

FAIRMOUNT NEIGHBORS HISTORY PROJECT

Maggie Gontrum, Consultant

Nancy Reckord, Interviewer

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N: I'm interviewing Maggie Gontrum. My name is Nancy Reckord and I live on Fairmount Blvd. And Maggie lives at 1636 Fairmount. [Today is September 2, 2010.]

M: Yeah, I've lived here since 1961 in this very same house.

N: Where did you move here from?

M: We lived on the south side of Chicago where my husband used to teach and we came with our daughters, Katie and Elsa. Katie was 5 and Elsa was 2 1/2. After the so-called " slums" of Chicago, this looked like Paradise to us. (laughter)

N: And did you come here for Peter's job?

M: Yeah, we came for the job at the U of O.

N: And he's a professor of?

M: German.

N: OK. So he was a young professor...

M: Right, making something like \$5000 a year. (laughter) [Amended later to \$7500]

N: And had you ever been to Oregon?

M: We had never been. I have a sister who lived in Lake Oswego at the time. So we stayed with her while we were waiting to move in here. We stayed 2 weeks with her, I think, before our furniture came.

N: So this was your first house?

M: This was our first house, Yeah, actually only the second house we even looked at when we first came to Eugene. We just loved it right away.

N: Why did you choose this house or this area?

M: We wanted to be near the university and that was the main...No, we looked at one other house way out on the west side but there were only 2 in this neighborhood. We just decided right away this was it. Because it looks like Cape Cod. And I spent summers on Cape Cod, and so did Peter.

N: So, in 1961, this was a \$5000 house.

M: No, he made, his salary was \$5000. [Amended to \$7500] The house was \$10,500.

N: Wow. (Laughter)

M: And all the houses along here were little boxes, almost identical. From the Howards, ours, the Mungers, two houses, were almost exactly the same.

N: And you're referring to houses that are all up and down this side of the street...

M: Up and down this side of the street, yeah. It was called McClean subdivision. Somebody had built all at the same time, in 1929-1930, and we found some nails in the house that were square

nails. It was the age of square nails, when they built the house, I don't know much about construction but they were pretty old, those nails.

N: So, did they have the same floor plan? The same materials?

M: Um hmm. They had sawdust burners in the cellar. All of them, and all of these 4 houses you can see where somebody has covered over the ground floor, you know, has covered over the place where the sawdust burner was loaded. And this house, I was told, once had a water-powered elevator to get from the first floor to the second floor. I mean this is something I never saw but Pat Scarlett, who was a docent at the art museum, told me that she got married in the backyard of this house in the 1940's and she remembers living on the second floor and having to go downstairs by way of water powered elevator. I can't tell you any more than that. But it must have been quite an unusual piece of equipment.

N: So was the park here? And functioning when you moved in with two little girls?

M: Oh yeah. Our whole life revolved around the park and Condon School and The Grasshopper. I'll tell you about that if you haven't heard about it.

N: Is that a newsletter?

M: That was a newsletter that the children in the neighborhood...

N: OK. I've heard tangentially about it but I 'm interested to hear more...

M: That was the great binding force of the neighborhood. Anita Johnson's kids were on it and the Hultings. Betty Jean Hulting was probably the prime mover of that newspaper and her kids did it in their basement.

N: And how old were your kids when The Grasshopper newsletter...

M: They weren't of an age to do more of the creative stuff...they were too young for that. I mean, one of our kids was in the "Tot Jots" which were the little dictated pieces from kindergarten age. But the Hultings did more sophisticated interviewing and things like that.

N: Did you have more children by that time?

M: No, David was, no, this was 1961. Katie was 5, Elsa was 2 1/2 when we came...I forget what year The Grasshopper started...David wasn't born until 1965...

N: And was The Grasshopper gone by then? Was it called "the" Grasshopper Newspaper or Newsletter or just The Grasshopper?

