

INTRODUCTION

Hi, this is Jim Heumann. In this interview I will be speaking with Sean Rankins. Sean is a sail maker and the owner, with his wife Inger, of Northwest Sails & Canvas in Port Hadlock, Washington. He grew up in Southern California and started working for North Sails in San Diego in the late 70's. He went on to open lofts and support big regattas all over the world, including a couple of Americas Cups. During the 80's sail making got regularly interrupted by other adventures like riding a classic motorcycle throughout India, Nepal, and Asia, as well as stints in Europe and Canada. In 1989 he showed up in Port Townsend, Washington riding one of the classic motorcycles he had sent home from India, and fell in love with the place. Soon he had a job with Port Townsend Sails then went on to do several other things, like timber framing, before settling into his sail loft in Port Hadlock, WA. He talks about Port Townsend in the 1990's, the "funky boatyard" that is now the Boat Haven shipyard, the wooden boat racing series that took place in Puget Sound in the 90's, the Wooden Boat Foundation, the Sea Dog Regatta, racing on Maxi boats, working with Lowell North, almost sinking on a boat delivery, and much more. Here's the interview.

Jim

It is February 2 2023. We are in Port Townsend, Washington, at the Boat Haven Marina. So, Sean, can you tell me a little about where you were born, where you grew up? And then how did you get to PT? Let's start there.

Sean

Boy, that's a long, so long ago... Anyway, I was born in Southern California, like a lot of us up here. And I kept running away to be in greener northern places my whole life as soon as I could, and doesn't surprise me at all that I ended up here. Anyway, I came from a boating family. For sure my dad was, a Navy man, spent his four years on aircraft carriers, and two of which were lost in the war. And he had some stories that we never got to hear. I'm sure. He was one of those ones that wanted to forget about all that and start all over. And so we grew up, but it

was powerboats that he always had, little ski boats, no matter what in those days, it was all wood boats and definitely moved into fiberglass boats later on, but that was mostly for waterskiing and things like that the ski boats, but he always had wooden saltwater cruising boats. Really cool ones actually. And one of the last ones was a Monk 48, I think. And, and he always had, because he was kind of a knucklehead when it came to mechanics and anything working with his hands, he was more of a cerebral type turned out to he was a became an attorney and then later a judge. So that's was his walk in life.

Jim

And was this San Diego?

Sean

No, actually, one of the biggest counties in in Southern California, San Bernardino County, and but he always had a couple of friends around that knew how to keep things running. Because for him, it was all about fishing. The marlin would be running, or the tuna, we used to fish a lot. And it was so much fun. Up to six lines off the boat, not commercially either. And we'd bring back and basically feed the neighborhood and those days everybody had a freezer full of fish. It was pretty cool. It was a fun way to grow up. But he he didn't know as far as sailboats were concerned. They were in his way. He was one of those stink-potters that we sailors really liked to throw a flare at once in a while. But anyway, so I started like that, and I was always wet my whole life growing up, we had a place out on the Colorado River for like, almost 30 years. We grew up, I grew up on motorcycles out in the desert and dune buggies and skiing and on the river and then being in the salt, you always kept a boat there. Usually Newport Beach in the early days then later it was San Diego. And that's where I grew up.

Jim

Where on the Colorado River. Did you have a place?

Sean

Well, it was if you went out I10 To Blythe, west pass San Diego, Palm Springs, Indio, Blythe, which we're all pretty small back then, I mean tiny, and then you'd hang a left. And you go in at the California side. And there was a place called

Twin Palms. Really good friends of my family bought that little piece of land on the river and then we and others started putting up trailers and stuff out there. And it was like such a great childhood, I'll tell you. And so that's that's where we had a place up on the river. And, but we moved around in different places. Early on like San Fernando Valley, we're in a place called Tarzana. I went through there a couple of years ago when I couldn't believe it. But back then all the canyons were fire roads and we used to ride our mini bikes up there. And on the top of the crest we looked down on Malibu, and the sunsets, and it was pretty wild and different back then.

Jim

And how old are you?

Sean

I was born in 54. So in eight weeks or something, I'm going to be 69. I left there in 79 after university, like I said, I'm just gonna learn to sail and I want to just sail over the horizon and keep going, so I just moved down, because I always liked being down by this coast. That's because we lived inland a bit. And I just ended up working for Carl Eichenlaub. He was a boat builder down there on Shelter Island. He was the boat builder guy that kept all the boats running for decades for the America's Cup. I'm sorry, not America's Cup, for the Olympic boats. And he had his own yard there and it was right across the street from North Sails. And I used to see them hoisting sails up on top of that roof. They had about four masts up there for really big, big sails and small ones. And I remember just thinking, Ah, that's what I want to do.

Jim

How did you get the job with at the yard?

Sean

Just asked, he had me fairing hulls, fiberglass bottoms, it was horrible. Not my medium. And I just kept going across the street and Mr. Bennett, who was an old Star crew for Lowell [North], he was a shop manager. And after about six months, he knew he wasn't gonna get rid of me. I was in there every week. And so when somebody else left, they hired me. And about two and a half years later, I was off

sailing for them in other places and setting up lofts and doing a lot of sailmaking. It was so much fun. And so I think it was about 1979 that I left California, and sailed to Europe, on a boat that we built sails for, and did lots of racing over there. And I was supposed to go around the world. And it was back in the day of the maxi boats. I really was attracted to large boats. So I spent a lot of time doing that working for North usually. And these regattas, we set up these basically mash units, to fix the sails that were busted, and blown out, or didn't have the right shape. And we'd have a crew of sailmakers that would work through the night, fixing them - up to 60 sails, I remember one night, just sometimes little tears, big tears, there was five of us and it was crazy sometimes, and we didn't sleep at all. And we get up and take the sails back to the boats and we'd go out and break them again, come back and it'd be like that for... some of the regattas, and things that we were part of, were weeks long. It was a lot of fun. Something you do when you're in your 20s and have the energy for.

Jim

Wow. So you just learned on the job then...

Sean

Yeah. And that's how I got into sailmaking. And I got to work mostly for North Sails. But I got to work on five different continents in different lofts of theirs and on different projects. And it was fun. A couple of Americans cups, and then went down to Australia for 87 to be working for the syndicate the what was that syndicate for, I forget now, but they were they were eliminated pretty early. So I did something else for them down there. And so I did that off and on for 10 years out there in the world. I kind of checked out and other things in between. It was really fun. And that's how I got into sailing. And that's how I came to Port Townsend. It was just another crazy road trip and ended up here and saw what this place was like (was on my old BSA) and Ed Luchard stepped off of Adventuress one day with Ellen Faulkner. Ellen was working for Carol Hasse and Nora Petric at the sail loft there in Point Hudson and heard I was a sailmaker and she goes, Oh, you should come and visit the sail loft. It didn't matter where it was in the world, I always went into the sail lofts, because I think they're really cool spaces. And I went in and Nora offered me a job right there. And I was waiting for

Inger [Sean's girlfriend, now wife] to show up. She was in China, we'd been traveling off and on and known each other for some years. During the 80s...

Jim

So you got here when?

Sean

89 it was spring of 89.

Jim

So you left Southern California in like 1979 and then did the 10 years traveling around and then ended up here?

