

Key Information:

Name: Ralff: Somoff

Age: 64

Current Cabin: 58

Date of Interview: February 18, 2016

Interviewer: Ashley Coyne

Ethnographic Preface:

I interviewed Ralff: Somoff on a Saturday morning in his cabin (58) of which he gave me a brief tour before we commenced the interview in his living room that looks out on the Sound. On the tour, he pointed out various features of the cabin which he explained in greater depth in the interview. We discussed the history of the cabin from the 1950s forward, including the many add-ons and modifications which Ralff: has made to the cabin over the years. While he explained that he is a carpenter and has worked on many Salmon Beach cabins over the years, he specifically discusses cabins 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 64, and 92 throughout the interview as well.

Ralff was very descriptive in outlining the various projects he took on as a carpenter on Salmon Beach and described the construction of certain cabin features in great detail. He also had interesting stories and provided intriguing insights into the shifting demographics of Salmon Beach. Ralff: said he has worked on upwards of 30 other cabins on Salmon Beach, so it would certainly be worth interviewing him again to learn about his other projects and the histories of other cabins.

Transcription:

AC: Great, so I'll just start out with some of the more basic information that you told me when we were touring. When the cabin was built and by whom it was built?

Ralff: It was built in 1939, and I know the first owners were the Faulkners, but I don't know if they were the ones that built it. And part of it was built from the forms that were used for the Tacoma Narrows Bridge.

AC: Okay, yeah! Can you tell me a little more about that? I think you had started talking about that [on the tour], so they were building the bridge and they just kind of left the material?

Ralff: Yeah! Well back then, they just sort of threw the stuff in the water, and people from Salmon Beach from what I understand went out and scavenged it – it was just floating [laughing], so you know? That's the way most people got the means of heating their houses, was by firewood which was just floating by. I still do heat my house with firewood, as you can probably attest to right now [pointing to crackling wood burning stove].

AC: Oh, yes, it looks cozy, haha.

Ralff: Yeah but I have to go out and get it, and that's one of the things I love doing and one of the rare things that's done anymore down here. It's part of the pioneer spirit.

AC: That's wonderful! And so how long have you been living here? You said you've been here for quite a while?

Ralff: Well yeah, in fact, this is my 40th year. I moved down here October the 14th of 1977. I rented a house for about a year and a half and then I bought this place.

AC: That's really cool, and so how did you come to live in this particular cabin? Was it just what was available, or were there specific aspects of it that you - were [interested in]?

Ralff: Well it was just listed. I was working in a real-estate office at the time and I saw it in the multiple listing service. And so that's - I think it was \$27,000 - and so I jumped at it and horrified a few of the neighbors because of the outrageous money the likes of me were spending on this place were driving up the values. But I was desperate to get a place having lived here for a year and a half and in love with the whole culture of the place.

AC: So you said you had lived here for a year and a half before, were you in a different cabin then?

Ralff: Yeah, I lived in cabin 26, which no longer exists. It was one of the infamous cabins for the fact that it had the Tallman family. There were two big families that lived on the Salmon Beach from the 1950s on. The O'Malleys, who coincidentally actually lived in this house for a short while when it was cabin 53, and it ended up being cabin 103 down there or maybe 101 [where the Tallmans lived] but they had seven kids in a really small cabin! And so those were the Tallmans. And Rodger Edwards has a book for sale on Salmon Beach that was the story of the Tallmans coming down here - that was a really fun read. Anyways, so I lived in that infamous place and was renting it. When I came down here with a girlfriend - she was just gonna housesit this house and the owners came home early from a boat trip because they had engine failure. So we hung around a bit, drank a bit, smoked a bit, and got to know each other a little bit. And then the word got back to me, because they took a liking to me because I was bitching about how Seattle - in 1977! - I was thinking it was getting too crowded. And so the word got back to me that "Well, if Ralff is interested in renting this little cabin that we have kind of behind our place" - off to the side but still had a better view - to let him know. And so I came blasting down here in my 1974 Gremlin - Levi Gremlin I might add - and I told them that I was really interested in renting a place. They said, "Well, are you working?" and I said no, but that I was getting unemployment. [They asked] "How much are you getting?" [and he replied] "Oh about 70 bucks a week." [They replied] "Alright, how about 70 bucks a month will be your rent," and I went "Done." So that was my start of being turned from a city kid into a beach kid. I learned about digging, piling - that was just a blast. Great tutelage there under Dave Grout.

AC: So you said it's [cabin 53] no longer there, what ended up happening to the cabin?

Ralff: Well they ended up taking it down to build a much larger cabin. I mean originally, the owners - Dave and Sandy of old [cabin] 26 - built a place in front of it and kind of a little off to the side so it had

a neat view of the Olympics. And then after a while - a couple owners later - they ended up razing the whole place, taking down the one in front, and all of 26, and built a *really* big cabin down there. It's not even really a cabin, it's a house.

AC: And what cabin - or house - is that? Is it like part of Salmon Beach?

