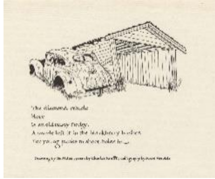

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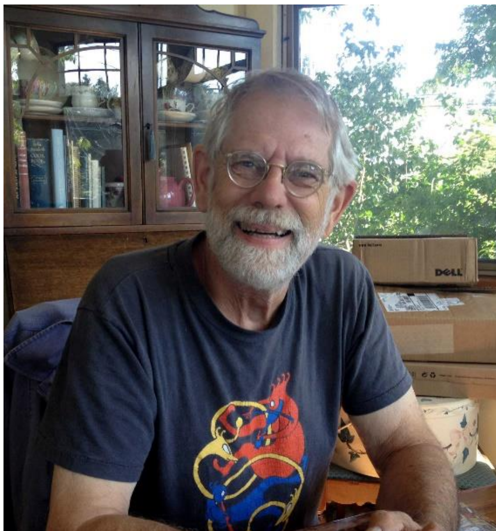

This interview was conducted with Steve Herold on August 21, 2014 at his home in Seattle, Washington. The interviewers are Paul Piper and Tamara Belts.

SH: So you want to talk about Fishtown. Is there a particular focus you want to talk about?

PP: I've got a series of questions, but don't let them limit you in any way.

SH: No, no, no, no. I lived there for decades. We can talk for a little while. (laughter)

PP: Okay.

SH: I just heard from Paul Hansen this morning.

PP: We interviewed Paul, August 1st.

SH: Yes, you better, because he's about to leave.

PP: And Charlie Krafft this morning.

PP: So, we'll go ahead. My name is Paul Piper, and I'm here with my colleague Tamara Belts from Special Collections at Western Washington University. We are going to be interviewing Steve Herold, and the date is August 21, 2014.

So, I wanted to know if you could talk briefly about your life before Fishtown, with kind of the transition of how you got [there], how that led you to it?

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SH: Fishtown was our life before Fishtown. I moved from basically Seattle and wandering around Puget Sound, but mostly Seattle to Fishtown. That was all. All of us, except for Keith Brown, who was, you know, kind of our lunatic, free rent, on the edge of things neighbor, were friends. We were there because it was a very private sort of thing. There was a lot of legal and personal issues that made it possible and had to be dealt with, the fact that we were only there because there's a family that owned it that was friends with Charlie Krafft, one of the members of it went to school with him. And we got explicit permission because they knew us, they trusted us, and they put us in there because they saw us as artists, scholars, in the Chinese mode, and knew us all as far as--

Four of us were graduate students from the University of Washington. All the rest had studied there, most of them with Roethke a huge thing that blew all the way through everything. That's why poetry sprang up so easily throughout the arts because the poets—I mean, Robert would say, "Let's write poems about that." And everyone would sit down and they'd write really damn good poems, and they'd all be in the Roethke style of just plain speaking, of bringing the tensions and the words you use and how you put them and position them and stuff. But you know, none of this cutesy stuff. And none of the more antique stuff. If you don't have an inflected language, the traditional scansions and rhythms and stuff just don't work very well. Germanic is a very abrupt and harsh language, and I guess it doesn't gallop along like, Greek or Italian and stuff.

All of us had been involved in many things. There are elements of this too. I was very active in SNCC and the Southern Civil Rights movement in the 1950s and 1960s. I mean, I was really involved in a big way. I had friends beaten and thrown in jail and some killed and it was a pretty active thing. The Vietnam anti-war thing was weaving through it. Certainly what was called the hippie sort of revolution, I mean, you're talking about the summer of love in 1967, and I was one of those few dozen people that made that happen. We were weaving back and forth.

I was in San Francisco and then Berkeley and Seattle, back and forth and back and forth to watch the people on each end. And so we had this wide community of the arts. I mean, people like Gary Snyder, where it's known he studied with the same person at Reed I did, became affluent in kind of that same mode, and that became his thing. That became with me a renaissance person, you know, one of those elements of expression. Now I mostly do music, and I write, 8x8 European and American dance tunes, and I can do the same thing there I do with my art. I find the same rhythms, makes it kind of interesting.

So we were looking for those things, finding a lot in the great opening of Oriental art and poetry and literature that was suddenly coming out at that time. And the fact that so many things happened all at one time is a part of why there was that glow of the 1960s and 1970s, because there was a huge blossoming of information and everything.

I had a bookstore called the Id Bookstore, and I thought, gee, I thought bookstores had to be publishers too and you added a printing press, so I wasn't going to get a letter press, that's nonsense. So we got, by chance, that very year, the first small, affordable, little offset press, the AB Dick 360 came out, and we were able to do up to 11x17 prints all ourselves. We did little poetry books and broadsides and long posters and things that we can't talk about, and all kinds of things like that. So we had this involvement. It was a very wide ranging thing.

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The people that went to Fishtown were a coterie wrapped around Charlie Krafft and Robert Sund. They kind of came together as an artistic pair, 1966, 1967, mostly because of Ibsen Nelsen. Ibsen Nelsen is the unsung hero of American art up here. Without him there would be no northwest art. Everybody met at his house. He had poetry readings, and literary readings, and art showings, and concerts. His kids were part of Fishtown, and their friends were part of the crew, and all those things just wove around. Then when we moved out, we had connections. I go and stop in New York and see one of the original Fishtown people every time I go back there. It was just marvelous, just, you know, amazing.

So anyway, this was a very close sort of group, and that's part of its power and why it did what it did and why it was so productive, because we communicated and understood things, you know. I remember once when I was about 16, 17, I had a little cousin, and she was just a little sweetheart, and being a cousin, we had very strong family traits that went through, and we thought about things the same way. And we could sit down and within a few minutes, we could understand everything that was going on and with each other, and I just didn't have to say anything because it was understood, you know. Because we had worked together and worked on common grounds and artistically come together to start opening and sharing-- When you start sharing things, when you get a poet writing something and a calligrapher writing it out and an artist painting a picture around it, all of a sudden you have to kind of move together and communicate together, and it's a lot of that.

I met Robert when Charlie brought him in with a little broadside they had done, it was a great big rising sun or something, you know, full sun up there in the sky, it was a poem by Robert. Robert always loved to do broadsides. And it was this conjunction of those two working together and Charlie being more hungry and getting people out that brought them into me. Once they came into my bookstore, I started working with them directly and doing things all along, printing works for them. I printed a number of books for Charlie and broadsides and stuff for Robert, and we did a lot of original art. And see, that's one of the things that characterizes this too, we knew each other, we worked together. We worked together in Fishtown. We worked together as an artistic group. It was some of that spirit of the time, you know, the community, a wider community, and then there's all the wide outside world influences, because we were on the hippie trail. I mean, we were one of the main stops, you know, with neon lights. And so we had people from Germany and California and Mexico and China and stuff, coming over just to be there and say, I was there.

PP: This is in Fishtown?

SH: Fishtown. Oh, Fishtown was big time. And so we had those influences and worked all that in, and we were—I noticed some of the work we did, we looked outside of our community, and we took northwest things like the northwest mystics, some we were considered to be the followers of, as we see it too. And we took that vision and then we brought in all these other things, and then our personal view on that and then made these things, and they were very stacked deep. So we looked to the—to look at something and, Wow, let's take that and you do that and we'll do something together. And we'd sit and we'd actually plan out how we could work together to do it. I mean, that's how the community worked too. If the boardwalk went down, everybody grabbed a hammer and nails and went and fixed it, even with the case of Paul Hansen, it was the boardwalk to his cabin and he didn't feel like working for

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it, so we did it for him, you know. But there was that kind of a spirit. And as long as that was there, it was a vibrant community.

Then of course as with anything, there was a lifespan, and you had to have new input. This was a fixed group of people, and I think that was our strength and weakness too. Because after a while, people had drifted off to do other things, or they married somebody, and, you know, just kind of tch, tch, tch, tch…

We went back, Bo Miller and John Bisbee, who is another one of those critical people that won't pop out much except in my book. He was one of the kids—he also was a good friend of the same Chamberlain that was Charlie Krafft's friend. They were the same age. And he was one of the kids at 13 building my cabin up there in Fishtown, you see. So we went back to take a look at it, about 19-, up to 2000, and we knew the place real well, which we thought, you know, the cabins had been taken out, after the big argument over the logging thing. And so we went and decided to walk up over the hill and try to find them. What would have been a five minute walk took us an hour and a half, with serious, whacking and smacking. And when we got to there the edge, we couldn't tell where the cabins had been. All the trees and the brush had just taken over again. And it was a wonderful northwest nature thing. It was glorious in that regard, but it had nothing to do with Fishtown. Fishtown was—what happens. It's like any community, you know.

Have you ever gone back to a beach thing, like say even Coney Island, after the season's over, and it's the first cold, windy Saturday in October, and there's only two or three people on the beach walking their dogs, and you had the feeling like, Did the world move away and leave me here? You know, there's something wrong. It's a very funny sort of empty feeling, you know. The show-- I've been Seattle Center after the Folklife Festival, which has like half a million people and it's just wonderful when there's all this noise and wonder. And you come back a few days later, and it's this clumped down ground, like the elves had come through and trampled the grass at night, but there's nothing there. And it's empty and quiet, and it just feels really weird, very much so.

