

**Narrator:** Jack McQuade  
**Date:** May 28<sup>th</sup> 2015  
**Interviewed by:** Alex Jaber  
**Place:** Swiss Pub, Tacoma, WA

**Alex Jaber:**

All right, today's date is May twenty-eighth, twenty-fifteen. I'm sitting down this afternoon with Mr. Jack McQuade, owner of The Swiss Pub, here at nineteen-O-four Jefferson Avenue in downtown Tacoma, right in the heart of University of Washington's Tacoma branch campus. Mr. McQuade, thank you for taking the time to speak with me today.

**Jack McQuade:**

[It's ] my pleasure.

**AJ:**

To start things off, can you tell me a little bit about your background in the Tacoma community? When were you born and where did you grow up?

**JM:**

Yeah, I was born March twenty-eighth, nineteen sixty-two right up the hill from here, at St. Joe's hospital. I grew up on the South side of Tacoma, went to Lincoln High School, graduated in nineteen-eighty-one, and proceeded to go to different institutions, different colleges and then ended up working in a lot of different fields over the years.

**AJ:**

What sort of fields have you worked in prior to acquiring The Swiss?

**JM:**

I worked in restaurants while I was going to Green River Community College. I was going to be a draftsman and I decided to switch gears and then [went] to photography school and then I worked in different restaurants. I worked in woodshops. All these different jobs I've had in the past kind of led me to what I do now, owning The Swiss restaurant and pub.

**AJ:**

I read an article in the Tacoma News Tribune, clocking the ten year anniversary of the Swiss pub back in two-thousand-three, and they mentioned you and the co-owners had met previously at another restaurant or bar not too far away. Can you tell me about that?

**JM:**

Yes, we all worked at Engine House Number Nine over off sixth and Pine Street and I [worked] there for five years. My business partner, Bob Hill, was there for twelve and Gale worked there prior to [me] working there. The three of us got together. Bob Hill asked me to get involved and so we came downtown and started remodeling this great old building. We started in September of ninety-three, well actually it was September of ninety-two and six months later we opened up April twenty-eighth, nineteen-ninety-three the front room and the bar room. A year and a half later we broke through the brick wall and opened up the other two rooms, which were in the old eighteen-ninety part of the building.

**AJ:**

Can you tell me a little bit about the location here? Not only the building itself but the surrounding area? What was it like when you first came down here to look at purchasing the property?

**JM:**

Well, UW owns property, but we were a little late finding that [out]. It was pretty rough, and my business partner Bob found the place and I said 'well, let's give it a go' and with a lot of hard work and help from the police department and the liquor control, we were able to clean up the Tavern that was down the street and we started making the place a lot safer but it was pretty rough down here, twenty-two years ago.

**AJ:**

What sort of examples can you give about the safety at the time in the late 80s early 90s?

**JM:**

Well, there was a [surge] of drug activity in the area, especially black tar heroin from Mexico. [Heroin] was prevalent in this area, so we were able to clean our little area by really cracking down on what was going on around us.

**AJ:**

[Many] articles, journals, newspaper articles and accounts of that time, it kind of paints this area as being, you know like you said, a lot of drug addicts, [and] homelessness. What can you tell me about the buildings that are now occupied by the UW campus? What can you tell me about those? Were those being occupied by any businesses or were they mostly vacant?

**JM:**

[They were] mostly vacant. There were some, where the science building is now, the blue and brick building, that used to be William's oil filter and they were there for many, many years. Down below, where the library is today, was just a vacant power station building and that was taken over by pigeons and rodents. The guys who cleaned that up [that place], they had their hands full. It was a mess but slowly and surely they started fixing up different buildings. The Washington State Historical Museum was built, which helped out the area and yeah, every year or two it's like another building gets renovated and the place keeps getting better and better and better around here.

**AJ:**

In our previous meeting you mentioned the rich history of the building, it's now The Swiss. Can you tell me a little bit about what you know about this building specifically, prior to your arrival? What do you know about the history?

**JM:**

Well, in doing some research and then with some great photographs we've got from the library and from the history museum, In nineteen-thirteen the front room was a little store like a general store. Where the bar area is, that was the saloon and then the other two rooms were the store front and the creamery because all the Swiss had dairy farms, so it was Penrose Dairy and they were making cheese and butters in the other two rooms. Years later, they took the store front out and put these big warehouse doors in that we see today and it was O'Farrel's beer distributor for years and then after that it was a machine shop making small parts for Boeing. Boeing still has hundreds of contractors in the Puget Sound area making parts for their airplanes, but for years it was a machine shop and what is now the music room and the pool room. But yeah, they, the Swiss immigrants well at the turn of the century, every ethnic background had their own meeting place and around there is still the Polish Meeting Hall, this is the Swiss Hall, so

the halls above the businesses on Jefferson, and you entered the hall from Market street and then above the hall there were apartments that the Swiss community was renting out to help pay for their community hall, so it has rich history of being the center of the Swiss community which is now moved out to Boney Lake.

