

## Key Information

Name: Sasha Conlon

Age: 38

Current Cabin: 84

Date of Interview: February 17, 2017

Interviewer: Julia Lin (University of Puget Sound)

## Ethnographic Preface

On one of the few rain-free evenings that allowed for the sun to set upon Salmon Beach, I sat down with Sasha Conlon of Cabin 84 to discuss some of the cabin's history. Sasha was a tall and inviting man, making one feel right at home at an instant. After cracking open a beer, we sat in his previously childhood bedroom, now kitchen dining room to talk about some of the stories he had to share. This cabin in particular has an interesting story of its timeline and ownership, leading us to unveil how Cabin 84 had acquired its current tenant.

The following transcriptions document Sasha's memories of residential occupancy. It moves to document the myriad of stories that took place throughout his lifetime on Salmon Beach, from his initial birth that took place in the cabin's living room corner to the "squatting" type residence that he takes today. Sasha also takes us through the history of the house being sold, foreclosed, and now in the process of being potentially repurchased. This was not Sasha's first time being interviewed on Salmon Beach history, and expressed that he continued to recall more stories as this project resurfaced each year. Sasha also expressed an idea that may prove useful to the future application of this project archives: to gather multiple cabin residents to sit down together and compile events of the past, through perhaps, a roundtable of drinks and good conversation. There may indeed prove to be an exciting ethnographic project within that proposal.

## Transcription

Julia: So if you could start by telling me a bit about how you got associated with this cabin --

Sasha: Do you know any of the backstory here?

Julia: I do, I do know that you were born in a corner of this room, right over there --

Sasha: (chuckles) right over there, yeah that's what they tell me.. My family lived here when I was born, and uh, I should know the story of my birth way better than I do ... my mom tells it to me, it's like a party

trick for her. Yeah, so I was born over here and grew up here, until I don't know, until I was around 7 or so. My family moved off the beach and ended up in North Tacoma, I guess. So yeah, not that much time went by, I always visited the beach, I had friends down here and kept a connection. I went to school in Evergreen and some college buddies ended up moving down to the beach through myself and another friend who lived down here – I kinda introduced them to the beach and one of my buddies ended up living here, in Cabin 84. The people who owned the house had kind of just taken off.

Julia: Mhmm.

Sasha: Kinda just walked away from it I guess.

Julia: Mhmm.

Sasha: Yeah and he was renting from them which kind of just turned into him squatting.

Julia: Mhmm.

Sasha: And then he got a job on a NOAA boat: the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. Yeah, so he left, and I was like, what's going on, what's happening with the house? And I kinda thought well, maybe we'll just kinda hang out for the summer. And I guess that was about two and a half years ago or so. And uh, I'm trying to buy it as we speak. That's the synopsis – that's all you need.

Julia: So you've been there for about two years total now, then?

Sasha: A little over two years. I think we've done two summers and y'know, whatever.

Julia: So you've talked a bit about how it's kind of like a repossession thing, can you talk a little bit about what's going on with that?

Sasha: Well, so right now it's a bank-owned house. So I don't really know, I mean i don't know what it's going to entail. I have a list of hoops I have to jump through. If I show them that I'm serious about buying it, that I can potentially buy it.

Julia: Yeah.

Sasha: And I also have to sign a cash-for-keys agreement.

Julia: Uh-huh.

Sasha: Are you familiar with this?

Julia: No.

Sasha: The banks in this kind of a scenario, they will often pay people to leave the house,

Julia: Mhmm.

Sasha: When it's in decent condition ... Whereas a lot of people who got foreclosed on got angry and destroyed their houses. So, um, anyways, I have to jump through all these hoops, sign an agreement that I'll be nice, and as a contingency, if we don't buy it, then we will leave it. The bank is gonna send an appraiser down to tell us how much they want. They basically have agreed to work with us before they open it up to the market. So I feel good about that. But this is kind of an atypical real estate transaction, so we'll see what happens. Either they come back with a number that's realistic, or y'know, this place is falling apart, really. I'm a carpenter, that's what I do for a living. But I can't really fix it until I own it.

Julia: Have you been making any small renovations, like not ones that may necessarily affect the contract --

Sasha: Yeah, I don't know if I'd call them renovations, but I'm fixing the problems that are dire – dire but minor. I'm trying to keep the roof from leaking, things that affect our day-to-day comfort down here. I haven't given you the tour here, but the kitchen, you might be able to see it's sloping down aggressively, the floor in there is kinda failing. It needs a lot of work, much of which is against my interest to do that work now to potentially make this house worth more money before I buy it. So, kinda trying to wait it out. Either we get it or we don't, but if we get it I'm gonna buy a house that needs a lot of work ... we'll see.