Ralff: Yeah, it's part of Salmon Beach North. There are two corporations here. Cabins one through forty-four for sure, because 45 is odd and it's split into two...[trailing off]. Anyway, at one point Salmon Beach had two different landlords, so to speak. The South end, Salmon Beach Improvement Club, had James Wiborg as the landlord. And cabins one through forty-four had the Metropolitan Park District. And so that's kind of how it got split up, and how we're two different corporations.

AC: That's interesting.

Ralff: Yeah, it is, but now we all finally got to buy our properties! It's great not to be in a situation where you can get kicked out any time.

AC: Sure yeah, that kind of has to keep you on your toes there. And so, we are trying to gather history on all the cabins, so do you know when exactly it was torn down?

Ralff: Cabin 26, I don't know exactly.

AC: But it was maybe a few years after you had moved?

Ralff: Oh yeah, I'm thinking maybe it was in the late 80s, early 90s. They would know down there. Oh, Rodger Edwards would know, but I don't know if you know of him.

AC: No, not currently.

Ralff: Well he is the Salmon Beach Historian, and cabin 45 is it?

AC: Oh yes, I do!

Ralff: Yeah, you can't not know him, and he's proud of the book that's the Arcadia Presses. I get along great with Roger, he's a hero of mine in some regards. He's been delivering the newspaper down here forever, and part of the reason I still even get that pamphlet is just because Roger's still doing it. He's been the Secretary of Salmon Beach Improvement Club, and I've been president down here a couple of different times. He's just one of those people you have to keep on a leash, he just goes off! But he's an invaluable guy just because of the fact that he has all this knowledge about Salmon Beach. He's been here since 1962 or 63'. My good friend, Richard Turner, he bought his house down here for I think \$45.50. And her bought his house down here about the same time that Roger got down here.

AC: And do you know what cabin that one was?

Ralff: Well Richard's bounced around. The first cabin that he bought down here was cabin 82, which no longer exists although there's another cabin 82. He's ended up now [in] cabin 64, which has the chicken

coop up on the hill, and that's where the poetry readings are and all that. He and I are great friends, we've travelled a lot together. He comes here on Tuesdays and we have dinner and a movie night. But one of the things that's great about Richard is that even though he and Roger have been down here about the same amount of time, Richard's the guy who's hung with the drunks and was just kind of crazy with them. Roger's always been stoic and uptight about certain things. There's great, great stories that Richard tells about Roger and how Roger used to get in trouble with some of the old drunks. Richard's got the best stories. I've heard his stories many times over, and they're always great even though they're the same story.

AC: Great, well we'll have to keep that in mind!

Ralff: Yeah, if you get a chance to interview Richard, it's a real treat.

AC: Great! And I'd love to hear more about just the modifications that you've made or that were made in the past to this particular cabin as well.

Ralff: Yeah well, in fact, I added two stories. When I came down here I was able to kind of enlarge the property a little bit, that the city's not supposed to know about...Now we're not allowed to enlarge the footprint at all. So what was done in the past can no longer be done. You can't do anything, it's very restrictive. When I got out here it was just a little deck out here [pointing to deck behind house through window]. And I added all this [pointing to expanded areas].

AC: That's cool! And you said you added the whole wrap-around deck then?

Ralff: On the second floor, oh yeah! This house was just a simple little cabin, right? And then it had a little peak at the top, so like a third of the space up there. The chimney went straight up and was next to my bed upstairs - it was a very humble little place.

AC: Can you explain some of the modifications you made to the third floor? You're a carpenter, right? So you designed those and did those yourself?

Ralff: Well it wasn't a modification, basically what I did was - and Ed Fahnoe was the main contractor with me on this cause I was going to Oregon once a week - basically we took down the roof and that story. So this was basically open space here [pointing to the ceiling, above], and I was sleeping down here. One morning I looked at Purushky, my cat, and she had morning dew on her [laughing]. But then the joists [beams] went on and then the second story and the lid got on there in two weeks. So all of that was not really modification, it was brand new stuff. But I had years to fantasize about it, and then I had it engineered. I had an architect and engineer work on it. So this house was way up to the code in 97', it has a sprinkler system. I always like thinking out of the box. Here, walk over here for just a second. [We walk out to his front gate]. So I wanted to come up with a design I hadn't seen before for a gate, have you ever seen that design before? It's this thing right here [outlining design with finger], it's continuous. And here it is again [pointing to other part of fence]. This is where I tested that out, and that has to be some kind of style, but I had never seen a fence of that style. So I drew it out on paper, and that's sort of my thing, I just want to do stuff that I hadn't seen before. Especially at Salmon Beach, because Salmon Beach is such a unique community. One of the things and why I've liked to work down here on these eclectic places is because it allows us to be really creative and to be out of the box. It has

kind of driven me crazy down here to see these boring boxes go up. I'm thinking: "God, you know, you have this canvas that you can work with, why not just be imaginative?" So the wrap-around deck [on the second floor] is great to walk around, but it also fulfills the purpose of - you can see through the window [pointing] here that I've got firewood stacked there, and that's firewood that I've gotten from the last few months. So it sits out here and dries for a year, and then I transfer it over to this other side. So the wrap-around deck is also firewood protection.

AC: So very functional! Awesome, and can you just tell me a bit more - I know we discussed this before - about the modification you just made to the top of the building [small side shack]? It's just great to hear the story behind those and your family history and everything.