**AJ:**

Do you have any idea of when they stopped using it as the Swiss community hall for meetings and gathering?

**JM:**

It was shortly after we opened up or during the renovations, it took six months to remodel, so I think around that same time frame they moved everything out to Boney Lake.

**AJ:**

When you first came here, correct me if I'm wrong, the history museum was not yet built?

**JM:**

Nope.

**AJ:**

The Tacoma Art Museum was not in existence, the UW T campus, it wasn't even here? it was at the Perkins building located down the road a little bit, so...

**JM:**

Correct.

**AJ:**

Were you weary at all about starting a business here with not as, not as many tourists' attractions as there are now?

**JM:**

Well yeah, if we were three people, three individuals coming from another state and tried to open up the Swiss back in nineteen-ninety-three, that probably would have been a lot tougher, but people in town knew us from our time at Engine House Number Nine and we had kind of a built in crowd, so when we did open up, it was funny, during that six months with the remodeling, we [would be] out and about, and people say 'when are you going to open up?' we always tell them 'two weeks' cause if you say

two months then they lose interest. Then, Gale took that and we created our menu. Still on our menu [today] is the fortnight, which means two weeks, so we have 'today's' and 'tomorrows' and those all kind of started from the whole two week thing.

**AJ:**

What was kind of food was on the menu in the beginning? Did that change over the years?

**JM:**

Yeah, we've added different things; we added burgers and french fries over the years but some of the original sandwiches we still make today and a lot of Gale's recipes we still use. Gale passed away six years ago in a tragic truck accident but we still honor her and she was the heart and soul of this place and we still use a lot of her recipes and we always think about her.

**AJ:**

Now, for my project in particular, I'm interested in the transition of the UW Campus over the last twenty-five years, particularly in regards to the reduction of crime in the area. Can you talk a little bit more about the last two and half decades or so as far as the overall appearance of the downtown area goes here?

**JM:**

Oh yeah, once they had the UW start working on the buildings, like I said, with the history museum and then with the greater Tacoma convention center being built along with the Bridge of Glass and the Glass Museum and all those areas fixed up, we've got three great hotels now The Marriot, the Murano, and now the Holiday Inn Express to our right, yeah it's night and day of what it used to be down here. Now, it's a lot safer and with progress also comes, you know, we're squeezed down on parking down here it's always an issue but we've got some great buildings. We try to keep as much parking as we can around here but it's getting tougher and tougher as it expands.

**AJ:**

What about police presence in the area that you've noticed over the years from when you first opened up till now is it increased or decreased or is it stayed about the same?

**JM:**

Well, I think it's, it stays about the same, we've been pretty fortunate to have more and more businesses and more and more things open at night so criminals don't like to go where there is a lot of light. We do get some car

prowlers and that's been an ongoing issue but we're downtown so there's always [going to be] a transient population...

**AJ:**

Yeah, it comes with the territory.

**JM:**

Yeah, twenty-two years ago, we'd always walk ladies to their car and now we don't have to do it as much because it is a lot safer. But you are in a mid-sized town, so there's always something going on. The police and the downtown security plus the UW Campus security [offer] quite a lot more eyes and we communicate really well when someone comes in the area that's causing problems and we try to nip it in the bud as soon as it happens.

**AJ:**

That's good.

**JM:**

Yeah.

**AJ:**

Now being on the UW Tacoma campus, with that, a lot of students, a younger crowd maybe. How's your business adapted to the clientele of student population over the years?

**JM:**

Well, like I said, we're in the twenty-second year and up until about year nineteen we were just twenty-one and older and with the University of Washington going to a four year campus and a lot of our clientele getting older and having kids we decided to go all ages seven days a week until eight-thirty at night with a wait staff. Years ago you would've had to walk up to the kitchen, place your order, and the cooks would bring the food out to them. So now, people sit down, like a normal restaurant and place their order and people bring them stuff. It's a concept. But the population, building, and like I said, having younger students in the area, plus families bringing their children in, The Swiss has changed over the years and now we're full service with minors until eight-thirty.

