

Key Information

Name: Dave Maxwell

Age: 80's

Current Cabin: 75

Date of Interview: February 27, 2017

Interviewer: Lee Nelson

Ethnographic Preface

My interview with Dave Maxwell was very relaxed and informative. I did not receive much information on his specific cabin. However, I gained a lot of knowledge about Salmon Beach's history in general, as Dave has been living on the beach since the seventies. The original cabin 75, owned by Art Barlowe, was destroyed in a landslide in 1971. Dave bought the property from Art for \$75 and built his own home on that land. It originally was one story and was intended to be Dave's bachelor cabin. He purposefully built it back and out further over the water, as the front section was only ruins of the original cabin.

When Dave married his wife, Sue, he decided to build a second floor to enlarge the cabin. The two of them had three boys and raised them all on the beach. In the interview, Dave talks about raising children on Salmon Beach, and how this specific community and location influenced their upbringing. Sue was absent from the interview, however that was alright because Dave has been living on the beach longer than her and knows quite a bit about many of the cabins as he has watched them change owners, be destroyed, and/or be renovated. His knowledge is a great resource and he was very excited to tell me all that he knows.

Transcription

Lee: Alright, so I'm here with Dave Maxwell on Salmon Beach, Cabin 75. So to begin the interview I'm just going to start with the basics: When and why did you decide to move to Salmon Beach? I know we were just talking about this earlier, but if you could just say when and why.

Dave: Well, I was living on Salmon Beach when I got out of the service, going to college. And it was a cheap place to live. And things I like to do – scuba dive – it was right out the front door, and fish, so it was kind of neat. And I was actually living here in 1971: there was a heavy rainstorm and several slides, and one of them took out this cabin, number 75, and destroyed it. So I bought the cabin from the owner who was back east, for \$75, and we burnt what was left of the cabin and started building out from the end of where the landslide was and started building out the front. That was on the recommendation of some neighbors who had lived here for a while, and I built the structure of the cabin like many of the other cabins that had been hit by slides before but weren't damaged, and that was that the main

structural beams went out toward the water and 90 degrees to the beach line, and that allows the cabin to move if it gets hit by a slide without losing its structure. So it's kind of how everybody started building that way after that.

Lee: So you said you lived here on Salmon Beach before you bought this property?

Dave: Yeah I was here; I was living on the beach when I bought the property.

Lee: Oh okay, and were you living further down?

Dave: Cabin 26, on the north end of the beach.

Lee: And who owned the cabin before this?

Dave: Art Barlowe.

Lee: Was he the original owner, or do you know the owner before that at all?

Dave: Oh gosh, no. There were maybe twelve owners before that ... ten ... something like that. But Art actually owned two cabins. He owned the one next door also.

Lee: So how many years have you been living in this house?

Dave: Well since 1971.

Lee: Since 1971? Wow, so it's been quite a while now. So everything I'm looking at is part of what you built?

Dave: Yes. There's literally nothing from the original cabin left. I had a bathtub, a clawfoot bathtub, but I gave that to a neighbor.

Lee: So has there been any major modifications since you built it? Anything else that got damaged since you've been here?

Dave: No, no. At first I had envisioned it as just a bachelor cabin – but when I got married, and I put a second story on, and enlarged the cabin quite a bit. We had three boys, so it was a good place to raise the boys. It gave them something to do besides hang out on the street, you know, and they learned how to fish and kind of about the outdoors here and playing around in boats. So it was lot better than playing video games up at the 7-11 or something.

Lee: Absolutely, yeah. So then, how much of your life has been at Salmon Beach? Or have you been here your whole life?

Dave: Well, more of my life has been here than any other place. Yeah, I was born in Northern Ireland, and I came here in 1951. So twenty years later I wound up buying this place. But I lived up in Wilson High School's area, but we were off of Tyler Street. That's where my dad had build a house, and then remodeled a big house. So, yeah, I kind of lived and went to school with guys in this area and some of the guys I had gone to school with were living in Salmon Beach. And the neighborhood, the Ruston area – I knew people from there because we went to junior high and high school together. So it's part of our community.

Lee: That's fascinating. So what is the community like here on Salmon Beach?