M: Just The Grasshopper. It was self-explanatory. Elsa was in kindergarten and she wrote Tot Jots so that must have been in 1963 or '64 and then we went to Germany and Katie was quote "Foreign Correspondent" and contributed one article (laughter) from long distance. I don't think David ever figured into The Grasshopper.

N: Did it have any long lasting influence on your daughters? Did they become journalists? (laughter)

M: No, but it was just wonderful though, because you know when the Hultings moved out...They had the one (house) with the beautiful pink magnolia...and the track star moved in there. Devine, Roscoe Devine moved into that house. And his daughter, when she was a student in middle school, Roosevelt, somebody put the bug in her ear to do a research project on The Grasshopper so she was combing the neighborhood for old copies of The Grasshopper so she could do this research project and write it up for some class at Roosevelt. So we were all scurrying into our basements to get the old copies. I'm sure Anita has some old ones because her kids were very active. Are you interviewing Anita?

N: I don't know. I'm not, but somebody might be.

M: Whoever interviews Anita...

N: She probably has a treasure trove...

M: She might. No, it was wonderful. We had a dog named Butterscotch when we first came in 1961 and there was always some little mention of Butterscotch in almost every issue and people all over town, all over the neighborhood, would mention Butterscotch and say they'd read about Butterscotch (laughter)

N: And did the kids do all the interviewing?

M: Oh yeah. There was no adult, no visible adult input at all. Kids did it all.

N: And how did they produce it? Type it? [Later amended to add that some headlines and drawings were done freehand.]

M: Mimeograph machine. Remember those things?

N: Oh yeah. (laughter)

M: But they typed it and then mimeographed it?

N: But they could have hand written it on a ditto master...

M: They hand illustrated it somehow... They would type the things and probably paste them onto the paper and then they would have a few little hand designs. I can't remember if there were photos or not but if there were they were pretty crude.

N: Probably not if you were doing ditto. Did somebody have a ditto machine?

M: Oh yeah, it was all in the Hulting's basement which is now Derek Johnson's house. Derek would be a good person to talk to...

N: Uh huh. You said that was a real binding force in the neighborhood. In what way?

M: Well, just that people had a common reference point. For example, the dog, Butterscotch, or what was happening at the park...

N: Was this involving mostly people involved with sort of, lower Fairmount?

M: It was the Condon area, Condon School area; I think any kid who went to Condon was eligible to write in it. Great rivalry between Condon and Edison. I mean, our kids used to hold their breath, hold their nose, when they drove past Edison (laughter). One of the sub themes in The Grasshopper was how many kids were going to be in the classes in Condon next year. Whose house might be sold, I mean, it was very anxious to keep up...

N: Might be sold so there would be fewer kids available to go to Condon? And Condon eventually...

M: Closed

N: So you're saying in another 10 or 12 years from the time you moved here the population at that end had dwindled enough so they were considering closing Condon?

M: Yeah, this was very much in the air and Betty Jean Hulting, mother of the Hulting kids who ran the Grasshopper, her husband was Dean of Journalism, was always very interested in bringing people into the neighborhood and populating Condon School because she probably saw the writing on the wall. I mean we hadn't lived here long enough to know, you know, just what the problem might be but she was very much aware of it. She was very aware of who lived where and...

N: Was the Condon/Edison rivalry fun? Or the kids really took it seriously, or the parents really took it seriously?

M: Oh, they didn't compete in any way, you know, they just sort of have that ...oh, we didn't hear that much about it except when I drove the car past the school and they'd all hold their breath (laughter) and I would say it wasn't serious at all... They didn't tend to run into each other, you know, 'cause they would walk to school to Condon and the kids all walked to school in the morning without any parents you know, they...

N: Did they ride bikes? Or walk?

M: I think most of them walked. We have home movies of them all walking together down the street. Cory Johnson would come down Birch and would meet with Katie and then they would walk down 17th to Condon, and they'd walk home again and we'd never worry about them until they came home, you know, after school.

