

TAPED INTERVIEW WITH MRS. GERRY GARRISON BY AUDIE MANGOLD.  
JANUARY 21, 1993

Audie: First of all Gerry, lets start with a personal question...When and where were you born?

Gerry: I was born in Tacoma Washington, February 20th, 1927. at the Tacoma General Hospital.

Audie: When did you first move to Day Island and what inspired you to actually move out here?

Gerry: Well we moved here in 1952, in the fall, our oldest daughter had been born in June (1952), and we moved in (here) in September. It was a house that we could afford, I think we paid \$9200.00 for it. It was the little house back here. (Gerry motions to the East side of Day Island) It was the house in back of this one. So in 1952 we moved into 1952 Day Island Blvd. East.

Audie: That must have been quite a challenge for you to move out here with just an infant.

Gerry: No..because, we had bus service, it wasn't remote 40 years ago like it had been 60 years ago. University Place was beginning to be built up, we had a grocery store up at the corner there, so there was a little community there at University Place. and so we could take the bus into town and Earl worked at General Mills, and we'd go in on the bus and then he'd pick us up after work. You know we only had one car, no one had two cars.

Audie: How has any of the initial feelings that you had for Day Island changed, when you first moved out here in 1952. (Very long pause) You stated that this was a house that you could afford.

Gerry: Well, we remodeled and we remodeled, and we acquired this one and we remodeled over here about 8 years ago. I don't think our feelings have changed, I just think that we've just grown so much more used to living here. I can't think of another place that I would want to live.

Audie: You wouldn't consider San Francisco or..

Gerry: No, no reason to. We don't even consider retirement areas, you know going south in the winter or something. What fun would that be? All of our family and our friends are here, it's a comfortable community you know.

Audie: Speaking of family, what kind of a family did you have? Sons or daughters?

Gerry: Two daughters.

Audie: O K. Was Leslie your oldest?

Gerry: Leslie is our oldest and she lives in Seattle, and she has the two granddaughters. Our granddaughters. And Wendy lives on Bainbridge, I think she chose that because it sort of reminded her of Day Island.

Audie: Do you think that at any point in time they would ever consider moving back here?

Gerry: Either of them?

Audie: Yes.

Gerry: Work for all of them is up in the Seattle area.

Audie: How many grandchildren do you have?

Gerry: Two.

Audie: Just the two from Leslie?

Gerry: Yes.

Audie: How about your son-in-laws, where do they work?

Gerry: Wendy's husband is with Honey-Church in Seattle; Mike is with Callison Partnership, an architectural firm.

Audie: When you first moved here on Day Island, what interesting events happened on or nearby the island that you most remember?

Gerry: (laughter) That was so long ago... In 1958, in October when Wendy was born we went across the NEW bridge to get to the hospital, the approach (to the bridge) wasn't quite finished but we were able to get across the bridge early that morning. And while I was in the hospital they had this big ceremony and ribbon cutting and so I always remember that back in 1958.

Audie: How involved was the Island (residents) in getting this bridge going?

Gerry: There were lots of meetings and lots of meetings at the club house because the railroad did not really want to spend money on a high crossing. They wanted signals and a railroad crossing to replace the one that they had over here that would come up and over and would be very shallow. But the county held out and then the community really held out for

not a railroad crossing but a bridge. Of course back then that was all woods back there, the county had to acquire the road which ended just behind the school playground. So all that went through the woods until just a few years ago, was built up for the bridge.

Audie: So the railroad was instrumental in holding out until they had to do something?

