So I was in Florence Wusso's cabin, and I figured out how much it was I was spending so I could show people I was on the right track, and it worked out something like \$7.82 a month. I really just house-sat for that time. But it didn't have any heat and the roof leaked, but in the Spring it sold. That's when I moved down to cabin 82 and bought it from Earl Anderson.

Kanchan: And that's the one you live in now?

Galen: No we are in 64.

Richard: I bought 89 a little while after 82, and I built cabin 60, and then I went on a puss-and-boots trip around the country because it was getting too yuppy and crowded with up-hillers.

Galen: And what year was this?

Richard: That was about 1972 – too crowded. But after about a year I came limping back totally broke, no house now. Rodger Edwards, our historian, lent me money to rent the house that we own now and to get going again. Eventually we were able to buy it from him. Harry Almquist was a used car salesman.

Kanchan: He lived there and he built it?

Richard: No he was just a guy who used it as a party cabin. He'd go down there and bring women and screw them. He was married and there is a famous incident where his wife came down and caught him with some woman and busted some windows out, drove them out of there and then on the back wall in the kitchen wrote with lipstick, "hell is truth seen too late."

When I moved into that cabin the prior renter was the infamous Jeannie Bikini. She had painted murals all over the walls and all the furniture and walls were either red or pink.

Galen: We just remolded 64, actually. We put a whole new downstairs in, and we unearthed a mural. It had seaweed and goofy fish floating around.

Richard: The original house was built in 1910 with scrap wood and pallets. The whole floor had rotted out by then! I had already built the second story. On the first floor you could see the water through the floor. And when we started pulling the kitchen cabinets out the floor fell out in that area. And then we tore the walls out.

Galen: It was really made out of pallets, this was before there was such thing as plywood. They were really hardwood and some were stamped "Tacoma," and then some were stamped "made in China." Just kind of an interesting juxtaposition there. We had our neighbor Dan Anderson help us with that, and another neighbor, Ralff Somoff, helped us with that too

Kanchan: So when did you do that?

Galen: 2013-ish

Kanchan: How did it work with building the upper level first?

Richard: We had to build false walls – not even false walls, just beams with temporary pilings which then supported it, and moving them around ... [showed picture] We also try to make it look like nothing happened because of building permits and the city.

[showed picture of the chicken coop, Dad's house, of the mural, which may have dated back to the 30s or 40s]

Richard: Yeah, Jeannie Bikini was the kept woman of a local banker who would come down when he could. She thought herself an interpretive dancer. She was kind of a blond bombshell – I mean she was pretty foxy. But she was just a writer and she eventually moved on. She wrote some kind of small paperback novel about her relationship with Salmon Beach, and it starts out with her riding a whale. When I read that I was like "oh, I don't know!" – I think she's a bit more imaginative than truthful.

Galen: Well isn't that the case with most people down there?

Richard: Well you don't want to let truth stand in the way of a good story.

Galen: Takes a little bit of crazy to live down there. You'd be amazed about how many different kinds of crazy there is, kind of like alcoholics. You know, the happy one ...

Richard: Kelly says you can't be screwed down tight and live there.

Galen: But there are the kind of people who are screwed down tight, a little too tight!

Richard: Yeah, now we have the doctors and the lawyers

Kanchan: So did anyone else live in your guys' cabin before?

Galen: [laughs] Half of Salmon Beach – half of Tacoma, probably!

[told me to talk to the historian for specifics]

Kanchan: So do you know who originally built the cabin?

Richard: I don't. I do know it was built in 1910, and the Chicken Coop used to be a little shack up on the hill. Now I've rebuilt that cabin and somebody else has turned the former woodshed into a cabin, so everything replaced itself.

Galen: So Dad's place [the Chicken Coop] would have been the community hot tub/cabana.

Richard: Woodshed would have been a woodshed and the cabana for the community hot tub, one of the sites for the Salmon Beach community co-op for groceries

[The co-op existed for about a year, with groceries delivered to the Antique sandwich shop, then boated into salmon beach]

Galen: Yeah the great thing about salmon beach is you don't have neighbors – you are a neighbor. If you don't get along and the shit hits the fan, if there's a landslide, or someone needs to move a house – everybody comes together to help and puts their issues aside. People will still knock on your door for a stick of butter or whatever.