N: Now did they take their lunch? Did the schools have cafeterias?

M: The schools had lunch and they had a janitor who would always collect their food and take it home to his pigs (laughter).

N: Wow, that's neat. You know later, they wouldn't let people take scraps out because it was unsanitary, or you didn't know what was happening to it. Now I suppose they're back to recycling everything. (laughter)

M: I guess those were well fed pigs if the kids had lunches they didn't like...They carried their lunch in little boxes, lunch boxes...

N: So a lot of kids took their lunches.

M: Yeah. And they also had a school lunch, I mean it was, not a bad thing to have school lunch.

N: So, tell me some more things about what the neighborhood was like as a place to live when you first moved here in the 60's...I assume it was a very friendly place.

M: Oh yeah, we had just come from the urban environment you know and we thought it was a little bit too friendly. Somebody came and put cookies on the porch and we thought, "This is kind of strange"... (laughter)

Nobody would have put cookies on our porch on the south side of Chicago...we all lived in apartments and people were sort of guarding their privacy as much as they could 'cause we were otherwise thrown so closely together in an urban environment but we just loved it though. Katie looked out in the back yard here and saw a white picket fence and space and said "Oh, Mommy, we can have a horse!" (laughter) It was that wonderful to her after the city. And it was much more open. The photographs that I found in these old scrapbooks of Fairmount Blvd. showed almost no trees.

N: Really!

M: Yeah, it was ...and in the years when we first lived here and in 1968 when we put this addition on with the flat roof up there, the children could sleep outside and there were some really hot dry summers when it didn't rain from May until September and they would just leave their sleeping bags and their mattress pads outside all summer and they'd sleep out there and

there were no mosquitoes. And 'cause there weren't as many trees, people didn't water their lawns as much, you know, everybody kind of left their lawns dry. So now, our grandchildren don't sleep out there, there are too many mosquitoes but it was just perfect then for that. But since then, all these trees have grown up. There was one huge holly tree where Robin Munger's house is now (1620 Fairmount) and that was the terror of all kids who were learning to ride their bikes down the sidewalk because the holly tree was looming up there with all its prickles (laughter). Somebody finally cut that down but that was about the only tree. And I used to walk to summer school at the U of O, I was taking a course in Russian one summer, and I remember dreading going across Villard because it was a huge expanse of treeless, hot, space and it wasn't until some architecture students decided to plant trees in the median there on Villard that that became a pleasant and shady street. But it was very open and very hot and you dreaded to walk (laughter) that space if you were walking across 15th.

N: Well, I was hearing from the Starlin boys that there were lots of fruit trees around here when they biked to school, which would have been in the late 50's.

M: So they biked to...

N: They went to Condon...and they rode their bikes but they were a little older than your girls but they remember picking apples off the tree on the way home from school or plums from...well, they mentioned plums in this back yard actually, since they lived at 1636 ...or maybe it's plums at 1676. That could be. (The Starlins lived in both houses at different times.) But were you aware of a lot of fruit trees around here? Because I think it was an orchard at some point. There are a number of apple and cherry trees sort of dotted throughout the neighborhood.

M: Yeah. I was talking about this project today with a friend who massages Don Hunter who does the slide shows for years and years and years at the Natural History Museum and he told her he used to live on Villard and he took a plum tree when he moved away when he moved up to the hills on Van Ness [amended to Central] and planted the plum tree at his new house and it gave birth to lots of other plum trees so his plum tree, Don Hunter's plum tree, he's alive at 94 or something like that, still, and he has all these descendants of the Villard St. plum tree.

N: Did he live in this neighborhood for a long time?

M: Yeah, Don Hunter. Well, I don't know how long he lived here but when he moved away from Villard he took the plum tree. Anybody who does much with the Museum of Natural History knows who Don Hunter is. [Known for his slide shows of Lane County and Columbia Gorge history.]