Ralff: Oh that! The onion dome thing the Byzantine dome, yeah right. Well I thought about it for a lot of years, about how I'm gonna make it. I was trying to find books on how they make these domes, but I couldn't find anything. So, as is my way, I just sort of invented a way around it. So I created the ribs, basically, out of one-inch-thick plywood and that gave me the form. Then I designed a circle for the top and a bigger circle for the bottom, and then I wrapped it with wire and then chicken wire and then fiberglass and what is actually on the cover there is Bondo, auto body filler, really toxic stuff. And it really sets quick, so I did all that on the deck. Then I built a ramp. Basically, it went way out here [pointing out to deck] - about 30 feet out - and we put it on a dolly and rolled it out there.

AC: That is so cool! [So it took a] team effort then for that?

Ralff: Well it was really great because I did it on a Saturday and within just about a half hour all of sudden I had a deck full of people - it was at 9 o'clock in the morning. Dan Anderson, typically, was down here in his bathrobe and his cup of just watching the whole thing. It was really funny, it was just a great Salmon Beach team effort which is something that used to happen down here all the time. It would just be like "Wow we need to put in a piling," and so people would just kind of get together and do that sort of thing. That sort of thing is greatly missing these days that sorta used to happened all the time. People just used to say "I'm gonna have a piling party, I'll have some beers here" or something like that, and now it's all hired and it's hard to find people that do it. Yeah, that's a whole different subject. But yeah that's [the Byzantine dome] an homage to, like I said, my Russian background, and then I put that turbine thing on top with the black, red and Schwarz rose gold - I can only say it in German - in the German flag's colors.

AC: That is so cool! Were there any more very personal touches you felt that you've added? Let's see, we already discussed [this] on the third floor, was that a design you had had in mind before?

Ralff: Yeah! Doing the five gables up there? [pausing] No! I just sort of thought about that and I worked with an architect on that and then he designed it. He had a different design [that] went up - he wanted these diamond shaped things - and I said, "I think I need portholes."

AC: Gotta have portholes!

Ralff: Gotta have portholes, right?! Gotta have these portholes! [Walks over to a porthole in the floor and opens it]. There's a light on it, and so coffee grounds and stuff goes down there. Yeah! So I found the portholes!

AC: So this wasn't already in?

Ralff: Oh no!

AC: Okay so you put in that porthole there in the ground , too?

Ralff: Yeah, it's my garbage disposal. The old one is still here which was this [pulling open cabinets under kitchen sink]. So I've a got a smaller one that I rarely even pay attention to over there underneath that table.

AC: Oh that's so great!

Ralff: Yeah, it's great because when the tide comes in and I have light there it attracts the fish.

AC: Cool! [So you can] go fishing down the porthole?

Ralff: So there's little guys - no, I never see big fish, plus I'm a vegetarian.

AC: Oh right, sorry about that.

Ralff: That's alright, that's alright. Like I said, I don't kill anything. Well let's see, I used to kill brain cells [laughing]... A few years ago I got back with my friend Neil, he and I were college housemates together. I don't know why - I love him so much - we were apart for about 20 years and we got back together again. I had these non-alcoholic beers - good ones like the Clausthalers, not the ratty stuff like O'Douls - and he said "That's amazing because I don't drink anymore," and I said, "I don't either! That is so weird!" He and I both just got to a point where we just didn't drink. Neither one of us had drinking issues with alcoholism or whatever - it was really odd. Both just gave up on it! So it was an odd coincidence. So anyway I don't kill brain cells anymore. But - here's what's really messed up: I'm still spaced out and I can't blame it on being hungover! It's like what the hell! What did I just go into this room for?

AC: I get it, yeah I know, I know! Going through a doorway and forgetting what it is you're going in there for, I completely get it. Apparently, it's actually some phenomenon - like once you go through a doorway you just forget, it happens. So it's totally normal apparently!

Ralff: Alright, well I firmly believe from what I've read is that that the culture is just getting to the point where people are just living with distractions. Because you've got your phone's ringing or there's a message beep or something like that. There's so much stuff going on that people are not as focused like they were forced to when there were just a few channels on TV and a few radio stations. I was thinking about it just in regards to - I think it's more difficult for people these days to easily meditate, because their brains are just having stuff bombarded. Yeah, because I've been meditating for a while and so that's something I think about - not thinking.

AC: Yeah, just like clearing the slate.

Ralff: Yeah! How to keep the distractions out of your mind. If your mind is so programmed to flip switches on and off, on and off, on and off [making ch ch ch sounds], how can you shut them all off?

AC: Yeah, just going haywire all the time.

Ralff: Sorry I go off on tangents all the time..

AC: No that's okay, this is interesting, it's good to hear about the philosophy and everything behind it! Can you tell me about any other - you said you made some modifications to the bathroom. This one bathroom, you said you raised it?

Ralff: Yeah, I raised it, it's a potentially wet area, and so I just raised it and made it all tile. It also kind of gives it a separation - [seagulls squawking] I just have to watch to see if Zelda starts nagging too much, I'll have to turn the hose on her. Well I don't even have to turn the hose on her, I just go get the hose. But her and Seymour, they will be out here and they'll do this [makes seagull noises], and it just drives me nuts sometimes. I only feed them in the morning and at night, or in the afternoon. Seymour's, I think, he's at least 19 years old.