So that's kind of the thing, I think Fishtown more than the lower Skagit, because we were so close living together, 13 of us. We created a synergy and an interaction and an energy that kept us working together, and working on the mark. We'd hear Charlie was having a show, and he'd say, Hey, you, you, come and join me. And so all of a sudden we had 10 days, and we would produce these wonderful things. I mean, this thing maybe about a half an hour to put that together, you know. And so we were able to do that, and then we would do nothing but splitting wood for several months. That's how life is. And that's the other side, everything's just glorious, they'd come up in the summer, and Oh God, you know, why is he trying to do work now? Hey, hey, kick back and enjoy life, and no, no, no. Those few times we did that, we had wet wood in the autumn, and that's not one of those good things. Just surviving in a comfortable way. If you want to be a bum and just left the place fall apart around you, maybe you can do nothing. It's a full time job. And you'd use a chainsaw for an hour, and I couldn't run a brush or pen for a couple days afterwards. Your hands were doing this all the time. And people did things like that. One time I was splitting wood and I had some pilings to put in by the river, and then my last cedar piling was a little bit small. I shouldn't have, but I said, Nah, I'm not going to go back and get another one. And so I took my 16 pound sledge and I hit it, and it shattered, and I caught my hand between that and a rock on the ground, and my hand went to about that wide. It looked pretty weird.

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And so we soaked it in river water, which was the coldest thing we had, and a few minutes later it came back again. But I was that close to, you know…. And Daniel, downstream, was splitting wood and slipped and hit his hand with a hatchet, and they had to get him into the hospital some night, and on that river, well that's not easy. So yes, it's very interesting, it's a very vicious world.

And we realized we had a huge advantage, which makes artists succeed very well. And that is that like Thoreau, mom was only a short walk away. We could go into La Conner and get a shower at friends' and have a nice meal, and get in the car and go down to Seattle and hang out with friends. I even had a spare bedroom I rented from friends for our trips down there. In the early days of Fishtown, I had a house up on Capitol Hill, and it was the Fishtown hangout. It was very near Ibsen Nelson's, about two blocks away. And so we were kind of the poles where people hung out. And they'd come down and crash on the floor and have parties, and we had artistic things where we'd sit around there all night and, you know, each writing poetry on each other and stuff back and forth and roundabout and all this, pretty neat, pretty neat.

PP: That's quite a story.

SH: Yes, and so that's the—and that's it. Life is just story. I'm an historian. All histories do is tell stories. And that's why we're lucky. If you are an art historian, and say I'm dealing with the Rijksmuseum in the Netherlands, and they can't take anything unless it's 101%, absolute certain and proof, it's got to be unique in some way. They say, We reject much authentic stuff because it doesn't have something that absolutely proves it. We need absolute scientific fact now to touch stuff. Where the historian says, I did the best story. We know it, we only know a little bit. All the stories are written by the guys that won, take the other three grains of salt. And so you take that and then you try to make the best story, and then 20 years later, somebody says, Well, I reread this, and I don't think that that was right. You made a wrong assumption there. And we made an assumption when we amend or change the text, because it was handwritten for a long time, and as a paleographer, I can tell you that there's all these things, and most of it's been by dictation. So if you mispronounce, the way that a Chinese would pronounce Hungarian will get you to a lot misspellings.

And their characteristic, that if you know this was written in China, you'd know right away which things to correct for. But sometimes you squeeze the thing a little bit, Well, this is really 42 instead of 142. This was that, and we tell great stories.

And Fishtown is just a story. And art is just story. We're telling a story. In the museum catalog, it's one of these things that comes to you and you realize it's really more powerful than you deserve. And I realized that what we were trying to do in Fishtown with the whole thing that the era was trying to do, is we realized suddenly that there were things beyond what we see and feel. There were things that are invisible to the eyes. A little print says everything's essential, it's invisible to the eye. What artists and poets are trying to do is either show you something that is completely invisible and essential, like the structure of the universe, or to at least hint at its existence and tell you, Look, see what you can find. And that's all we're doing, you know. We're telling stories, and we're telling a story to make a connection to you. And every time we do a piece of art—

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I had a big discussion on this two nights ago with a microbiologist of all things, from Indiana University, about when you do these kind of things, you're trying to put out an emotional connection that you've had to something. I'm walking down, we see a sunset. There's nothing inherently nice in a sunset. It could be very ugly too, that brash colors and maybe rain coming or something, but there's something that happens, and I want to try and tell you about it. So I write about the sunset and what it does, hoping that you will pick up on what it was I was really talking about, and that's how smart people are and how not smart they are, by how much they can get out of things or where it takes them. And it can surprise you sometimes who reacts. And there's all kinds of different ways and different tools.

There's a teacher I used to teach by the way, you're supposed to, you know, give them material and you'd give them tests of papers and you'd grade them, and this would catch some bad guys. And I realized after a while, no, they're all good guys, and the problem is me. If I didn't teach right, then somebody didn't get it, and so if that's true, I need to revisit that immediately and find another way to approach it to catch that person's attention to make sure I'm getting their attention.

Sometimes I'd have to say things three or four times, not because you say it three times like the old adage does, but because I got to talk to-- I had classes of 350 when I was working at the University of Washington. I mean, that was just huge. So you had to really try and find out who in your eye was not getting it and stuff like that.

And the same thing is true when you get into art is that you're trying to make a connection and tell a story, and we all—we had some stories to tell, and we knew what we were telling. There are stories of some of those things, some of which people tell and some of which we don't, and they are the core and essence of those things. Almost every artwork that came out of Fishtown came out because of a direct thought, experience, meditation, interaction with something. There was nothing of, Oh, I think I'll paint some birds today. Anything you see is various sorts of things.

PP: Could you talk a little bit about how important you feel the actual place was?

SH: Oh, Fishtown was sacred on Earth. (laughter) When little Daniel Stokely got up there from Texas, he was only like 17, and decided to see the world, barefoot Daniel wading in the swamp, he settled down there at Shit Creek next to Robert. And we were sitting there one day, drinking some tea and the usual things that we did with dried tea, and Daniel said, You know, the thought comes through my mind a lot about never leaving this here swamp. He said, This is the nicest place on Earth. And in the summertime it was great, and the winter when it was bitter cold and clear it was just great. When it was mucky, sometimes there were times you wished—especially if you didn't have the firewood.

Yes, it was a zone of transition, that riparian zone, where water comes in and then meets the land, but it had originally gone all around us too. We were the freshwater tidal area, where the Sound and the Skagit River and everything met and flowed and things happened, and had a lot of connections. There's an old Indian village there, and we dug up those artifacts all the time. I still got the best artifacts ever found at the—well, I got it digging in my garden at the foot of my hill.

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So yes, the place was very important, and it had things -- And again, the other thing that doesn't get a lot of understanding is, except for Paul Hansen, we all were northwest-- We talked about this, wasn't really Fishtown, so we'll leave him out of it but he-- God, Tom was smooth, he just fitted right in like he was a glass of bourbon.

We were all northwest kids, and we all pretty much knew each other. And Ibsen Nelsen was an architect and woodworker, for goodness sakes. Both of my grandfathers were carpenters. My dad did carpentry all the time, and I had to go there and help him. I might not saw a straight line very well, but I sure knew all the tools and how to use them. I was very comfortable doing that. We could move the cabins in the woods. We could resurrect them. And only Paul Hansen's—Paul didn't do that. Paul came from Walnut Creek, and it wasn't a particularly happy sort of thing for him and, you know, when you're involved in things. He had to go into the military, learned Chinese there, became a Chinese scholar, but had that different sort of approach. And so when his floor started falling apart, he just bought more carpets and laid them over them. When the wind sort of blew through the wall, he would nail a picture over it, you know.

PP: (laughter)

SH: Paul was very direct that way. So we were very comfortable doing this. And in a sense, it was little boys' heaven. Remember, the only girls were the girls we brought with us. There were no independent women. Not until Maggie Wilder was given my cabin. You know, I gave her the cabin, and then she became the goddess of Fishtown, but it's all her. She's the only one there now, aside from a few people who come up to room in the cabins. So this was you know—and then that's all part of that togetherness. I mean, we all could understand each other, we all knew what had to happen. And someone would say, Hey, that boardwalk, you know, down near Oz's needs to be fixed. Yes you're right. I noticed that the other day. Let's get some hammers. I mean, we were very proactive too. We were not lazy people. I mean, we knew how to hang back and spend many nice days in the summer, smoking weed and drinking tea and writing poetry and stuff like that. But at the same time, we were not shy, we knew what the drill was.

We had the support of neighbors. And that's the other thing that doesn't get talked about an awful lot. Margaret Lee was our godmother. She and Buster were just the people that made this possible because the Chamberlains would let us in there, but Ken Staffanson, the farmer, had no use for those goddamn hippies, you know. He was an old blockhead farmer from Norway, and was very old school. He was the one who ran Charlie out at shotgun point when he first went down there. And then Charlie learned who owned it and then Ken Staffanson was told he had to be nice to us. Oh that ate into him really badly, you know, being overridden by your, the lord of the manor. And that's just kind of how it was.