N: Who else was in the neighborhood when you were here that you remember of great importance (laughter)? Like you mentioned Anita...[Johnson]

M: Well, there was an English professor named Horn who lived in a house that's since been torn down...I think it's the one where there's a huge house where the tennis team lives now with the terra cotta roof, and his wife was a very ...a faculty wife par excellence You know, she used to have faculty wife sewing sessions or literary sessions or whatever was the social structure at that time. Sort of before we got here. But she was sort of the "grande dame" of the faculty wives. But she also taught piano and I thought this was convenient and I'd try to take some piano lessons from her and she always said that she had a piano that Arthur Rubenstein had once touched! (laughter) But she died soon after we came here.

N: Was she an elderly woman?

M: Yeah, she was fairly elderly but she was definitely of an older generation. I mean, Mir [Starlin] would remember who she is, but I mean even Mir seems young compared to what Eve Horn was (Mir is now 94). She was rather haughty in an old fashioned kind of way. I can't remember who else was famous except for the Hultings.

N: You know, one of the things that's happened in the last few years is that they have these 4th of July celebrations. Do you know when that started?

M: Yeah, that was Sarah Harnsongkram and Lauren Herbert. They started those.

N: Oh, so that would be within the last 10 years?

M: Well, they started them when their kids were little and they wanted it centered around little children's games and then of course as their children got older they weren't as motivated any more so it kind of died a natural death. But it was great because it brought people together and we would see people to talk to that we'd only seen going in and out of their houses. And in that way it was really nice because...[phone call interrupted]... The 4th of July picnics were wonderful. Because even though we lived across the street from the McConnaugheys there is something about standing together in a little group like that. I can still remember Bayard McConnaughey told Peter [Maggie's husband] the story of ...he lived through Pearl Harbor. And he told Peter all about that and Peter never forgot it. You know, we would see Bayard McConnaughey walking to and from the University. We would see lots of people walking to and from the University but you would never stop and talk and tell stories...so that's what that accomplished. You got to know other people's stories just because you were put together with them for a couple of hours.

N: So, before those 4th of July picnics, there weren't any neighborhood annual gatherings?

M: No, we talked about it for years and I thought, "Oh, wouldn't it be fun to have a beer garden like the ones they have in Germany where they sit around under a chestnut tree and drink beer. And the Austins would talk about it too.

N: Well, the garage sales that happened in the fall the first couple of years that we were here (2005, 2006) were a little bit like that where neighborhood people...that's where I got to know some of the neighborhood...

M: Yeah, that's what the Austins [Fred and Sandra Austin] picked up on...the Austins never went to the 4th of July party because they had their own in the backyard with their kids. And Tim and Roberta [Boyden] never went because they were out at Art in the Vineyard so it was really done by Lauren and Sarah and I think Chris Ramey. Those kids are all the same age now, [40+] all in college, or headed that way but it was something we talked about for years and it finally came that some kind of gathering took place. Before that, a lot of our life revolved around the park because there was a park leader. And some of the park leaders were just unusually magnetic.

N: Now were they hired by the city?

M: They were hired by the city and they supervised the pool and they supervised...

N: This was a wading pool.

M: Right, this was a wading pool that everybody felt so much sentimentality about that we were able to raise all that money because people LOVED their memories of the wading pool.

N: Do you have pictures of that wading pool?

M: I was looking for them but they're not in that book but maybe they'll be in an earlier book. I have some other ones that are sloppier...mostly I have home movies of that...but there was one woman... the art projects were sometimes just exceptional. They would sit there all day. Our kids would take their lunch and we wouldn't see them until the afternoon.

N: This was summer only?

M: Yeah, summer only. While the wading pool was open. And if it was too cloudy the woman would still come in the cold and she'd do the ...sometimes there were men...like the Siegal boy after whom the bench is named...there's a bench on the other side, a wooden bench, that was erected by the Siegals who lived up on Sunset. Close to where Mir [Starlin] lived. And their son was teaching at the University of Washington and he died suddenly and he had been a park leader so they donated the first bench to the park.

