

## FAIRMOUNT NEIGHBORS HISTORY PROJECT

George Currin, Consultant  
Katherine Lieberknecht, Interviewer  
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Katherine Lieberknecht (KL): I'm Katherine Lieberknecht, and I'm here interviewing George Currin. It's October 19, 2010, and it's probably 6:45 in the evening. Thanks for having me here. I have a bunch of questions here, but I'm sure we'll just go along as it goes, with the stories. It starts off with "When did you move to the Fairmount neighborhood?"

[After World War II there was a housing shortage for returning veterans. You had to apply to a housing authority to get on a waiting list for available housing. This is when we were waiting in the Veterans trailer camp at Sladden Park. Dad somehow circumvented the housing authority and rented the house on 15<sup>th</sup> street directly from the owner who lived across the street on 15<sup>th</sup>.]

George Currin (GC): In 1948...My dad was from Cottage Grove. Mom was from Indiana. And, after the war, they were both in the service, Mom in the Navy, Dad in the Army; we lived in Portland for a short time. And then moved to Eugene in, I believe, it was 1948. And we moved initially to Sladden Park, out in the Whitaker area. And that's because there was a trailer camp set up for veterans there. And we lived there for a few months and then moved to 15th street between Villard and Moss in a house that just, in the last year has been torn down. There's a vacant lot there, on the south side of the street, right on the alley. We lived there for a couple of years; my brother was born in '49. We were living there, and then we moved to 1452 Moss Street, which is between 14th and 15th, on Moss, and that's where we spent most of our grade school years. And then the university bought that property to build a dorm, bought us out, and we moved up here to this house (1964 Moss Street), I believe in 1953. I then went to the rest of Condon, Roosevelt, South Eugene and onto the technical vocational school after that. And left home in the early '60s and ended up leaving Eugene in the late '80s, and then we moved back in 2000, and bought this house [1964 Moss]—my mom still owned it—and bought it from Mom, and moved back here to take care of her. She had Alzheimer's. And so then we bought the house, and did some remodeling and stuff, and we've been here since 2000.

KL: Right, ten years, then. So, if you don't mind me asking, you moved back to take care of your mother, but also to move back into this particular area?

GC: Well, we moved back to take care of Mom, but we had talked about coming back to the area. We have four kids. Two of the kids had gone to Seattle. One was in Portland. One stayed in the Eugene/Springfield area here. But in the interim, they all moved back to Eugene/Springfield. So, another benefit for us moving back here was that all of our kids were here, grandkids were here; it was all about family. This was a nice neighborhood to grow up in, and I kind of had the idea that, oh, it would be nice to come back and live in the area that had families. It wasn't the big Seattle metropolitan area that we'd been living in-- the Puget Sound area.

KL: Right, that's nice. Do your grandkids come up to trick-or-treat here?

GC: They do. It's a great trick-or-treat area. We traditionally run out of candy every year, no matter how much we buy. We have a couple of grandkids who live in Creswell, and they come in here with their friends to trick-or-treat, and we have some, well, they're older now, they don't trick-or-treat, they live down in the Thurston area, out in the River Road area, and they came over, and brought their friends over, and now, Delaney, the oldest from Creswell, comes over and not only does the trick-or-treating, but she wants to manage the candy, and answer to door, and do all the stuff here. So, it is a great place.

KL: Halloween is a lot of fun here. But very busy. My kids are little, so we go out early, but even when we go out early, it's packed on Moss Street.

Janet Currin, George Currin's wife: It is fun to see the little ones.

GC: It is. And we kind of dress up a little bit, ourselves, and a lot of times, we'll sit on the porch, and greet them out there, if it's not too cold.

KL: That's a nice idea.

GC: Yes.

KL: Do you recall why your parents moved to Eugene?

GC: Well, I think it's because Dad was from Cottage Grove. Our family homesteaded in Cottage Grove. And he had ties to Oregon here. So after the war, he moved back to the Eugene area. He worked for Southern Pacific prior to the war. And then when we moved to, I think, to the first house on Moss Street, he got a service station that was down by the courthouse on Oak Street. And, he had a service station there, and then another service station out in Glenwood. And I think he had ideas about being his own businessman, for a while. I think he got tired of that, though. And he ended up going to work for the post office.

KL: Mmm-hmm. The next question here is "What do you think makes our neighborhood unique, or special?" And, I guess you could talk about both what it was like when you were growing up here, and now.

GC: Well, it's not the same as when we grew up here, but that was some of the attraction in moving back here, because it was just a fabulous place to grow up. Living in the fringe of the University, Hendricks Park so close, Washburne Park was just unbelievable. Even though it was a private park that Mrs. Washburne maintained. We had the Mill Race, where we weren't allowed to go to, but we did, anyway. The river...I mean, there was just all the great things that went on here. It's changed somewhat now, in that Condon is no longer the grade school, everyone goes to Edison, it's not quite as compact and close as it used to be, I guess it felt a little more community to me, when Condon was here, and I'm sure that has a lot to do with me not having young kids going to school. I suppose if I did, I'd feel the same way about Edison now.