Gerry: Yes, they didn't want to spend as much money. It was a grade crossing, that's what you call it, and that's what they (the railroad) wanted. Well everybody could just see the problems with a grade crossing, it was dangerous. And school buses...of course back then we weren't getting any school busses because the old bridge was condemned. We had a five ton load limit. We couldn't get a full load of fuel oil at one time -- and when we added on to our house over there (Gerry is pointing east again) at that time and they had to bring cement over, they had to bring it over in barrels across the old bridge because they could not bring a cement mixer across the old bridge -- it was too heavy. When you went across that bridge it just flipped up the big old timbers. (Gerry's hands are waving in the air mimicking the old bridge deck.) So when Leslie started kindergarten that year, I would drive her up to kindergarten across the old bridge and then to school, and I think she came home on the school bus and I would meet the school bus at the old grocery store. It was Stephen's grocery, its that green building that is still boarded up down in there. Well it used to be like a grocery store where you could go in there and buy penny candy and stuff like that. Anyway, I would meet the kids and bring them back across the bridge because I didn't even want them walking it. You could fall in a hole. So that went on for quite a while with meetings and then the county coming up with the money, and then finely in October of '58 is when we got the new bridge.

Audie: So the bridge actually brought the island people together over this issue.

Gerry: Well, even in back in those days you know the Reading Club, it's 50, 60 years old, and the women got together after they hung their washing out on Mondays, and its essentially the same group that still meets, but we don't meet every Monday now. But they used to.

Audie: The Reading Club? What was that all about?

Gerry: Haven't you talked to anyone about the Reading Club?

Audie: I heard about it a few years ago but I just passed it off as one of those things that I wasn't really involved with.

Gerry: Well, the women meet, there is probably about 20 or so as a rule. We meet the first Monday of the month, and still get together for lunch and programs. Sometimes we don't have a program and then we'll just talk and visit, and its kind of a good networking thing where the ladies keep in touch. I guess, you know, if you were going to be alone on the island, like we have a lot of widows, that its a good place for people, because there are people who know who you are and think about you.

Audie: You had mentioned that the Reading club is almost 50 years old, and that most of the members then are still the same members now?

Gerry: Oh no! (laughter) Mary Babare was a member until she died. Marion Van Winkle is still a member who still comes, but no we don't get the younger ones that are working. But there is a pretty good representation. Sometimes younger ones will come, like to the Christmas party. They know it's there and when they get older they'll probably participate if they want to.

Audie: When you were raising your daughters, How did you spend the holidays?

Gerry: Well, pretty much at home. All of our family was right here so I think we usually ended up having all of the holiday get togethers.

Audie: Were there many activities that the Day Island Club got involved with?

Gerry: Well...One time we had a dance club. The Day Island Club would sponsor dances at the club house and we'd have a little three-piece band and the ladies would really work on the decorations. We really knocked ourselves out on decorating the club house sometimes.

Audie: And this would be held during the holidays?

Gerry: Well...it would be held during different times of the year. It would be like bring-your-own-bottle, that kind of thing. At least you were close to home (she chuckles). But anyway, they decided to form a dance club because the Day Island Club was underwriting the dances, because they weren't really making their expenses. So then we had some people and friends from off the island who wanted to join the dance club too. So for a while that was going. Then that sort of went by the way side. About in the sixties, people got so busy they didn't want to work on committees, women went back to work.

Audie: Do you see that changing the culture of the island during the sixties and the seventies?

Gerry: Oh yes! I don't think its the same for the young people of the island like it was when we were young. You know, we'd all meet on the beach together for a picnic lunch. That was before we ever had a pool at Titlow even. The kids, all they knew was how to swim in the water out here. It was cold, I'd wade with them but I wouldn't swim. So after Titlow pool opened up they all wanted to go swimming there. But we would just bring our sandwiches and stuff down to the beach.

Audie: What were your aspirations? What did you want to be when you grew up, or before you were married?

Gerry: I still don't know what I'd like to do. (She's laughing) I still don't know what I want to do for a career. I can't recall anything -- with my generation you worked until you got married and got pregnant and then you stayed home and took care of your kids. Your choices were office work, teaching, nurses, that kind of thing.

Audie: That's true, it was very limited for women.

Gerry: Yes, there was nothing very exciting about any of it.

Audie: What kind of a job did you have?

Gerry: I worked for the Federal Government at the Mount Rainier Ordinance Depot, which is now the Logistic Center on Fort Lewis. I was a medical secretary.

Audie: Were you satisfied with that job?

Gerry: Oh, it was fun for awhile, but it wasn't that exciting.

Audie: Did any of your family members go into the military?