AC: Oh my goodness, yeah, so that one on the boat [pointing to small boat on back dock].

Ralff: No that's Zelda. She'll go off and have kids, although she didn't last year. She'll go off and have kids, and then they'll show up and they're all grey [Zelda's offspring], and then Seymour takes care of them and Seymour will feed them. Even right after they're fed, they're right behind Seymour, and they're nagging him constantly [makes bee high-pitched bee bee noise]. How can you handle it?

AC: So Zelda, like after Zelda Fitzgerald, like Scott Fitzgerald's wife?

Ralff: No, no, I don't know, I have no idea..

AC: Just for fun?

Ralff: Yeah, I think the very first Zelda I ever heard of was in this old TV show called Dobie Gillis, so I don't know where it comes from.

AC: That's great, oh my gosh [laughing], and just to clarify for the recording, these are the seagulls that are currently perched around.

Ralff: They're not neighbor children or anything like that.

AC: They are the seagulls.

Ralff: They're the seagulls, right.

AC: That's so great. So do you have any other stories about the history or anything that you wanted to share that you were thinking about?

Ralff: Well there are a lot of stories, of course, that go back over 40 years, but I was thinking about telling you about who was here when I first got here - the type of people. Right now, it's quite homogenized. There's a lot of young families down here right now, safety patrol sort of ...

Anyways, so when I came down here there were - and predominantly in the North end for some reason where you'll find the least interesting houses, the more commonplace, whereas down here there [were] the more funky houses, the ones where people had been really inventive. But it just seems like down in that area, it was slightly conservative. There were more summer cabins, and it just so happened to be that way. Down towards this end they were more permanent. So you had some of the more part-time owners who maybe have rented out these houses and then in the summers they would take it over.

Those were some people. Then you had another group of people, your blue collar workers - people who worked in the shipyards, [did] carpentry, that sort of thing. At that time - back in the mid-70s - it was a really economical, cheap place to live. These places didn't have a sewer system, it was wild, and the roads were dirt roads. When I first saw the parking lot, I thought "What the hell?" All these old cars from the 50s and 60s, a few of the cars had holes drilled through their hoods with chains and padlocks on them. That was because there had been a raft of battery thieves. We had rural mailboxes, just the regular, old narrow kind with the front lid on them.

So I've talked about two types of people - the homeowners, the labor guys who were generally in their 20s and 30s, and at that time there were still some old timers down here, kind of down-on-their-luck, old drunks, there were still a few of those characters around. Then you had the very eccentric, liberal, some would say, hippie types, and the Antique Sandwich Company which I believe started in '76 or '77. They used to have up there Amnesty International letter-writing sessions and stuff like that, a lot of folk music, it was a real hip place and it's still pretty hip. There was a little bit of this and that in between the groups, of course, there's people melding back and forth. There were some really hippie types who would also get into the labor pool thing. I was looking at some pictures of this Salmon Derby thing, but I was looking at these recently because I was going through all my old photography, and I thought, "Woah, these are some rough looking cats," and I was hanging with em'. They were interesting too, because they made a lot of money - a few boilermakers and all that sort of stuff.

Then in the 70s and stuff, they always had cocaine. It was part of the deal, too, if you were gonna come to a party - I know this is gonna sound weird - cocaine was really just ubiquitous. So if you were gonna go over to Grout's, at a party there, you probably had to have some cocaine with you, just to share. If you didn't, you were kind of a welcher-type. It was a lot of pressure for someone like me who didn't have the kind of money, but I was still kind of pals with those people somewhat. I was looking at those people, a lot of those guys just didn't have good attitudes. They were kind of like hard core, not peaceful people.

But Grout, my mentor, he was like an older brother to me - oh! I figured out there was another group of people that were major here, too! That was UPS students. I would think that there were probably at least six or eight cabins down here that had UPS students. In each one of those cabins there were probably rotating four or six [students]. And like Pete McDonald [one of his friends], Rancho Guerra [property that McDonald owns which was discussed prior to the interview], his parents sent him here ... But the thing about a lot of those guys, they were part of the work pool, too. So if you needed help doing something, they would be part of the work thing. Not all of them were rich, so they would help put

in pilings and this and that - you don't see these guys hardly ever! [referring to some different seagulls perched on the back dock]. I'm gonna grab the hose, pardon me! [Walking out to dock]. I'll have to blast Seymour, or at least - you just have to go for it. [Spraying seagulls with hose] You too Zelda!

AC: So it's kind of a love-hate relationship with those guys?

Ralff: Yeah! It really is!

AC: Great, well it sounds like you have so many great stories, so it's been a couple years since you've been interviewed?

Ralff: Yeah, but I was thinking about what's changed. Money has changed. These places cost so much money, it's not really effective for somebody to buy a house and rent it out, so there aren't any UPS students down here any longer. Of course the old timers, they've all died off. It's just that that's all changed. Where did I fit in in all of this? Well I don't know. I was just an eccentric guy, that moved down here and then I started doing a little bit of everything. I started working at the shipyard, and then I decided to get a real estate license and that didn't work out because the market [had] crazy interest rates at that time, somewhere over 20 percent, couldn't sell houses. Yeah, it was really crazy!