Some of the other nice things that the neighborhood had was all the little corner grocery stores. There was one at 17th and Moss, there was one across the street from Maude Kerns-- that's the one that has the bamboo growing around it now-- I can't think what it was called; I almost want to say the Cottage Grocery. There was one on 17th and Orchard. Tom's Market down here [on Agate and 19th] is the only one still surviving. There was one across the street from Edison School, on the corner there. There was one on 13th and Columbia; it's been gone a long time. Those all disappeared, except for Tom's, when Safeway came in, down next to William's Bakery. It was kind of an interesting transition, because as kids we made our rounds to the penny candies, and all that stuff down there. I think one of the big draws, especially when we lived down in the 1400 block of Moss Street—1452 Moss—was Williams Bakery. Williams Bakery had--this will sound funny—had the best sidewalks.

KL: (laughs) They did?

GC: Our sidewalks were all rough and had little ridges in the them, so when you did your shoe skate skating, they vibrated you-- they tingled your feet. William's Bakery had these wonderful, flat sidewalks, where all us kids would go down and go roller-skating, and play. And that-- these are some of the stories the grandkids keep asking me about-- but, we would go down and play at William's Bakery, and we got to know the people who worked there. And so, we would roller skate around to the finished end, where they'd load up the trucks, and where they'd package the bread, and every now and then the packaging machine would screw up, and they'd give us extra pieces of bread. So, they'd give us this bread, and we'd skate back around to the other end, where they'd mix the ingredients-- I still to this day remember his name was Bill-- and we would go in there, and Bill would give us brown sugar and raisins, and we'd make a brown sugar and raisin sandwich, and we'd come home with this sugar high, and Mom could never understand why we weren't hungry. That was almost a ritual.

KL: Was it?

GC: Yeah, it was. It was just a place to play. And the other thing about William's Bakery was they used to have the businesses...the businesses used to have a contest for the best Christmas displays. And they would set up these...Williams Bakery had this giant manicured front lawn. It was like a park in itself. And they'd set up this huge nativity scene out there. It would just knock your socks off, it was so great. And they'd usually win it year, after year. It was just on the block where we grew up-- this fabulous Christmas scene that was going on there.

KL: Wow.

GC: And then next to William's Bakery was Kaarhus's boat shop. Anybody talk to you about that?

KL: Not to me, but talk about it, that would be great.

GC: Well, Kaarhus's boat shop, they are they makers of the very first McKenzie River drift boat. And, you think about OSHA and all this stuff, and us kids going through William's Bakery with the big baking machines, and it's the same thing...we wandered through this boat shop with the

saws and the planers and everything going and they're painting lacquers, and we go in there and smell the lacquer. Well, they would give us all the scrap wood. And we'd build forts...oh, my goodness. There was a vacant lot, where we'd built one time; I'd say it was like four or five stories tall, this fort. Well, it was probably four or five stories tall [less than 10 feet], about as wide as this chair [four feet] out of scrap wood, and we built it and got up there, and it fell over (laughs)

KL: (laughs) Well, no one was hurt.

GC: Well, Sandy got her tooth knocked out. It was just one of those things, where you got all the free scrap wood to build forts, you'd have your free snacks of brown sugar and raisin sandwiches in your fort. (laughs)

KL: (laughs) No wonder you guys wanted to move back. That's sounds wonderful.

GC: Let's see, other things us kids did growing up was, when Safeway came in, right next door to Williams Bakery, there was a huge celebration there.

KL: Do you recall when that was? How old you were, maybe?

GC: Well, I was in early grade school, I'd say. So, um, we moved up here in 1953. I would have been nine or ten. So, I must have been in first or second grade, maybe. But, next door to me were Bill and Bob Farwell. They were twins. And the thing I remember about Safeway is that they had huge celebration out in the parking lot, the grand opening, and they had a twins contest, and Bob and Bill won it. Maybe they won it because there weren't any other twins (laughs).

KL: (laughs) Right.

GC: but that sticks in my mind.

KL: A twins contest, huh? How interesting.

GC: Yes, well, it was. And there was this big flatbed truck, and all this stuff. I don't know-- that always stuck in my mind.

JC: It brought the community together.

GC: Well, yeah, it was. That's exactly what it was. At that time, the University had a dry zone. You couldn't sell any liquor, any beer or wine, within this dry zone. Well, just a block over where PC market is, used to be Irish and Swartz Market. Well, they were a block over, and they could sell beer and wine. And that's really probably why Safeway never made it.

KL: Interesting.