N: How nice...

M: They still have to pay for the upkeep of the bench...so every once in a while they used to come back and visit the bench and see if it needed repair...but this one woman [a park leader] was from Hawaii. She was a student here and her name was Monica Lee and she rode a little red Vespa or mini motor bike and she just had all the kids following her around and thinking she was

just great and she taught them all to do this and that and we kept in touch with her over the years, or over that year, and she came and showed us how to make wonton soup and various sort of Japanese American specialties, so she was a little exotic bit that came to the park...

N: It sounds like this neighborhood was a wonderful place for kids.

M: Yeah, it couldn't have been better. I mean, we really thought we were in paradise.

N: Did you use Washburn Park at all? Or is that a little too far?

M: That was used for the Spring Sing at Condon... and they would carry an upright piano from Condon School out into that pool, I mean that pool had never been used as long as we were here; it was never filled up with water...

N: The wading pool?

M: Right, so they would bring out, I think they would have band concerts there now, they have never filled up that pool, not since we've used it. They would bring the piano out from Condon...

N: In a truck or something?

M: No, they would roll it up the sidewalk (laughter)...That was one of the nice rituals there...and the Condon playground...originally it had a playground there...I think the younger kids on one side and the older kids on the other side of Condon, north and south, and when Condon closed, Marna Broekhoff, who grew up in a house over here and then lived up at the top of the hill when she was married, organized some Marines to build that into a playground after the school was down so she was the prime mover of that project.

N: From a parent's point of view, well, maybe your kids were gone by then, but talk a little bit about the feeling of the neighborhood when the Condon school closed and became Magnet Arts and Edison was divided into Edison and Eastside... Was there a lot of talk in the neighborhood about how that was going to affect kids or...

M: Well, it was hard on all of us to have the staff diminished. You know, first the librarian, and then the music program, and we were just heartbroken because David had fallen in love with Kathy Pengelly when he was a 2nd grader.

N: Oh, and she was at Condon?

M: She had taught at Condon for one year and then she was only at Magnet Arts so Condon regular [the original part of Condon School] couldn't afford to have her...

N: Oh, right they were in the same building, I was thinking...

M: I don't know exactly what happened there that Kathy couldn't also teach the regular Condon kids but maybe she was stretched too thin...

N: She must have been hired full time by...[Magnet Arts]

M: I've told her that since - I've seen her walking her dog - she still lives here.

N: Yes, she does.

M: But it broke David's heart when he was just a young kid...yeah, they struggled through...I have some photographs of Condon in its heyday and when Katie was in the 6th grade, no Elsa was in the 6th grade along with Shelly Poticha and Eva Bernhard and some other kids, I just read

about Shelly Poticha in the paper here [referring to the Eugene Weekly]. She has a job in the Clinton administration. [Amended to say Obama administration.]

N: Oh!

M: These kids were all at Condon when it was just beginning to dwindle and then David was in the 1st grade at the same time. She was in the 6th grade and he was in the first grade and things just went downhill after Elsa got out. Elsa still had a good time but by the time David was in 5th grade, the 5th grade and the 6th grade were together...Well, in some ways it brought people together because they were all fighting to keep it alive. I think Peter was on the Small Schools Task Force that Tom Payzant [Superintendent of Eugene 4J Schools] set up and he met with people all over town to see how feasible these small schools were...and there was quite a bit of you know, bitterness and sadness, but ...I think we all sort of knew which way it was going to go eventually...

N: Well, it's so interesting to watch that continue. I mean, now we will be facing some of that school closure, I imagine, in another year or so...they just can't afford to keep these small schools open...

M; But this was the first wave. This hit us ...you know, it was a big surprise. But as I said, Betty Jean Hulting knew that this was probably likely to happen. She was really up on these politics and had her finger to the wind, much more than we did.