So we came in through the Lees. They had a road that came down clear to the river, and it was a little bit easier, and we could drag stuff to the river and float them on down further. I was less concerned—behind me was the big second hill, that behind Charlie and Bo's and stuff. And so you had to go up and over that, that was a big hoot. But for me, you'd just come down the river along the boardwalk, and so, we carried 16-foot 8x8 timbers from the railroad switching yards on our shoulders to be the supports for my three-story tower.

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PP: Wow.

SH: And on up the hill.

PP: So, was the land owned partly by the Chamberlains and partly by the Lees, then?

SH: Well all the Fishtown cabins were on the Chamberlain land.

PP: Okay.

SH: The Lees had -- There's an angle where the river comes down and then makes an angle to the north. And where it does that, there at that bend there, it went to a thing they called the big rock, and that's where the boardwalk started, and that was all Lee land. Then from there further on north was all Chamberlain land. And so all the old hunting cabins and stuff that we were in, the fishing cabins and my boat cabin, were all on Chamberlain land.

Then under the Lees back in the teens and '20s and '10s, there were a lot more people that would come up there for hunting and fishing, and so there were cabins all along below the cliff of the Lees too. And as they went away finally after the Second World War, they were happy to see that go. It was a nuisance, those people coming out in their cars. They kept a bunch of them right down there where their well was, you know, one of the first tenants, and then down along the river, a few of them—one of the Fishtown people, Jimmy, went up there and got a cabin from Margaret because he got kicked out of his place on the river. They were moving people off. It was a duck preserve, and he'd been out on the out. He, I think, may even still be there, he just really settled in. Skip and he got on. And now, yes, Skip is still there, and he's the son of Margaret and Buster, and really loves the place and wants to, you know, make sure that it doesn't—anything happen to it. All the developers would just love to get their hands on it.

PP: Yes.

SH: It's a killer spot.

PP: The original cabins that you folks had, those were net cabins from—

SH: They were a mixture. They were everything people needed. They were originally float houses. If you -- John Bisbee found a nice picture, 1880s or '90s, and the river was full of gillnetters, and all these cabins on log floats, rafts, anchored down, and then the logs were getting waterlogged after a while. You got to change them about every 20 years. They said they were getting wet in their feet. One of my cousins lived on one of these original house floats, down there in Portage Bay, which was just a little cabin put on a bunch of logs, and it was getting pretty waterlogged. If they had a party and if everybody went to one side of the house, they got wet up to their ankles. So they tried to distribute people a little bit wider, so they couldn't all be on the same side of the house at the same time.

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So they pulled the cabins in, they dug little slots and threw the dirt up, and that made the little lands on the sides, and then at the high tide they would bring them in on—there were pilings, and let it drop down onto these pilings with some spacers, and then that's all the hunting/fishing cabins were that were. They had their problems. Charlie was floating all the time. Bo was floating a couple times, and he built his deliberately higher. Paul's was higher. We noticed the later ones were built about three feet higher. So, kind of like that.

PP: One of the things that intrigues me is that, and you've spoken about it already, but just how much work it was to live there in a way, in terms of—

SH: Yes. (laughter)

PP: --rustic kind of living. I mean, that kind of runs counter to the thought most people have of like dirty hippies, who—

SH: Yes. If you haven't been there, you don't know what it's like to live there.

PP: Right.

SH: I go around the world right now, one of my joys, I get -- Life is good to me. I have money flying in from unknown corners, friends that died that I helped get in their careers. And one of them just died, he's worth half a billion dollars. He created a chair, Asian Art History at Cal-Berkeley. He created a whole Asian art department at the museum in Honolulu. And he gave all his friends huge amounts of money.

PP: Wow.

TB: Wow.

SH: Because that's why he got it. They helped him get it, and he was going to give it back. So I go around mostly to northern and central Europe, North America, and I may be in the Orient sometime soon.

And I'd go there and I'd try and settle in for a period of time, four days to a week, two weeks, you know, and I stay at the same place, and I try and get the feeling of what it's like to be a person there who lives there, to go to the post office and deal with them, and have to do various things, to go to the grocery store, and cook, and deal with getting your garbage picked up, and enough to do that. And I discover it gives me a much richer and deeper understanding and clears all the cobwebs of preconceptions out of your head really fast. And that's why we had these problems with people on the hippie trail coming up in the summertime, thinking life was all good. You know, in southern California, in about two months of the year it doesn't even get chilly, and they call it chilly. It's 45 degrees for God's sake. It's a hot day and we're here. I really enjoyed that a bit. But none of us minded hard work. I mean, Hans Nelsen is so into

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loving working wood and fixing these cabins. He came up after he'd moved out and fixed up some cabins just to fix them up for people, you know.

PP: Wow.

SH: And he would work the whole summer, maybe three or four months, doing something just for the joy of it, because of course, and here's the other side, none of us feared poverty. We'd been students for a long time. But the first thing you learn as a student is money will come one day and learn to live comfortably. You don't have to be saving for retirement now, you know. You're just planning your life and somehow, when you're talented enough. I had enough jobs, and there's all that kind of money, and money was easy in those days. The '1960s is unbelievable to people that, oh, they look at how low the wages were and rents were less expensive, and they hear about depressions, and there were these things. Well, it was hard to get a job, but if you had a job you could -- We had T-bone steak all the time in the 1950s because it was so damn cheap. It was cheaper than hamburger. You know, bones in them makes them cheaper than hamburger. And so, life was easy. And there weren't too many artists.

Robert Sund stood out as an artist with his hand out. He wanted the world to support him, and he got it, but then he would lean a little heavy and he had to go away for a while, and come back later on. But it happened easily. Then someone would just say, Here, Robert, here's a $20 bill, you know, go enjoy yourself. Well that would keep Robert for a month. So, well, I lived in 1973, I lived on $350. That's $3500 today in purchasing power more or less. Almost all of it went for gas for the car and a few augments, a little bit of food we'd buy in town. But, by God, we got stuff cheap from Margaret and from the valley, and neighbors gave us stuff.

I worked at Tillinghast, the seed company, and so I got to know all the farmers and all the people with nice gardens, and they said, Gee, Steve, we've plowed that field there, 20 acres, it's got tons of carrots. Help yourself. But if I came up from Seattle and would walk in and try to pick them up, I'd get shot and blasted on my butt. It's just, it's very inclusive. And that's something else that we literally fitted in. Fishtown was a good place for us. We were out on the edge of things. Too many guys went in to the tavern, the 1990s, every damn night, we're getting drunk, and they thought that was being a hippie. And, there are those damn hippies.

When I worked for Tillinghast, I'd been there about two days and I was in the back of the warehouse putting potatoes from one sack to the other, because if they sit too long they get kind of moldy and mushy, and there's nothing worse than the feel and smell of a moldy, mushy potato, let me tell you. I've plunged my hands into them too many times. So I was doing this thing, and my boss, Ed Dailey, was another one of the silent wonders in the La Conner era, had one of his old neighbors come in, you know, two old guys talking. And the guy says, Gee, Ed, I hear you hired one of them damn hippies. And Ed said, Gee, he's not a hippie. He's that new guy on the river. He works. Boy, I'd hit a homerun. And so I had put in only a few days, and that's why, I worked in all camps, and there was too much the sort of people who just kind of hang out and do things and get in little cliques. And La Conner had a lot flow through it. All the real people, you know, moved out to kind of the edges. Anacortes has got quite a number there. And even up the valley now, you know, as far as Edison there's quite a huge bulk of them, so it was pretty kind of neat. And all that spread out of La Conner. And the original thing there

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was of course Guy Anderson and those guys back in the 1930s. I knew several of the guys that went up here. Several you wouldn't even know their names. You know, Don Reefy's not a name you'd know at all, fabulous artist! But he got married and wanted to have kids, and so you can't-- He continued to paint in his basement, but couldn't do the show, the artist thing, and so gradually slipped out of kind of view, you know. I published a little book of his drawings a few years ago, one of the rarest northwest things you'll ever come across in your life.

But there was this humming in the 1930s because there was nothing to do. The world would come to a stop, and so art was a nice thing to do, and life was cheap if you had a little bit of money. And these guys, being college guys, being artists, you could make enough. And they all drifted away, and Guy Anderson kind of remained there, and Clayton James came in of course, and it was just a little thing. And so when people came, they were kind of the spark that set this new tinder on fire. And suddenly if new artists used to come, like Charlie, you know, just came up there only because his parents insisted he had to go to school somewhere, and he couldn't run away to San Francisco to visit his cousin Grace Slick anymore because, that was naughty and no-nos, and they did those naughty no-no things. And so he went up there and basically Charlie and Skagit Valley College are just kind of, you know, like, used very different definitions, and yet he found a professor there that suggested Fishtown. He said, You ought to look there, a nice place to paint, and you might find a cabin too. And so, it's just who influenced what, and how do things happen? And the answer is, it is a very three-dimensional interactive thing, and we found in that rural community, their idea-- a lot of Scandinavians, a lot of English. A whole English village came over to make La Conner. That's where the Gages and the Gaches and all the people came from, you know, Dentons. They all came from the same village [on] the same ship.

PP: Wow.

TB: Oh wow.

SH: One guy came, checked it out, said it's as good [as] home and the land is free, and they came out and they brought the squire and they brought all their relationships and stuff with them.