GC: Because whoever was the brains behind selling Safeway there, they built it on the wrong side of the street. (laughs). And then, next to Irish and Swartz they built the addition where

Hirons is at, and that was Tiffany Davis. And then they had another, just about when Safeway opened; they had a huge celebration like that, too, with the neighborhood coming in.

KL: Did your parents, or your mom, do their shopping down in that area?

GC: They shopped at Irish and Swartz. I think it had something to do with it not being national chain. Irish and Swartz was a local store; they had several stores around town. But I think that's the reason that they did that. We didn't shop at Safeway, although us kids all hung out at Safeway because we were able to eat grapes and nuts. And we sat there by the check stands by the news rack and the magazine rack was, and we read the comic books, until they chased us out, they ran us out of there. And then we would go across the alley to where the Harley Davidson motorcycle shop was at, and we'd hang out there, and we weren't allowed to do that either, and listen to all the guys talk; they were real colorful. And, well, the neat thing about it was that the City of Eugene brought their police motorcycles there, too, so we got to see the cops' motorcycles. That was cool.

KL: Did you guys walk everywhere? Did you bike everywhere? You had your skates, you said.

GC: Well, we didn't really bike much, it was mainly walked, and wagons, and trikes, at that age, and skates and stuff, down there. The bikes did not come until later. And really, we just about walked everywhere, even up in the University. We played up around there. Next to the Harley shop was a little mom-and-pop cafe, and it had counter service. We could sit on the stools, and that was really cool, to go in there and sit on those stools, and order a glass of water.

KL: (laughs) I'm sure they loved that.

GC: After they ran us out of the Harley shop, then we'd move next door, and have a glass of water.

KL: You guys sounded like a little pack. This is great.

GC: I started to write a little story here for the guy at the [Register] Guard, Welch, about the Moss Street kids, and I never got to it. But I think back on it now, and they must have thought, oh, God, here they come again.

KL: Did most of the houses up and down Moss Street have kids?

[GC: In my early grade school years my Moss Street universe was basically north of 15<sup>th</sup> street. It seems like we played with the kids on our block or the block across the street. As we got older it expanded to the area around the university. When we moved south to the 1900 block of Moss Street our universe expanded to Washburn and Hendricks Parks.]

GC: We did. It was really interesting. Probably from 19th street north, was more of a blue-collar working class area, and this side of the street up [south of 19th] and the way Fairmount wrapped around, was primarily where a lot of doctors lived. From 19th to 17th there were some college professors, but it was mainly blue-collar who lived in those areas. On the corner on 15th and

Moss, on the block where we lived, was the Highland House. That was a girls' sorority. It was a four-story building— huge, huge, out of place wood building there, and that's where our moms got the babysitters for us. It was usually in the Highland House, where we were dropped off. And so we had free run of this girls' dorm, all through there, and everybody ran around in their underwear. But for us, as kids, that didn't mean much then. I can remember panty raids going on, and stuff. All of this that we've talked about so far is just a two-block area.

KL: Right-- it's very rich.

GC: So, where the old Romania place was over there-- it used to be the Coca Cola plant. And that's where we would go by on our bicycles and snatch a Coke out of the trucks that were left there on the weekends. And I think back on that now. The Cokes were warm.

KL: (laughs) I was going to say, I'm sure they weren't refrigerated.

JC: I'm sure it had nothing to do with taste.

GC: And we felt so daring. And they knew you were doing it. You know they were the old-style trucks that were all open on the side. They didn't lock them up, or put them away.

GC: Where they are building the new dorm right now, used to be where Condon grade school was at. And that was torn down the year I started grade school. And so I went to what is now Condon Hall, which was Condon grade school, which before that used to be Roosevelt Junior High. And I was the first grade when it became Condon. And for about half of the year, we were in what you'd call now a portable classroom. And it was interesting because the building that we used for our classroom, I'm pretty sure, is, you know where the Lincoln Condominiums are, the old Lincoln grade school, and there's that building sitting on the corner?

KL: Oh, yes— yeah.

GC: I'm quite sure that that was the building that was there at Condon, at the time. I can't verify that, but it looks identical, and I kind of wonder, when they finished the work at the grade school, and they moved that out of there, if it went to Lincoln. Going to grade school there was really kind of neat, because you could walk home for lunch. My mom was a nurse, and she wasn't home, but we had Mrs. Farwell, the other person who watched us until our parents got home. And you could go there, and she'd have lunch for us, or we'd eat lunch at school sometimes.

KL: But sometimes you'd come home for lunch, or rather, go to the Farwell's for lunch?

GC: Yeah...Mrs. Farwell was just a remarkable lady. Dirt poor, but just didn't matter, she was just the best woman... you couldn't imagine what a nice neighbor she was for everyone in the area there. Things I remember at Condon were one teacher in particular was Mrs. Fredrickson, and I had her twice, and I think in the second grade and again in the fifth grade. It may have been the third and the fifth. But one of the reasons I think I liked her the best was that when the whole class got their spelling right, she took us up to the ice-cream store. Maybe the reason why I remember it so fondly is that we didn't get to go there that often (laughs).

