

Key Information:

Names: Scott “Scooter” Wurster and Kristin “Willie” Williamson

Age: 45 and 51

Current Cabin: #82

Date of Interview: February 4, 2017

Interviewer: Arielle Kligman (University of Puget Sound)

Ethnographic Preface:

This interview was conducted at Salmon Beach inside the interviewee’s house. The house was at the end of a bridge. Upon arrival we sat down in the living room with a window that overlooked the sounds and a bridge. It was raining, but when it is not they both sit outside on their deck and enjoy the weather. During this interview, Scooter was able to pull up a lot of photographs that he took in 2012 during a big remodel of the house. I pictures showed rotting of the walls and the loading of the lumber through the sounds. In the interview Scooter explains that in order to get supplies you order it and send it to Point Defiance and subsequently load it on a boat and bring the boat to the cabin’s deck. Both Scooter and Willie attended the University of Puget Sound and resided in Tacoma after they graduated, though he graduated six years before.

This specific interview strived to cover the historical synopsis of the building and rebuilding of their cabin. Since Scooter lived there longer he was able to tell me about, not only the building of his current home, but about other cabins he lived in throughout the years. As they recalled the changes and challenges of remodeling their house, they shared extensive information of their feelings towards Salmon Beach. Although they love to live in the house they do, they agreed that the house is just a house, and it is Salmon Beach’s community and neighbors that make it so special to live there. Their behavior towards the beach was evident in the way that they welcomed my friend (Cato) who drove and me into their home and happily shared their information on their beloved house and neighborhood.

Transcription:

Arielle: How long ago did you both move to Salmon Beach?

Willie: I moved to Salmon Beach in fall of 2002, but he’s been here longer.

Scooter: This is a rendition of when this house was remodeled. From that, that is what the guy wanted this place to look like.

Willie: But he fell a little short.

Scooter: This is actually the part of the house over there, but the second story never materialized. They ran out of money.

Willie: When we bought the house, these were doors that we turned into windows.

Scooter: There was just a lot of rot, so we basically had to...

Willie: Remodel this house piece by piece.

Arielle: I know a lot of the houses around here have changed a lot, do either of you have information on what it was like before the changes you made and how this cabin came to be?

Willie: Yeah, we've just been photo documenting. This house was two houses, but I don't actually know when that change was made. The guy who built the house in the more or less current condition did it in 1984, and then someone else bought it from him in 1994. And then we bought it from her in 2011. So we've been photo documenting as we've been taking out doors and creating new windows, dry wall, that remodeling stuff. But nothing super formal.

Arielle: Do you know who owned it before you?

Willie: Yes, her name is Rachel Nugent and she only lived here for about seven years and then she rented it for quite a while. We moved in as renters from September to January. She wanted to sell the house but we were not ready, we weren't sure if this was our house. But she did an owner finance so we bought it from her and then we were paying her our mortgage until we were able to do enough remodeling and get it conventionally financed because it looked like it was in good shape, but all of the doors, windows, and floors were rotting.

Arielle: What was it rotting from?

Willie: The house was supposed to be built differently, so the guy who built it put on a temporary roof in 1984 and so it had never been finished properly and so the water on the flat roof was leaking into the walls, particularly the entry wall, which we have totally redone. We had to rip it all off and redo it. And those doors, which are beautiful, they are all solid wood, but down here the elements are pretty extreme so things rot pretty quickly. It had no overhang or anything so it was not very well maintained because it was just a rental for a while.

Arielle: When it was first built, do you know who built it?

Willie: Was it Richard Turner?

Scooter: No, Richard bought it from Danny Anderson's father.

Willie: Both of those people still live around here.

Scooter: Just to give you an idea, here are a few pictures of the rot in the back of the house. That's all the rot after we took the dry wall out. The initial design was not adequate for an area that rains a lot.

Arielle: How long did it take for you to rebuild this place to get it to how it is now?

Willie: The major work was when we ripped off the back entry. We ripped it off in May and then were dried in before October. But that wasn't finished, that was just structural. We've been working on this house bit by bit for a long time.

Arielle: So you were living here while you were rebuilding?

Willie: Yes. Pretty much. The entryway and that whole side was the major deal. The doors and windows were also major. These windows weren't even here, so we popped those in. Eventually we're going to move the kitchen over there and the dining over here because we want a bigger kitchen space.

Scooter: I've got a spreadsheet that our friend Kate has been putting together. It is a broad history of who has lived here.

Willie: Have you seen the Salmon Beach book?

Arielle: Yeah, Andrew showed it to us in class.

Scooter: Anyway, Roger has the phone lists dating back since forever. So from that, you have an idea who owned the house and who rented the house, and I have a document somewhere.

Willie: So Roger does a new phone list quarterly of who is in which house, and [that list] acts as this historical documentation of who's lived where. He probably has it back to the 70s or 80s.

Arielle: Since these houses are so historical and they all have a special or specific way that they were built, is there anything about this house that you can recall?

Willie: Well this is probably one of the newer houses in its current state. It was built more or less in its current state in the 80s. I don't know much about the two houses that were here before that.