N: Over the years, were there any other conflicts that come to mind in the neighborhood? I mean, there's the schools, but I don't know if there were other political things that took place in the city or the neighborhood that other kinds of issues...

M: I don't remember us being very concerned with the city. Of course, our social life was with the University and Peter's colleagues there so we didn't take part too much in civic affairs until I got on the school board and you know, then I really did understand what the city politics was all about. (laughter)

But we were pretty much living in this unaware state. There were probably other people who were more aware of it than...I mean we weren't good...most of...a lot of University people were completely aloof from city politics. A lot of people in the humanities anyway...

N: Did the university have a huge effect on your family? On you and Peter, just as neighborhood residents?

M: I think that most of our social life was there...every once in a while we'd go to academic parties and somebody would bring in a judge, you know, (laughter)...

N: A NON-university person...(laughter)

M: And it really wasn't until I got onto the school board that I became acquainted with people with other functions. You know, partly when I was teaching, when I was a high school teacher I got to know other people but even there, so many University kids go to South [South Eugene High School] that...

N: When did you teach in Eugene?

M: 1969, which was the year of all horrors breaking loose, '69 to '71.

N: Just two years?

M: Well, I started in the fall of '69 and went to the spring of '71, maybe '72. Yeah, the '72 yearbook says, "Mommy returns home!" (laughter) I have little cards like the health plan that I got when I was a teacher...so I quit then.

N: Why did you quit after just 2 years? [2 1/2]

M: I was exhausted. I was only a part time teacher but it was a very, very difficult time and there were bomb scares at South Eugene, there were kids... it was the first year of Open Campus, '69, and the kids didn't know what to do with themselves and they all, en masse, swamped the Y, and they crossed the street and inundated the Y and....

N: Was the little restaurant in the Y yet?

M: I don't think it was at that point. Well, it might have been there.

N: Why did the kids go to the Y?

M: They just didn't know what to do with this free time...they didn't know where else to go...so they would just go there...

N: And before that, they were structured into a classroom...

M: They were not allowed...and they were not allowed to leave the campus supposedly...a lot of them didn't have cars in '69 and they didn't have that freedom, so, it was a really difficult time to teach and a lot of the things that I had been trained to teach were being questioned so...I was exhausted and then my own kids were reaching adolescence so I thought that was more important place to put my energies on...

N: So then how many years after that did you go on the school board?

M: I went on the school board, I think, what was the year that Tom Payzant switched the principals? [Transferred principals from one school to another without the usual process]

N: Probably, he was only here 5 or 6 years so about '75? '74?

M: Something like that, anyway, that was the year, and my colleagues at South lined me up to run in protest of the principal's transfer...so the little tensions that we'd had over Condon school here then mushroomed into this city wide tensions and one became much more aware of the place as a whole...and the interesting thing...

N: Did people start coming to you in the neighborhood as a member of the school board?

M: They sure did when the strike came. [Eugene 4J Strike of 1978] Because the 2nd year I was on the school board, I think there was a strike...

N: That would have been '78. I interrupted you a minute ago. You started to say something interesting...

M: Oh, it was fortunate that the sections of town, the elected position to the school board was not local but was city wide because that gave you a much more of a sense of the good of the whole district, not just fighting for your particular neighborhood school...so whoever designed it that way was farseeing and foresighted.

N: What do you think some of the biggest changes are that have happened over the, well really, 50 years, that you've lived here, right? You came in '61. In 2011 that will be 50.

M: Right, we've been on this street longer than anybody.

N: So you've seen all the changes of the owners and the gardens and the trees and the cars...

M: It's a lot prettier now, I think, than it used to be. You know, the landscape on Fairmount Blvd. is just beautiful I think whereas I wouldn't have said that, except for the beautiful magnolia tree across the street (laughter) ...well, 15th street (the dead end) was a lovely place too. Some of

Katy's best friends lived on 15th street. All the houses are rentals down there now except for the couple that had the... she does fish research...