KL: (laughs) Right.

GC: The ice cream store has been there...it was called Dell Hoff's when I went to grade school there. But I mean, it's been an ice-cream store as long as I can remember. That was a real treat, to do that. The other thing I can really remember is Mr. Logan, my sixth grade teacher, was a WWII vet, and he had a wooden leg. And, oooh, that was something.

JC: (laughs) And he shared it with you?

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GC: (laughs) Oh, he did. He not only shared it with us-- he lived on Villard; I think the house is vacant now - the second house south on the west side of the street from 17th. And he would invite us over, the whole class over, and he was just the neatest teacher. He had us over for a Halloween party one time. He was just the most personable teacher in getting us ready to go on to the big junior high, which was sort of a big transition. And he was just a super nice guy. Other than that, Condon was a lot different than the other grade schools. We didn't have sports. We had a principle, his name was Mr. Good, who would let you go out of sight, and swing, and play and stuff, but your group activities were square dancing and things like that. We didn't play softball or play stuff like that. And we were kind of made fun of, because of Edison; they had sports like that, they played sports like that.

JC: Did you have PE?

GC: Nope, no PE. We had things where we went to the gym and we did square dancing, and we did stuff like that. And the auditorium of Condon, because it used to be a junior high, had a basketball court in there. And lockers and everything, but we weren't allowed to do any of that.

KL: That's really interesting.

GC: Yeah, it was real strange, how the two schools were so different from each other [Edison and Condon]. (pause) All the kids in the neighborhood had a guinea pig.

KL: A guinea pig?

GC: Uh-huh. Or, ten or twenty guinea pigs.

KL: (laughs)

GC: Because the science lab at the university would give all of us kids free guinea pigs after they were done using them, much to our parents dislike. So used to go down to the Eugene Pet Corral and try and give our guinea pigs away. I remember that's how my brother John and I got a dog, was that it was an agreement that if we gave away and got rid of every single last guinea pig, we could have a dog. You would just almost get them all given away, and there would be another batch. I'm sure someone up at the science lab is still laughing about it.

KL: That's great. Great story.

GC: The other thing we used to do is that we'd go to the science lab and they would sell us chemicals. We would get all kinds of things, we would make all kinds of concoctions; I mean, you think about it now.... none of us got really hurt too bad. I remember Eugene Chen, his dad was a professor at the university, had a black powder cannon that they had brought over from China with them when they came, and he was named Eugene because he was born on a ship on his way coming to Eugene [ed. note: GC not sure of this]. He had this cannon that we would go out and play with in the yard, and we'd put the stuff in there, and we got the stuff up at the science lab. We all have our fingers still. [GC not sure if the story about his name is true.]

KL: (laughs) Right, and most of your hearing.

GC: And, I'm just kind of rambling.

KL: No, this is great; you're actually kind of covering it all— the local businesses, where you shopped, places in the neighborhood that you enjoyed...were there any places in the neighborhood where you avoided, that were spooky, or scary.

GC: Well, (laughs), Mrs. Taylor. Mrs. Potater, we used to call her. You know what, I don't know why she was so scary. But she would come out, and we'd take off running down the sidewalk. And I don't know why.

JC: What about the tunnels? Did you guys ever go in the tunnels?

GC: We did. That was another place we weren't supposed to go to. They were the steam tunnels, up at the university. And they had a lot of snakes and stuff in them. But that was cool. You could go in the steam tunnels and come up in the dorms. You could go and wrap around and actually come up in the library. And it was really kind of neat, because you could go along, and you could see light where there would be another grate, and you'd open it up, and back in those days, the grates all opened up-- they never kept them locked. I remember we'd go in and come up in Carson Hall.

JC: Did you get in trouble? Did they not want you to do that?

GC: They would tell you, "Hey, you guys, get out of there," but then we'd go over to the next grate, and open that one.

JC: And I bet your parents forbade you to do that, all right.

GC: Oh, that was like going to the Mill Race; we weren't supposed to do that.

JC: So, you'd get down in there, and just walk around in there?

GC: Well, you know, it's not as big as you think, but for kids, it was okay to get down in there and do that. And, it probably wasn't okay to get down there and do that.

KL: Do you have any memories you'd like to share about Washburne Park-- you mentioned a little about Washburne Park-- or Hendricks Park?

GC: Washburne Park was where we went in the neighborhood and we would play ball; at that time, Mrs. Washburne kept the pond full of water, and there was a caretaker who lived there who was just a super nice guy to all the kids and everything. It was a place where we went and caught frogs and tadpoles; we waded around; it was always the place that if you'd come back from the Mill Race and you'd come back wet and muddy, you could tell your parents that you'd been over to Washburne pond instead. "Well, then how come we saw you crossing Franklin?"