Dave: Really interesting. If there is a disaster, people just turn out to help. People are willing to do anything, like helping me with starting my cabin. It was kind of interesting – we were having a fire on the beach and a couple of friends came down and they took this whole big section of a roof and threw it on top of the fire, so there was all this roofing that was going and black smoke going into the air, and I guess people on the other side reported that Salmon Beach was burning, so the fire department came down. I didn't have a burn permit. and they said, "oh, I see what you're doing here, you shouldn't be burning that stuff that makes the black smoke." And I said it was an accident and they kind of let me off the hook.

Lee: [Laughs] Well, that's good!

Dave: But anytime we've had storms that wiped out boardwalks the neighbors just come together and make it happen. They all just show up with shovels or buckets or whatever is needed. It's a neat community.

Lee: Would you say that the community has significantly changed since the 1970's when you bought this place versus today? Has there been more community growth, less community growth?

Dave: I was a lot younger then, but I don't know if it's so much different now. The people that I was here with – there aren't very many of them still here. There's very few. Their cabins have changed hands so many times. And we're a lot more stable than before, when it was rented property. When we were able to purchase our property, *that* kind of helped stabilize the beach community.

Before then, Salmon Beach had actually been condemned by the city of Tacoma, after an earthquake in 1949 ... 48 or 49 ... that caused cracks to show up along the bluff. It turns out it was much further north where there was a big sand bank – because that same things happened in the last earthquake: We had and about a half hour after the earthquake subsided, maybe fifteen minutes, and then a whole big

section of the north end of the beach just sort of slipped. It was a sandbank, and it sort of just gave way and it knocked out several cabins. The city didn't remember that it was condemned and they made people at Salmon Beach North do some grading on the hillside to stabilize it down to an angle they thought was safe. I don't know if there is anything really "safe" around here.

Lee: Yeah, so is there a lot of fear, do you think, of different natural disasters happening?

Dave: I don't think so. Most of it you can handle. It's very rarely that there is what happened here, happens. People have built up higher, and out further, and they've gotten away from that bank. We're also now controlling the storm water off the bank. Before, it was a dirt road and no drainage control. So those improvements have made a difference.

Lee: Is there anything that you know about the original cabin that was here as well? Anything important about it before it was damaged?

Dave: No, they were very typical cabins. They'd start out as a tent platform in the early teens or twenties, and people just came down and would build these platforms, and mostly they were all the way along Puget Sound and down into Titlow.

Lee: So even past Salmon Beach?

Dave: Yeah, and then the railroad came and they took a big portion of that out. But when I was a kid down at Titlow, there were still cabins like Salmon Beach built up against the bank. There was a house there on Rocky Point, which was a Girls Scout camp and owned by the park, and right in front of that house there were four or five cabins that were right on the beach, just like Salmon Beach. So the whole strip along here had been ... I don't know if everybody just sort of squatted. You know you could get a trolley car out to this end of town and walk through the woods down to Salmon Beach. People would spend summertime down here.

Lee: So what is your commute like? Or what was it like? Are you retired now?

Dave: I'm retired, yeah. I worked in Olympia and Tacoma and Bethel school districts.

Lee: So what's it like leaving for work from here every day? With the stairs..

Dave: With the stairs you don't forget to bring anything down ... Get your keys, you've got to get everything before you leave. You probably forget your keys one time down at the house and one time up at your car, and then you don't do it anymore.

Lee: Yeah I'm sure grocery runs, you try to make ...

Dave: All at the same time, or with boats. When the boys were here we would do big Costco runs – meaning we would do a boat trip to get everything in.

Lee: Oh, so you used the water as transit?

Dave: Yeah, so that was kind of the thing. We would get home and choose who would go down the stairs and get the boat and meet the car at the boat landing, at the boat lodge, down by the ferry landing there, and just run the groceries around, and voila!

Lee: Wow, so you just brought it up right to the ...

Dave: Or on a weekend, if you needed something from the grocery store, instead of going up the hill we just go into Gig Harbor and tie up there by The Tides, walk up to the grocery store, get whatever we wanted, and then come back. It was always a nice boat ride.

Lee: Do people do that much still?

Dave: Well, they don't have a grocery store down there like they used to. That's all gone. The communities have changed.

Lee: Do people still go out on boats often when they live here?