Sean

Yep. I was working and living and traveling all over the world and and got distracted a few times for long periods of times in like almost two years in India traveling around and ended up on a motorcycle, a 1940's motorcycle. And then after Australia working there, I met Inger and we went back to Asia and I ended up coming home. I ended up finding old motorcycles and I shipped them back to a place [where] I was kind of hanging out in Canada when I was in North America. And that's how we ended up here was coming down from Victoria to visit some friends and and yeah, that was in 1989.

Jim

Interesting, so you show up here and you get a job with Nora and Hasse and ...

Sean

Yeah, that lasted for like three, four months because Inger was coming over and then we were supposed to get on my motorcycle and head east and go back to Norway to live. But one thing after another, and we met so many great people in the whole sailing thing here. And just it was, for me, it was like something I'd been long waiting for, because I've missed being in one place and learning, building stuff, or just using my hands again. And so that's how I ended up here. And then she was a bit reluctant, but she fell in love with the place too. We did

always go back and forth to Norway and other places. But we ended up back here each time. And that's when, it's like 32 years later, something crazy.

Jim

So you said you really liked the sailing community here. What was it like when you got here?

Sean

Well, it's interesting that I said it like that, because the only sailing community was racing, that's what I want to distinguish - that I wasn't necessarily talking about racing, because I came from that, everywhere I was working for North working for ... people that have lots of money, and, and never been able to work for people that didn't have a lot of money. And that were doing a completely different kind of sailing, like maybe cruising. And I was really attracted to that, because a lot of egos on that other end, and I remember when I was working for Warren Luhrs during the BOC, that was kind of in conjunction with the America's Cup when it was happening down in Australia. When our team was eliminated, I was sent off to Sydney to work for Warren because he was in the BOC which was an earlier around the world race singlehanded. And so there's like five or six of us working on "Thursdays Child" fixing its rig that busted off the southern bite and me fixing the sails and building another one. Staying in nice places and having a car, and Mike is over here on his boat, no money, nobody to help him. And I just liked Mike and he was in the boat next to us and it was like I want to go over work with this guy. So that's what happened when I moved here. I was like, ah, I now have access to all these other sailing people that are getting boats ready to go offshore and just not come back, and people that were just sailing for fun on the bay or whatever. The only really racing that was happening was what Ed Barcott had organized which was really fun. So that's how it started here for me and that was the attraction. It was just the great sailing that happened on this bay - we had when wind when a lot of other places around Puget Sound and up in Canada didn't have. And wind and flat water so it was really fun and I just jumped in with both feet.

Jim

Nice, and so you worked for for Nora and Hasse for four months then what?

Sean

We went back to Norway and spent quite a bit of time there then came back and I did a lot of different jobs in those days. And probably the last one I did that lasted quite a while was timber framing. I did that for a long time working for a really neat outfit that was Port Townsend Timbercraft Homes, the Landaus and just picking up jobs in in the marine trades. I've worked for the [Shipwrights] Co-op for a while, for about six months, that was really fun back with the original owners. It was smaller and we had some really fun big work that we were doing. And I really liked that and but I kept coming back to sailmaking and when I had a chance to be where I am now [in Port Hadlock], that was a quite a few directors ago, the director at the boat school offered me that space down there because they had acquired the property there in lower Hadlock. I was already teaching students at the boat school, borrowing machines and other places to do it. At Hasse's, sometimes other places too. And that's a neat story about Van Hope. You were going to ask me about Van Hope. At the far end of the yard here towards the trail that goes out to the mill was what was known as the funky boat yard and it was really cool place. I mean oh my god that was a big attraction here with all these incubators scenes down there with different people getting started and some of the coolest projects happening down there. And one of them was definitely Van Hope's latest which was he was building the scow schooner "Patricia". And a lot of different people helping with that too. And I used to go down there and check out what was going on and Van was like a really super super guy and one day I remember he was coming pretty close to completion. The spars were getting done, the rigging was gonna start to happen. And I go, ... when you launch this thing in the spring, or whatever it was, I go, Van, you got sails for it? He goes, no, no, I haven't thought about that yet. And I go, what? you can't launch the schooner without sails. And I go, well, if you'll cover the materials, if I can get some sails, would you go for that? He said, sure. And so we built him a suit of cotton sails. For the scow Patricia.

Jim

Cotton?

Sean

Yep. And that's what he wanted. And he had an old cotton mainsail off a big old boat that was a jib headed or a Marconi mainsail, and it was big enough that we could actually cookie cut the the gaff mainsail out of it and, and do some shaping to help it and everything. And so we were able to get a mainsail, a gaff mainsail out of that. And the head sails and the fishermen, those those were all off of cloth I had to buy. And Shawn Lapatito at that time, was a director at the Northwest School of Wooden Boat Building. And I asked him if I could steal some students on evenings and weekends to build sails, and he said, sure. And so Hasse, or maybe it was Nora, I can't remember, said yes, you can use the loft on evenings and weekends. And so that's what we did. And we built those sails and...

Jim

Basically for free?

Sean

Yeah, well, we did a lot of that in those days. It was fun. I mean, what I wanted to do, take the whole money thing out of it, and all that, [rather than] helping a bunch of wealthy people, get their yayas out there in the racing world, and it was really fun for me. So that's when when I started giving back in a sense, because I felt like I could, I had a paying job during the day and, and we could do this. And so I did that for probably nine years through the school. And the foundation back in those days, the Wooden Boat Foundation, they had some really cool programs like the Youth S.E.A. symposium, these kids, it was a really cool program. And one [program] was that they would build a small boat, rig it, and [build] the sails. And so I'd do the sails. It was usually Ed that taught the the boat building part. It was to his design - a pram.

Jim

Ed Luchard?

Sean

Yes. And stuff like that. So it's always fun. And so then I was helping the Center for Wooden Boats and other organizations like that.

Jim

Center for Wooden Boats in Seattle?

Sean

Yeah, because people needed sails, and they didn't have money. So I helped them set up some kind of a vocational class workshops, and then they get the sails they needed. And if there was something for me, that was fine ... So they didn't have to pay for the sails and get them for the cost of materials. And it's still like that at the school. Pretty much we we still teach a lot. Or we used to, it's been a while, COVID kind of killed a lot of it. We'd be teaching these workshops to build sails for the boats that they were building there, which were a lot of small boat sails and others. And usually the students would come and take the class, or other community members. So for me that's been, a long, long time coming. And a big part of my last 25 to 30 years here, as a sailmaker was just education, making it affordable for educational organizations to get their sails, really good quality sails, in an affordable way.

Jim

Tell me more about the funky boatyard. Who was down there, then?

Sean

Well, boy, there's some people you definitely want to talk to that will give you more information because that was probably coming to an end right when we arrived, maybe a year and a half later it was gone. But definitely my connection down there was a lot of the shipwrights that you may note, that are still around here today. Definitely Burns and those guys were down there. It's definitely Ernie [Baird] who was soon after getting established down there. But that was after things kind of shifted, and he was able to get on the ground that he still owns, I think down there. And then there was definitely Diana Talley, had a little spot down there, and Van. And there was this other fella that he worked with. Anyway, a lot of really cool people, a lot of which are gone now, or moved on or whatever, unfortunately, some that have passed. And so not too different today, being a young person (I was in my late 30s by that time) they fall into this community, it only takes someone put the hand out helping you get a leg up and off you are. And that was definitely what it was like back then. And lots of people that are here today and made a living and enjoyed their life here, a lot of them came in

the same way thru the back door and sort of met really cool people that helped pave the way forward, and I'm beholden to a lot of people here. Definitely.