Julia: How much has this house changed? You said you grew up in it, and then you left for a hot second?

Sasha: Yeah, it's changed ... a lot, and now that I've been here for two years it's less obvious to me. But when I first came back, and maybe one or two other times over the years ... when we moved out my Dad had it as a rental for a number of years, before he sold it. But uh, yeah, it's different. Y'know? It's hard ... but some of the rooms are different. This zone right here, when I was a small child, I had a bed built off the wall basically. This was my room, here, which is essentially the same shape it is now. My parents had a bed, basically, in that part of the living room that's kinda sunken. They had their bed there so they didn't really have doors. And I had two older brothers, and their room was kind of that one there [pointing].

Julia: Behind the kitchen?

Sasha: Yes, to the left, kind of behind the stairs there. And yeah, there's been a number of renovations, it's not exactly how it was. Behind the white door there is our bedroom now, but that's been rebuilt, so

yeah ... that's different. The deck washed away in a storm, I'm not exactly sure how long ago, maybe ten years ago, give or take. That was when the previous owner, when they were still living here, and a number of people that lived on the beach got together and helped them rebuild it.

Julia: So the deck out there is a newer deck?

Sasha: It's newer, but it also needs some love at this point. This house is a lot of, y'know, different maintenance going on here, and we're kind of in a high-maintenance environment being right on the water ... y'know, like a boat. But no one's been doing that here, so ...

Julia: Did you ever get to meet or interact with the old tenants of this house before you moved back in?

Sasha: Yeah, they were interesting people, I don't know. It's kinda hard to talk about them without talking shit. I don't know if you should record that ... but yeah, uh, they're kind of scammers. They always had a way to scam some system or scam something. I think they did that around here a little bit, and I just kinda think they generally do that. So anyways they took off from here, and I don't know ... they're scamming in some other part of the world right now, Ohio, I think. But yeah, I mean they weren't bad people, they had a couple kids, and I think they enjoyed being down here, but the beach is an interesting place. It went through a little bubble with everything, whatever, in 2008, you know, that kind of real estate bubble. I think they bought this house for about \$200,000, and at one point this was listed for \$440,000, which – it's pretty much the same house.

Obviously the location's nice, y'know? You potentially have this hill behind the house that can slide, stairs to deal with, which I think sometimes just keeps this place from [being] just doctors and lawyers with a big escalator to the top. It was easy, you know – you take all your groceries down, and your garbage up, the day to day life, y'know. The middle of the night there's a log banging under the house and you have to get a pole and push up from out under your house; those aspects of the day to day down here make it a ... I don't know, I guess it's a certain type of people who are willing to put up with the bullshit for the payoff.

Julia: Do you feel like the community has changed at all since you moved?

Sasha: Yeah, I mean I don't know ... I think there's a certain kind of people that are drawn to this place. The money's one aspect, and what better view is there? You're right on the water. And I could never afford this, really, anywhere. So I think to that extent, with people, there's some opportunism. The houses are, well – some are shacks, some are houses, the prices vary on any given house at any given time, obviously. But you know some people have gotten in here -- for example my dad got this house in the 70's, I believe, for three or six thousands dollars.

Julia: Oh wow.

Sasha: There's a neighbor who won a house in a poker game, y'know? Like these places weren't taken very seriously and there were all these crappy little cabins that were falling apart. But if you walk around here you'll see that some of these are modern houses with modern amenities, y'now, like they're not little shacks any more, all of them. So yeah, anyways, what was the question?

Julia: Yeah, I was just curious about seeing things from your perspective, seeing that you grew up here and took a break for a little while, and you were able to come back to that?

Sasha: Yeah, I mean one thing's that changed for sure is that they're all getting built up. They used to all be shacks and now only half of them are shacks, maybe even less now, and half of them are kinda modernized. I think there used to be kind of a renter community down here, which maybe kinda has a negative connotation to it, but it made it so there were a lot more young people.

Julia: Uh-huh.