So I went back to school to get my teaching certification to go along with my English BA that I got at the University of Washington, and I was in a store buying some film and a guy recognized me from the record industry from when I had been working as a buyer for James Stores and he and I actually went to the same high school and he said that he was actually going to open up a branch office in Hawaii and that they were looking for somebody to hire to take his place as a sales rep. He thought I fit the bill and so I went in and I got hired to be a record and tape sales rep. It was great because life was just so interesting, 'cause when I was working for real estate I really didn't have money, but my wife had a little trailer up in Bonnie Lake, and we thought we could sell that and get the down payment. Cause the payments on this place were a whopping \$275 a month [laughing], but we thought we could pull it together! So we did that, and I thought "Okay, this is great, and I was thinking, "Okay, I'm really gonna have to do something now," 'cause I was doing hard labor on the side and all this sort of stuff. Bam! Got the job offer. It was a great job, really great job with health benefits and vehicle allowance and all that kind of stuff and really good money. It just so happened that way! It was great.

AC: That's so cool! If I could just bother you one more time just about any of the modifications, even the smallest ones that you've made, like if you could explain the stoplight one a little bit more on the stair case? That was so cool!

Ralff: Well yeah! That stoplight - I found that stoplight in a Goodwill in McMinnville, Oregon. I had that and I thought "Now what am I gonna do with it?" Then it just came to me. Yeah, I've got so many tangents. Let me just tell you real quick, [as a] record and tapes sales rep, after working there for seven years, they shut the business down. I knew about it, so I opened up a record store on the side. I had a record store in Auburn, a record store in Tacoma, they were doing okay. A friend of mine who was in the Levi Export business said "I'll train you how to buy Levi's," and then people come in and buy em', and I was making good money on the Levi's, better [than] almost on the records and tapes.

Then he said, "Okay, Ralff, you're doing great, man. You really got this down, but I could really use some help on the road. So here's the deal - he was working for an industry that had the Goodwill's contracts, and so to make a long story short, I ended up owning that company. So I had all the Goodwill industry's contracts from Tacoma all the way down through Oregon. What I did was, just like in my sales rep day, I would hit a store, they would save the product for me in the back room, whatever! I could say, "I want Nike shoes, or records, and here's the deal, I just want you to hold them back here for me for a week. I'll go through them, and I'll give you more money than you can probably get for them on the rack" and then write out a check. They were always curious about - [in funny voice] "Well, what's he want now?" - "He wants these weird vacuum cleaners" - "Okay, well start saving em" - it was fun for the staff, because their jobs were boring in the back room, and so I was in the back room like wow - that table! [pointing to a small coffee table in his living room] That table there I got for \$10 from the - which I came up with the price - it was in the back of the Albany, Oregon Goodwill.

AC: That's great [laughing], got some good deals then it sounds like it.

Ralff: I did! So that's the story of that traffic light. It just sort of came about right at the time I was doing the house. I got the stairs in and - oh! I've got this great idea, here's what I'm gonna do with it, and he's [presumably his contractor] like "Oh boy, Ralff, okay."

AC: So you made each stair have a different sensor for each light then?

Ralff: Yeah! On three different steps. I've got these little - there used to be this really cool place called Boeing Surplus, and I had this Boeing Surplus kind of waffle board stuff and I've got really intense springs, that's what you felt [when we were walking up the stairs during the tour].

AC: Yeah! I was like, "What's this?"

Ralff: Yeah, and so the springs - yeah that's it - would tap down to the off-on switch. [Looks out window to seagulls] God, you see how bad those guys are?

AC: Oh yeah, they're going.

Ralff: They're going for it again, and they're like, "We're not afraid of you. We're not afraid of water, we like water."

AC: [Watching a seagull bob its head] He's like, "Yeah, come at me."

Ralff: Well the kicking their head back thing is the "Feed me." Seymour will eat cheese out of my hand.

AC: [Laughing] That's so funny...

Ralff: Yeah, who's got who trained? So if you're interested in this - that's wormwood [pointing to an entry wall to the kitchen]. That's wood that I had taken to the mill and had planed - that was out of a log. On the deck here I had a bunch of it, and then the deck was wiped out by a landslide back in '96. This front door, as a matter of fact, [walked over to door] on the back side you can see mud on it. Which this is actually called glacial till, it's on the hillside. This door was knocked off of its hinges. During the remodel, I

had this door shut just because I wanted to heat that area there, and so mud came up to about here [signaling approximately two feet above the floor]. So this happened around two or three in the morning, and looking right outside this window here [signaling outside kitchen window], you could see trees. So that deck got wiped out, and all that wormwood stuff that I had got pushed into the water. [Walking out to back deck] Okay, come on you guys! [talking and signaling to seagulls].

AC: Oh my goodness, wow, that sounds like quite the ordeal! So that was during the remodel, so did you have to rebuild?

Ralff: No, that was prior to it - no that was during the remodel, you're right, of course! That was during the remodel because it had this place [referring to a kitchen area]. That's right, sorry. That's right that was during the remodel.