Dave: Oh yeah. There's a whole group of people that go down to Wyckoff Shoal down in the South Sound. And they meet up at Wyckoff Shoal in a low tide and dig clams, and geoduck, and go crabbing and get whatever seafood they can, and come back and have a big seafood feast. So, it's kind of a neat thing. Everybody sort of contributes something.

Lee: That's really interesting. Is this deck here [deck outside of window that goes over the Sound], is this new at all, did you build this as well?

Dave: I replaced it one time. We decided that we'd put grading outside along the edge so my wife could have flowers and not rot the deck out.

Lee: Oh that makes sense. That's smart. There's no railing around the side. Is that [common]?

Dave: There aren't many people, originally, that had railings on their decks. Most of the older cabins, if you looked, didn't have railings on the decks. It's just a nicer view, and getting things in and out and off. I still have sheetrock to do downstairs, and upstairs is done, but that's where the sheetrock will come over

the deck and probably be stored on the deck while we sheetrock in here. One of these summers that'll happen.

Lee: So you have a downstairs as well? A basement?

Dave: No, no.

Lee: Oh okay, okay. Are there any special characteristics about this cabin that you built. Is there anything interesting or unique to this cabin that's not common in other cabins at all?

Dave: No, no. I put timbers out that slide out so I could set my boat on the timbers. So now there are other cabins that have done that.

Lee: Are there? So you're a trendsetter? [Laughs]

Dave: Yeah! I didn't want to have boat space taking up my front deck, so it hangs down a bit lower so it's not right in the way. My wife sort of tolerates that. She'd rather have flowers out there.

Lee: Do you have grandkids?

Dave: Yes we do.

Lee: Do they like coming here?

Dave: Yes they did. They loved it.

Lee: I imagine. How old are they now?

Dave: Twenty six, twenty five, and twenty two.

Lee: Oh okay, so they're older now. What was it like for your kids growing up here, do you think?

Dave: I think there was a lot of kids at the beach at the time when they were growing up. So they had kids that were contemporary, but normally kids of various ages would hang out at Salmon Beach, where you might not do that in another neighborhood – you'd stay with kids your age or certain friends. But kids down here had known each other all their lives, and there may be almost a half a generation difference in ages, but they're all pretty common.

Lee: Do people that grow up here tend to stay here? Or do you think a lot of the kids move out?

Dave: There have been people that have stayed on the beach, and there are still a couple of generations of people living on the beach in different places. Our youngest son was still living here on the north beach, and just is getting married and setting up his own family, so he finally he moved off the beach. But he was not even twenty four hours old when he came home from the hospital to Salmon Beach. And he couldn't sleep comfortably anywhere else for years. Something about the tide coming in and out – this was home for him.

Lee: Wow, yeah -- I imagine. Could you imagine living anywhere else at this point?

Dave: At this point I probably will have to imagine it. As long as we can make it up and down the hill, we'll probably stay here. But eventually I'll be off the beach. But, like I said, I've lived here longer than I've lived any place else. I was living here by the time I was twenty six, and I'm seventy one. So, that's a good number of years. And what's funny is that my wife and I ... after the holidays we get out of town. That's our Christmas present to each other – to just take some time off and get out of town. Every time we go away, we try to find a place like Salmon Beach. It's like "okay, where's a place on the water?" Ya know? I mean you just kept looking for this place everywhere else ... it's unique!

Lee: Yeah, I saw that sign next to your door that says, "if you're lucky enough to live next to the water, you're lucky enough." [Laughs] I thought that was pretty funny.

Dave: Yeah my wife comes up with those.

Lee: Yeah, I find it very true. I've always wanted to live near the water. It's very appealing. Do you do much fishing off the dock, still?

Dave: Yeah! The kids always did that. They were really good. They'd get silvers when they were in. They'd fish off the dock. Or there'd be a float tied up off the dock someplace, and the kids would go out and fish off just outside of the kelp, which is a good place to fish. And then they would sell the fish to neighbors. So we had came home one night thinking we were going to have fish, and one of our boys sold the dinner to somebody else. [Laughs], so we got mac and cheese instead.

Lee: Not going to make a run back to the store for that.

Dave: [Laughs] No, no!

Lee: What about your original house, or your original cabin; is that still up, or has that been ...