Sasha: I mean I know a pretty large handful, maybe 10, plus 10, who individually lived down here, they were all UPS students, in their 20's, y'know? It was cheap. You could be in a room down here for a couple hundred bucks, whatever, in some little house. You know, like a rental. Some of them are like a one room cabin. Rent was cheap on that kind of stuff. There are still some rentals down here, but it kinda swayed and went the other direction. The average age down here is a little higher, it's not as affordable maybe as it once was in some aspects, I guess. Nobody's winning these in poker games anymore.

Julia: Do you think it's better that there's an older crowd down here?

Sasha: Well, I don't know. No, not necessarily. Well, I've become the "older" crowd, I'm not really in my 20's anymore, y'know? But actually this was brought up last night by a neighbor who also did carpentry -- I work down here a lot, and so in a sense, I don't know if that's a problem, but I'm a part of that problem. I'm working on the houses and making them nicer -- that's just the gentrification of the place. They either go that way or they sit like a time capsule, with the floors falling in and the roof leaks and all that. I wanna see Salmon Beach maintained and all that, but uh, you know, it would be nice to see a whole mix. It's just a bunch of old white people here.

Julia: Yeah, fair.

Sasha: A little diversity wouldn't hurt.

Julia: I'm curious about some of the stories that you've had inside the cabin -- cause that's just something that I wouldn't be able to figure out in a history book. Do you have any stories about growing up in this cabin and seeing how this changed for you, or for the cabin itself, within the community?

Sasha: Well, my parents are kinda hippies and they used to party down here. When he [my dad] was down here he had to have been in his 30's. He was like 36, 37, when I was born, and my mom was around the same age. So, you know, they were living cheap, living their kind of hippie dream. My dad, although he was a computer programmer and did that for a couple years, went to school on a physics scholarship, that was not really what he was into. He wanted to "work on wooden boats, man," y'know? So he was just doing that kinda stuff, living cheap. They used to have parties, they were like in their 20's, 30's, that's kind of the median age. As kids they'd have parties, not just here, all the houses! In those days that was before the beach got ... sewage treatment.

Julia: Oh, okay.

Sasha: So I grew up peeing on the fish ...

Julia: Did every single cabin have that?

Sasha: Yeah, yeah. So everyone pooped in the bay. That became a little uncouth, and the city came in and that all got modernized. Now everything gets pumped up the hill through the sewage system. That was kind of a gross story.

Julia: (chuckles) It's history.

Sasha: So a friend of mine, who's still here, and he wasn't born in his cabin but our mothers were pregnant together, and he's a couple months younger than me, and so he still lives in his "birth cabin," he's married, he's got a kid, second-generation or whatever. The story has a legend status, and it's hard to know where the truth lies -- we get together and tell it. We were kids at the time and now we're adults, and it's hard to know where the reality lies.

But there was a party, purported to be in this house. It's a vague early childhood memory. But it goes something like this: Galen, the neighbor -- he's about my age. And there's a number of kids -- so Salmon Beach has gone through a number of different "times," so like right now it's the golden age for kids down here. There's probably twenty, I'd say twenty or thirty kids down here on the beach that probably range in age from a couple little toddlers to young teens. The majority are probably somewhere in the middle. So it's pretty cool, it's a safe neighborhood and aside from drowning, it's not like you're not gonna get snatched up or anything.

When I was a kid down here it was the same: there was a lot of kids. It was pretty common thing to be

like, "hey, y'know, your brother's got you, don't go to the train tracks, don't go here," and you're good, y'know? Anyway, whatever, so we're a group of kids, on our own, standing around a massive pile of poop. It would have made sense that it was low-tide when this party happened. I mean, I don't know when was that last time you had gone to a party and pooped, but apparently that was going on, and we're all kind of standing around like, "holy shit, this pile of poop is as tall as us!" It's five or six feet tall! One person, as I remember it in my mind, or in the retellings – Galen's standing there with his hands in his Oshkosh overalls, and he gets pushed from behind into the pile of moon shit, and it's the size of him, and it's just mayhem. I don't remember what happened after that.

Julia: You just remember that he fell in a pile of shit?

Sasha: Yeah, he was pushed – blame it around. One guy has recently said it might've been me. [laughs] So yeah, one of my friends lived here a couple years prior to us moving in, and so I spend a fair amount of time moving in here during his tenure. Y'know, just hanging out. Salmon Beach is community oriented. So like, in the winter, it's typical to have poker nights, just send out a kinda impromptu "hey, is anyone up for poker tonight or tomorrow?" Whatever, and everyone brings like a quarter jar.

Julia: To bet your cabin?