AC: So it was just kind of like, "Oh, we're already remodeling, we don't have to rebuild necessarily."

Ralff: Yeah, I had the second story and all that going on, that's right. I have to put this into perspective, because Pam was here, right. Pam was here. She's one of the items I picked up in Silverton, Oregon. This was who I was helping move today, down to - she's going back to Utah. Yeah, we were together from '97 to until just a couple of years ago, but you know...

AC: [Shrugging] Life, life happens...

Ralff: Substance abuse. And she just couldn't kick it, ya know? And I had put up a good fight. So I'm sort of going through this thing today where she's on the road and now she's going to be completely out of the area. Even though we were divorced and all that sort of stuff, we still were each other's best confidant and now she's way out of there, and so today I'm kind of feeling a little weird. And I'm sure she's even feeling weirder. Yeah, yeah, it's life [chuckles].

AC: What can you do? [joking tone]

Ralff: What can you do? Yeah! Just do stuff that you won't regret.

AC: Live with no regrets - and things you won't regret...

Ralff: Yeah, there's some stuff that I've done in the past that just creeps up in my head, that I go "Wow! I really was bad," and that plagues me still. Sometimes I go, "Yup, this happened to me because I probably did that back then ..."

AC: It's all part of being human, you know?

Ralff: It's a learning process, it really is. It's all about growth. I've found, at least in my existence, that growth comes through struggle, that's where the best growth comes from. I figured this out in the weirdest way. It's 'cause I exercise in the morning. I do kind of a crazy bunch of stuff, 'cause I'm of my age now, 64, I have to exercise a lot. So I've been doing my push-ups. In my push-ups, I do two sets of 125, and I've been good with that. Then I thought, "Geez almighty, I remember when it was really hard for me to do 100, then 125...So now, a few weeks ago, I said I'm gonna start doing 150. And 150, I

really had to kind of power my way through. Then it just sort of came to me [snapping] – oh right! It's a struggle, but I'm gonna be better. It's like how it was when I went from 100 to 125. One of these days, it'll seem like it'll be easy. So growth comes through struggle. But here's something else, too: it's just the power of the mind. If I tell myself as I'm doing them that I'm coming up to a number, then it gets tough when I'm getting to that number. But if I lie to myself, and I tell myself I'm going to go to 175, which I'm really not, then ... Isn't that funny how that works?

AC: Yeah! It's really interesting.

Ralff: A bunch of years ago, I took some self-hypnosis classes. It's just kind of tricking yourself – you can tell yourself you're getting sleepy, and sleepy, and you're really not, but you are. You're eyes are getting tired and you have this candle you're looking at, and they are but they're not and then you kind of are... Then you're going, "Well if my mind believes that, can it believe this?" Eventually in self-hypnosis, you get yourself in between your conscious and your subconscious and that's the hypnagogic state. That's when you can kind of work with your sub-conscious – like quit smoking, or quit eating so much, or go back [to a] critical thing where oh right it was my uncle that molested me, and now I can deal with that, it wasn't my fault. So people have all kinds of – that's aggressive hypnotherapy, that's the hypnagogic state. Yeah, it's a matter of tricking yourself. Sometimes I've thought from meditation, sometimes I'll get into this really kind of stony zone, and I'm thinking, "I wonder if I'm at the hypnagogic state." Then I'm thinking about it and I'm like "Damn it, damn it! I'm out of the zone!"

AC: Can you describe the different kinds – you said that's wormwood [pointing to the entry wall of the kitchen], but it looks like there's some different kinds of wood throughout here?

Ralff: All the wood that's in the house is cedar. That wormwood was fir, Doug fir.

AC: Okay, and so you put that in?

Ralff: Yeah, the worms did it, you have to train em' [chuckles]. You have to keep right on em', keep right on those guys. It's like they don't have brains! But it's a salt water worm, or whatever it is – entity, critter – and it's called the churrito. That's what they do, they eat through that stuff. Hang on just a sec, I threw a piece in here, I don't know if I have any more out here [walking out to back deck to wood pile on side of house]. Oh yeah, yeah, yeah. Right, here's a couple little samples. You can see right here [pointing to a small piece of wormwood]. So they just burrow in there, and they usually go in the... So that kind of gives you an idea.

AC: So it's what happens to the wood [laughing]...it's those worms!

Ralff: Right, and they're probably not really a worm. They're probably like whatever kind of sea creature you can think of...an anemone or something like that [walking back inside and shutting door].

AC: And you have a very large record and tape collection and everything. Did you make any modifications in there [referring to room on ground floor] to accommodate for those?

Ralff: Yeah! Originally it was smaller. Aside from building the shelves, cause I used to have em' in cantaloupe crates - the sub-structure, I had to put support underneath the house, railroad tie and more pilings.

AC: You said it used to be a bedroom then?

Ralff: Yeah, when I first bought the palace it was - and, in that book *Salmon Beach Memoirs* that Roger has, it was really interesting in chapter five. They talk about walking into the house and there's the foyer and then there's the kitchen and then they went around the corner and then there's the bathroom and the bedroom. But it was cabin 53. Then, after I read the book, Roger said, "Oh and you know, your cabin 58 used to be cabin 53." No kidding! So I reread that and went, "Yeah! Yeah! That's my place!" Because these houses, they've had different numbers. They've been renumbered.