Scooter: Daniel Ently owned it, and then Anders Pearson, H. Munn, Warren, Anderson's father, then Richard and Nancy Turner, Bern Hess, and Gary Schultz.

Arielle: Wow, that's a lot of people.

Willie: Gary Schultz is the guy who rebuilt it. But he died of AIDS and then the second level part of here was supposed to be the nurse's quarter, that's the way he originally designed it. We've

since connected it but there's a second entrance to an upstairs and a downstairs over there that had a bathroom in it. The story is that as he was building this house he was suffering from AIDS and so he built that to have a caretaker. But his health failed quicker than he thought it would, and he didn't get to finish it, so he sold it to the woman we bought it from. One of the houses down here itself is on the historical register, so you can't really do anything to that house within the nature of its historical period. I think it was built in 1927.

Scooter: 1932 is when Daniel Ently built it.

Willie: But I think the story is that Gary Schultz bought the two houses that were here, and then tore them down and built this one.

Arielle: Did he tear them both down or just connect them?

Willie: He tore them down and started new. Not a lot of places down here have done that.

Scooter: I don't know how much history you got from Roger's book, but Salmon beach was originally a bunch of cabins on the water. We didn't invest a whole lot into it because we didn't own the land. Somebody else owned the land; it was other private landholders. People didn't really move in here, there were just a lot of cabins on platforms.

Willie: People were just squatting.

Scooter: You hear stories of people buying a cabin for \$32. People were just buying structures. I believe in the 80s they actually got a chance to purchase the property. Because the way it was before was that you leased the cabin. So in the 80s they bought the land and collectively created this community. And that's when you have the shift of people actually putting more into their houses because they knew it wasn't a temporary or fleeting thing, it couldn't just be taken away from you. And then through the 80s and 90s, you saw all of these cabins going more from cabins to being remodeled and rebuilt to more proper houses. Cabin #26 was three cabins that fell and were then built into one house.

Willie: Well a landslide took them down.

Scooter: No, they were torn down. Luke bought three lots and tore them down.

Arielle: Has this house ever been taken down by anything?

Willie: I don't think so, but I think that's why there is no house next to us, because a landslide took it down.

Arielle: Andrew was telling us that there is a place called "the gap," because of a fire. Did that affect this house?

Willie: No I think that is by the end, called the “Tranquility Gap.” There were three or four houses that were over there by the railroad. It goes through a tunnel and comes out by Ruston. The houses went all the way down there and ends around there.

Scooter: I know that the reason the boardwalk out here has a trail that is a bit off is due to a landslide so they built a bridge around that slide.

Arielle: So, you’ve been living here since 2002?

Willie: I have but Scooter has been here longer.

Scooter: I moved down to the beach in August of 1995, my senior year at UPS.

Arielle: You lived here and commuted to school?

Willie: A lot of UPS students would live here, but not really anymore.

Scooter: Well the thing is, there used to be many more quote unquote cabins and rentals so they were more rustic, and summer homes. So you could rent a house down here relatively inexpensively. When I was a senior I lived I #38 and then after that I moved down the beach to #87 and I lived there with a few other people. I can’t remember how much rent was. Maybe around \$120 a month. I was living with five other guys. It was super affordable. It was a lifestyle. When I graduated I was living down here with a cheap rent, living with a bunch of friends and then I also got a job working on the beach. Someone would want to remodel their house, and I got into carpentry and slowly helped gentrify the beach. Subsequently all of those small cabins and rentals were then bought by people and remodeled and now they are nicer homes. Now there aren’t many rental opportunities for college students. But there were a lot — I mean when I was in college there were about three or four houses that were rentals with students and there were a couple professors living here at the time: Al Eggers, who is geology, and Stuart Smithers lived down here.

Willie: Ann Woods and Terry Mace, I think they are both retired now. Also, Eric Puris [sp?], who is not there anymore. Emily Peine lives next door, I think she’s in IPE. There’s the train, it’s actually moving very slowly.

Arielle: Where does the train go?

Willie: From here it goes all the way to Nisqually and then heads east and goes to Lacey and then onto LA eventually. Through the hillside and pops out. You can also go to Portland.

Cato: What’s the difference between the historical number and the registered number?

Scooter: Well remember some of these houses occupy two spaces now. So #26 used to be #25 and #26.

Willie: They are numbered 1 to 104 but there are only about 80 houses. It used to go to #111 when it stretched all of the way.

Arielle: This has nothing to do with the house, but how do you handle the stairs?

Willie: I guess you just get used to them. But people have to move in by boat.

Arielle: When you were rebuilding it came through boat?

Willie: Yeah we have a little boat; most people just have little boats. But you just load them up.

Scooter: As far as building material you would get them bundled up at the lumber yard and have them delivered to Point Defiance and dump them in the water and tow them in. You need to wait for the tide to go out and load them up onto the deck. It's a totally different way to do things. You don't just roll up with your contractor's truck...everything has to be through boat.

Arielle: When you were rebuilding this house did you find issues with the tide or weather that would get in the way of rebuilding?