SH: So this is a very interconnected, family-oriented, personable sort of thing. One of the first things I did was try and meet every old person I could. They're the interesting people. All these other guys, they'd meet some of the kids or grandkids of the families if they were out drinking or out doing something together, but, you know, they never met how the thing really works. And they would never fit in. And I found like you have to know who's married to who, who's related to who. You can-- My mother is Québécois, from a little town called Vermusky (?), and family has been there for 350 years. And so everybody knows everything about everybody for 14 generations, and oh, it's just very important to know all of that kind of stuff. It's just amazing when I've met some of my family.

PP: Definitely.

SH: And so this all worked out because we were looking for community, we were looking for a connection, we were looking for back to the countryside, not be, you know, Daniel Boone and, cut down the woods or shoot the animals and live over the fire, but to find a livable way to—how do you do

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sustainable? How do you do a thing that would really work? Fishtown was a really sustainable economy. We'd barely touch the economy. Most of our wood came from the river, what floated on down, or windfall, we'd take a few things there. We ate simply and very organically, because you didn't have a refrigeration, you had to kind of play around with things. In the winter we'd monitor refrigeration, got to keep things cold, but to keep them from freezing. You know, we had 0 degree weather in those days.

We had a meditation one January -- In the Orient they only do it in spring and fall for good reason, too hot in the summer and too miserable in the winter. And so, but Paul Hansen had just come there that year and he was going to make this to-do, and Bo Miller showed up, and we had all these new people. And so we'd brought a few more people in, and they went to the temple, which was not only not heatable, I mean, there's holes in the wall you could put your fist through. It was an old net shack, big, but that's how it is, they made it a public structure. It was big enough to hold us all. And they sat there, they were meditating in sleeping bags. I would make them hot tea, and it would freeze in the half hour by giving it to them and coming and pick up the cups, you know. Geez, you know.

(Laughter)

SH: Pretty interesting environment. And so all that built into it, and also built into its demise, because after a while it's time to go away. We started having many kids. My son William would complain sometimes when he was up there, lack of kids sometimes, so I had to be his playmate. But when you talk to him now, he tells you honestly it was the greatest time of his whole life. It was the magical part. It was the going to Oz part, you know. He and Sarah, Bo's adopted daughter, were just inseparable, and then there was a couple of other little kids there, you know, Willow, and Ruby, Ivory's daughter. And they just had this whole world. They had little houses and magical huts up in the woods, and they became other things. This was the time that Star Wars was coming out, and these kids were just completely into magical worlds. We had all the books, you know. We had all the fairy tales and the Tolkien books and all the real histories and poetry and stuff, and so they could read through the books at night, and they'd go out and live it in the daytime.

PP: Yes.

SH: Pretty neat thing. And so all we did was replay that, and we told the story and we recorded it, and they did it and did it in different ways at different times. Sometimes I'm amazed when I see stuff that we've done. I say, God, I must have done that but I don't remember it. There are those kind of things. And like anyone else, we hardly sold anything. When Monet died, great Monet—he was so famous when he died. I mean, it was a national tragedy. He's got three museums for him in the region of Paris alone. 90% of his life's work was hanging on the walls of his studio. People don't really support art. In the end, after you're long dead, if you're viewed by the art historians as mainstream and important, or an interesting little sideline, you'll become known, you know. And of course, there's all the lies about it too, you know, artists never sell pictures. Van Gogh never sold a picture. Bullshit, his brother sold three or four for quick money, and Van Gogh gave many away. And you want to notice those pictures were to him, they were his footsteps. In fact, one of the reasons I'm going to Europe next month is I deal with museums there. And so, my friends will take me down to the Van Gogh Museum. And there's one

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particular painting called—one of the three crows in a wheatfield (*Wheatfield with Crows*), you know, done just before his death. And it's so negative and mmm… (laughter) And I can get up there and get close to it because I'm with the museum people. See if I want to go to The Louvre -- I got in there once, and no crowds or anything. Now it's terrible. So if I go to The Louvre now, I just call or email one of the people in the department. Like I'm doing a book on ancient Anatolian seals and scripts, so I call the Anatolian art department and say, Hey, I'd like to come in and talk to you about this book, see if you can find someone and take a quick look at your collection of them, and see what we can do, and maybe you could do da-da-da. They'd say, Sure, and then they'd say, Well I'm going to lunch. Of course, he'd say, On the way, he said, do you want to have a private tour? And so you tell him what you want, and they would say, Oh, the Mona Lisa's closed off for 15 minutes for cleaning. And then we would all have 15 minutes in front of the Mona Lisa. So it's kind of interesting.

PP: That's neat.

SH: Privilege is interesting.

PP: Just kind of wiggling back for a minute. How much or how important did you feel that Buddhism was as a religion and/or philosophy—

SH: Nobody was a Buddhist. How's that.

PP: Okay.

SH: A lot of the talk was done about a lot of feeling. Buddhism was seen as a powerful way, it was a very universal thing. I mean, when a thing becomes like -- Confucianism is a good example, that's what they call it. It's got a different name in Chinese, but, you know, that's (inaudible). It's fullness of the Chinese social scene as historically seen to preserve a rigidity that would keep society safe and altogether. Very hard to export that. We were interested in it, but no one goes around, you know, spouting all the Confucianism.

But Buddhism was something where Buddha was talking to mankind. It's one of those kind of great religions. And in Asia, it took in many things and it had many different things. When you get to Tibet, for example, Tibetan Buddhism isn't Buddhism. It's, you know, Bon, with a little bit of, kind of overlay. So we looked at this and we saw it had a great deal to say, and many of the key issues had been answered, very obliquely. If you read the Chinese classics, even translated the footnotes, this stuff is really oblique. You know, you're dealing with stuff you can't understand and there's no words for it, you know. Europeans used to call it stepping outside of time and space. Many of the monks and saints, when they had this connection to God, they would say, all of sudden they said the world fell away. I stepped outside of time and space into the land of the eternal, and I realized that I don't need to worry about this place at all. And this Buddhism was doing that with a lot of questions and answers and words, coming I think from the Indian the Upanishads. A lot of Hindi stuff was equally important to what we were doing. The Buddhism was a little wider. Paul Hansen, of course, was very big on the Buddhist thing, because he was into the Chinese studies and he liked that kind of thing, and he worked with Conze, you know, and that was him more on the Buddhism side.

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Charlie Krafft was the one who went over there all the time, went to India mostly, got into Buddhism to the Tibetans and Dharamsala and around that area, was down there, and he likes the big festivals, you know, things on the Ganges and all this kind of stuff. He's a real, into toluene you know. They got their own look on life. And so he brought a lot of the vivid connection of the modern way these things were and with the historical, which we did, and he'd been into all these books, you know, Aleister Crowley, and so we had fabulous libraries there, I mean, scholars. And even after getting rid of -- Well I had 7,000 books when I closed my bookstore and decided to go to Fishtown, and so, you know, I had a lot of books to get rid of.

PP: I imagine.

SH: And it was a really vibrant sort of thing. And we sought other things out, and we sought all those kind of -- And so we were deliberate in looking for a while, but there's also a little bit of move into ancient European philosophies and religions and stuff, not much of the classical stuff. I did a whole mythological series of works, working on things of the Scandinavian and the Oriental and the ancient world and Venetia and stuff, tried to take sort of vocations out of things from and stuff, that we'd use something and then find the artwork and stuff that would work with them. And I found that was really interesting because I knew I was bringing my emotional connection and my view of them, but as a scholar I saw them more deeply than others would. So I tried playing with it, but to see where you could pull your energies out.

But in the end we all fell back to ourselves and to the place we lived in. And I think that came right back to Fishtown, which is that Fishtown was a wonderful northwest experience. We were northwest people. It inspired us. It was the—Magnolia. Look out my window.

PP: Yes.

SH: There's 28,000 people here. There were 2,000 when I moved here. It doesn't look much different from this room, just a few more buildings here. But there's the park and trees and the slopes and stuff like that. There were farms. There were creeks that I fished in that started just down the street here. I'd walk down the alley and I'd knew what was there when I was a little kid. And so when I went to Fishtown, it was like, Oh my God, this is Magnolia in 1945. And so I felt very comfortable, very at home, and it just revived me. I mean, the greatest day of my whole life was spent in 1946 down at 35th and Howe Street, in one big lot, and I didn't leave that. Of course I was only 5 years old and it was a huge space, and I have never had a mystical experience like that in my whole life, just me and that sunny day and all of the things that I found there, and the flowers that I found, the insects, the birds that I dealt with that day are all my friends still.

So Fishtown did that for us. Fishtown was—it just sparked up. We didn't put in the word so much, though we talked about it a lot. And then Charlie started getting this, Shut up about Fishtown. We're getting too many visitors. And there was talk of the family trying to develop it, sell it off, and houses on the hills or something. But fortunately there was a thing called the scenic and wild rivers act, and you couldn't do anything within about 600 yards of the river, and so all that went away. So they logged it.