N: 15th and?

M: The extension of 15th here...down the dead-end. There's only one family owned house now and we talk to them often when they walk up and down the street.

N: Was there ever a time that you were aware of when that extension of 15th wasn't so desirable? When I was talking to the Starlin boys (I interviewed Scott and Clay Starlin) they both mentioned that as kids they don't think they were ever told not to go down there, they don't remember, they don't have any memory of that, but they just know that they didn't.

M: Hmmm.

N: That somehow they had a feeling that you shouldn't go down there.

M: No, no. Because Katie's best friend lived there. Marge Ramey [another Fairmount longtime resident] lived down there. She lived at the end of the street because it was cheaper. I mean, they owned the house at the very end, the Ramey's did, and Franklin Blvd. wasn't as noisy No, I wouldn't say that they had any fears about that at all. Katie, you know, and Annie Marquis played all the time.

N: Then it must have been a much safer time.

M: Oh yeah, as I said, we let our kids go to Condon, come home, never worried, let 'em go to the park, and never worried about that.

N: Where did you shop?

M: What is now Market of Choice has undergone many, many incarnations. It was called Irish-Schwartz at one point...

N: Always a grocery?

M: Yeah, always a grocery and Hirons has always been there as far as I know...

N: So it was there when you came...

M: Oh yeah. Hirons was once two stories. They had the lower floor too...where the Korean grocery store [restaurant] is...

N: Do you remember some little corner groceries around here?

M: Yes, the little store. Have you heard about the little store on the corner?

N: I heard about one on 17th and Moss.

M: Right, right. And David had his picture in the Register Guard one time because the little store was about to close and there's a picture of David standing there with his skateboard and saying what he went to the little store for. I mean it was just little bits of candy and...I don't remember them having groceries...but the kids loved the place and they would stop in there and buy little things...bubble gum...

N: Was that the Robertson's store?

M: It's now a home. 17th and Orchard. This side. NE corner.

N: I heard about 2 different ones. One was at 17th and Moss, or at least that's what they said, and another one somewhere nearby that's now a house that...and it was extremely small...Clay and Scott described it as a very, very small...

M: Yeah, it's now a rental house ...you can almost look into their kitchen as you walk by...

N: Did your kids go to Gantsy's? Or was there a Gantsy's (ice cream store on the corner of 19th and Agate)?

M: Oh yeah...

N: What else was around Gantsy's? How about Tom's Market?

M: Yeah, on the opposite side where all the dogs were hovering, waiting for bones. Yeah, they were a butcher.

N: Tom's Market was a butcher...

M: Yeah. I think it was mostly a butcher store. I don't think we ever went in there but I do remember the dogs waiting around to get the bones.

N: What about the other things? What's now Beppi's [restaurant].

M: Oh, that was Book and Tea. David had one of his first jobs there, working on the computer...that's when kids knew as much about computers as grownups. You know, just out of high school.

N: So, was it a private home before it was Book and Tea? [a book store that also served tea]

M: What was it? You know I...

N: I think that means the Book and Tea must have been in the '70's...

M: Yeah, Book and Tea bought it from somebody else

N: It's been a commercial establishment of some kind ever since...and now there's Eugene City Bakery next to what was Gantsy's, which is now...

M: And I don't know what Eugene City Bakery was before...my kids would probably know more about this than I do...

N: But that's sort of a little far for kids to go from here, isn't it?

M: Gantsy's? Well, they walked to Condon...so they would go there on their way home.

N: You really have lifelong friendships, don't you, from this neighborhood?

M: Oh, people have moved away a lot.

N: How many people are still around that you knew when you first came? Evelyn McConnaughey is still there.

M: No, she's a newcomer. [Moved to neighborhood in 1969]

N: Well, she's been here 40 years? (laughter)

M: Well, the Onthinks were ...they were the closest...we knew them for years...I mean, that was the Onthank's lawn the kids would sled down.