Sasha: Yeah, [chuckles] yeah. There was once time a pistol was put in a pot in lieu of having the money, not that long ago, a couple years ago. But yeah, I think there's a strong community here, so there's a lot of people who get together. Definitely more in the summer – in the winter people get more reclusive, in general, whether you're on the beach or not. So this house used to host poker night, in particular, fairly often. It's amazing how a game where you bring a jar of quarters can turn into a \$300 pot and all of a sudden it's like super serious.

Julia: Would you guys randomly just pick houses to do poker night?

Sasha: I think it depends, I think there are people more apt to host and so ... Charlie was the previous tenant prior to me, and he was a single young dude who liked to host, so he'd have people down. I don't think I've hosted it since we've been living here. Some other neighbors pick it up these days. It's always kind of impromptu these days. It's kind of an excuse to drink some beers and hang with a couple friends.

Julia: What was it like living here with your brothers? It seems kind of like a smaller place to live with a couple brothers.

Sasha: Yeah, so my older brothers are twins, and they're 7 years older than me, 6 - 7. And I mean yeah, I didn't know anything else, so when we moved off the beach, it was a trip. Down here you don't really realize it, necessarily, but there's some kinda rhythm you get into when you listen to the water. The tides

change, like they cycle with the moon and et cetera, so at any given season they're gonna be different or often you go to sleep listening to the waves. I remembered when we moved off the beach it was hard for me to sleep. We moved to a block off Stevens St. and N. 33rd. And being a block away off Stevens is, you know – it's not *that* busy of a street. Like there's some traffic, but it's not that busy, but the noise from a block away would keep me up. I couldn't sleep when we moved up the hill.

So it was interesting. I don't know, as a kid, it was awesome. This is like the best place to grow up as a kid. The house obviously is kinda small, but what did I know? I mean, I was small. My room was that space, so it was big to me. But yeah having all those kids down here – I mean, what else do you need? You've got the woods behind you, you've got the beach, and you've got the water. There's an age where you get a little older and get a little more autonomy, and it's like -- Oh, Salmon Beach, if you go to the north parking lot, the border of the beach is Point Defiance park, so y'know you're in, you're just into the park. Which is cool – having Point Defiance as your backyard. In middle school, in the years that I didn't live down here, and into high school I guess, I was like, "let's get away from the folks and drink 40's on the train tracks." You're out there and you've got your own zone. At whatever age I always felt the pull to be here. Yeah growing up here ... I guess growing up in the house, it never dawned on me that it might've been small, y'know?

Julia: Yeah. What age did you move out of this cabin?

Sasha: I was just about 7, I think. I was pretty young. I have a lot of childhood memories out here. The summers were kinda cloudy, but I think it's cool that Andrew is doing this project. I think the best way to really do this is to get like ten Salmon Beachers together, and then you'd get all the stories. There are a lot of stories! I think someone could write a pretty interesting book about all the ridiculous summer one-offs and you could dedicate chapters to like "this guy," y'know?

There have definitely been a lot of characters down here. My dad used to brew beer, which is nothing like what it looks like to brew beer now. They would take ... it takes three kind of things to make beer: sugar, yeast, and alcohol, and then you have some malt or some hops, right? The malt is the sugar. In those days you could buy one kind of malt, you throw in one big can right there, you throw the yeast in it, and they'd set a big crock pot out on the deck in the sun. And I'm sure all kinds of wild bacteria would get into it. And they basically let it sit and ferment until someone would try it, and would say, "no, it's not ready yet." At some point it would be ready, and they'd be like, "hey let's have a party!" They drank their hopefully non-poisonous alcohol.

There's tons of ridiculous stories. Down here, some neighbors down the way, they were trying to move a piano, dump it down the water, y'know. The situations people try to put themselves in ... and being down here – it's cool, but there are definitely aspects that are a pain in the ass, including moving in or out. If you have a big item to bring in, you have to bring it in by boat. For me, I have a little 12 foot boat, with

a little 10 horsepower motor, which is fine for one person. But you start putting two people or things in it and it gets wavy or choppy out there, or if it's a little stormy, it gets a little sketchy.

Julia: Yeah. So was there any particular reason, other than that you grew up here, that made you want to come back to Salmon Beach? Or this cabin?