Dave: Oh that's been completely remodeled. Cabin 26 was really small, initially. And now it's one of the bigger cabins on the beach. I don't know who owns it now ... Zitko had owned it for a while. But ... [Dave gets up from table to go get cabin directory] Who owns it now? [Finds cabin] Mike and Terra Enneking ...

When I was living down there, Ed Fanoie bought his cabin, cabin 28, and it was one of the older cabins that hadn't had much done to it. And Ed took it and rebuilt it, and expanded the floor plan, and then slid his cabin out away from the bank, and then built in a shop behind his house. So cabin 28 is still like that. It moved out quite a bit.

(Cabin) 29 was a little A-frame, and it's still an A-frame, but that has also been raised up and ... gosh [keeps looking through directory] ... a lot of cabins ... I built the cabin next door...

Lee: Oh really? Is that cabin 76?

Dave: Yeah.

Lee: When did you build that?

Dave: Gosh, it was winter 1988? 1989? Right in there, my old college roommate had the cabin and wanted to build it up, and so rather than get permits [laughs] ... We applied for permits and they were refusing them, and not saying why they weren't going to give them permits, and we wanted to go ahead and build it. So in the winter, we built a crane in the middle of the cabin with an electric hoist and a big caster wheel as a gooseneck, and with a topping lift – a crank – we could lift the boom up and down and then we could rotate it, so we just lifted all the beams up and built this beam structure.

Lee: Do you know just about everyone on the beach? Or are there a lot of people you don't know anymore.

Dave: There's younger people that I do not know. I still know some of the older people around, but the younger people I don't know – very few on the north end.

Lee: So would you say that you're one of the longest time residents on the beach?

Dave: Yeah ... Richard Turner is, I think, probably the longest on the beach. And my neighbor down here, Ed Quigley, was here years before I was. But other than that, I think, yeah ... except I didn't own my house when Ed Fanoie moved in. I was just living next door ... sharing a rental.

Lee: Who'd you live with in your first cabin?

Dave: That was Dave Grout, the owner of the cabin.

Lee: And did you rent from him?

Dave: No. We were just sharing the cabin. When I first came down to the beach, I came down to cabin 56. And that was Bill Frickleton who owned it at that point. He was a karate instructor, and we were going to Hawaii, so I came down and house-sat for him.

Lee: Is that how you discovered Salmon Beach to begin with?

Dave: Well, I knew about it when I was in high school – we'd come down here, and up above were all these roads, and then through woods and up and into the park. You could drive almost all the way to the Narrows Bridge on the dirt roads up there. So, it was kind of a place we'd go and bang around in old cars. It was neat. And there were people living at Salmon Beach. We'd gone to school with people from Salmon Beach. It was a viable community then. They had a store.

Lee: Salmon Beach had a store?

Dave: A store, a post office.

Lee: Oh okay, like a small convenience store? How long has that been gone for?

Dave: It wasn't functional in the late fifties. There was no functional store. The buildings were still there, and Foss had rented boats out of the boat house down here, and guys would come down here and go fishing. From Salmon Beach, the tide almost always goes north. On the outgoing tide, it just goes north. On an incoming tide, the tide comes around Point Defiance and goes over towards Point Evans, and comes back as a back eddy. And so in front of Salmon Beach it's almost always going that way. So you can put a rowboat in the water on an outgoing tide, and, going to Point Defiance, you can fish – you have to wait for the incoming tide to get a free ride back, but if it's an incoming tide you can float up to Point Defiance, fish up there, and row a few strokes up, and take the big loop. It's a free ride home. So you can go that two miles, or three miles, for free – just floating. So it was kind of neat. A lot of fishing was done from Salmon Beach, so they took boats out, and that was a big part of the community, just having people come down and going fishing.

Lee: I noticed a space where the bridge is, just past 76 then, or 77 – what is that empty space? Was there a cabin there before?

Dave: There had been cabins along the beach. There are one hundred and eleven lots. Not all of them were cabins at any point of time. Over years you have cabins get knocked down and not get rebuilt. And now, the number of cabins that are here now is etched in stone, and they're not going to increase that.

Lee: So no new ones will be built?