**AJ:**

Since we're outside doing this interview, and looking at the structure of the Swiss [next to us], it really is unique architecture, it's very noticeable and being a UW student myself, it's kind of iconic now, everyone just kind of

says the Swiss and you know what it is, you know where it is.

**JM:**

Yeah, but there was an article in the [Tacoma News Tribune] back in the seventies, and they asked ten architects to name the ugliest building in Tacoma and one of them wrote the Swiss was the ugliest. But, I think it has a lot of character and I think over the years we've changed the look of it and it is a really nice old building.

**AJ:**

Were you pleased with what you guys have done with updating it but also keeping the historical [features]?

**JM:**

Yeah, like inside, we basically just stripped down all of the remodeling that was done over the years and tried to get it back to original and had a dropped ceiling as well as a top of the bar, and had a acoustical tile ceiling, we took that down and we had this beautiful pressed tin, ornate ceiling that was all hidden. All the of the rec room, all the walls were covered in paneling, all the windows outside were plywood over.

**AJ:**

So that was kind of a pleasant surprise for you then?

**JM:**

Yeah, we knew about it before we got involved, we took flashlights and ladders and popped the ceiling tiles and knew what was up there so basically, our plan was to let the building speak to us and just try to strip everything back to as original as possible.

**AJ:**

In your own words, can you describe to me what this business means to you and possibly for the greater Tacoma community especially the South downtown area here?

**JM:**

Yeah It's just, for me it's a great feeling to see people enjoy this great space that years ago, no one wanted to come here so we just did a ton of community outreach stuff, we do a lot of benefits on Sundays, so whatever the city gave to us, we've tried to just give a little bit back. We started working with the University of Washington on a project called 'One million cups' where I provide coffee every

Wednesday morning at nine-o'clock and there's a guest speaker and we have you know thirty to fifty people show up every Wednesday and it's just another way to work with the University and the surrounding community.

**AJ:**

Now I'm not sure if you, I don't think you guys still do this but it mentioned in one of the articles I was reading about holding a weekly polka [dance]?

**JM:**

Yeah, we used to do it once a month; we used to do a polka breakfast.

**AJ:**

What was that?

**JM:**

It was [when] some of The Swiss, well they were Swiss immigrants years ago, they were the Schaffer brothers and they would perform on Sunday mornings when we had a big breakfast buffet. We did that for quite a few years until one of the brothers passed away the night before his sixtieth birthday and so the other brother decided not to continue that [tradition], but we really miss him. It was a lot of fun. A lot of the old Swiss society members would come down and dance all morning long to the polka.

**AJ:**

So it was successful? That must have been quite a site to see?

**JM:**

Yeah.

**AJ:**

Now going along with that music, is it true that you have live music that plays here too?

**JM:**

We would have music four-to-five times a week, [for instance] this Sunday we have a benefit for an organization that raises money for a country in Africa. But we also do [events], like tonight, Thursday night, Barney Wine Review is a band that plays folk music and then tomorrow night we have a cover band playing dance music so last night we did a blues band. We are always doing something different. Once a month we work with the Puget sound musicians for youth and kids play on stage, which is really a cool



thing to see. There are lots of grandparents there. Lots of folks down here seeing their kids up on stage playing music. Just another one of our community things we like to do here.

**AJ:**

Another thing I want to ask about is when you first come into your restaurant you notice behind the bar the Chihuly glass, can you tell me about that?

**JM:**

Yeah, when Chihuly's crew was putting the installation in at the union station, the crew was coming up for lunch and after work and we got to know quite a few of them and we were hoping to maybe getting a small painting but Dale came in one night and talked to our nighttime bartender Jeff Taggard and he said he would like to put glass on top and so we made the phone call and we found out he liked to paint the back wall a lighter color and we built a shelf on top of the bar and we built the boxes and then his crew came in put the glass in with the lighting and we've had it ever since three years ago they would come in here every two months and clean the glass but three years ago they said 'Jack, we're really busy' and they go they gave me a box of cloth baby diapers and a cleaner and now it's my job to go up there every two months and clean them.

**AJ:**

That's not cheap work, considering that's original Chihuly work.

**JM:**

Yeah, we always say that's a quarter of a million dollars up there but it's on permanent loan from Dale, so Dale owns them were just the caretaker for them but we really enjoy having them. All the staff that works at the art museum and the glass museum always tells visitors. There's actually a Chihuly walking tour which the University of Washington library has a chandelier which is part of the walk in tour and so is the Swiss. All right at this time, I got to go get my little guy.

**AJ:**

All right, we will conclude the interview, thank you for your time Mr. McQuade.