KL: (laughs) Took the long way home...

GC: "Well, I'd gotten wet and muddy before we went there." Anyways, it was also much brushier; it's real open now. So we had tunnels, and forts, and everything, all through all of that brush. And we could go in there, and play, for hours. Our parents had a bell they would ring, like an old school bell. Other parents had old cowbells, others would have whistles. All the parents had some different deal so that we could hear it over in Washburne.

JC: Really?

GC: Yeah. And if you ever heard your dad yelling at the top of his voice, you knew that you'd missed the bell. (pause) And the parents would come over and play softball and stuff with us. It was a really nice park. And I'm glad to see that the City does the concerts in the park, and the stuff like that. It's too bad that they can't somehow find the funding to get a wading pool back, because that was just a wonderful, wonderful area for the kids to play. And it was probably only this deep at the deep end [three feet] and the rest of it was real shallow.

KL: So, it was a pond when you were growing up, and when your kids were growing up, it was a little more formal wading pool?

GC: We didn't live in this area when the kids were growing up.

KL: Right, oh.

GC: So, we had the pond [wadding pool] at Fairmount, and the pond [wadding pool] over at University Park, but I don't think the City...but once the City had taken over, because of the liability, they drained it. They tried to put water in it for a few years, but something was wrong with the plumbing or something in it. But no, my kids, they never got to see it with the water in it.

KL: Did you guys make it up to Hendricks Park much?

GC: Well, Hendricks Park was a different story. We did [get up there]. Hendricks Park used to have a motorcycle climb; there's a real steep hill on the back, the scars are probably still on it. We used to go up there and watch them try and climb the hill on the motorcycles, and that was fun. The park also had a little, kind of a zoo; they had some elk, and some deer. But they also had Lovers' Lane up there. That was the place where we would go up on Saturday morning, because beer bottles were worth a penny; they were the only bottles Oregon had a deposit on. And we collected the beer bottles, and that was our money for the Saturday morning movie, the Saturday matinee at the McDonald. It was a dry zone—you couldn't drink around here— so the college students would all go up to Lovers' Lane and drink their beer and we'd go up there and collect the bottles and take them down to Irish and Schwartz and cash them in and get our 20 cents, 25 cents maybe, and go to the movie. Well, you stop and think, it was a penny a bottle; there were a lot of beer drinking up there.

JC: How did you get to downtown to McDonald's? Did your parents drive you, or would you take the bus?

GC: No, we would walk sometimes, or we would take the Fairmount bus. A lot of times, I'm thinking back, Mrs. Fitz would drive us too, sometimes, because she was the only woman in the neighborhood who drove. Mrs. Fitz was the only one, in her old Studebaker.

KL: That's great.

GC: Where Condon grade school used to be, where they're building the dorm right now. Condon, the one they torn down, had a basement. It was a big, two-story building, and it had a basement underneath it. And that sat vacant for a number of years. And that's where they did the homecoming bonfire. And the university used to have what they called a Noise Parade, leading up to the homecoming bonfire. And it started somewhere, it may have started downtown, but it started on the west side of campus, and it would come down Alder Street, down 13th Street, up University Street, and then down 18th and then on over to here, and that would be the lighting of the bonfire. Well, the Noise Parade, that consisted of flatbed trucks and all kinds of things with air compressors, steam generators, huge, huge circular saws that they would get from mills, they would be beating on them with pipes that would make noise, all kinds of noisy things. Well, it was finally discontinued, because people were losing their hearing, [the ones] that were in this parade.

KL: That's wild.

GC: But it was cool. It was really something. And then they would end up at the bonfire, and all week long, they would be getting scrap lumber from the mills; we had a gazillion mills around here then. And then just before they would light the fire, Friday night, Huntington Fuel, and the Huntingtons lived on Orchard Street, you know the big house?

KL: Right, someone else has mentioned that.

GC: Well, Huntington Fuel would come over and spray fuel all over it.... They would soak this thing with fuel oil, and then while the noise parade was going on, in several occasions, Oregon

State snuck down and set it on fire ahead of time. So that led to huge fraternity guards all around, and fights, and that was even cooler. Those were the things growing up, as a kid.

KL: I was going to ask about neighborhood celebrations, and I think that count— the Noise Parade. How about Christmas caroling, fireworks on the block?

