

This recording is an interview with Spider Wilson, a tattoo artist who grew up in New Westminster and who operated a tattoo business on Columbia Street for 17 years. The major themes discussed in the interview are the life of a business owner on Columbia Street, the real estate development-led change in the character of New Westminster, and Wilson's experiences in New Westminster. Wilson closed the tattoo shop shortly after the interview.

Interviewers: Andrea Walisser and Michelle La

Interview date: 13 August 2013

Date Range: 1960s to 2013

Sound Recording Length: 00:47:45

Spider Wilson is a tattoo artist who operated a tattoo parlour on Columbia Street for 17 years, and is a New Westminster native. He was born at St. Mary's Hospital and attended John Robson Elementary and later Lord Kelvin Elementary. He believes his job as a tattoo artist is a mixture of being a social worker and a bartender. He reports feeling a strong connection to the business community on Columbia Street. Having grown up five minutes away from his current shop, he talks about the changes to Columbia and Front Street in the face of real estate development. In his recollection of New Westminster as a child, he shares stories of his visits to Rob Roy Meats, Royal City Café and how he cruised up to the A&W on Stewardson Way as a teenager. He spent time at the waterfront as a child, and remember the large number of tug and fishing boats on the Fraser River. He toured the Russian submarine on the Fraser River and states jokingly that he never saw longshoremen working, as that was never in their job description. In this interview, he mentions his friendship with Gary Lobel at Galo Shoe Services and how he tattooed, among others, the 67-year-old lawyer across the street. He repeatedly returns to what he views as the problem with the city's parking system, and how the city has lost its character.

Section 0:00 – 01:34

- In this portion of the interview, Wilson talks about growing up in New Westminster, moving away, and later relocated back here with his tattoo shop in 1996. The building where his current tattoo shop is located used to be Rob Roy Meat and he remembers going there as a child.

Section 01:35 – 07:52

- In this portion of the interview, Wilson shares how he entered the tattoo industry as a commercial artist after receiving a scholarship from Walt Disney. Having been located in Surrey and New Westminster for over 32 years, Wilson talks about the life of being a tattoo artist, the challenges he has faced in New Westminster and describes his shop as an institution on Columbia St. He talks about the rising cost of the real estate, which has made it hard for him to sustain his business in the waterfront area.

Section 07:53 – 10: 24

- In this portion of the interview, Wilson states how he has a 50/50 connection to Columbia St. and to the waterfront as a business owner. He talks about the film industry using the waterfront, but in recent times has been pushed away by the city. He goes on to talk about how there is a sense of camaraderie and community between the business owners on Columbia St.

Section 10:25 – 21:56

- In this portion of the interview Wilson talks about the various apprentices he had in his shop, and how one of them is now one of the most prominent tattoo artist in Steveston. He talks about how he believes the craft of the tattoo artists has been diluted and commercialized, the effect of this on his daily work, and the changing demographics of his customers. Ultimately, he states that the industry has lost its credibility.

Section 22:57 – 28:50

- In this section Wilson talks about the changing business environment, and the reasons for this. He talks about the two bars on Columbia St and the social element that contributed to the interconnected business environment in the past. In his explanation he discusses the concept of heritage, the parking system, the “deteriorating” Quayside River Market, “antique alley,” bridal capital of British Columbia, and the changing pub environment. He states that the character of the city has been destroyed.

Section 28:51 – 35:05

- In this section of the interview Wilson talks about how the city was built by first focusing on Columbia St., and later uptown, and the effect this had on the waterfront. He shares his view on the loss of identity and space on the waterfront as real estate projects are prioritized, and talks about the Railroad Terminal Pub and the old Keg Restaurant. His grandmother lived on the hill for 40 years, and lost her view as the developers realized they could only “build up.” Towards the end he talks about how the chemical damage from old industry is hindering further development.

Section 35:06 – 39:29

- In this section of the interview Wilson describes the New Westminster of his childhood, the feeling of the city being small and intimate, the pool halls closing and his observations on the waterfront as a child. He describes touring the Russian submarine on the Fraser River and the *Britannica* as a child, and that the waterfront was filled with tug and fishing boats. As a schoolboy, he would attend the May Day festival in Queens Park. He shares the story of how two policemen chased a Taiwanese boy from Skytrain to Skytrain in the midst of the “Korean/Taiwanese drug war” in the late 1990s.

Section 39:30 – 47:45

- In this section of the interview Wilson talks about rising crime and homelessness. He returns to how he was born at St. Mary’s hospital and now lives in the same area. He reports that his mother owned an antique store, a second-hand store and three houses in the 1960s on Agnes Street. His neighbours growing up were the family of the actor Raymond Burr.