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PP: Before we get to that though, could you talk about whether there was kind of a common political core or element to the—

SH: We were apolitical. I was a very political person before I came there, was involved in much of the tea movements, and I'm one of the founders of them. I stayed pretty much involved in the anti-war movement for a while. I remember in 1973, Robert Sund walked in, and he said, This is awful! We got to stop this fuckin' war! It's got to be stopped now! And I said, Robert, we said that 7 years ago. We're tired out from that, but who'd do your work, you know? You've got some work to do, you know, for mankind. So, we were political liberals, I think you would say, very fiscal conservatives because if you didn't have money you couldn't pay for anything, and we realized that, and we dealt pretty well with that.

But the politics was mostly posturing. I ran the Americans for Democratic Action on the University of Washington campus in the mid-1960s and late-1960s, with a fellow called George Waring. And we were both students at Giovanni Costigan and good solid liberals and good potentials, and this was something we resurrected, and we were really being powerful politically. Then one of the national authors came in, one of these political types from, you know, the cigar smoke that's still thick on him, and he says, God, he said, you kids have built a really great thing here. You've got a lot of stuff, a lot of actions, and we can really use it. We got to lot of stuff that we can trade away in order to get a few things adopted. Which we said, What do you mean, trade away? We're here because these are our positions. It's not a-- These are the things we stay, he said, and then we renegotiate, but it's okay, we won't talk about any of these. You give us that and we'll leave you alone. And I said, should we close the branch down. We said that's not how we're going to work.

Fishtown was kind of that way. We had our own things to do. We saw there was a lot of posturing and money, and things were starting to get that way, you know, and there was the endless, and will Richard Nixon ever come back again and again and again, you know, like a bad penny or the ghost from hell. We were focused on who we were, what we were doing, living there. I mean, that was a pretty full plate.

PP: Yes.

SH: And we realized there is some combination --some of us talked about it more, and we broke into little groups of talking, you know. We'd go visit Paul, two or three of us, but Paul wouldn't come visit us too much. He was more of a hermit, you see. Bo and I were very close, and Charlie would get involved in this an awful lot. And of course Keith Brown would come floating around anyway. He was very good at helping out and labor and stuff like that, but, you know, he had his, all of his weaknesses that were unique. But we did talk about these things a lot in groups, and sometimes we'd get together for different poetry night dinners, and we'd, you know, cook food together, and then we'd write poetry, and we'd talk about what was going on, and it was kind of like the city council meeting. You know, Charlie was our acknowledged mayor, and the rest of us were on the works committee and the boat repair committees, and we all had to have a working—we always had a working boat, boardwalks for everybody, you know, access to firewood. So we had these key things, and we'd all work together and

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talked about it, and the some were political but mostly it was agreed, we thought, wow, you know, this is a long ways away.

Seattle was 60 miles and 300 years away. We would come down here and we viewed it as an alien place to come down to. I had more of a connection here than the others. Bo Miller was raised over in Apple Valley, down in Bellevue when there were apple orchards, and he saw the apple orchards get chopped down. He saw houses like his parents being built there so that people could live the good life in the orchards, which didn't exist anymore. Paul Hansen was raised in the walnut orchards out in Walnut Creek. He said he saw the last walnut tree being cut down to put in a shopping mall. You know, that's how that kind of thing was.

But yes, and people say, What about your music? God, what do you think about the 1950s and 1960s, rock-n-roll came in, all this music, and acid rock and Jimi Hendrix and this stuff, you know. That was the world. We weren't of that world. We were artists and poets, and we were Northwesterners. There was no music there. We played around and made noise and stuff at various times. I played music younger, but I didn't come back to play music again until 1978, 1979 arrived, started working with the Fiddle Tunes Festival and the Folklife Festival and stuff, and realizing that all this music my friends had played for years down at Reed and since then was stuff I probably wanted to play around with. And so now, as you see on the floor, I've got piles of instruments and play lots of music. But we didn't see that as a loss. Keith Brown had a radio and a battery, and none of the rest of us did. We learned that you could play around with stuff, and musicians came there. But it was out in the outside world.

And so politics and music and stuff, you'd see that there are these avenues of mankind, and when you choose one of the major avenues—you know, the Greeks had a muse for everything, a muse for music and a muse for art and a muse for poetry, and once you pick that muse, you were down that road and she was the one thing you gave offerings to, and you forgot about the others more or less, except when you gave donations to all the muses, which you did every once in a while, you know. And so, we were that way. We were very focused on what we did, our art styles, our poetry styles. We influenced each other and moved back and forth, and yet we all kept moving out in different directions, like an amoeba's arms. The organization had to organize— not organization, organism had to spread out to encompass that, and make new arms, and there's a lot buried in it. I've been going through—I've got boxes and boxes of archives, and my walls are full of stuff. Bo Miller also has tons of stuff. See, that's something we are looking for too, is we need an archivist. We need someone who will run the archive for the Fishtown / Lower Skagit art phenomenon— that continues to this day and is viewed as one of the—it's certainly the biggest art movement I've ever come across in America. And yet, how we thought of Charlie Krafft, and he's never gotten more than $5,000 for a painting, and he's really a world class artist, despite his mouth.

I was back doing some visiting teacher stuff at the Old Lyme School of Art, in Connecticut, which is one of the world's great art schools, and a marvelous guy there. I just listened to his class after I was done doing my part. I learned more about tricks of art and the rhythm of art in that one little half a class than I have in a long time. And they had a little art exhibit of their teachers there, and they are Northerly people and Northeastern regional art, you know, teaching there. And boy they looked like junior or senior project paintings that had brown and yellow tones and, you know, kind of that late 1940s, early

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1950s, more of a brash long linear, but when Cubism was breaking up into Expressionism and all that kind of stuff. These were something for $200,000 to $300,000, and they almost all sold. They were not of any particular great merit. They were regional themselves, but back in New England where all that money is, and just down the road, Paul Newman was living. And so these things were hundreds of thousands, and out here stuff of much better long-term quality can't get $5,000 or $10,000, which is very interesting.

PP: I had a few more things I wanted to talk about. One was, was there any connection that you folks attempted to make with the native people, the Swinomish?

SH: Well, yes and no. How's that? Some of us -- I have Native American blood, so for some of us it's kind of a real sort of thing, though mine is back in Nova Scotia, the French side. We were aware of this and there were a lot sympathies. We were there before they got the fishing rights, and then we watched what happened. And it led to an erosion of our good feelings. We watched them, they'd never fished. They just had the right to. And they drove with string nets from one side of the river to the other, 10, 15 of them. And then the next year they'd say, There's no fish! White man took all the fish! And we'd see them, they were so drunk sometimes they couldn't come back and empty their nets. And you'd see rotting fish there for days. The stench was really strong.

At the same time, we were pretty close to them. There was a big forest there. There had been an Indian tribe there. Some of them, like Maggie Wilder, I think, dated one of them for a long time and brought him in at a time like for Arthur Jorgensen's funeral , and stuff like that, you know, for purifications. She was really helpful that way.

We knew them well, many of them. We would let them come up and have a cup of coffee and warm their hands and feet when they were waiting for the tide to change and go get their nets out again. And two days later, there'd be a fresh salmon on our doorstep. It was an amiable relationship. But we weren't deeply involved with them. The Indian reservation was a society. It's a very peculiar and very unsupported sort of world to be in. You're more prisoners, I think, than anything else. My father grew up in South Dakota, and there's all the great Sioux reservations there. And let me tell you, you want to talk about, Brave New World come back again. It's just, there's nowhere, there's no help, there's no in, there's nothing to do, there's nothing but picking things out of your brain and doing violent things.

And we see that here, in the Swinomish, there's a number of people, the Vox (?) for example, are a big family. Very interesting how the Indian tribes across the country, many of them take white man's first name/nicknames as family names. It's true in Nova Scotia, and it's true in Minnesota, in South Dakota.

PP: I had another question.

SH: We didn't mesh into their society (inaudible)—

PP: Yes, okay. And this is going back more to the art. It strikes me that so many of the artists at Fishtown used multiple techniques and formats. You know, they wrote poetry, they painted, they

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maybe did sculpture, calligraphy, a lot different things, which I find a bit unique, but maybe isn't in that world. But what—was there something about that place or the people there that made that happen?

SH: Put a thought in your mind. Sit there and think how this is possible. 1967 is the middle of the Italian Renaissance. If you know anything about renaissance gentlemen, they resurrected the ancient stuff. They resurrected the art of books and they made fabulous books and brought the art of writing to the legibility that made type possible to where we now use the same letter form to this day in both our cursives and our printed works, and everything like that. But no man, however great he was, was merely a sculptor, merely a painter, merely this… Every man was a bit of a-- Every gentleman had what he called his cabinet. In his cabinet was some Roman seals, and some Etruscan pieces, and some little Greek objects, and some Icelandic things, and a knife of a medieval, portrait of a saint, and a little of this and a little of that, a thing of curiosities. Probably the greatest of them was the great Emperor Rudolph the Mad of the Habsburgs in the late 1500s, who moved to Prague, up to the castle on the rocks so he could get away from everything, and he had thousands and thousands of art things from around the world and that's just what it was.

We were academic scholars. We were artists. We had a wide range of views, and so we did much of everything, just as we had to do our own construction on our cabins and splitting of wood and hauling of water, so we had to also deal with all these other things in the art world. And they all are a part of us. I mean, one of us was a poet. When you talk to a poet, you talk in poetry. We talked in poetry sometimes. We wrote notes to each other, and they are poetry. I've got a few of them downstairs just to remind me of that's how it really was.