Jim

Who besides Van would have been mentors for you?

Sean

Well, geeze, there's so many. I would say nearly all of the instructors that have gone through the years at the Northwest School of Wooden Boatbuilding. All were friends, and still are there. They've definitely been a huge encouragement to me in my vocation. Definitely. And I would say Van of course, and oh, boy, right now I'm sitting here thinking I'm having a brain fart, but there were so many people that were in the marine trades. Definitely. Nora and Hasse. They were always really good friends and supported me, that's for sure. And a lot of individual shipwrights, blacksmiths, machinists, many of which weren't on port property back then, and still aren't, and they're out in the woods today. And maybe they were here, and they're there now. But if this is the epicenter, you can almost go out in all directions, and you're gonna find people over on Whidbey Island and, and Marrowstone, and down to Kitsap way and going west, and definitely, up on Fidalgo, that are in the marine trades that have had time in Port Townsend, or new people, and have been associated with people here. And there's a huge network of talent, and definitely over to Seattle way too, and we're just lucky that is so concentrated. And some of these more outlying areas, even within miles of here. It's a different reality, because, they're more isolated.

Jim

What was the town like when you got here?

Sean

It's interesting, coming from Southern California, I have to admit that I've always been very omni present and conscious of rapid development, and bad choices having to do with that, and I saw it happen in here too and it kind of scared me, because I fell in love with the place. But it turned out that there was a lot of folks here that felt the same way, because they came from somewhere else, maybe, and they just found this place to be so special. But we all have a hand in

changing it. And sometimes you can't stop it, but there were a group of people here definitely some in government too, that were into smart growth. That was kind of a slogan, or maybe it's not a slogan, I'm reaching for the word that that would be. That was a phrase that came up at that time. And not just unique to Port Townsend, either. It was other places too. And there were people that were trying to, slow it down, or at least be smart about it. And it's probably what saved this place, but it's changing really quick now. I mean, before we know it...

Jim

Was it pretty affordable when you move here?

Sean

Oh, heck, yes. I mean, but then again, on the money I made then it was a struggle. It's just a bigger struggle now, I'm sure. But I'm not kidding, Jim, when I moved here in 1989 things shut down, if you're lucky if a restaurant was open after Thanksgiving. Yep. And wouldn't maybe open...the only place that used to stay open was like the Bayview. Or maybe Robin and those guys would keep the Landfall open. People just went into this linear thing. Most marine trades shut down unless they were geared up to help some of the commercial fleet that was in town. But it was amazing. Dogs would be asleep on Water Street. No kidding. That sounds silly. And I'm not exaggerating. I'm not talking like fleets of dogs or anything. But it was so different. Our friends Dave and Alison, behind the Town Tavern, that was one of my early jobs, I was helping them kind of get that place ready for the Silverwater restaurant that was there, behind the where the Town Tavern was. And everyone thought, Allison in particular was completely nuts, because it was gonna be a non-smoking place. And they were opening just before everybody shut down. They're like, no, you're not going to have anybody. And so that to this day they never had, no business. And ... so the place was ready for that, it was funny. A restaurant opening up at that time a year, and being non-smoking. It seemed like it was going to die in the first week. So it was different. And a lot of the old Victorians, the big houses up on the hill, they had like a bunch of old hippies and young people living in there, everybody piled in, even some of the places I lived. And there was just like, a lot of roommates, and just people sharing spaces and, and a lot of empty places, and things started changing, in a big way. This is really a segue away from sailing, but it definitely

changed. Like a lot of places to change - with a [computer] modem. When that happened, it was like, didn't matter where you were in all the beautiful places tucked away up here, and up in Alaska, out here on the West End, you name it. It was like, before that it was only artists and writers and loggers and fishers, these people that could be maintain a place out there. Because if you were an artist or writer, well, your stuff was sold in San Francisco, New York City and stuff and, and then when the modem happened, he just he just had to make it over to Seattle once every fortnight or something to whatever. So that's when things really started changing.

Jim

Did people get along? All these different groups?

Sean

Those days? Definitely, I think I'm not saying they don't today. But yeah, the thing that really attracted me besides looking at [the water], is there weren't any fences in Uptown. And in the neighborhoods, you could see right through to your friends, your neighbor's backyard and talk to them. There was so much, and still is to this day, but there was so much happening with at the early days of Centrum and just stuff out of Fort Worden. Hot jazz, cold jazz, Writers Conference, Fiddle Tunes and all this stuff. And then what was happening in town too, it was like, when tourists came to Port Townsend in those days it's not because Water street was full of looky-loo shops, and people buying seagulls and stuff. They were coming with intent because of something cultural. And that was really interesting for me, so that was the kind of people that came and were tourists in those days. They were definitely coming in with a with a purpose, because of something that was happening. And it was year round. And that was also, for me a real draw. So we used to do all of that back in those early days, now today you can't even get seat. It was definitely a different time. I love it today too. But it was definitely a different place then.

Jim

And were you involved with a Wooden Boat Foundation.

Sean

I was, early on, just because of my interest on boats and kids and education. And I was on the board for maybe four or five years, I think same time as Tim Lee and Ted Pike. Ted, another icon, where you here to meet him?

Jim

Yeah, I knew Ted a little bit.

Sean

... another compatriot and definitely an influence in my being here.

Jim

What was the Wooden Boat Foundation like back then? Was it pretty organized?

Sean

Well ... when we came, the old the gentleman that ran it, who I know his name, it's going to come into my head at two in the morning now. I can't remember it right now. It was him and one other person and then Scott Swantner. When he came on, he was already a good friend. It was him and Libby, who's Libby Snick today. And it's amazing what those two people pulled off, Scott and Libby and, and the board that they had. Definitely, he was the one that got us into the Cupola House out of a street-front kind of office, that was the [office of the] Wooden Boat Foundation before that, and with some really cool people in the community ... Scott would be a really interesting person to talk to about that period of time. And the people that came in to influence so many young people from who knows how many corners of the world that came, not at not only locally, that ran through programs that were happening through the Wooden Boat Foundation. It was pretty amazing.

Jim

So it was going pretty strong back then?

Sean

Sure, especially for when you think about its smallness. And it grew for sure. That was a pretty neat time, again, to be in Port Townsend. And Point Hudson was in

those days still underneath the Rally Corp, the people that had the lease for Point Hudson, which is an interesting history. There's way more people that can talk to you about that than me, Carol Hasse being one of them. But it's amazing that there was never any responsibility in their lease agreement that they should keep paint on the buildings, or make sure the plumbing or the docks were kept, it was it was such a shambles when they Port it got it. So that was an interesting period of time, because that transition was happening, that lease was coming to an end in the 90s. And, and the Port was going to take over. Nobody knew what was going to happen, if the Port was going to sell it or hand it off to some other...

Sean

They were really thinking the Port was going to sell?

Sean

Nobody really knew what was going to happen when that lease ended. Some people thought they knew. And very few people thought that the Port would want to take it on because it was such a wreck. Back where the Maritime Center is now, just the expense to clean up sites like that [it was a petroleum facility]. And even the infrastructure. The Port is still in arrears that way. There's so much maintenance that still has to happen that's been deferred for so long. And so that was a big changing dynamics at that period of time too. And yeah, the Wooden Boat Foundation was right there in the Cupola house and anyway...