GC: The house that used to be the UO day care center on 15th and Moss, that was the Harris's house; Lynn Harris, he was a local Realtor in town. And that's where— Halloween was the big celebration in the neighborhood, I think, that brought lots of the neighborhood together. And he would bring all the kids down into the basement and he had silent movie collections. And all night— we would run up to Fairmount here, and do our trick-or-treating, because you got the nickel candy bars. You went up and got your good candy bars, you came back there, and you went to his basement and watched movies. And the sorority and fraternity houses did a deal at the UO that they had for the kids, too, at Halloween, and that was always a nice celebration. And then in the summer time, the neighborhood used to get together, and us kids used to go to Safeway, when the watermelon truck would show up, and we would help unload the watermelons, and they would come up there, and guide you up on the truck, and you'd throw them out, and another guy would catch them, and then they'd put them in a shopping cart, and we'd wheel the shopping cart in and unload them on a conveyor belt that took them down to the basement and they'd put them away down there somewhere. Anyway, all of the watermelons that were cracked, they gave us, and we would come home with a shopping cart full of watermelons, and the whole neighborhood would come together and eat watermelon. No fixed date, because it was when the watermelon truck delivered. It was a neat deal. And I remember when we got television— we didn't have a station in Eugene-- and the little mom-and-pop grocery at 13th and Colombia went out of business, and it opened up as a TV specialty shop. Oooh, TV. And so, Dad had to have one; so we got a TV, and all the neighbor men came over, and they all assembled this huge water pipe— screwing water pipes together— with this massive antennae, way up, and the ropes coming down and everything. And the men would come over and watch the Friday night fights and the women would play canasta at our house, and I don't know what us kids would do; we would all be outside, because the men would all be in there, watching, and the women would all be playing cards; that was quite a social thing, for quite a while. And the kids would get together and watch Mr. Moon, from Portland-- did you used to watch that?

JC: Oh, yeah.

GC. It was really funny. The only station we could get was KOIN from Portland. The other thing that we did as the guys growing up here was Hayward Field was where they played football. And we would sell programs. And so it was a source of income for us. We could go there and get the programs and sell them to the people coming in the gate and make enough money then that we could do things. The same at Mac Court, up at the pit, we sold soft drinks and stuff- we went through the stands selling them. It was really employment for us kids in the neighborhood here. And we got a chance to do that. We also got to go to the football games as part of the Knothole Club.

KL: The Knothole Club?

GC: The Knothole Club. And we actually had a card, and it was called the Knothole Club, and you paid 25 cents for the card, and that let you get into a special nosebleed section in the end zone and watch the game, because all of us kids would get in there, and try to sneak in or peak into the fence, and I think it was like, peeking through a knothole or something, and that's why they called it the Knothole Club. It was kind of neat that we all got the opportunity, I guess. That was probably just for the kids at Edison and Condon; that was part of...

JC: Being good neighbors?

GC: Yeah, I think so. It probably was.

KL: Was there anything that you didn't like about growing up in this neighborhood?

GC: Well, there was a little bit of the elitist part between the doctor/lawyer/professor type and the blue-collar part, and you could see that, it was very evident in grade school, because there were two first grades, two second grades, two third grades; blue-collar kids in one class, other kids in the other class, all the way through. That, of course, stopped when you got to junior high, because you were all mixed in different classes. But it was very evident, through grade school, that there were the two different things. The other thing that we had at Condon was that all the time, we had all different student teachers, and different ideas tried on us. My age group, my class, they decided that they wouldn't teach us phonetics, so we had to go back in the third and fourth grade and take extra reading and spelling classes because we had never learned, and they kind of gave up on that, when my brother went to school. They tried a different math system on my brother, and then they had to abandon that, and go back. So, there were all these things that they were trying at the university, and they would come down and try on us.

KL: Do you have any other memories of your neighbors that you'd like to share? You spoke of the twins' mother...

GC: Well, it was interesting; there weren't all that many girls in the neighborhood. The one I talk about, of course, is Sandy Waning, and I think her sister, Barbara, either works at the PC market, or Tom's. She's, I think, five years older than I am, so I didn't know her as well, but I did Sandy. I'm trying to think who else was around. Bob and Bill, and Doug Fitz, lives in Newport now, Mike Perry is down in Brookings; I don't know of anyone else who's even around here anymore. [There were other kids, boys and girls but they were older or younger.]

KL: You've covered all these questions, which is great... Were there any conflicts that divided people, or issues that brought them together, growing up? You mentioned the class thing...

GC: You know, the class thing, I don't even know if we were aware of that until late in life. That didn't even dawn on us; I don't think that even dawned on me until our grandkids were going to school, and we were talking...what kind of brought that up was that our granddaughter was having a hard time in grade school with reading, because so much time was being spent on English as a second language, and she was falling further and further behind in her reading, and that brought me back thinking about what we had done when we were in grade school, and how I

had to go back and take the extra reading classes, and everything. As far as the neighborhood, I don't recall any real divisions. Although, the big division for me was when I got into Roosevelt, and there was really a huge difference as far as friends went, and as far as knowledge level, between the kids in Edison and Condon. It was like the kids from Condon were way behind, the kids from Edison. And it surprises me somewhat, because of the make-up of the people who lived along the Fairmount area—the doctors and the professors and such. And maybe that's just my classes that I was in in Condon; maybe the other class did better. I don't know. And then the big outstanding thing, once we got to junior high, was how much more developed the boys were in their physical skills, and sports, and everything, because they had had that all through grade school, and we hadn't had that at all. That was just a real eye opener.