And it's interesting, if I go to a music festival, and after a day or so, there's so much around, and you're so attuned to it, and everything else is just blanked out, I'm down another pathway now. And I hear a tune distantly on the air across the whole green, and I sit down and play it perfectly, and I can play it day after day. And I go home, and two days later I note, it's all fading and it's not there anymore. There is a buildup of energy and support of your brain, focuses to those places.

When we were in Fishtown, that's exactly what was happening. We were focusing, different parts of our brain down different avenues, so we would do poetry nights, and Charlie would say, God, I got this drawing; it needs a poem. And someone would write poem. And then they'd say, Steve, you got to come here and write this thing on here, and do it in a way that makes this better than it was before it was not written on there. Charlie used to take a little dip pen and just make—prick letters. He wanted those words on there so much because they really, they got the message across more easily. It was letting you do a kind of piece of art where you can do easily, because remember, none of us are perfect.

Charlie had-- I just admired him greatly. And one day I said, Gee, I wish I was that good. And he said, I'm not. He said, You'll notice there are things I keep re-doing. I do those well. I can't do hands worth a damn. I don't do things I don't do well. Every artist does that. That's why people are noted for doing their birds because they can't paint an animal to save their life. So we would share this stuff back and forth, you know, as well as kind of inspiring us, and so I would do a piece of both poem and Charlie's drawing, and then I would go do a drawing and Bo would write a poem, and then Charlie would help us put it together, and then out of the blue, Hans Nelsen would come back, and he'd say, Hey, I decided to

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make some really great art friends. That's one of them. Hans made friends for us that were just perfect for Fishtown. And that became part of the artwork. Nobody else knows that, unless like we tell him explicitly, they didn't know that that frame was part of, why the thing's that why and why it's got a green background, why it is the way it is. And we all sat there and we created that thing, and the framing is an artwork also you see. So I mean, this kind of—it was like you spin the wheel, you know. And it was, Okay, Charlie, it's your turn, now it's Arthur's turn, now it's my turn, and we do this around, and we would all kind interact and support each other that way.

PP: It's fascinating.

SH: Oh yes. You can't plan it. You can't make it happen. I think the key thing was, we've got the car running in Seattle, where it was easier to deal with, to get fuel and do the repair job and stuff, if I can use an analogue, and then we drove it up to Fishtown and we parked it as a Diamond Vehicle, and shot it full of holes. We had a thing, we had a—it's the psychic, it's a bad word, but it's that non-visible connection that brings friends together that makes artists work together, why two artists are good friends and they paint together for ages and just work really well, you know. And you wonder why these things break up. I got some, a bunch of family pictures. I'm collecting stuff now as my family's dying off, and most of the portraits and stuff died when my grandparents came out from Mobridge in 1942. And because Grandpa worked on a railroad and came for free and the train wrecked and burned everything. And so, very little of that all of the early years. I have an aunt named Edna and she was—her hair was cut to a crew cut, and she chewed tobacco, and she could beat the shit out of you, and she was five feet tall, and she worked on cars and was a welder for a profession, and married her third husband, who wasn't a murderer, who had 13 boys, and kept them all in line. Then I came across this picture in the family archives when she was 16, leaning against a wall in this long dress that comes down to mid-calf, with a smile on her face, and she's one of the most gorgeously beautiful women I have ever seen in my life. And you would never see the 40-year-old Ruth in this 16-year-old girl. And so we run into those same kind of things, you know, how things just change and trans-modify. Why do friends become friends or not? She was best friends with her sister May, and I saw a picture a few years later, you know, May just had her first baby and was holding it in one picture, and there was Edna holding it in the other picture, and all these people, and then all of a sudden, boom, they won't talk to each other, you know.

Fishtown was that connection. And we had there some interesting little spunky things. One reason Robert picked the cabin a mile down the stream because Robert had to be king of the roost. We did a book called Calculus, a wonderful production, did a bunch with handmade paper, only handmade paper thing of a hippie production you'll find anywhere.

TB: It's that the long accordion thing, right?

PP: I haven't seen that.

SH: No, no, it's a book. It's a folding, 5 ½ x 8 ½ book.

TB: Okay.

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SH: It was hand sewn. We did 200, because at 200 we got tired of sewing them and we threw the rest out.

TB: Okay.

SH: All that kind of stuff.

And so Robert said, Oh, that's a wonderful idea, a book of all ours. Of course I'll be the designer and choose what's in there and decide how it's going to be. And we said, No, no, no, Robert. We are all going to do this. We're going to sit down and get the material and do it all together and all put the book together. And he said, Well I'm not going to be in it. If I can't run it I won't be in it. And that was how it happened. No Robert in it.

PP: Wow.

SH: Uh-huh.

PP: He was older, a bit, right?

SH: We were all older.

PP: (laughter)

SH: There was a huge run, okay? Paul Hansen and Robert are about the same age. Paul wasn't much--Paul is two years older than me. Robert was about five or six years older than me. I'm ten years older than Charlie. Charlie, Bo, and Hans Nelsen are about the same age, went to school together. And Eric Nelsen was a few years younger. He was a little kid running around there, you see. And so there's those kind of those age differences. The core group would come out of Ibsen Nelsen's house, around his kids and their friends, and then the wider group. And Robert had learned about this and was a long time hanger on. That's where we were when Asparagus Moonlight was created, at Ibsen Nelsen's house. And I've got the notebook, and I 'm trying to get it published. I had to move my office, and so everything's kind of discombobulated.

PP: Oh okay.

SH: Trust me, I've had the book for ten years, so.

PP: Yes.

SH: But yes, very interesting. You started seeing—because that's where people tried to step out, all those little doodles that Robert did, they first appeared there in 1967, 1968. And I pulled a couple of his poems out of there that are just tear drop—I mean, wonderful. He wrote a poem about gillnet fishing in

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Alaska in the lower panhandle in 1967, only about six lines, and it was the best Alaska poem I have ever seen. It was just marvelous. So it will be in print one day. Yes, that kind of stuff.

PP: So I'd like to kind of wrap this up. Could you talk about how the initial phase of Fishtown that you were involved in and did—

SH: Oh…there wasn't much Fishtown. Charlie Krafft lived in Fishtown from 1968 on, intermittently the first couple of years, and then kind of full time, but it got born. And they started having people come up there, and he wanted to have them come only on Mondays and stuff, but would get rid of most everybody. And so Robert was up there once, and they were talking about the Second Storey Gallery show, which was, you know, when really everything started coming into the open for us, and the fact that we were a group, that there was something going on in the Skagit, it was all done there, you know, by Charlie and the Second Storey Gallery. And so he said, Gee, I don't know how I'm getting back home. He said, Come on and pick me up. You and Karen would like this, you know. And so, it was one of those days.

It was the 16th of January, 1971. And he drew a little map, how to get there to Lees', you know, up to the Lees', and like an idiot I knocked on the front door like a bible salesman and bill collectors and lots of people doing. Yes, they let me go down and see Charlie and Robert. That was nice. So I parked the car and went on down, and it was one of those Chinook days. It was like 60 degrees and really balmy and just really nice, and you could feel the ground starting to soften and things growing. It was a really positive thing walking around on the boardwalk and everything. I got up over the hill to Charlie's, and he made us tea, and we had a nice long chat, and it was, Wow! This is really neat, every little boy's dream. And so I said to Charlie, Can I come back and visit? And he said, Oh sure, anytime. So we went on out, took Robert home, and had a long talk with Robert on the way out, and so lots of things were percolating around about that time.

I started coming up frequently. I started coming up every couple of weeks, and I'd spend a day or two over a weekend. I was a graduate student running a bookstore, and I was the boss and owner of the bookstore, so fuck it. I could do what I wanted. And it had been very stressful. We were the center of the hippy-ness and anti-war and the ACLU. I was on the board of directors, and it was our office, and other things, and the cops shot our windows out all the time, and we were at the center of the riots, and I was just fucking tired of it, you know. I wanted to kind of get back off of that, so it was feeling pretty good.

And we were walking out in April one day, a sunny day, very pleasant, and the woods were leafing out, and I looked up and there's this place up on a little hilltop. And you don't normally look up when you're walking through the woods. You watch it so you don't stumble. I said, What's that? And so he told me about it was the kids' cabin. It had been built and then people had lived there and it was empty. He said, Come on, I'll show you. I went up and looked at it, and I said, Gee, this is neat. Because all the other cabins are down on the river, tucked against the rocks, and at 11 in the morning, it's still dank and shadowy, and it's just, you know, not-- I mean, Charlie's cabin was not a great place if you liked light. This place was up on a rock in the sun, on the south side of the big hill. And he said, Well, if you like it, I'll give you his address. This belongs to Martin Chamberlain, Jr., you know, and you can write him. I bet

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he'd give you permission. So I wrote him, and he said, Sure, I'd love to have another artist in my cabin. Do anything you want. In fact, he said, I don't want it. He said, You can have the cabin. I can't give you the land, but the cabin is yours. Nice guy.