Jim

And what cool boats were in town when you got here?

Sean

Well I have to say that another big attraction to me is how many wooden vessels of all types were still up here in the Pacific Northwest. It's a friendly place for wooden boats for sure environmentally and in the climate here. And so that was really great, but there was there were way more wooden boats in either marina at that time than there are today. Though we still have quite a few, which is pretty amazing. And there was a lot more activity in the Pacific Northwest here in our region with fun races on the bay on different bays in different waters at that time, which is another real draw for people like me here. WYRA [Wooden Yacht Racing]

Association] was one of the organizations that did that. The only existing event that is a part of what that once was is our [Classic] Mariners Regatta, two days of racing, that still happens, but it used to happen in up to six other locations. ... including this one. And so you had to do at least one race on each of the other [locations] or maybe, I can't remember now, a combination of so many races in different places. And then the accumulation at the end ... maybe we counted for two because we had two races over two days. And anyway it was a neat series. It was a series that I would like to see something like that happen again. It was so much fun because some of the fun was just getting there and then getting home at the end. We had a really strong, fun cruising club. That was kind of the stuff that happened in between [the races] and sometimes it was getting from point A to B like from here to the next regatta wherever it was. And we'd have fun races. Van Hope gave us a cup for that, that still exists, it floats around.

Jim

I've heard of that. Pete told me it was like, some Harvard cup or something.

Sean

It was it was for rowing. Again, Scott Swantner, or Alex Spear would be to good people to learn about those early days too, because they were also part of instigating all that fun on the water. And we still have that cup. I think it's on my piano at home, it's my turn to, put the challenge out.

Jim

Well, tell me about about that, about what the challenge is and how that works.

Sean

Well, unfortunately, over the last 30 years, it's been a kind of an exclusive thing. I wouldn't use that word, but I'm lacking the word I want to use. But it meant it was with for wooden boats. And, and definitely it had to do with a certain group of people that were into doing it at that time. All these overnights, kind of fun things, and it was really casual like the boat that got there first, the one that won that race, were they responsible to have cocktails ready for the boats that got there [later]. I can remember one epic outing where the overnights was going to be inside the hook at Dungeness Spit. And Alex Spear got in front and stayed in

front like often happens with Vito, Vito Dumas, and, and we're a mile or so back. And we can see he made the beach, but instead of dropping his hook, we're all heading up that way on the outside of Protection Island. We can see it through binoculars. And he turned right. And he was slowly putting with his main sail up, but he had his engine turning over and he was putting up towards the point out there by the lighthouse. And there was like 30 boats fishing so he could tell they were salmon up there, right? So he kind of ... meandered through this fleet of boats out there fishing and turned around and came back. And by the time he came back, we're all ... dropping our hooks. And he holds up this this like, huge salmon. That he just trolled through the fleet and just grabbed this monster. And he came back, in those days we used to have fires on the beach, and so we were all up there.

Jim

it was not a wildlife refuge at that point?

Sean

No. Or it was not so restrictive as is it is today. We used to do that. And, overnights ... up at the backside of Rat Island. And then, we'd go to other places too, but that's what the cruising club would do, is was kind of fun.

Jim

And what were you sailing in?

Sean

Well, somebody else's boat. And then we had Havhesten and I sailed on Havhesten. So that's our little Norwegian open keelboat.

Jim

Oh, and you still have that?

Sean

Yeah, and we used to take that cruising every year up into the islands, for three weeks at a time.

Jim

And you'd camp?

Sean

Yeah, yeah.

Jim

And when did you get Cito?

Sean

Well probably my influence going over to Europe and seeing all these cool double Enders up in Norway.

Jim

Explain what Cito is ...

Sean

It's a Danish Spitsgatter it's a 38 square meter class Spitsgatter. It's based on sail area. And which is 38 square meters and main and jib. And they had different sizes. And in Denmark, I mean all Scandinavia, they're all building double enders. That means the stem on both ends. And, the Danes were famous. There were three pretty famous ones through the late teens, 20s 30s and 40s. And, it was a pretty competitive fleet of boats, and they had up to five different sizes in them from I think the smallest was a 20 square meter, and the largest was a 60 square meter. And I think the most built, though, were the 38 square meter and maybe the 30 or just under it were the second largest amount that were ever built. They were popular sizes. And our boat was a 1935 design, and launched in 37, built by builder for himself. This guy Vass. He built it in his backyard in Copenhagen. Some really cool pictures of that.

Jim

I'm how did you get it here?

Sean

Another really good story for Scott Swantner. I met him when I came to Port Townsend. Early on I stayed in his yard. That's how I got to know him. Stayed in my tent. Him and his wife, Colleen. And he had a Spitsgatter, and I'd been looking for one for years. I tried to buy one up in Canada, which is now here right here, it's called, used to be called Latte and now it's Pia. Many people knew a Ahoi' Mench that owned that. Now Leah Kefgen does. But we almost got it up in Canada, but I couldn't come up with the money. It was only like five grand but I didn't have it after 10 years of traveling and no credit. I always had this thing for Spitsgatters is where I'm going with that. And so Cito came to us because this guy that bought it from the last Canadian family that owned it, because it was always up in Canada. He kept ignoring the boat, and about three times she almost sank in her slip. Turned out her garboards were falling off. And I kept pumping her out and giving them a call and saying, your boat is sinking! And it was mostly Scott, that was like, "Shawn, are you going to be down there"? Because, our boat was named Doxy back then, but her original name was Cito. We gave it back to her. ... And so anyway, he gave us a deal that we didn't refuse. And so we ended up with Cito. And then eight years later, we got her back in the water after going completely through her. It's a big thing. Yeah. So that's how we ended up with Cito. So I think we got her in 2005, I think it was the fall. And again, like she was sinking, so we had to take her out of the water. And I mean, above the engine kind of deep in the water, engine half underwater, that deep. And would have gone deeper if she had never been pumped out a couple of times. Then I think we'd launched her in 2013 - January. Took a while to get her back in the salt.

Jim

...you've spent a lot of time in Scandinavia then. Right?

Sean

Yeah, Inger is from Norway.

Jim

So did you do a lot of sailing there?

Sean

I did. Yeah. I sailed to Norway on a big Maxi boat back in...what was that? Trying to remember now...80? I think it was 79? No, 79, that's right. We were supposed to go to Fastnet, no, we were supposed to race at Cowes, that's what we were trying to get across the Atlantic for. The boat [belonged to] Huey Long, another one of those magnates. He was a shipping magnate, and he had a whole string of "Ondines". I think we were on Ondine four or five. I can't remember, six? Picked it up in Sturgeon Bay [Wisconsin]. I showed up with the sails, the rig was going in, we were leaving, putting the boat together through the Great Lakes and off into the Atlantic. Broke some stuff, ended up back at in Newfoundland for repairs. And we missed Cowes.

Jim

This is the big race on the Solent there in the UK?

Sean

Yes. And after that, I'm trying to remember now it was so long ago. Was it that year, the next year, that was Fastnet? But anyway it was '79. So right about then, that's when I went across and when we were redirected since we didn't have to go to [Cowes], it was over, we wouldn't have made it for Cowes. The owner, Huey, says, well, make a course over over Scotland, Pentland Firth and to Oslo - we'll see you there. So that's what we did. Ten and a half days cross Atlantic, it was pretty fast crossing. Yeah. And we went up over Pentland Firth ... It turned out that Huey, the owner of our boat, and the king at that time, Olaf, in Norway were old buddies, they'd been racing Six Meters together back in the 30s and 40s and 50s. And so we were put up by the Royal Family and took him sailing it was really it was...