Gerry: Earl was in World War II. He was in the Navy for 5 years and got to see some action... (Earl is present and briefly tells of a Japanese airplane shooting at him during the war) Earl made it to the rank of Chief Quartermaster.

Audie: Gerry, what was your involvement with the Day Island Club? Have you always been the secretary/treasurer?

Gerry: It seems like it. No, its only been about 28 years. I looked it up once not too long ago. Before that a woman named Fern Almquist did it. And then she retired. Bill Willoughby, that's Marci Tuckers dad, at the time was president of the Day Island Club, and I was working for him part time, for Foremost Dairies doing food demos. So one day

Bill said well how would you like to take care of the Day Island books? because Fern was retiring. I said, well, I guess I could handle it. (She laughs)

Audie: Who was Bill Willoughby?

Gerry: Bill Willoughby was Marcie Tucker's father, and that is the Willoughby house that she lives in, and where she grew up.

Audie: Who was W.D. Tucker?

Gerry: Well, there was Fred Tucker who owned the house next door. (Gerry gets up from her chair to retrieve one of her many ledgers) But a...W.D. Tucker was one of the early names on Day Island and he built one of the very first homes on Day Island.

Audie: How do you see your influence affecting decisions that are made on the Day Island Board of directors?

Gerry: (Long pause) Well... I try to remain very impartial about things, so that I can see both sides of something and I have lived here long enough to know that there are sometimes personalities involved that might have some bearing on an issue. If I feel it is necessary, I would speak up about something knowing some background, but I really try to stay impartial and non-objective. In other words I don't like saying things like, well that was discussed ten years ago, and they decided not to do it, or that it just did not work, or something like that. Because everytime around a different board wants to do different things and I can't be just a know-it-all. (She laughs)

Audie: Do you think that your knowledge and certainly your years on the board, plays an active role in the decisions being made?

Gerry: I try to make it help them, you know like Susanne (Underwood) this year, and the (past) presidents, to know what has gone on before and what activities, or to help maybe think about something that should be discussed. That kind of thing. But I'm not a policy maker or a decision maker unless I see something that needs doing, you know like the club house floor, and so I've talked to Susanne about that and everyone agreed that a paint job was needed and that looks wonderful. I don't want to be running things.

Audie: Do you see yourself more in a support position.

Gerry: Yes, I would hope so. I don't want to be bossy. See this is what's making it hard for me, I figure that in a couple more years I should really think about giving up the books. It is very hard for me to consider who might take over the books.

We have a lot of people who are very active and who are very perceptive about things, but they are also very controversial and they rub people the wrong way and I wouldn't want someone who is very abrasive to come into this situation.

Audie: So you've actually taken a kind of personal role on the secretary/treasurer.

Gerry: Yes, I guess so.

Audie: You regard this as your duty, your job. You enjoy it then don't you?

Gerry: Yes, I do. I like being involved with the people, and keeping in touch with things. I think I'd miss it if I didn't have it. I can't just completely retire. Oh you know, maybe in a couple more years -- I'll think about it. When I think about the Island and I think about the different people who might be interested in the job, its really hard to (long pause) to settle on some one.

Audie: There seems to be a lack of minorities represented here on Day Island. How do you feel about that?

Gerry: I have no idea why that is. I have no idea. I can't recall a time outside of one renter who was black -- and lived over here on the east side of the island, they were a nice young couple -- I can't recall an instance when anyone was say, wanting to buy here and there was any uproar about it. I think that most people do not know where Day Island is. Some think that its over by Fox Island or over by Anderson Island or some other remote place. Some may wonder if you have to take a ferry to get here. You know on Fox Island there is an Island Blvd. Maybe they are thinking of that one.

Audie: If you could make any changes to Day Island, what would they be?

Gerry: Well I think the island needs lots of things. It certainly needs cleaning up. Some properties are pretty disrespectful. I don't know that we have any clout, the (Day Island) club doesn't really have any jurisdictional power and no covenant or things like that to be upheld. There are some properties that are just a disaster. I would like to see the power lines all buried. The streets neatened up. Some of the vehicles and boats and RV's that are parked all over the place could be put in a lot. Ideally I think we should contact Brain Mcguire about renting out space on his parking lot for some of those things, I don't know that he would even be interested. Wouldn't it be nice if we had a parking lot for boats and RV's and trailers?