And so, I started moving stuff up there and settling in and thinking about it, and living in it as it was until I started changing it. But at that point we realized, this is starting to grow. The only other person in Fishtown at that time was Tom Skinner, and Tom would come out because he was an aspiring artist, and alcohol was hitting him over the head hard, and he didn't want to pay rent. And so, he knew Charlie, so he came out after drinking out at the bar and stayed on at Paul's cabin.

That's how Paul got there. And after a couple years, they made candles one year. I've got their candle sign downstairs. I've got all the archive downstairs, all the Fishtown stuff, which is why I want a place to archive this damn stuff. I don't want to have it anymore. So he moved out that summer. And Paul had moved up to Bellingham after graduate school, and he'd been married, and then—because he decided it was time to get married, and so he saw a pretty girl and thought he'd marry her. And that was fine and they had a daughter. So he had a dog and a daughter and a cat, and all those things, and then his wife demanded things like being a husband, and of course that didn't work too well. (laughter) So he moved up to Bellingham and got a girlfriend up there who was Elizabeth Mabe that came down and lived in Fishtown with us. And she was, oh, more valuable than Paul. I mean, the women are really what made this thing happen, you know.

And so we said, What are we going to do? Who are we going to invite here? Because there's no thought that, you know, we were just like forget it. We realized we had something. Charlie and I at that time, and by April of 1971, we realized we had a dragon by the eyeballs, and this was a real thing, because we were just thriving there, we loved it, we couldn't imagine not using that power, and we cleared little walkways, and in fact we were making our own world there. And, you know, Charlie and I kind of thought it out. He was known from the start as the mayor or the boss of Fishtown. And I took my direction from him and how things were, but we harmonized. We were good friends, you know. At the same time, of course, Charlie has that other side. He won't show us his notebook. We who were Fishtown cannot look at his notebooks after we came there, because they are his diaries where he was sometimes dishonestly honest about all his frustrations and anger and the things he said about people. He was deathly afraid that, well you know, we would really take it out on him.

So, but we really found that we could work together, so we sat down and we said, What are we going to do? And he said, Well, he said, we need someone there who fits in. And I said, All I can think of is Paul Hansen. He said, God, that was my first choice too. And so by unanimous assent, we wrote a letter to Paul and we said, Paul, there's a free cabin in Fishtown. It's not in great shape, but it will give you some access here, because he had started the bookstore in Bellingham with books from my store then my store closed, and then he was having troubles there because he'd helped with two or three other hip things, make the south side of Bellingham become so popular. I mean, you didn't know what it looked like in 1966, 1967. I mean, it was empty lots and weeds, and there were rotting things, and buildings with no roofs, you know. Only one or two, the bank building was one of the very, very few that had a roof, and this was because they'd rented the apartments out to all these old retired people that used to

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work down there. They got a couple Bellingham pieces in my work too, from just being out there, you know. I was a great thing, good calligraphy.

And that was starting to fade because his landlord said, Whoa, you've made this so nice now, we're going to triple your rent. I got a boutique that wants in here, and that's what happened, a boutique went in there. So he just closed the bookstore and came on down to Fishtown, and all of a sudden we had a community. And we covered some terrain, and I was in the near side, and Keith Brown joined me, and then there was Gasoline Alley, and that was the far side, and the core of Fishtown was of course Charlie and Paul , and then Hans had come up and fixed up a cabin, and all he wanted to do was fix it so he gave it to Arthur, and then Arthur Jorgensen came in and went in there and knocked the boardwalk down so he wouldn't be bothered. And my brother-in-law at one time came in and lived in a cabin between Paul and Bo's for a while. And so we had this floating community that just started growing from that. And it was all by who do you know.

Bo was there because Charlie met him in India, in the winter of 1971, when Charlie was there. And Charlie said, Come visit me in Fishtown, you'll love it. So Bo got back, went to Fishtown and said, Wow, he said, let me look for a cabin. And he went and he found a little thing, and he said, Not much here. But he found some nice pilings and a slot, and then the wind came up the stream and it blew a bunch of stuff loose, and an old barge came down and it was so waterlogged it jammed on Barge Island, and it had a paddleboat shed on it that had been the commissary for this crew that had been working up the river and stuff, and no one knew who owned it and gave a damn, and it had been abandoned anyway. So we took it apart and built his cabin from scratch, so that was built from scratch. Mine was the one built by kids, and I resurrected it and made it a big, you know, sort of a fairytale thing out of it. We all had our own approach to it, and it was all because we all—none of us could have done it alone, you know. So I mean, that's kind of the—it started as this one person like a seed, and then that, you know, brought two, and then three, and then we all had the same ideas, and, you know, we talked to art people instead of to lumberyards.

PP: And then, could you, just to kind of finish up, talk a little a bit about—

(phone interruption)

TB: Take a quick break here.

PP: Sure.

PP: Okay. –about the incident that—the logging incident, I guess, that—

SH: (Laughter) Yes.

PP: Kind of—

SH: The most misunderstand thing in the history of Fishtown. The opposition to it didn't work because they didn't understand why it was happening. And it had nothing to do with trees, and it had nothing to

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do with Fishtown, or anything else like that. It had to do with family interior dynamics and a bitchy old lady who's the daughter of the nastiest old man you could ever imagine, who just happened to own half of Puget Sound at one time. And that's Colonel Haller, and stuff like that, you know. He was a—also, he was the only Indian general that was known to have not just lost a campaign, but to have saved his life, as has been said, because he was back at base before the firing even started.

PP: Wow.

SH: He was the first to flee. But Colonel Haller, Haller Lake in North Seattle, all that stuff. His only child was a daughter, who married Mr. Chamberlain, who was a convenient gentleman of impeccable background, and dull as could be, and into business, and older than her, and probably died off as he should have and left her to run the estate, which she was very well equipped to do. And Mrs. Chamberlain didn't trust youth and didn't trust the discipline that's how people would be, and so when she left her estate, the bulk of it was in the residual as they often are, including the Fishtown farm, and including the Strawberry Point estate, and including another estate up by the Canadian border, and some other stuff. And so she decided that until the youngest of her grandchildren and heirs, she had two kids and six grandkids, till the youngest of those grandkids was 30, no one could touch, in the family, could touch the estate except for one member of the family, which ended up being her son, Martin Sr., who was an academic also, one reason why artists and poets and academics were welcome there. And now you see about this little-- Every time you'd touch a button there, there's a little thing that comes up, new factoid. And he would be the administrator. He didn't like that, but, you know, family duty.

So she promptly ups and dies at that point, and the estate goes into effect, and so Ken Staffanson's left as a share cropping farmer, and they don't think much of it. We know this because they offered me the entire Fishtown farm for $500,000, in 1972. I could've raised the money, and we decided we didn't want to own anything. It was pretty stupid. Later on they were offered 5 ½ million and they laughed.

Well the youngest member was Marty, Martin Jr., who built my cabin with John Bisbee, and so he was very sympathetic to the woods, and he didn't care if he had any control over it. Well, but his cousins, one was an investment banker and the other one was a big executive in the logging industry. They were just fit to be tied. They were hysterically angry. Their land, they couldn't do anything with it. They could not make their thumbprint felt upon it, and they owned it. Some of them, when Marty was something like 8 years old or 9 years old, when Grandma died, so they had to wait 20 years or more to collect this right and to do it the right way they should. They lived in Bellevue. They didn't live out in the Skagit Valley.

Well, when the Fishtown logging came up, Marty Chamberlain, Jr. had just become 30 years old, and so a flood of gargantuan proportions in the family was just unleashed. Now we can finally do something that will reflect our intentions and how we want to manage the land. Remember, we're on a little periphery. We're down on the river on waterlogged land that the family can't own, but the state didn't want to fight for, and so that's an issue that, that's where the talking should be. I mean, this is really-- So we're nothingness. I am well known to the family. I knew more than just Marty. I knew Martin and and I knew his sister really well, and I'd met Melanie, which, you know, was a regretful thing. But, you

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know, I was accepted into the discussion, and I talked to them before about the running of it. I'd helped them with various things.

We had stopped a forest fire there, which would have really made a big mess for them. We worked for Ken Staffanson when he got into a real bind because he couldn't get any Mexicans, and we went out and we helped him do critical work so the estate would do well. They knew that, and we knew there was a synergy back and forth there. So they decided in this family meeting that logging the—everything except Haller Hill, that's the hill behind Charlie's that's where the Indian villages were and everything. Those were touchy points, because if they find any more of the Indian stuff on those two little sites, then all work stops and there's troubles, and they got the Indians involved. They didn't want to do that. So they took the other hill off and the flats down by the farmland, which had been gone through for ? (sounds like pewter?) logs in the 1950s. It wasn't virgin, but it was the only remaining lowland virgin or near virgin timber in all of Puget Sound. It was a big deal. But they wanted some money. They didn't get much because, like, what would happen when Mrs. Chamberlain let them log in 1953 for ? (sounds like pewter?) logs, they lied to her like mad. They said, We only took out 1100 board feet, and they took out 3200, you know. Things like that.