Jim

[At this point in the interview the battery in the recorder ran out. We continued a week later so you will notice a quick change of topic. Sean will talk a little more about the King of Norway a little later. What directly follows relates to a talk that I had given the night before about sailing a small boat to New Zealand with my wife.]

Sean

I used to tell clients and people, they asked me, "What kind of insurance should I get when I'm going to go offshore?" But this is back 20 years ago or more. It was like, "Forget the insurance, invest your money in ground tackle and storm sails."

Jim

That's what we did.

Sean

They're like, "What?" Today, you can be in contact anywhere, literally, if you have the right phone on board and this and that. But today people are just leaving with so much stuff. So now it's like, "What should I do?" It's like, "Well, before you go off shore, unless you're wealthy and if you need to make money along the way, learn electronics, refrigeration. You're going to be so handy. You're going to be in such high demand because people ... " You were mentioning, the things that broke down, you saw people are always fixing their sails. Mostly because they left with inferior sails, unlike what you had, or they were old to begin with and they didn't put the importance on the sails that they did with their sound system or something. Some entertainment center on their boat was more important than the engine, which is their sails. They keep forgetting that the engine is their auxiliary. So that was neat. That's the part that I really appreciated about your talk. And you guys were content, and there was two of you down below, when you weren't on watch. Because like you said, your sea miles was a fraction of your time spent enjoying cultures and places. You guys did it right.

Jim

When people would ask us was the boat too small? We would say, "Yeah, except it was the right boat for us at the time." It would've been, in some ways, nicer to have a big boat, a little faster, a little more room, but it was the right boat for us and I'm glad we did it in a small boat.

Sean

What I did was so different, I'm on these big boats. They're just rocket ships. When I was on Windward Passage some years later, we went from the West Coast to Hawaii, same thing, 10 days, something. Yeah, and it was kind of a race because there was a Kialoa and a couple of the other Maxis that were getting

there for the Clipper Cup, leaving the West Coast. We all left at the same time and it was like a race.

Sean

And I've never been on a passage that was like a passage. We're like, "how come the spinnaker's not up?" Even though we were using the junkier sails and stuff.

Jim

When you were on those passages, you were the sail maker, but you must have had duties at sea as well.

Sean

I never had to fix a sail whenever I was on a boat for North Sails, but I did on other boats that I was on. I was on one boat that I thought I was literally not going to make it. The boat was sinking. A brand new boat too.

Jim

Really?

Sean

The thru-hulls were coming out.

Jim

When was this?

Sean

During those same years. The early 80s. You'd put reef in and the sail is tearing in your hands. It was all brand spanking new. We were delivering the boat to the owners from Fort Lauderdale. Picked up the owners, took them up into the Abacos up in The Bahamas, and then from there we had to get down to St. Thomas, and then I had to get up to Canada. So on that trip everything was falling apart on this boat. And that was the time in my life when I said, "I will never get on a boat that makes me feel unsafe again to go out there."

Jim

And what kind of boat was that?

Sean

A Morgan 41.

Jim

A Morgan. Those are good boats, aren't they?

Sean

No, not then. And they were the center cockpit with the state room in the back and they were cheap and people ... would buy them and ... they'd put them down in the Caribbean and they'd come and do their six weeks or whatever on it. And so it's almost like having a timeshare thing and these boats go into charter service down there. No. They're shit. Compared to what I was used to. It was different what I did compared to what you ... What you guys did, I've always wanted to do, my whole life and I still haven't. And it'll never happen because Inger will never do something like that. And I probably wouldn't just go off and get a boat and say, "See you honey", for the three years. It will never happen. It's too bad. No, I have been vicarious living through folks like you and the Paysons and all of them, everyone. Because they knew how to cruise. I've never went cruising. I go cruising now, but it's not the same thing.

Jim

So how did you keep the boat from sinking that you were just talking about?

Sean

Well, you would not believe this boat. Three, maybe four thru-hulls, maybe five including the sink and the toilet. But anyway, the major ones, so we are stuffing rags in them because we didn't have corks or anything. And it was crazy out there, what do they call them, the South-Easters or something. And one of the knockdowns that we got, the only sextant we had crashed across the inside of the boat ... and it broke. So the only way we had ... we didn't have a GPS or anything, this is like 1980, I think that was in 1980. And so whenever we could

see a ship that would answer our radio, they'd give us a fix. And that only happened twice all the way from Northern Abacos to St. Thomas. And we made it. It was the stupidest ... after stepping off of boats [I was used to] where there's a navigator, there's an engineer, there's a sail maker, that's the way those boats were.

Jim

Oh, on the big Maxi boats?

Sean

Yeah, because a lot of these boats did Whitbreads and stuff like that. And in those days that's what it was. They had to have a qualified person, even someone that like can do surgery on board, almost a doctor type person that was almost like an EMT. I'm not kidding. It used to be like that. And then that's all changed now. So I was just this 26 year old taking orders.

Jim

But when you were on the boat were you standing watches?

Sean

Oh yeah. The only person that didn't was the cook, which was usually a woman in those days. And she was awesome. Yeah, I think when we went across Atlantic, there was seven of us on this 81-foot boat.

Jim

That's the one where you took the King of Norway sailing?

Sean

I think it was the Ondine 5. See, they knew each other when they were younger. Huey Long and him, and they did a lot of six meter racing and stuff. Huey Long, look him up. He's a pretty amazing character. He owned a boatyard. He was a shipping magnate, basically. Freight and all that.

Jim

Was he a good guy?

Sean

No. He was a bit of a ... Well, back in those days, some of these people were just my way or the highway. It takes a certain kind of person to get to that level of sailing. And it's rare when you meet somebody that's really nice. I really liked Lowell. Lowell North. He was amazing. Jim Allsopp, I can mention a lot of large people in North Sails that I worked with over the years, and those people were really, really nice to be on a boat with. And they encouraged you to do your best and stuff. And then there's other people that are just screamers.

Jim

How did you get the responsibility of setting up new lofts and stuff all over the place?

Sean

Well, in 1979, they were gearing up for the Whitbread. I might be getting these couple of year years wrong, it's so long ago. 1980, there was going to be the first, was it the first Whitbread? I think it was. And that year they were all ketches. And in those days, the loft that got more than 50% of the sails that were in the inventory, their sail maker went on the boat.

Was that the year Merit, I think, won it? I was going to be on this one boat, and we did a lot of the sails and then I think it was Hood sails that made one more sail than we did, and their guy went. I was packed to go. I had the sewing machine, everything. I'd been on the boat, the bilge was where I was going to sit. And there was a thing up there where the machine was, because there's a lot of breakage and carnage on those races. And then it didn't happen and I was devastated, at 26. And I'd been working for North for three years at that time. So I really got to move through different parts of the business. And then let's see what happened. Oh, they go, "Well, can you go to Florida?" Because that was the SORC, it was that time of year. It was January, February.

Jim

What's SORC?

