

Interview with Mark A. Peters, at his residence in Puyallup Washington, March 11, 1993  
by Carrie Bratlie.

**Mark when were you born?** November 29, 1955.

**Where were you born?** Olympia, Washington.

**Which Hospital?** St. Peters, the old one on the West side.

**Where did you go to school?** Here in Tacoma. Collins Elementary School on 128th street in Puyallup, Washington. Ford Jr. High in Tacoma, Washington. I Graduated from Franklin Pierce High School in Tacoma, Washington in 1973.

**What colleges did you attend?** Olympic College and University of Puget Sound. I graduated from Olympic, but not the University of Puget Sound.

**Have you spent much time on Squaxin Island?** A lot, all the Time.

**Do you fish and collect shell fish?** Yes.

**Is that how you support your family?** Yes, As a rule fishing.

**Could you tell me about growing up? Your times out on the Island what you were doing?** The first time I really remember the Island would be probably when I was working for my grandfather in the late 1960's. Collecting Oysters on his Oyster bed, and selling them. And doing a lot of fishing .

**This is not with a fishing pole?** Yes, this is with a pole.

(Laughter), That's when you could catch fish out there with a pole. We would pick up Oysters during the tide. If we wanted clams for our own personal use, we would dig them.

**You were not selling the clams?** No, just the oysters.

**Olympia Oysters?** Yes, Olympia Oysters and Pacific Oysters.

**When I spoke to your dad he said that the Pacific Oysters wiped out the Olympia Oysters.** No. Well I think it was the dredges, from what I understood. I remember when we used to cull, and pick up Olympia Oysters by the scow full. Then they started dredging, picking up Oysters at high tide. Then the mud and silt would float over the "Oly" beds and fill them up until the "Oly's" died. The silt settled over them and killed them.

**Since you grew up in the Tacoma, and your dad grew up in the Olympia area and remembering the generational differences, do you think when you and your siblings were growing up that there was much prejudice because you were Indian? Or did anyone even notice?** I never had any problems with it. I think a lot of people were intrigued that we were Indians.

**Franklin Pierce is definitely WASP area.** I never had any problems. I had problems not per se slander, but a lot of prejudice with my fishing. People would find out that I was fishing with a gillnet. There is a lot of prejudice that way. I have had run-in's over the years on that subject. Basically that is the only prejudice.

**Do you think that maybe because you're you and when people get to know you the prejudice dissipates. I think that you and your brothers tend to break a lot of cultural lines when someone realizes that you are number one an Indian. And Number two, you're Indian fishermen and your no different from any one else. We're no different from anybody else. There are a lot of people over the years that I have noticed. Once they get to know me as an individual not as a black, white, Red or whatever. They think gee this guy isn't all that bad. What he does he does. It's my**

livelihood, it's what I do. It's no different than owning a bowling alley, being an attorney, or whatever.

**I think a lot of cultural barriers especially in the bowling leagues, have been broken. I have seen that is not really all that big a deal that you are an Indian fisherman.** Me, as an individual, I have known you for years, and I'm not pretending to be something that I'm not and if you don't like me, well, too bad. As a fisherman I do get taken advantage of. People ask for fish when I'm out fishing and selling my catch.

**Are you going to try and teach James and Breanna (his children) the native tongue if its available?** I would if I had easier access, but I have to go to Shelton to do it. They're doing that on the weekdays, I don't think they have weekend classes, and if they do it's not feasible for me. I have my kids in different sports and they keep me busy during the weekend and most of the week. If it was more accessible to me. [If] I didn't have to drive an hour and half to get there I would do it most definitely. I wouldn't even mind doing it. I always thought it was a shame that the Native Americans let their tongue go. But the Native tongue was washed out of the mouths of the Indians.

**How do you feel about the tribe as a whole? My tribe? Your tribe.** As a whole I think the tribe is in good shape. They are bringing in a lot of people that are educated to turn the tribe around. Because we're supposed to be sovereign. We have our tribal enterprises that puts money back into the tribe and they are getting people in there that know what they're doing. And doing the best for the tribe, as they know how. It's no more of this individual stuff anymore. I mean you still see it. You see it anywhere in society. But as a whole the people that are on the council are for the tribe. The people had realized at this year's council meeting that a change was needed and they made the change when they voted in the new council. These people are for the tribe. I think there could be some

discrepancies on individualism but on the whole it's for the tribe . I think it will be good for it. The tribe has come a long way. We're not sitting down.

**That's the thing about the Squaxin's, you were the first group to sign the Medicine Creek Treaty. It brought up the fishing rights problem and the Squaxin's started the case that became the Bolt decision. It's not like the Squaxin's have sat on their laurels waiting for someone to hand them anything.** Yes, they never have. They are always looking for new avenues for revenue. Right now we're in negotiations for clamming beach rights. Once we get this, and it's not just us, the other tribes are involved, we need to get the Canadian American treaty figured out. The Canadians are taking a lot of our fish.

**Once again the white sport fisherman and commercial fisherman are blaming you for the depletion of the runs.** Yes, they're blaming us. Take a look at our catch from last year. Our total Chum, Silver, and Chinook were in all 37,000 fish, that was all. Now look at what the white commercials caught and I know it was more than that.