Sasha: Yeah, honestly, I came down here to squat for free. And again I was living elsewhere and thought, well, this is like a summertime place to crash and hang out, and I really didn't think there would be any kind of longevity to it. But I would have taken any cabin on those terms. The fact that I was born here – you know, it's cool, obviously. I wanna buy this house, but again, it's like I wanna buy this house, but ultimately it has to be an investment that sort of makes sense fiscally. I mean I don't have the kind of money where I could just say, "I wanna buy a house, or I'm gonna sell!" Ultimately, at the end of the day, it has to be a sound investment, or at least a *potentially* a sound investment. We are at the bottom of the hill – it could slide – I mean there are some things that could happen down here, but I'm willing to take some of those risks. But yeah, if this opportunity had really opened itself anywhere else, I'd probably be there doing that.

[phone rings, and Sasha returns to the table after receiving his call]

Julia: You were talking about what kind of made it enticing that brought you back here?

Sasha: Yeah, so I came down because I couldn't afford not to. It's free ... for a minute I was paying some rent to the homeowners. They had walked away and weren't paying the bank, but they still owned the house. But it was really cheap. And then they were foreclosed on, finally, which took probably like 5 years, or something of that nature, which is a really long time for a bank to foreclose. I think when the banks went through their glutton of inventory, they obviously didn't want to flood the market with all the houses they were sitting on. So little by little they put more inventory on the market, to control the market that way. They offloaded the ones that were easier to offload first. I think this [cabin] is an interesting kind of project from a real estate perspective. The location [is unusual], and also the fact that this house is falling apart. I think it wasn't flying off their shelves.

So I guess I came down for certain set of reasons. Then, after being back down here, it was just nice to be here again, I guess. And again – there's a good, strong sense of community here, and there's what today qualifies as a "younger crowd," which is in their 30s and 40s, mainly. Then there's the old-timers. Mostly everyone's pretty cool, and you kinda catch people on the trail and chat for a few -- that's typical. We've got a community garden just a couple doors down, at that big gap in the houses. In the summertime, when the garden's going off, at this end of the beach, but it's open to anyone, Friday evening after work bring a drink, a cocktail, a snack. People come together and hang out down there to watch the sun go down.

So the community's there, in that sense, but also you're living on the edge of nature here: stormy, rainy, winter kinda thing. You can definitely get some landslides. The quality of the hill varies behind different houses. Some spots are more slidey than others. Some slides are big and hit houses, and a couple houses have been knocked into the water. Or a slide comes and blocks your trail – everyone's trail. And if that's the case, go grab a shovel and dig for a couple hours, and everybody gets together and makes it work again.

It's nice being a part of a community like that. I lived up the hill, where it's like you don't know the neighbor two doors down, and nobody gives a shit or even makes an effort to nod. There's a few people I don't know down here – mostly they're on the other end of the beach, they park in a different parking lot, they use a different section of the trail, and we just don't run into each other. There's a few kind of recluse types – it's a funny place to be recluse, living ten feet from your neighbor.

But I'd say to a larger extent everyone knows each other. Sometimes problems arise by how close you are to your neighbor. You can see these little feuds – aspects of how some people have things they were pissed off about twenty years ago, and it manifests itself in various ways in some relationship some other way. But yeah, for the most part everybody gets along. The beach does these funny little get-togethers. There's a Mount St. Helen's party, usually on a Saturday right around the date of the Mount St. Helen's eruption. A couple of the older guys get together and build an effigy of the mountain and stick fireworks in it. And it's an excuse to go down to the beach and have a potluck. They light off the thing, that's it! There's a big 4th of July party, the rowboat race – that's always fun. The whole beach shows up. I think we're on the 46th, 47th annual rowboat race. So it's a race that starts on the south end. Non-motorized is the only criteria. There are different classes, and it's very informal. Some neighbors have gotten together and coordinated a square dance, with legit callers and fiddlers. So that's been happening once or twice a year. There's an annual Halloween party some guys are hosting, and the poker thing I was saying.

So the community's involved. I haven't really been involved because I haven't been a homeowner down here, but there's some board meetings and the homeowners pay some dues. The beach at various times has had to borrow money for different kinds of projects. We maintain the stairs and the gate where you came in -- someone hits that gate twice a year and we get it fixed. There's always some kind of project.

Salmon Beach is actually two entities: there's the north beach, and the south beach, and they're different legal entities. In the past they've sued each other. The north-south strife seems to be over, but there are different parking lots and different stairs for each side, and if we end up doing projects on our side it would end up under the purview of the south side. Anyways, that's the breakdown of that.

[End]