Willie: Yeah you have to time everything with the tides. Every house gets a tide chart, it has the curve of the tide. When it's low it goes all the way out about 20-30 feet, and there's a huge beach. But when the tide is high it goes all the way past the boardwalk. You can only put your boat in at a certain tide. And you can only unload your boat at a certain tide or it can create a big difference with the water surface and the house. You really just need to time it.

Arielle: When it is low tide are you able to be on an actual beach?

Willie: Yeah, there's actually a big beach.

Scooter: This is an example of when I was redoing these doors; I took the door out and put in a window. You have weather you have rain. I mean, hello, we don't have a door or a wall and it's raining! But we've got a tarp! And then as far as working with the tides, there were challenges. You'd have to build scaffolding; you've got to totally work around the tides. That's when I was doing the front of the house. Definitely challenges.

Arielle: It must be so cool to live in a house that you helped build and in a community where you helped build a lot of it.

Scooter: It is. When we were redoing the deck we had to get the lumber package like I was telling you. Just drop it at Point Defiance and wait for the tide and send it here and load it onto

the dock. So I tore half the deck off rebuild it, then move the lumber to that side and rebuild the other side of the deck. You do everything in stages.

Arielle: I feel like I got a nice idea how this house was built and rebuilt. Is there anything else that you would want to tell me about this house or about living here in this specific cabin?

Scooter: It's always in a perpetual state of work. Have you ever heard of the Remington Mansion? Or Winchester? It is in Northern California. It's basically the family of the ones who made the Winchester rifle. His wife believed that the house was haunted from all of the spirits killed by that rifle. In order to confuse the spirits she was constantly building the house. There are stairways that go to nowhere.

Arielle: It's a museum now right?

Scooter: Yeah, it's a museum. Sometimes this house feels like the Winchester house. There's always some type of project going on. Just living down here, like Willie was saying earlier, it's a harsh environment and just as soon as you get something finished, repainted, or fix a rotten deck board, something else needs to be done. It's always in a state of perpetual work.

Arielle: How long do you think it will take to move the kitchen?

Willie: That's a matter of funds. We'll do it once we get the money to do it all. First we need to replace this door and then our roof needs to be replaced and we have a full attic but it's only so tall, so we are figuring out if we can make a room out of that, not sure what to do with that. But there is a whole bunch of permitting issues with the city because we're in a sensitive environment here and they don't want to have huge mansions in a landslide zone on the water. Just as far as resource space.

Scooter: We're in an interesting situation now because it is a unique historic community, but there are also shorelines, and we are restricted, and officials might not be supportive of the community, so it's really hard to build down here.

Willie: There are charges to protect the environment and we don't want to be on the wrong side of that.

Scooter: But you also need to be working on your house. A lot of people will do stuff without permits — they used to anyways; because that's what you need to do.

Willie: We haven't done a lot of adding on to our house, just windows and doors.

Scooter: But now if people want to do the right thing and go through the permit process, it is really difficult and costs a lot of money so its...

Willie: A constant balance of being a good citizen of the environment and wanting to have your house the way you want it. There's not a lot of waterfront left in Tacoma.

Scooter: Some of the regulations that have been put in place to protect the shoreline and for the development. This is such a unique community. There's no other place like it in the Puget Sound. Probably no places like it in the state. It is a different type of development than you would find in other places because it is remote, you don't drive up to it, you've got to come down stairs, and it's under a high bluff. It is remote as to other places that are getting development into McMansions. It's a different sort of use of the waterfront. I don't think the regulations necessarily consider the uniqueness of it. But we are in a process of trying to change the legislation to have the regulations defined by the shoreline changed.

Arielle: Wow. What does that entail?

Willie: A bill in the legislature.

Scooter: They basically changed some legislation that restricted what and how you can build down here and this is a process that happened unknown to any of us. If it really restrictive on what you can do to your house and as a historic community, which is a fact we use to try and change the legislation, for the preservation and enhancement of this historic community, and the restrictions that they place upon on us don't necessarily allow for the preservation and enhancement of this historic community. So we are working to change that. It used to be much simpler.

It is a really cool place and there are a lot of cool cabins down here, but what really makes this place special are the neighbors, and the community. That's harder to put your finger on it, so to speak, but that's what makes this whole community what it is. Everybody lives down here and the houses are just the houses, wouldn't you say?

Willie: Yeah, it's a tight knit community. Not everybody gets along with each other but everybody just takes care of each other. If there's a landslide, there's a work party going to help dig people out. When we were doing stuff on our house there were a lot of neighbors who helped us if we needed to push through and get something done quickly. Even if we just have the structural pieces of the houses, they are simply built by the community. That's what we've done for years, and there are several contractors who live here and rarely go to contractors who live outside Salmon Beach.

Scooter: And when they do come here they're out of their element. They really don't know how to deal. People show up to do work and go to the top of the stairs and exclaim, "what is this?" Also whales come around four or five times a year. In the time I've been here I remember a few occasion where everyone is excited and tells everyone that there's a whale.

Arielle: Where are you both from?

Willie: I'm from Minnesota and he's from Pennsylvania. We both moved out here to go to UPS and just stayed here in Tacoma.

End of interview.