Dave: No new ones.. Yeah, the Shoreline Management Act has been slowly eroding out property rights here, on our half of Salmon Beach, to the point where we're trying to change the laws in our favor; much in the same way that the floating homes community in Seattle did. They got the laws changed so that they were a preferred use, and then that loosened things up for them. We own our property, we bought our tidelands out in front of the houses from the Metropolitan Park District. And we'd like to continue to be here as a residential community. I don't think there's any other community anywhere that's been regulated to our degree. I don't think it's right.

Lee: Absolutely. Do you think Salmon Beach is still going to be here in fifty years?

Dave: I think so. I think there's a good chance to that. The studies that they had showed us – that docks and structures over the water affect marine life, and the study that they showed me that I read was on Hylebos waterway, and they collected samples of marine life under the docks and then out in the open ... and there was one study they showed us that they were able to trap more juvenile fish, of all species, under the docks than out in the open. And they were obviously avoiding predation, so ... And they went through the study and they said "well, therefore, the docks are bad."

Well I didn't see where it came from ... What I see here from Salmon Beach: there's a kelp line out there, about 75 or 100 feet, and in the summertime, with the kelps growing full, that's where the young fish hang out. They get into the kelp to avoid predation. They also get under the cabins to avoid predation. So we can fish between here and the kelp, but if you went down to Point Defiance, that is a pristine beach, the same beach as us, and there aren't any juvenile salmon in between the kelp and the beach. They're in the kelp. So it's almost like we have an expanded environment for juvenile fish – for the salmon. And I don't see that as a bad thing. But they made the decision all over the state – "Yeah, docks disrupt salmon runs, and so then docks are bad." But they also say they're concerned about "minus six feet, to plus six feet" of tide. Well ... plus six feet of tide is out in front of my house. It's not on the plus six feet of tideland. And so, I don't see that we're an issue. But, oh gosh, I mean, some regulation's good and they just keep cranking it down, and more regulation is better ... so I think that they really need to justify what they're doing along the waterfront.

Lee: And you said the community has been taking action for that?

Dave: Yeah, yeah. It's going to take a couple years. It's not going to happen right away.

Lee: Absolutely. Has it been more ... have the policies and decisions become more rapid within recent years? Or has this been gradual over time with the city?

Dave: Gradual over time. When Shoreline Management Act first came out, we were an approved community. And then the regulation became tighter, and tighter, and tighter. And now we are living in a "natural environment. Well, it's my house. It's not a "natural environment." Point Defiance is a natural

environment, but they just included us along with Point Defiance. So that was a recent change a couple years back, and it's just ... we're not compatible. We're a an authorized use and all of a sudden now, we're losing our rights as a community. I don't think those should be legislated away.

The Shoreline Act was started to preserve the waterfront for public use. There was nothing stated in the shoreline act – no method of purchasing property to expand the Shoreline Act, and even today it says that residential, single family residences should have a priority for any variance that's given. [Variances] should be single family residences. So here we are, sitting, looking for this variance to be allowed, and there's no vehicle in the Shoreline Management Act to buy people out of their property. So you can't just regulate them out. We're not going to go away quietly, and this community will come together over that issue. Other than that we might fight like cats and dogs. [Laughs].

Lee: So ultimately, what do you hope for the future of Salmon Beach?

Dave: Yeah, I would like to see a reasonable set of codes set up so that we don't have to go through a substantial development permit every time anybody does anything down here. It would be the same thing that an apartment complex or a hotel on the water would have to go through – the same thing we do, except we don't have to do a full environmental impact statement. But everything else, we go through a hearing. You pay all these fees to go through, and somebody sits in judgment of our project, just like anything else on the waterfront, but we're a community. It should be simplified. It shouldn't be that expensive for us to remodel or redo anything down here. We should get reasonable requirements.

Lee: Is there anything else that you think you can inform me about regarding the history of this cabin, or other cabins, that you think have great importance to Salmon Beach?

Dave: Well the history has changed over the years depending on the time. During the Depression, these cabins were fully occupied. And even into the forties and fifties, the cabins were occupied, and many of them were migrant workers. And then into the sixties – at the end of the sixties and the start of the seventies, there were a lot of young people that moved in down here after the Vietnam War and such. It became a community again, and it became viable because people were building new or renovating existing cabins, and built them up. They were always working toward becoming a community.