N: Is that the McConnaughey house? [1653 Fairmount]

M: Yeah. And Ruth and Carl Onthank, he was a vice provost or something at the U of O, and they always used to tell us where to go hiking in the mountains and where you could swim and she was listing all these lakes where you could swim and I remember her stopping in the middle and saying, "Oh, but you'd have to wear a bathing suit in that lake." (laughter) And up in the Cascades, there are two lakes, I've never seen them, but they're called Ruth and Carl Lakes and I'm pretty sure they're named after Ruth and Carl Onthank.

N: Oh, nice.

M: Yeah, where they probably went without bathing suits! (laughter)

N: Who else used to be around here?

M: Well, Elga lived where Alan Reeder lives [1645 Fairmount], Elga Brown, kindergarten teacher... Her daughter and Elsa did a lot of things together. Eva and Elsa. And Eva now has an ice cream store in Portland. Something Moon, Cold Moon? Ice Cream Store...I think it's pretty successful. And Toby [Brown] was one of the prime movers of the park [Renovation]. Contributors to the Park. Elga's son Toby, who lives in Hong Kong, sent us our first big check to get things moving. He said this is a very important thing to do. And this huge check arrived from Hong Kong.

N: Oh, how wonderful!

M: And he even got one of his colleagues to donate \$1000! (laughter)

N: Wow!

M: To Fairmount Park! Because he just had such wonderful memories of it.

N: Well, I think Fairmount Park did that for a lot of kids. It was a very, very special place and in reflecting on this I wonder if that's because kids had more free, maybe not more free time, but the ability to...

M: Unstructured, yeah.

N: I mean now, most of the kids who are in the park are supervised by their parents. I mean it's very rare for...

M: I mean there came a time when the transients would all come down 15th street up from the river and you know, you knew it wasn't safe.

N: Now when was that?

M: After our kids were grown. I mean, by the time I was taking my grandchildren down I always went with them.

N: Would that have been in the 80's, or the 90's?

M: I don't remember, because I was thinking...

N: How old are your grandchildren now?

M: The two oldest of my grandchildren were born here. They're now 19 and 21. They had such a good time at the park, even though they lived near Kincaid, and they had such a good time here when they were little kids that even when they were 13, 14, 15, they would come back and swing at the park, or see saw at the park, because other parks they'd been to, you know, there are no see saws anywhere else. So they would come and...even they had a sentimental attraction to that park...Something so manageable about it, you know, ...

N: Yeah, it's small...and protected...

M: But it had its secret corners. I think Toby remembered going there with the Lewinsons and painting something on the inside of the restroom or something behind the restroom wall and he said, "When they tear down that old restroom they'll find what we did!" (laughter) And Sandra (Austin) had actually found some of the old paintings that they'd done on some of the walls. Don't ask me some of the construction details but...

N: I know we need to stop pretty soon. Is there anything you want to say about the future of the neighborhood or just your reflections about Fairmount? What it's meant to you as a neighborhood? Or what kind of place you think it's been?

M: I still have hope that we can preserve some of this. I hope that the density is going to work in our favor somehow, although I don't know quite how, I mean I like the idea...I mean that's what this article talks about [referring to the Eugene Weekly] about having neighborhoods where you can walk to places and managing density is terribly important. I mean, you know these plans that we've been looking at of zoning and having greater density you know, it might be nice if we can all walk to someplace to shop and meet each other along the way and stop by the park while we're shopping and...so you know, I have hope.

N: That's a good thing.

M: Right. Of course, I don't live as close as you do [referring to the building of the new university arena]. Or as Tim and Roberta [Boyden] do.

N: Well, we'll see how this parking district works out. That's next. Thank you very much. I'm going to turn this off...

End of September 2, 2010 Interview with Maggie Gontrum

Transcribed by: Nancy Reckord

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