**What about the 50/50 of the Bolt decision?** No, it's not. And it will turn out that they owe us fish and we'll never get paid. Every time we overfish we have to pay them back. I know damn well we won't get paid back, that's just the way it is. The sports fisherman are blaming us, the commercial people are blaming us. We're not blaming them. we're not blaming the sports or commercial fishermen. They are out doing their thing too. We're blaming the high seas drifters, and the Canadians. Canada came right out and said we're going to take these fish as long as you're taking our sockeye, we'll take your silvers. Well it's a proven fact we're the last ones [on the salmon run] and there is no sockeye in the South Sound. No runs at all so who is it killing? It's killing us, so we lose out either way. It's really sad.

**How do you feel being our age [30's] about the fact then when the treaty was written [Medicine Creek] the whites had no knowledge of any water on the Island to sustain life. Negotiating the treaty, five villages were handed this Island and no one knew that there were artesian wells on the Island.** If push were to come to shove I could live on that Island real easy. I would have all the food I would need. There are Orchards on the Island, all they need is a little care , but hell they produce great apples and plumbs as it is. I would have water. It would take nothing to retap an artesian well. I would have no problem with it. People camp out there, but there are so many wild dogs from the state park. White man can't keep their dogs on leashes at the state park.

**What was your happiest memory growing up? Teen age years.** Playing sports in high school, those are some of my happiest memories. I met so many people of different origins and stuff. Especially when I went to college and played football. My football years at O.C. [Olympic College] where I met Marleen [his wife] in college are my happiest.

**Were there a lot of Indians at Olympic?** There was a few. I don't know why so few, because the Skokomish Reservation is right up the road.

**Are you glad that you didn't grow up around the reservation? That you grew up outside of that area?** Yes, I am glad that I didn't grow up there. If I had grown up on the reservation I would probably be an alcoholic or druggie. The morals are not as high on a reservation.

**Why is that?** I think it's because of the way people have thought of reservations. It's a lot easier for the Indians. The housing is so much cheaper. They can screw off and blow their money on God knows what. I'm out here in Puyallup, and I have to work hard [Puyallup is a conservative community]. You have to be conservative in what you do. You may have a few beers off and on, but you have to watch your p's and q's or you'll

nose dive. On the reservation if you nose dive, what are they going to do, foreclose on the house? That's already yours? That your paying \$120.00 a month for? I've had to work for what I've had and have. I like it that way.

**How cheap is the housing out there?** Real cheap, it's based on what you make. A family I know lives in a nice three bedroom house, nice. Twelve to fourteen hundred square feet but they're paying \$110-112.00 per month. But when they leave the house they can't sell it, it's not theirs. It was issued to them.

**Do many leave the reservation?** Some do, mainly because they have gotten married and move off. Basically the ones that are there, are there.

**Are you going to teach your children as much of the Indian ways as you can?** Yes, we talk about it all the time.

Beranna is Hiticlinket [Alaskan Indian and white].

**Does James have any Indian in him at all?** Yes, he does. He's Apscott, he's out of Oregon. I could look it up in the adoption papers it says in there. They both have Indian backgrounds. I think it's real important for Indian kids to learn as much as they can about their heritage because once its gone its never coming back. If it can be kept alive it will always be there. I think all Indian adults teach their kids the Indian ways, what they were like .

**Are you and Marleen going to try and get the kids adopted into your tribe?** Yes, Jame's tribe is defunct now, but Breanna is registered in Alaska...

**Are you teaching the kids how to beach saine and fish with the nets?** Yes, James is a good fisherman already...

**What would you say to those people that are prejudiced simply because you're an Indian commercial fisherman as opposed to a white commercial fisherman?** To them individually I would have to say look at what the Indian did in the olden days. They used the fish as a way of trading, it was the way of living. They lived off of it and we are no different now then we were then. We have the same rights as we did then (supposedly). Every one looks at us for depleting the fish, which we haven't. I explained that earlier, it's the Canadians. What a lot of people don't look at is the Indians have got hatcheries going for fisheries enhancement and we have been going out cleaning the old creek beds ( spawning beds) up that the white man has messed up, i.e. Simpson lumber, Weyerhauser, we're trying to keep it going. We are not taking any more fish now than we were 100 years ago, and what we caught we used. Just because I'm an Indian, don't blame me for the impact, the pollutants that have caused the problems. The white man is basically not doing anything. But it's ok for them to go out and fish. A guy once told me that he wouldn't mind if we fished if we went back to the canoe and a spear. He didn't like the idea of the power boats and whatnot. The thing I would have to say to him would be, "well 150 years ago what was the white man fishing with?" The same thing we were.

**Speaking of that, you had loaned me an article from a 1980 news paper in which you were fishing and the lead article was that there were people over the bridge you were under disgusted that you were fishing as a Squaxin Indian. Do you remember that?** Yes.

**Do you remember the feeling that you had that day?** I was afraid for my well being. The people above the bridge were very hostile, slandering us. The whites only see what they want to see.

**Have you ever felt threatened out on the water?** Very much so.

**Was it whites?** Yes, Whites. I have been shot at a few times on the water. It's very scary, I'm out there earning my living. I don't expect to be shot at on a construction site, which is my other profession. Why should I be shot at fishing? I have no problems on land with prejudice, but the second I go out on the water using my Indian Heritage then the slander starts. Just because I'm on the water. It hurts, it hurts deep.