Richard: We were trying to get on the national registry of historic places and we didn't get it the first time, but we did for the state.

Galen: We had to. You know the city never wanted Salmon Beach there. So that's kind of our trump card. That was basically done because of Rodger Edwards and Oscar Graham.

Richard: Salmon Beach is the kind of place where if there is a fire, everyone gets a bucket and forms a bucket brigade and puts the fire out. And as soon as it's out they start stealing each others buckets.

Kanchan: So were there every any fires or slides?

Galen: We had a landslide last winter! There's a handful of them.

Richard: We have a thing called minor spalling, where a bit of the hillside dislodges and falls down, but that's enough to knock out your back wall.

Galen: Yeah, it was up to the second story of our house.

Richard: And our hill right now is a little dicey right behind the house. I finally got all the trees out and then I cabled them all together like a daisy chain, connected to a big tree on the other side of the hill.

Galen: He's got a cable around the house too!

Richard: If I hadn't cabled that last stump, it would have come down and really nailed the house. The thing about Salmon Beach is that it has become popular, but the insecurity of the hill is the same as it always been.

Galen: And a lot of the banks won't loan to people who are looking to buy down there because of the need for landslide insurance.

Kanchan: It's probably hard to find

Galen: It is, but if they are willing to insure J-Lo's ass then you'll find someone who is willing to insure a cabin down there.

Richard: You now have to factor in the cost of a sprinkler system for fires cause the houses are so close together. If one goes up the other ones will too. And then if the fire boat comes down to put out the fire then the houses on each side will get pretty bad water damage too.

Kanchan: So has your house ever burned?

Richard: No, not ours

Galen: Never severely, but you know maybe tenants have caught the floor on fire while cleaning out the wood stove.

Richard: 16, 15, 14 and 13 were all burned down because of Christenson's fireplace. It was actually just a pit with a cone over it and it had a screen around it. Anyways, someone put their trash in it and forgot to put the screen back and started to burn up the trash, one of the bags rolled out onto the floor and they weren't around to see it and by the time they did, k-bang!

Kanchan: Do people burn their trash often?

Galen: Yeah, on the beach

Richard: Yeah, any paper or cardboard that they don't want to carry up the hill, but its becoming less and less common.

Galen: But the more wealthy people, it's not in their lexicon to do this. But usually whenever I do a garbage burn all the neighbors come running out with bags of recyclable paper so they don't have to carry it. But for some reason people see that odd. It is what it is. It's 142 stairs – why carry something up that can be incinerated? It's not like we're burning tires on the beach.

Richard: And it's fun to eat corn on the cob on the deck. It's real gratifying to toss it over your shoulder.

[more talk about trash, and ways to remove things from the beach]

Kanchan: So in your house, do you guys have any weird quirks?

Galen: We've still got an indoor outhouse. There's maybe two other cabins on Salmon beach that still have them. (A closet with a box and a toilet seat).

Richard: We got the sewer system in the early 1990s. When I moved there in 1962 or 1961 (I don't remember which), there were only 13 cabins lived in year round, so the indoor outhouse wasn't really impacting much of anything. But now that there is basically wall-to-wall people, there's no more brown

trout, cause that's not allowed. We have it because of problems with pipes freezing but we also have sewer now.

Galen: Yeah, agate hunting as a kid was always slightly dangerous.

Kanchan: Anything else you built in the house for kicks and giggles?

Galen: Jim the plumber was a tenant for a while, and he scored a bathtub and installed it on the porch deck, which was fun on 4<sup>th</sup> of Julys, but we took it out after a while.

[talk about 4<sup>th</sup> of July and community events]

Richard: So the focus of your interview is the history of our cabin - so were not doing too well, huh?

Kanchan: Well you are, actually. I got a lot!

Richard: Well if you call Rodger Edwards he can tell you who built the cabins, how long different people lived in them all the way up to the present. And he has photos of living there. He is our historian. He has a chart or something.

[more on history of the beach generally, then end]