KL: I'm sure. That's interesting. We've heard a few stories about the proximity to the university, as a kid, and how's that affected you. Anything else you'd like to add to that?

GC: Oh, the university? I didn't go full time to the university, I didn't graduate; I can't believe that, growing up here, that I didn't. Well, that was the other part of the thing, was that the blue-collar kids were channeled to the vocational (college); we were a huge timber mill industry; I went to school for technical drafting, and structural engineering, designing mill equipment. That isn't a degree that you get at the University of Oregon. So, you were kind of channeled in those directions, early on.

KL: Is that what's now Lane Community College?

GC: It is now; it then became Lane Community College. It was called Eugene Technical Vocational School at the time. It was a great school. When I went there, we had to take classes that had to be transferable to Oregon State, not the University of Oregon. Growing up on the campus—we took advantage of so many things that were there, just because we were in the neighborhood. There was the fine arts museum, which is now called the Schnitzer, and it was just so cool for us kids because there was all of the Asian art stuff in there, and the koi ponds, and all of that stuff that was available. The library was just a fabulous resource for looking stuff up. When we got old enough that we had to do reports and everything, we wouldn't go down to the Eugene library, we'd go to the university library. And in addition to that, they had these cool elevators that you could ride in. They were elevators that you stepped in a hole and it would take you up; you used to see them in mills and stuff; I mean OSHA-- I'm sure there aren't any around anymore. There was just a belt that just kept going, and there would be a little hand thing that came out, and you just stepped in there and grabbed a hold, and it would take you to the next floor, and you'd hop off. And we'd get kicked clear out of the library, when they'd catch us doing that.

JC: Was the university a good neighbor?

GC: Well, I think they were. I think they seemed to have been a good neighbor. Everything was open to the neighborhood, at the time. We could go in, like I say, we could go in the library; there was at the time, there was a men's and a women's swimming pool. We could go use the swimming pool because the only other pool at the time was the Jefferson pool over by the fairgrounds. If we wanted to go swimming, it was summertime, and we had to walk all the way

to Jefferson, because there weren't any buses that went out that way. It wasn't until probably maybe the eighth grade that Amazon pool was built. Eighth or ninth grade, maybe. The Y happened when I was in the seventh grade. That's when the Y came, with a pool. But those were nice areas, where we could go, at least go swimming. And of course the Mill Race, they had the canoe shack, and all that stuff we did down there. On the other side of the physical plant of the university, there was a hobo jungle, between the railroad tracks and the river, and we used to go down and visit with the hobos and stuff, and we'd even get in more trouble when they heard about that. But there wasn't drugs and stuff like that; they were people who traveled the rail. It was a place where they stopped; I guess the train slowed down there. It was like going to the Harley Davidson shop, and listening to the guys talk and their stories there. We'd go down there and you'd hear these fabulous tales, of other places where they'd hopped on the train, and "and you got to be really careful when you hop on the train going south, because one of them goes to California, and one goes to Cottage Grove, and Ashland, and Medford. We used to say "boy, how will we know which train to go on?" like we were going to do that, someday. (laughs)

KL: (laughs) Right, hop a train to California. (pause) Now that you guys are back, do you still use the university? The museums, things like that?

GC: Well, we have. The museum that I think we've liked is the natural history one. We did an outdoor play up; we've done that. The track meets here are just unbelievable. And I'm a track fan. I went to the NCAA trials when they had them here, and I got to see Pre run; I was a Pre fan. I still am in disbelief about all of that. Those were really the days where they played football here, and the track still kind of keeps that alive. Oh, I know the other thing I was going to tell you. Where the law school is, that used to be veterans' housing.

KL: I've heard about this; the Quonset huts.

GC: Well, they weren't Quonset huts; Quonset huts are kind of dome shaped. They were built out of...they were 12 by 12, and they were built out of three sheets of plywood, each way, and eight foot tall. They were there, and then they were on the north side of 15th, just east of Agate, was another set of them. We used to go down and just terrorize the people down there, too. Under the kitchen sink there was a door that would open from the outside, just like your door under your kitchen sink, and so we would sneak in and open the door and we'd rattle the pots and pans. And we'd shut the door and take off. (laughs) We were nice kids.

KL: (laughs) Right, just looking for something to do.

GC: And behind the fire station down there, there was a laundry facility. And I think it might still be there—the one the university uses. That was the laundry for all of the veterans' housing there. We would go in there—because it was warm—it would be cold and rainy out, so we'd go in there and warm up, and stuff.

KL: Another little stop?

GC: Another little stop. And another neat stop would be to stop by the fire station and visit with the firemen and all that stuff. We probably had a circuit we made. We wore ourselves out.

KL: That would be a fun map.