AC: Sure, so the numbers that he refers to in the book might not correspond to the current numbers?

Ralff: Right.

AC: Okay, that's good to know!

Ralff: Down here to there's the cabins, for instance, on both sides of me, cabins skip a number. This is cabin 58, so that's 56 right next to me on the North and then to the South that cabin 60. When it started out these were fishing shacks down here, and they were much smaller cabins. They were taken down, and now maybe one cabin now occupies the space of two smaller cabins.

AC: That's really interesting. It's just so interesting, I think. Do you have anything else about the modifications you made? And it sounds like you've played a large part in all of the modifications and everything, and the add-ons.

Ralff: Oh yeah, completely, 100 percent! Here and on other cabins on Salmon Beach, because I've been part of the remodeling.

AC: Oh cool! What other cabins have you worked on then?

Ralff: Well, I'd have to go down the list - a lot, including building cabin number 51. Or, I'm sorry ... Well three cabins [walks over and looks through paperwork] - I'm sorry, it was cabin 52. Cabins 50, 51, and 52 were all wiped out by a landslide back in, I think, December of '96'. So they're brand new. The ones that are there are brand new.

AC: Oh wow! So when were those wiped out again?

Ralff: Oh December - oh, I'm sorry, February the 8th of '97.'

AC: Okay, that's good to know, too.

Ralff: Yeah...They were wiped out, and then cabin 54 - known as the Long House for a few years - that actually burned down. That was December the 26th, I think, of '96'.

AC: Okay, so a lot has happened throughout the years here!

Ralff: Yeah, yeah, and that was all major stuff there.

AC: And so you said you helped build - what was the cabin number that you?...

Ralff: Yeah, Ed Fahnoe and I built cabin 92.

AC: Okay, okay. Oh! Where Andrew Gardner lives? 92?

Ralff: No, no - did I say 92? I meant 52. I think I said 52, but you just heard the "2" part. Cabin 92 was remodeled by George Jay, who was an amazing, and is still, an amazing character. [Chuckling] Oh gosh, he is something else. I think he just had his 80th birthday? He's one of those guys who can just do massive amounts of drugs and alcohol and have all kinds of crazy stuff going around around him while reading an 800 page book. He's just amazing - he's one of the most engaging people I've ever been with in my life, and he can just talk anything. He can just hang with an old blues musician or talk to an old Russian lady and has his steel trap memory for stuff. At one point he was Vice President of Puget Sound Banks. Yeah, he's just all over the place!

AC: Just like doing whatever!

Ralff: Oh yeah! George is just one of the most amazing people on the planet, and he's a direct descendant of the first Chief Justice of the United States - John Jay whatever it is. Anyway, so when I got down here, that was the coolest house. There wasn't a house even like it down here. So I'm glad that Andrew's got that. His wife, his ex-wife, lives next store, and Andrew lived over here for a short while.

AC: So you and Ed Fahnoe built that together? Or 52 together?

Ralff: 52. He and I have worked on a lot of houses down here together. Ed's a true - he's a master carpenter, and he's a former shipwright. Those are the guys that do all the carpentry on yachts and that sort of thing. I think he's the most intelligent person on Salmon Beach. He just is. He's just one of those guys that does the New York crossword puzzle in ink. When we've worked together he'll go [in another voice] "Well, it's simple Ralff:, just take this tangent and you multiply this cosine" and this and that, it's like "Jesus, Ed." Math? I think that's math your talking about...But! I think he's about 73 or 74, and he's a chain smoker! He lights one right after the other one, and you just go "Oh my God!" At some point you just go - he's the most intelligent guy I know, but doing the dumbest thing I know. Never could whip the habit... I've probably worked on 30 houses down here easily. It's just through the years - I've worked on houses next to me. [Phone rings and automatic voice says "Call from Pamela."] That is her, but I'm not answering it. Yeah.

AC: Wow! So what work did you do mainly on those?

Ralff: Oh, gosh...I've done just remodels and - mostly remodels, I guess. I'll tell you how I got into that real quick. When I was making really good money with the Levis business, I turned that money into - you

know, doing rental houses. Then I kind of had developed that skill set working with people down here, 'cause this is always a real can-do - was a can-do community. I learned carpentry from all these people around me, and I just thought I have kind of a knack for it. And doing eccentric stuff, as you can tell. So I decided - 'cause there were people who asked me while I was working on my rental house if I would work on their place - so I ended up becoming a licensed and bonded contractor. So that's how I got into that, and then when the Levi business kind of imploded - supply and demand and all that sort of stuff - I just went into doing that. And because I've done a lot of work in this community, I've gotten a lot of work in this community. It's like if I would have done bad work, I wouldn't have gotten any jobs. So that's how that kind of all fell into place. But I like doing really trick stuff. So it's like, "Give me a really hard project to figure out!"

AC: What's the hardest project you think you've worked on here on Salmon Beach?