Audie: What about (a parking lot) across the street from Al Brevick?

Gerry: Yes...Al owns that lot you know, his son almost built on it a couple of years ago. That and Kay's (Undis's) lot must be the last two left.

Audie: If you could obtain Kay's lot, what would you do with it?

Gerry: Oh...the only thing you could do with it is to build as much house on it as you could, because you'd have to pay a good price for it.

Audie: Aside from a house would you do anything else?

Gerry: Oh, how about a community swimming pool. Something for the community.

Audie: If you could improve the Day Island Club house, to include anything, what would be on your wish list?

Gerry: Well you know that building is never going to be great looking, without a complete face life or something. The next step hopefully, would be to get those floors done. But other than that, if something could be done to the front of it, but, anytime that it has been discused, the plans have been so ambitious with no plan to maintain it that nothing has ever taken place.

Audie: You have no wish list? (for the Club House?) What about the internal sections of the building, right now part of that is used for a dance floor occasionally and there are some Day Island activities that do happen there about once or twice a year, But what about a ... say, a museum?

Gerry: If it could be on the walls or out of the way because we need the floor space when we do have something there. In years past we have had things like tumbling and gymnastics for the kids, we've had little ballet classes, we've had aerobics classes, we've had Scouts. If anyone on the island is interested in their kids having a Scout Troop and want to meet over there, then its available.

Audie: Are there any fees involved?

Gerry: The only thing would be, that it's available to anyone on the island for the activity that they want to use it for, which in the case of the Cub Scouts or Scout Troop, would mean any little boys of that age on the island or their friends from school, because no adults are going to use it. But it is available for that kind of thing and there wouldn't be any fee. As long as you have a community function then we don't charge anything. It is only if you have a private



party that we charge you \$10.00 an hour. In fact we don't seek any outside groups, because it is only for club members, because the parking is bad, so we don't go outside of the community. The only reason that the square dancers are over there on Monday nights is, it was part of the original group that Oscar and Anna Utguard started, and they are both gone now, but the square dancers continue.

Audie: So the Day Island Club house does derive a little income from the Club house.

Gerry: Oh yes, it pays for some things.

Audie: Since you first moved here, have you noticed any shifts in cultural values? For example, the concept of the right of private property. Have you noticed that people have put up more fences and limited access where before there did not used to be?

Gerry: No, the only thing would be that fence down there on 19th street, that we put in because the scuba divers were such a problem.

Audie: Did Day Island build that or did the county?

Gerry: Day Island paid \$400.00 for that metal fence. We were given permission from the county, and now the county has waffled on their ordinance that we've posted up there. The upshot of it was that, this year the county has put their own padlock on it and that they are not even opening it up for anybody. If scuba divers want to come down then they will have to call the county and have them open it up. It's the only way it could be controlled and yet the county won't give us a letter saying that we have a right to keep it padlocked, so it's not our padlock now, it's the counties.

Audie: What was the overall issue of that to start with?

Gerry: Scuba divers were parking all over and laying their wet suits out in the street and using the bushes for a bathroom, and picnicing on the neighboring property and the bonfires and trashing the place and in the middle of the night they would be out there. They were a public nuisance.

Audie: So Day Island went down and put a fence up and established control of it.

Gerry: Yes, and then we had to renew all that this past year with more meetings with the county and the upshot of it was that instead of the Wadley's and the Andersons having the key now that they could unlock it, actually they were leaving it unlocked it just looked like it was locked. Now the county

has said that since it was a county right-of-way that they should be responsible. So they are responsible even if the fence is damaged. We even took out insurance on the fence originally, but if the fence were torn down now, or the gate twisted like it was, the county is going to have take care of it. They (the county) didn't come with any ordinance that says that we have a right to keep it closed.

Audie: Since its beginning as a campground, Day Island has been the home to some important people to Tacoma. Do you remember if any of these important people played any interesting role in the development of Day Island?