Sean

Southern Ocean Racing Circuit. That happened in Florida. Boats of all different sizes from quarter-tonners up to the Maxi's would race there in all these different categories, different classes. And it's part of the circuit that these big boats would follow around the globe. And after that they end up going to Europe and there's a whole bunch of stuff that happens over there. And so I went to the SORC, and so basically that's when I got to work with Jim Allsopp and some of his fellas. His loft was in Annapolis, and so they were responsible for that part of the eastern seaboard. And since then, years and years later, one of the guys that worked with him, this guy Mike Toppa, he ended up starting the North Sails Loft in Florida for North Sails.

And when I worked for Jim and there were five of us getting together, bringing the machines down. We would rent a space and if you were lucky, a loft. That did happen sometimes, but not those years. And so we'd set up almost in a place like this that had a bigger area, and we'd have all these machines in there, and we'd definitely work around the clock. We'd go out and break the sails, bring them in, fix them, work through the night, go and put them on the boats again the next day.

Jim

So were you on the boats when they were racing?

Sean

Both, yeah.

Jim

Oh, you were? When did you sleep?

Sean

Well, that's the thing, you didn't. You were really lucky if you'd finished at two in the morning or something. But there was plenty of times that it wasn't like that like if the weather was bad. And it wasn't just breakage, but somebody if didn't like the luff curve of their sail, or whatever, flapping the leech, the leech needed take-ins and stuff. Anyways, it was lot of stuff. And so we were lucky when a lay

day happened. That's when we would [rest]. And I think I did that about five or six times, three SORCs, a Clipper Cup, the World's for Maxis over in Europe and Sardinia. That was in 1980 and helped bring the boat there from Sturgeon Bay, Wisconsin. That was Ondine. We literally, the boat got launched. I landed in the plane and I [have] all the sail that we made in San Diego and I'm heading for the boat. And when I'm coming down there, the crane's putting the mast in. The crane let go, the rigging was just made off, but not tuned, and off we went. All through the Great Lakes, literally putting the boat together, rigging it and everything. And so it was a lot of that kind of fun stuff. And that boat ... I got off in Sardinia because, I think I told you last time, he wanted to send the boat back to Sturgeon Bay for a new keel and rudder. He wasn't happy with that boat, and I thought we were going on to Australia with the rest of the boats. That's where they were going after. At end of the summer they head that way.

Jim

Why do you think North has survived when so many other sail makers have disappeared?

Sean

Well, the history of North Sails is really, really interesting, I think. Not just Lowell, but just the way he set up the company. And when I got involved, right out of university, so that's '76, there was over 51 lofts in the world, North Sails lofts. Almost all of them were definitely service lofts, but probably half of that amount, maybe 20 or maybe less than the 20 were actually lofts that built sails. And there's some really great information about that. And the competition that happened between Hood and North, who were the biggest sail makers in those days around the world, there was quite a bit of really good competition between those lofts. And there's several good books on that. Lowell's approach to everything was very scientific because that's where his background came from as an engineer. And Ted Hood, he used his eye and he had his book of numbers that he never showed anybody. And Ted was a genius. Year after year his winning sails were on the Cup boats and eventually North was getting in there too. But Lowell was the type of very ... analytical ... If he had a successful shape in a sail, he had to know he can replicate that on a completely different vessel with a similar sail. And so I think North was probably one of the very earliest lofts

that actually got into software, creating their own designs and getting them mechanized in that way. And when I was in the loft, everything was laid out on the floor and we used a lot of very interesting ways of cutting the shapes in the panels.

Jim

All by hand I assume.

Sean

Yes. But the numbers [were determined in] various ways during the phase of years. And in those years, Tom Schnackenberg and Michael Regalson and a lot other people were coming to San Diego. And that was all happening ... when I was there in those few years before I left and never came back, to that loft anyway. It was really a heady time and it was really a neat time to see the trajectory of the science in sail making, especially from the perspective and the direction that North took.

Jim

You said you did all this sail making and then you did timber framing for a while, and then you came back to sail making. What did you like about sail making so much that you came back to it?

Sean

Well, it's interesting, I always just had a knack for it. I think early on it made sense to me, and it was something that, it was a process that I just enjoyed. The part about the designing and all that, I didn't get into that until many years later because there was always in-house folks for doing that. But I was building sails of all types, sizes from one-design dinghies to large boats, and spinnakers. That was really fun. So the design part came later, but I always just really liked it so much. And other jobs I liked too, but for some reason I just always drifted back to sail making because I always wanted to live near the coast. I tried living interior. I thought that for a long time I was going to be this guy, just disappear in the mountains, but it's just too far from the sea. It's really hard. And so when I'm near the water, I want to be on the water. I grew up in boats, but they didn't have any sails. And so it just was natural for me to just gravitate... If I lived in an area

where there was enough sailing going on and people needed sails then it was just something I would fall into. And I started and stopped many times in my life because I got sidetracked for a year or two over here doing this, or a year or two over here doing that, which had nothing to do with the ocean or sails, but it was something I always came back to. To this day, I still totally love my job. I definitely stepped away from ... working with people that were really trying to push the envelope and race their boats hard and all that. There's another whole ethos to that and living in that kind of a place as a sail maker.

And I really like the pace here, one customer comes in and I'm building him a replica sail for a boat that's from the 1790s or an old brig or schooner or something. And he wants hand sewn bolt ropes and traditional cringles in his sail and I'm doing that. And then another customer comes in and I'm making him a code zero for his big multi-hull and a big firebird sail. So it's all fun for me and I get my jollies right here. I don't need to go and live in some big place with all that competition and hitting the road so hard like it used to be. And spending a lot of time on boats. And that can almost take the enjoyment out of sailing. That has happened to a lot of sail makers. And other people, it's just too much work. But a lot of them loved it till the day they died. I've known, actually unfortunately, quite a few of the sail makers that I've really known and respected a lot are gone. And they loved it right to the end. It's a neat trade, really. I feel blessed really, that it's still happening in this country because for a while it was all-

Jim

Well, not that much. You're one of the few lofts, well, there's a few around here, but it seems like most sails now are built overseas.

Sean

It's true, unfortunately. But part of the reason I started this loft was when I moved on to the bay, I think I mentioned in the earlier session, but I just fell into education and it was really fun. And so I started making sails for people that needed them and didn't have a lot of money, and definitely nonprofits. And so when I was offered that space by Bill Curry, who was a director at the school at the time, when they got the property, he asked me if I was interested in a space. I go, yeah, we need a classroom. Because I was always borrowing spaces and

machines, and I've never looked back. This whole winter so far has been people in there building their sails with us. And that's what we do in the winter months when it's a little less crazy. And so for me, teaching it is really fun too. And so anyway, it's an easy thing to come to work.

Jim

What advice do you have for young people who want to get in the marine trades?

Sean

Well, I have been asked that a lot. And the first thing I tell them is you just have to move to a place where you can get saturated in that. Because if you want to learn sailing, unless there's some giant lake out in the middle of a desert somewhere, you're not going to be living there. You got to move to where the sailing's happening. If you want to learn skiing and get good at it, you got to just move into the mountains. That's the first thing. You just have to put yourself in the place where the possibilities could happen. And Port Townsend is known for that for sure. A lot of dreams have come true for people that moved here and ended up in the marine trades. And not all of them went to the boat school. A lot of them did for sure.