Ralff: Oh boy, it could be this house [chuckles]. Yeah, I will say - Oh! Oh! Easy! Just figured it out! That was number 64. This was back, I think, in 2013. Now my pal Richard, Richard Turner, he said I was the guy to do this. He and I, by the way, we've shared birthdays for years because I'm May the 23rd, he's May the 24th. I was born in '52, he was born in '42. So we always celebrate our birthdays - and especially the big ones - together. Like when I turned 30, and he turned 40, and that crept up ... So anyway, we're bonded in a whole bunch of different ways, but he had this crazy-ass idea. So the second story of this house wasn't in great shape. The first story was horrible. The walls were horrible. The floor was horrible. The pilings and the beams were horrible.

AC: Ooh...when the foundation is bad, that makes it challenging, I'm sure.

Ralff: Right. So my job was - and I pulled this off - and I had people coming in like Ed Fahnoe, master carpenter, going, "Whew! It's all yours Ralff:." I took out the first floor and all the pilings and beams and stuff and put all new ones in, while supporting the second floor.

AC: That sounds crazy!

Ralff: It was the craziest job.

AC: How did you pull that off?

Ralff: A little bit at a time, seriously! I just did a chunk and removed a chunk. Dan Anderson from cabin 63, he and I were on this, it kept me awake at night. Richard had a summer place - or a winter place actually - in Mexico around the Acapulco area called Playa Ventura. We Skyped back and forth. So I was walking around with my laptop saying, "Okay, here's what's going on Richard!" And so he was basically managing the situation from down there, basically just giving me the okay - or basically just seeing how his money's being spent. So that was [one of the] - if not the craziest - jobs on Salmon Beach. I always had people coming in going "Oh my God! Oh! I'm glad you think you know what you're doing, Ralff:." So Gray Lumber Company would work with us in regards to - they would have the best building materials anyways, but what they will do is strap the lumber loads and then drop it in the water at Point Defiance and then we just tow it around. It takes about an hour and a half. So that's what I did, is I towed around the beams and all that sort of stuff and the whole lumber load.

AC: Wow, that sound like quite the project to take on, that is really cool.

Ralff: Yeah, but it all worked out! Now his son is Galen, and his wife, his baby - God! Richard is one of the more eccentric guys I know, which is why he's one of my best friends. His son, Galen, is way off the chain. His specialty is neon glass, and he's taught at Evergreen State College, and he's got this beautiful little daughter, Grace Eloise "Knuckles" Turner. No shit, really? Knuckles? It says right here [pointing to her name on the Salmon Beach contact list] This is on its birth certificate: Grace Eloise "Knuckles" Turner. It's like, Knuckles?! What is she gonna be in a Dick Tracy movie or something like that? But Galen was born on Salmon Beach. He was born right there in ole' cabin 64, so it's great.

AC: That's fantastic! Well, do you have any closing statements about this cabin's history or any of the other cabin's histories that you worked on just to throw out there?

Ralff: Just to throw out there? Well, all I can say is that people just have to be vigilant about the hillside, that's the biggest nemesis. You have to be proactive about it. 'Cause at anytime this could be wiped out. That's what we have to think about down here. We could be eliminated. There's agencies out there that don't care much for us, so they want us gone, like the Department of Fisheries. They wanna do this whole ... There's a gal who lives down here - sweet gal - Lily Kristen Williamson who lives in cabin 82, and she actually works for the Department of Fisheries. If she chimes in about something about Salmon Beach, they really give her a lot of flak for it, "Oh, you're one of them." There are these real purists out there who wanna do a complete reclamation as they did at Chesapeake Bay. They kind of really think that we don't belong here - we don't deserve to be here, even though we're a historical entity.

Salmon Beach did have a nefarious reputation. When I got here it certainly did in regards to the sewer. Of course the real nefarious reputation - it harkens back to Prohibition and I remember this would be a community that they would be hit, 'cause it was done over there. There used to be this thing - you may already know this - that before the bridges and the ferries, there used to be the Mosquito Fleet which would take people over to Home or wherever, or to Gig Harbor, so there's a lot more transportation here. It's so interesting, actually!

I love the history - like the cable car lines that used to be here! There was one that went right on 12th and all the way to Steilacoom, and the building is still there on 12th and Proctor, the cable building. It is cool. Yeah and they had cable cars that went from downtown all the way to Point Defiance, and it was really a going-on thing! So there was a lot of traffic, and part of the traffic was nefarious. They would hit Salmon Beach and the booze would go up the hill and into Ruston. Ruston was a real happening place, because even when I moved here the smelter was going on. All these bars that are no longer there, because the guys would get off work and hit the bars. Now, in the entrance down there at Point Ruston, they have a little museum there. It's kind of in this lobby, it's right kind of next to the Franciscan cosmetic place - Franciscan something or other - but if you go in that hallway, there's all these great old photos and stuff of Ruston and up the hill and it's really curious. So, it's just that it's changing so much, so fast right now, I can't even keep up on it. So, I don't know what's gonna become of this place. I just think it's gonna get more gentrified and lose some of its characters, because I do kind of miss the rascals and the near-do-wellers.

AC: Yeah, I get that. [His phone begins ringing] Well thank you so much!

Ralff: Well I know I went way off on tangents.

AC: No, no! It's great to have all these different stories.