So they decided to do this, and it came out, They're going to log Fishtown. So we started getting some of the facts, and I realized that most of the people that were involved in the logging thing, it was clear cut. Trees are good and the Chamberlains are bad. Who are these people, you know? So I wrote, if you ever want to see it some time, I still got a copy downstairs, a report analyzing the parts of land they had there, looking into the other alternatives to logging to produce revenue, and discovering if you put it into a natural preserve as virgin timber, which they can do, the tax benefits on the farm would be vastly greater than anything from the timber and would go on forever, and then the timber would still be there when you sell it the timber. The timber was not at a very high price right then. They had to make a decision because of politics in the family, not because of the timber. It was not an economic decision. It was a family political decision. And so therefore, it could not be changed.

So I gave them the report, had a long talk with another member of the family, Chris, down in Scottsdale, Arizona, the brother of the investment banker and Melanie, had taken over. And so, he gave me a call. Then we had a long phone conversation, and he said, You know, he said, we read the report. No one has ever given the family this kind of awareness or credit. And so we talked it over. And he said, Those were good points, and in some situations that would be a very good thing, he said, but because of family reasons, we cannot change the decision that's been made. It was difficult to make the decision. I mean, Marty and his sisters were against the logging, but as Marty told me, he said, Steve, it's my family. I can't have my family not talking to me, you know.

We argued, we used the report, we talked everything we could, and we agreed we had to make a compromise somewhere, and this was the compromise we did. We got Haller Hill, and they agreed on the Indian sites, and of course they couldn't log down by the water because mostly just sort of the muck and willow and stuff, but there was a buffer zone. And so they logged the other portion. And they triple replanted, as I say. Normally you use a certain replanting rate and then it's a failure. They replanted three trees for every one that they cut. They had an arborist come in and analyze the terrain and plant clumps of trees of different kinds based upon what would natively be growing there. There are cedars

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in some places and firs in others, and maples and others, and they did it in kind of an interweaving, and it grew up very fast and very thick, and they've done a little bit of thinning.

To my thinking, it was negative, and I hated to see it go away, but I knew those trees by name and they were wonderful, wonderful places, and they just bulldozed and chunked around, and it's not very pretty. But of the loggings I've seen, it's one of the least objectionable, one of the least nasty. When I drive to Mt. Rainier on the east side up Highway 410 all the time, and boy they were logging like mad a few years ago to get every bit because the rules are about to change, where they were grandfathered in to clear cut log right up the Highway 410. Oh, what an ugly son of a bitch that. They've left these little bands about 100 yards wide so you wouldn't see it from the road. The state asked them to do that. It was part of the conditions for logging before. But they knew no one from the state would remember those conditions, and they didn't, and then they go on all those strips, clear cut right by the highway.

Well, Fishtown had elements of it, but they didn't have big—they cleaned it up pretty well, and I thought it had been pretty well done, and the wildlife is popping back pretty well, you know, because they planted that and they allowed stuff to come in. Besides the family thing being the dominant thing, was not how things should be done, I thought it was not a particularly bad situation.

Then these guys in the cabins, they had this big thing, We're going to stop this. They chained themselves across it. They damaged the equipment, and they tried to bring lawsuits. They're tenants, you know. And I thought, Oh dear, you just don't do that. These people are very old fashioned. And so, sure enough, the leases were not renewed, and then they had Ken come in with chainsaws. Oh, he loved that, and his son, Craig, and they cut those damn hippie cabins apart and threw them in the river. That was kind of another interesting statement on Fishtown and the locals and the one guy, who doesn't own any land, has all the authority from, you know, because he's working there and there all the time, you know, all those kind of things.

PP: Were people's possessions still in those cabins when they—

SH: No, no one was caught by surprise.

PP: Okay.

SH: And there were some people squatting after the people that had the leases went out, and they may have lost something, but no.

But things were still there when Bo left. He didn't take everything along. He had a studio and he left stuff up there, and when they cut the studio down, I went and in the mud I pulled out a lot of his drawings and stuff out of the mud. I've got them downstairs, you know, just haven't even cleaned the mud off of some of them. And so it became one of these things where you're seeing this right now. It's a lightning rod to draw all kinds of—it wasn't this logging, it was all logging. It wasn't this family, it was all families that own land. Do you see what I mean? I had been particularly close in working with them about it. I had no trouble. I told them personally I thought it was stupid and they shouldn't do it, you

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know, and if I had any ability to stop it, I probably would, but, if it's their land and I followed their right, and I told them, you know, you have the right, and this and that and the other.

It's like, I made a friend at a dance in New England, a little 11-year-old girl, and she's a fabulous little dancer. And so I immediately got ahold of her mother because, you know, you don't talk to 11-year-old girls, and her mother thought we were charming, and my wife and I were good friends with good friends of hers, and we all had dinner, and we all did these things, and then her mother decided that she was getting too much exposure to the big world, and she said, We just want all you adults to just not contact my daughter till she hits 16 because I think she needs to be not so inundated by adult things. And I would have maybe controlled it, but not done so much. But at the time, I realized, this is an absolute right, and this is one of the few sacred rights of a parent to raise their child. One of the few sacred rights of property is the right to do any legal purpose with it you want, because that's why you have an owned property. And times may change and attitudes change or I may not agree with you, but I have the right to do my property my way, you do yours your way. That's why every house here looks a little bit differently now, you do those things.

And so I think that it was an overblown thing. My friend Bo Miller would not agree with that. He was very strongly against it, you know, but of course he'd moved out. I was still living there. I felt no fear that I would have a retaliation if I did anything reasonable. If I had pointed in any way that I wanted-- I said, I did about a 30-page report, and that was accepted positively. I talked to them about it. I met them when the ? (sounds like tourists?) were there, both during and after the logging. We were all genial and friendly, and there was no thought of not continuing my lease. And so I think that the negatives that were seen are because we had people that didn't have any connection really to the valley or to those woods, or maybe even to the state of Washington, who would come there. The kids who were living in the cabin at that time were mostly hippies who wanted to be in this hippie place, and that's when it really became sort of hippie hippie, and way after hippies were hippies, you know. This was the later '70s, you know. This was the late time.

It's a strange group that now go around acting as hippies. It's almost, a cult sort of thing, the people that have this need to give a statement of themselves this way. I wore corduroy pants and had a sports coat and the beard of course and the whole thing. I'd put my sports coat on and my pants and stuff. I'd go down to a university gathering and I'd be accepted just fine, and I could also go up and hang out with a bunch of hippies, smoking dope on the river, and I was accepted just fine too, because, you know. And my wife at the time, Jenny _? (Couldn't catch name ? Kulchinsky?), became Jenny Herold, was always angry at me. You're not hippie enough. You need some more tye-dye. Let me make it.

She made clothes. Let me make you clothes. I was just looking downstairs, four or five shirts she'd made, all kinds of really nice, you know, American old fashioned sorts of stuff, and I didn't go in for that kind of stuff, you know. I didn't wear beads and do bells and stuff like that, you know. I was more internal. But you see, again, Paul Hansen and I and Robert Sund were older by 6-10 years than the big main thing. And then there's a couple of younger ones behind that, you know, not too much of the kids.

And so, but that was a positive too because it was just a little--that clothing thing. It was the richness of our community. We had people who were married and people who were living together and bachelors

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and single women and kids of different kinds, and then we were old and we were young, and we had to deal with all these different issues and all the things of a town, and so we could not be one dimensional. We couldn't be just a bunch of-- I've seen the pictures and visited a lot of the hippie settlements, and they came up and sprang out of the desert in Arizona. And by the next year, the dust was blowing through the rooms, and their plastic was all cracked and gone, and they were just, you know, a ghost town.

Our town lingered in one form or another for about 25 years. You know, I was there for that long. And Keith was there until the last day, so years went when they took him away. And we had various people come in and out and roundabout.

PP: Well, I want to thank you. We're going to have to wrap up.

SH: Yes, whatever.

PP: Tamara, did you have anything?

TB: No, I found it fascinating. I guess I was just curious, maybe not so much Fishtown, but what is your degree in? Because you obviously are very into books themselves.

SH: A paleographer, so I have degrees in history and paleography. I started as an astrophysicist, working on unified field and thermodynamic transfer of the universe, and realized it would take so many years in graduate school to get to where I wanted. And then the big clincher was, I had a roommate in my second year, and God, he was the nicest guy. His name was Kuiper. And if you know anything about astronomy, Mr. Kuiper Belt?

PP: Oh yes.

SH: Uh-huh. This is the son of Mr. Kuiper. And so we were drinking wine one night, and that was a job of course I would be aiming for, if anything, just this guy I wanted to work with him then. His son said, Yes, Dad said I've got to work my butt off and get through in four years. He can't hold the job forever. So my job was already given away. So I changed to history and paleography because that was my other love, and because I had to start knowing how to do it because I was taught that way at Reed. And when you learn how to do an art, if you learn how to sculpture and marble, even a little bit, boy, you're going to be a good art historian. You're going to know, when you look at a piece and you just know it, you know. I've been a wood carver and a stone carver too. It's part of what I do. And right now I want to buy work of the ancient seals, and it's only the Middle East and the Balkans and Greece. And I can pick them up now and I can tell how it was carved, how it was built, how it was done, how the guy was feeling that day. Is it genuine, is it not? Is it from here, is it from there? You pick it and you look at it, and you can know that, you know, if you've done these kind of things.

TB: Wow. Okay, thank you.

(End of recording)

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