And so now we are. Both groups, both community organizations – Salmon Beach North and Salmon Beach Improvement Club – we own the property, so now, as both corporations, as a community, we fight for our well being. At this end of the beach we already put in city water, and so that allows us to at least have our fire flow down here. The fire department does not like the system we put in, and I don't think they trust it, but it is here. And even having the beach as remote as it is in a city, there's ways around fire protection here. You can put in sprinkler systems for a home and cut down the problems with fire. That would be always – some people that have lived here – that would be their biggest fear.

People who had lived here in the fifties – and I went to school with some of them – one lady said that that fear was always there. They were afraid the beach would burn down, and how would we get out of here? Well, there always were ways to get up the hill, but they were broken up. There use to be a trail way on the north end of the beach. Most of that kind of slipped away, and now there's a set of stairs on the north end, and trails on the north end, and our stairs, but there use to be another trail, another set of stairs, further down the beach. There are more ways to get up and more parking lots. There were three big parking lots that were up above the beach. One of those got taken up by park side, and took out our access to that parking lot and our trail at this south end. So, we just hope the tides in so that we can get out of here by boat if we get stuck.

Lee: Have there been many issues with fire?

Dave: A couple times! The last one was a fire at ... jeez [pauses to think] ... fifty four. Ed Christianson had a complex there. He had two cabins, and then he owned another one right beside it, and he was cooking something. Our power ... it was winter time, and he was cooking something with a gas fixture, and the hose started to burn. He tried to take it out and couldn't, so it burnt his cabin.

The fire department was able to get lines from all the way on top of the hill set up, and two fire boats tied on and just kept the fire down until it burned out. And so having the two big fire boats was a great thing. Now those two fire boats are not running. They have small motor boats running, and they don't have the crew along Ruston Way. They're not funded like they use to be. I think it's a shame, I think there will be a big fire down on the waterfront some place that's going to cost a lot of money.

But that fire was able to be taken care of. And the same guy, Ed Christianson, he had a fire at a cabin on the north end of the beach. There's a platform there that's still left from the fire. So he's been burnt out twice. He's passed away now ... so maybe he's not going to burn anything else up.

But yeah there was a fire on the north end, and I knew one of the guys on the fireboat at the time, and he said that they got ... This was fireboat number one, the one on Ruston Way. It's up on blocks there now. And he said that they got in front of the cabins, and aimed their water cannon at the cabin a little north of the fire and blew it down. It peeled plywood, it peeled the roof off, and just blew the cabin down. And then they did the same thing to the cabin on the other side. And then just sort of put the fire out in the middle. But they literally tore a cabin down on each side of the fire. They were afraid that it would get going and they wouldn't be able to stop it. At that range – they were close enough to just put that hose on and tear the cabins down.

Lee: But they destroyed the other two? Were people living there at the time?

Dave: No, no.

Lee: Oh, okay. Has anyone rebuilt on that property, then?

Dave: Several of them have been rebuilt. One that didn't rebuild, now can't be rebuilt. I find it interesting that a guy [Tim Seiwerath] bought the lot from Salmon Beach north and moved a boat on there. So he's using his lot as a boat facility. So he's living in his boat down at his platform on Salmon Beach.

Lee: Interesting. Is that the only boat house on Salmon Beach?

Dave: Yeah. So he was able to use the facility.

Lee: Awesome, well you know quite a bit about Salmon Beach, don't you? [Laughs] I think that covers just about every question that I had. Is there anything else that you think should be known?

Dave: No ... It was a great place to raise boys. I don't know how it would be for raising girls, but boys were great. And it's one of the few communities that you know your neighbors. You know your neighbors' children. And everybody kind of watches out for everybody's children.

Lee: It takes a village to raise a child.

Dave: Yeah, we would find out when we got home what our boys had been doing. Some interesting stuff ... The older boy would take the middle boy, because he was real mouthy, and, one day, he and his buddy tied him to a sawhorse and left him on the beach and forgot about him! They walked away. And the tide was coming in, so it was like this Norwegian Torture ... The tide is coming in, and he's screaming, and finally some neighbor came down and got him untied.

Lee: Oh my gosh!

Dave: I think he could have gotten himself untied.

Lee: Yeah, maybe if he would have spent more time trying instead of shouting, huh? [Laughs] Well, thank you so much for taking time out of your day to talk to me.

Dave: Well I hope that helps your process.