Gerry: About the only real important one that I really know of was Henry Foss.

Audie: What did he actually do, and what was his influence?

Gerry: I don't know that he influenced the island so much, but I do remember that he was the first one who donated the Christmas tree lights for our community Christmas tree. That was the initial start of the park down there. I think just because of who he was, it was kind of a thing...you know...he lives down on Day Island and he was an important person in the tug boat industry. Outside of that, he and Agnes paid \$200.00 for the piano for the club house, which is kind of in bad shape now, but he donated that. That was a piano that we had, that belonged to Earl's mother and the club house needed a new piano at that time so they donated \$200.00. Other than that, I don't know of anyone and I can't think of anything really civic. He (Henry Foss) was bigger than Day Island and affected Tacoma more.

Audie: Al Davies is another name that keeps coming up. Of course Al Davies was involved with the boys club. Did Al, at anytime influence Day Island?

Gerry: I didn't ever know Al Davies. He was around and I think I met him and I knew who he was in the early years.

Audie: Do you think that the residents of the island tend to be more private as opposed to outgoing? And if so, why is that?

Gerry: No more so than any other community. There are people who will participate and others that don't want to because they are too busy. Generally you would get well acquainted with your immediate neighbor and then through other activities like dinners and the Reading Club. We had an Orthopedic Guild for a number of years, but that was disbanded. If a person wants to be involved, they can be, and if they don't want to be, they don't.

Audie: As you know, Tacoma has long been considered as a blue collar town, with some strong ties to unions and union issues. In your own opinion was this attitude of some of the residents of Day Island towards the unions? Or did they basically reflect more toward the white collar workers?

Gerry: We've had a great variety of professions and professional people and workers. Everything from the doctors and dentists and lawyers to bankers, and insurance men like Earl, and John Eganberger down here, and telephone men like Phyllis Edlebrock's father. Phyllis Edlebrock is another one (to interview) because she grew up down here on the island, they have a Willits canoe in their house. I'll give you a list of people you should talk to. So I think that we've had a great diversity, this is not a truly white collar neighborhood.

Audie: In your opinion is the neighborhood 50-50 blue and white collar? Half and half?

Gerry: Well, we've had people who own their own business like Dick Lowery, and gosh, so many have retired that I can't remember. (As she laughs)

Audie: What percentage would you say is retired?

Gerry: Well if you gave me time, I could probably run down a list and really give you an accurate account.

Audie: In your own opinion.

Gerry: (She laughs) Oh...maybe a third. Let me think. (A long pause) Oh...I'd say maybe a fourth are retired. Yes...about one out of four households, maybe.

Audie: With the increased attention being given to waterfront property, what direction do you see Day Island taking off to? Do you see this as a threat or do you like what you see?

Gerry: No, I don't see it as a threat, because of everything that has been acquired on the water. The east side is a little different. On the west side, everything keeps being upgraded, or torn down and rebuilt and kept up. There isn't the problem of home pride or whatever on West Blvd., but its East Blvd. that has some real problems.

Audie: If you could change the east side, besides moving some of the junkers out of there, what would you do?

Gerry: Tear down a lot of stuff. Some old garages and some terrible old houses.

Audie: So you'd like to see those properties improved?

Gerry: Oh yes, they should be. Like that old garage that looks like its about to fall over, maybe someone should go over and just push it over.

Audie: My last question. Do you have any opinions about the future of Day Island?

Gerry: No...I have hopes, but I don't have opinions.

Audie: What are your hopes?

Gerry: That things will look better. You know, it really is a very unique community. It is something that should be...maintained. [Earl reminded us that it is the only place in Pierce county that does not have the railroad running in front of it.] The railroad is a ring of steel all the way around Tacoma. On this spot here, the railroad cannot build in front of us.

Audie: What else do you see about Day Island that makes it so unique?

Gerry: Well...just its location, its amenities, views, its away from the mainstream, we do have a lot of traffic, but at least we don't have heavy traffic like Bridgeport or some place like that. We are still kind of tucked away.