And so it's definitely better than it used to be. When I moved here it was hard to make a living in the marine trades, especially since it was so cyclical. It got quiet certain times of the year. Dead quiet. And if you were living over in Seattle, it would might have been easier, especially if you're hammering nails and building houses and stuff. And so the wages have gotten better. I wouldn't say they are where they should be compared to some other trades, but definitely. But I tell people, unless you're going to think big or something, you're not going to make a killing. But it could be a nice life. It's paid for our life. My wife and I were surprised when we see what both of us make. And that might be one person's wage here in this town in a year.

So it's not something that's going to make you rich. Not that some sail makers haven't made a good living, but again, that was really big operations and stuff. And so it's like a lot of things, when you're a maker kind of person, you get into something where you're just like an artist... it's just like if you're doing it for the money, well, it might happen, but that shouldn't be the priority because you might

be disappointed, but it could be a really cool lifestyle and that's what we gravitated towards.

Jim

You went to college though?

Sean

I did.

Jim

What was your major?

Sean

My whole life, when I think back about it, I was just wet all the time. I was just in the water, surfing, diving, swimming, skiing, water-skiing. Everywhere we were, it was about water. And that's not something you spend a lot of time in up here. I was studying marine biology, all the physical and natural sciences really is what I was studying in university. If I had my dithers, I wanted to be a professional diver, naturalist biologist, and work with people like Jacques Cousteau, of course, and just out there on research ships and underwater all the time. That was really what I wanted to do. But sailing, being on top of the water and doing stuff always took over.

Jim

So what happened that you didn't do that?

Sean

Well, that's an interesting story too. So I was set to graduate in 1976 with my BS after four years, the University of California system. I was on a loan that last quarter, it was a quarter system, and for a quarter at the UC system in 1976 it was \$250 a quarter.

Jim

And this was UC San Diego?

Sean

No, it was Riverside the last years.

Jim

That's right. Because you were from San Bernardino County.

Sean

Yep. A place called Redlands. So I had this loan, and I wasn't the only student, but the federally insured student loans, and the government was having a problem maybe with some deficit or something, I don't know what. But they let us know that the loans were coming, let the dean know. So I let the dean of the college and the university know that my funds were coming. I didn't have \$250. I was working in a 7-Eleven. I took the job from 6:00 at night till midnight from a guy that had a shotgun taped to his neck, from a guy that was robbing the place. And I didn't make a lot of money there. I was doing it because I wanted to eat. And so the loan didn't come through, and it was the week of the finals, and they wouldn't let me take my finals.

They reneged on the loan. The government did, not just to me, but it was probably 100 students at that university in different departments. And [had too much] pride to ask my dad or my mom. And I thought, well, I guess I just have to go next fall to finish up. And I went and got a job in a restaurant, went back in the kitchen. And then a few weeks later, I got down to San Diego and eventually got a job down there. And that changed everything. I never went back. I never finished that quarter.

Jim

You had one quarter to go and you never finished?

Sean

Well, actually I did the quarter. My whole life changed once I got that job working at North. So it wasn't a huge blow, but at the same time it was... Well, my parents thought it was a waste of a good education.

Jim

I bet they did.

Sean

But anyway, it all turned out okay. I think I made the right choice.

Jim

Seems like it. So let's step back - what was India back in the 70s [80's]? You spent two years there traveling around.

Sean

Pretty much. Yeah.

Jim

That must have been crazy.

Sean

It was one of the most amazing times in my life. I probably almost died about 1000 different ways. When I climbed out of there at the end, I think I normally weigh about 190, I weighed 140, I was like a rake. So was my mate, mostly because I was riddled with worms. And we were out in places that they hadn't seen any European types or anything since maybe the war. We were on these motorcycles, these old Enfields, and later on some BSA's and Triumphs, all through India and Nepal. And it was really something, it was so much fun. And then other parts of Asia too. I was on my way to Australia [for the Americas Cup], and I had about two years, and I thought I'd get to there sooner but I made it there just in time to get to Perth. It was the Eagle campaign. That was the name of the 12 meter. I worked for Jim Allsopp, but they were eliminated early.

Jim

Okay. But in India, how did you make money?

Sean

Well, luckily it didn't cost much to be over there in those days. And this is way before the internet or anything. But in the off season, in between other jobs, I told

you I was in Austria, those winters. And then sometimes I'd be over in the spring, I would go back to Canada and I was tree planting up there.

Jim

So you were back and forth to India then?

Sean

No. This was the years before I left. That was in 85 that I ended up over in India. And the America's Cup in Australia was 87.

Jim

So you had some money saved up then?

Sean

Yeah. Tree planning, I'd left with \$10,000 after working six and a half to eight weeks. And I traveled for a year and a half on that. So it was that sort of thing and it was great. So many great memories, some wild amazing things, and saw a lot of places in Asia. But that was where the motorcycle adventures happened. And then the bike followed me to Australia. And after working in Perth, Fremantle, I traveled around Australia and then back to Asia for another eight months with Inger. And then after that, I guess we're looking at around 89, yeah, I think I came back to Canada and then ended up in Port Townsend. I got here in 89. So from 79 to 89, I checked out. I think I told you why earlier, had to do with Ronald Reagan getting elected. I was like, I'm out of here. I'm not coming back until that guy's out of office. Now I'm paying for it because I played so much when I was younger that I'm never going to be able to retire.

They say that those years from 26 to 36 or just before 40 is your most productive. Well, I blew that. Yeah. My best buddy who I did a lot of that adventuring with off and on for different times during those 10 years, he just passed away a few years ago. I think he's the only one I could really share those memories with. Some of the crazy things we used to do, get involved in. I guess we're all having friends and missing friends that way.

Jim

Well, that's true.

Sean

As we get older.

Jim

Tell us one story from India. I'm sure in two years you had all kinds of crazy stories.

Sean

Well, I think that there was so many facets of adventures that we had, but I think the one that might be the most interesting for anybody listening to this [started] because we ended up in Sri Lanka. We were there for three months, we heard about these great motorcycles, these Enfields in India. We thought we'd go over there and just get a couple and bum around for a few months and keep on heading through Asia and eventually get to Australia. Well, because we got these bikes and started bombing around, all this other stuff happened that was so amazing. And then eventually I saw an old BSA that was beautiful outside this cafe in New Deli. And I just hung around to see who came out. And it turned out this guy, I think he was French [and I asked him] where'd you get this bike?

And he goes, oh, you must go to talk to my friend Kaka Singh, these two Singh brothers. And we found him. And through him I got the BSA I came to town on. I'd finished touring with it around Australia, Mexico, to Canada, all this crazy, thousands and thousands and thousands of miles going like 45 miles an hour. And through that, after working in Australia and saving a bit of money, I met Inger in Malaysia. And then we traveled all over parts of Asia, Malaysia. We never did make it to Micronesia or anything of those places, but we did get up into Burma, which was Burma then. And again, all over India. And I was looking for motorcycles and she was looking for temples. And I ended up gathering, from all these far reaches of India, these old, really rare, British bikes, and one American Indian.

And Kaka and Kuku Singh, these two brothers, these two Sieks, they were something, tiny little shop, little lgarage on this busy street, rickshaws going by and everything, and tuktuks and all this stuff. And that's where the bikes were put

together. And it had to look like I was riding them. And we fixed them with like-new old stock parts that were still in their original wrappings from the war when the British Raj were there. And some of these collectors, like Kaka and his brother and his family, they have, if you ever went to one of the car shows, they've got carriages back to the early 1700's and stuff. And so everything comes out of the woodwork. And one of the bikes I brought back was a really famous rare Norton that he grew up on, they were hunting boars in it. One would be in the sidecar. And I brought that bike back.

Jim

In a sidecar with a gun hunting boars?

Sean

No, but they had to have a way to get the meat back home, so it's for the sidecar. And the guy that who had the gun that would do the shooting was in the sidecar. And my friend Ian wanted me to bring that bike back for him. So I did. And I brought seven bikes back. And it was quite an adventure just traveling around, finding these old bikes, getting them to Delhi to where Kaka and Kuku's shop was, and getting them all together. And then basically have to smuggle them out of India.

Jim

Onto a ship?

Sean

They went by ship to Vancouver, BC. The place we had whenever we were in North America was in Victoria, so that's where they ended up, my friend Ian's brother's place. So that's a pretty cool story. And it's pretty interesting to think about, you'd have money wired to American Express. You'd go in there and you'd take out \$5,000 for all this stuff, or maybe even let's say \$1000 dollars. The biggest Indian note at that time was a hundred rupee bill, which was like \$10. So it doesn't quite fit in your money belt, you know what I mean? It's like you got this luggage [full of money], it's pretty funny. And I would go immediately out, because I had this Indian connection from Kaka and Kuku, and this guy would buy my US dollars and I'd get the rupees that I would be paying Kak and Kuku with, and I'm

almost doubling my money. So everybody worked on the black market like that. So it was really interesting, this whole money exchange thing that was happening, and me trying not to look too suspicious, walking around with all this luggage, but it was pretty funny. And it all worked out.

Jim

And you still have some of those bikes.

Sean

Most of them went away. I still only have three. And the one I came to town on, the old 1940 BSA, it's actually a 37, my Indian, that's a 43 with a sidecar, and another BSA that I'm finally restoring now. This is going to be a slow process. It's pretty cool. It's a 1936 BSA Sloper. That means it's got an incline engine, really cool bike. And I also brought a sidecar back. Looks like a little runabout, a little dorade in the front deck and everything. You should see this, it's pretty cool.

So yeah, I got distracted a lot out there, doing crazy things like that. Did a lot of shipping things around - boats and everything. It was fun. We brought Havheston from Norway and ended up bringing it here. And it's of fun to do that sort of thing.

And it all changed when we got here and got planted, though. ... when I got here I could not believe how beautiful it was. And just all that water out there and on weekends and everything, we'd never see a boat. They were all working boats. And then the only thing that happened was one night a week when Ed Barcott was out there with the fleet of boats [the Quimper Tar Series], and that was really something. So I started getting involved with that, but it seemed to me like, God... at that time, there were other people in town too that were really trying to get sailing happening on the bay, on different venues... A lot of it's gone today. The Shipwrights Regatta is one of the ones that still happens. There was a Seadog regatta. It happened twice a year. That was really fun, especially for educational reasons.

Jim

What was that?

Sean

Oh, boats would enter, and it was a Le Mans start off the beach. And when you came in on the beach, the horn would go off and the boats could not raise their sail or lift their anchors until that person was on board. And then they'd have to sail along. And it was down where Union Wharf is, not Union Wharf, but the city dock. And they'd come along there and they had to be able to throw a monkey fist, and if they missed it and flubbed it, they had to come around and get back in line. And when they came, we'd tie this package onto them, and you had to have a dog on board. When I started using my boat it was a stuffed dog, but they'd get a package that showed them these different way-points and where they had to go and the different drills that they had to do along the way.

Some of them were test questions about rigging or navigation, and they had to do these different drills. It didn't matter what part of the course they did, they had to be able to reef underway and they had to be able to, well, there was just a whole lot of different drills, and there were judges out in boats to be judging them. And we would take bribes.

Jim

Who organized that?

Sean

Oh, God. Pete Townsend was in town back then, and myself, and most of the people that were out on the water in those days. I'm just trying to remember. I don't know if there was an organization that was responsible for that. I think it was just a bunch of people, but it was mostly in my memory through the Wooden Boat Foundation. And it was educational too, because the Sea Scouts would be out there. It was really fun. So that happened for many years. And then we started this whole sailing series that happened, the Whitecap Series, and then the Summer Series and the fall Nightcap Series. But most of that happened because we did the [Classic] Mariners [Regatta] every year. People didn't understand the rules much.

There was some incidents that kept happening, and we used to have up to 45, 50 boats in four classes back in those days. And so the Spring Series was about getting people out on their boat every week and getting their crew work down and their sail changes down and their starts down. And so that's what that was all

about. And it was pretty successful. And that first year after that, that first Mariners Regatta after the first Spring Whitecap Series the level of competition just went in a completely different direction. It was so cool. And that went like that for years. So it was neat because that was all happening really in the early 90s and through the 90s and into the new millennium. Things started changing, but it was a really kind of a fun time to come to Port Townsend.

Jim

Sounds like it. And why do you think things changed in the new millennium?

Sean

Well, just were fewer people...that was all about wooden boats, mostly that I was talking about. And then things opened up for sure, because there were fewer of them. Things got more expensive and people were aging out for sure. And it wasn't just here. It was everywhere. Everywhere in that period of time, it was really a struggle. And in a lot of places, there was some rather large, very formative type organizations that had certain events under their flags that went down and never came back. And it wasn't because of something like the Covid that we had. It was mostly just because it was hard to get the numbers to show up.

[Port Townsend] is still...what a beautiful place to sail, flat water and wind. And it's blowing here when it's not blowing anywhere else. I stayed in Freemantle for quite a while after the cup ended and the sailing down there is amazing. And they have this thing called The Doctor down there, and that's the wind. And it's like clockwork. And so when the doctor's in and it was amazing. The beach is north of Fremantle. It's like people go to the beach down there and they have these lee cloths on poles. And they just worm it into the sand. They dig it down and they lay down behind that thing because you're just getting sandblasted. And when the doctor's in...

And so when I came up to Port Townsend and I was working in Point Hudson, it was amazing. By 3:30, definitely by 5:00 you could just see the westerly it's just like clockwork from May through the summer. And it was just like, I couldn't believe it. It was like "the doctor's in", it just reminded me of Fremantle. And it was constant. Sure, there's lots of shifts in everything, but it was a westerly and it

just came in and that was something. And then it was the opposite the other times of the year when it was just the southerly, southwest, southeast. And so it was like, to me, it seemed like some kind of sailing mecca...

Jim

Well, I've got to say, I'm a little envious of those times that you're talking about back with the Wooden Boat Series, it sounded like it was just a blast.

Sean

If you have other folks that you'll be talking to that were here before I got here, definitely, all the Daubenbergers, and John and Anne [Bailey] and Alex Spear. And I could just name tons of people that totally benefited from the period before I got to be in such a cool place like this. It's always had that magic, I think. And if you're a water person, it's a great place to be. And the gateway to all the islands and everything, the whole Pacific Northwest, all the way up to Alaska, it's like it just gets more and more and more. So we're lucky.

Jim

Yeah, we are lucky. So I think this is a good place to end this, and I want to say thank you very much for your time. I really appreciate it.

Sean

I'm honored that you asked me, and I look forward to hearing some of the other interviews you'll go through because there's a lot of cool people here. And when I just think about the friends I know and how they came here, it was the same kind of thing. It's like a vortex. It's pretty neat.

Jim

Great. Thank you.

Sean

Thank you.