JC: Do you suppose the businesses would allow kids to do some of those similar things now?

GC: I think, with OSHA regulations, would not allow [it]; there's no way that you'd get into the bakery, or the boat shop.

JC: A lot of things have been lost.

KL: I was thinking about that; my kids and I do things like that, but we set up tours. It's very formal. But it's not just like-- well, they're not old enough yet-- but it's not like a pack of friends doing it.

GC: You were asking if the university was a good neighbor then, and I think it was a much better neighbor then than they are now. Well, when they bought our house out, and we moved up here, they were never going to cross 15th Street. And then they were never going to cross 17th Street. And now they're out, well, they're up to 19th street, except for the first row of houses, I think. What bothers me about them not being a good neighbor is that I totally understand that they need to buy property and get it while it changes, but then they don't do any maintenance on it, and they let it deteriorate to the point where they can say, well, it's not cost effective anymore, let's tear it down. And that's not a good neighbor. There's a shortage of housing, and these are period houses, which deserve some type of preservation. And it would be wonderful housing for students to live in. And I can't believe that the university does this, just poor, poor management. It's probably is good management from their budgetary standpoint, but it's not good management for a neighborhood. I worry a little bit about this side of 19th Street. When we decided to move back here, for, oh 25 years, there were no kids on this street. Other than Hoffmeisters up here. The Hoffmeisters had some younger kids. All of the families had moved away. There were older people here, like my parents and the Senn's, but there weren't any kids left anymore. There were no young families. Well, when we were coming down and visiting Mom, all of a sudden there was a resurgence of families in the neighborhood, and that's what made me think it would be a nice area to move back into. And I hope that the university expansion and all of this doesn't do away with the part up here.

I don't think the rentals are necessarily a bad thing. But they need to do something, somehow or another, to get the family presence back in. A little mixed use. Typically, the students who are going are younger, they haven't started a family yet; they're only there a year or two, and then they're gone. So they don't really become part of the community. And I don't know how you—you can't discriminate in housing, but how do you encourage families to move in. The university used to have— well, they still do, over on Patterson, across from Roosevelt, used to be university housing for families.

KL: Mmm hmm, and there's actually a little place, on Villard on the other side from us, on the west side, that is student housing for families, as well.

GC: So, the university just rents to people with families [there]?

KL: Mmm hmm, and it's a new building; it's nice; we have some friends down there, and they're there for four or five years— it takes them a little bit longer to finish. But I think mostly it's [the neighborhood] is pretty unaffordable for younger families.

GC: We built an apartment above our garage, and we rent that out to law students. It's been very nice. Law students are serious, and we don't even know he's there. And we keep the rent low, because don't have a lot of turnover then; and it's basically passed on at the law school from one student to the next.

KL: I bet; I'm sure it's quite a find.

GC: They just walk down the alley to the law school. Maybe it gives me a little more feel or tie to the university.

KL: I don't want to keep you, but if you could just talk a little bit more about any challenges the neighborhood might face.

GC: As far as challenges go, one of the big issues is probably going to be parking. And access to the neighborhood. I went to a City meeting and came away so dismayed with how the City handled the meeting with the Walnut Street node and how the access is going to be handled into this part of the neighborhood. Once that node and the traffic revisions are done, only the two places to gain access into the neighborhood from Franklin are going to be Walnut and Agate. When you have a big activity, you're pretty much trapped here, with having to go down to 24th, and go west to some side street to get out of here, and I tried to discuss this with the city planners, and they were having a public meeting down at the library, and the transportation planner stood up and told me that "years ago, there only used to be stop signs, and now we have traffic lights." Didn't he?

JC: Well, his point was, it's progress, and you have to deal with it.

GC: Well, guess what? I lived here before there were stop signs.

KL: (laughs)

GC: I think those are going to be the issues that we're going to see. I would be real excited to see the Walnut Street node happen in my lifetime, and see some revitalization, particularly on the north side of Franklin through there, where the businesses are; see something better happen with those properties. As far as that goes, I'd really like to see the Glenwood area redeveloped, particularly take advantage of the setting along the river. And make it more user friendly, where you could have access along the river, and have some type of establishments that could take advantage of the river atmosphere, rather than the light industrial type stuff now.

KL; Any other information that you'd like to share, or stories?

GC: Well, I've got a picture of this house, back when there was a boardwalk sidewalk. I'll show it to you.

JC: And you've probably seen the pictures of the trolley cars.

KL: I've seen some of them. (pause) I have seen this one.

JC: Those are really neat, I think, to think that the neighborhood was once served by trolley cars.

GC: Well, I remember, before--- well, the street car lines are still out there-- and I can remember their being there before they were paved over.

KL: (gives a little background on the history project)

GC: (shows the photo of the house) The Pikes built this house, and there are two more, identical to it, over on Columbia, and Beppe and Gianni's is the fourth one, and that was remodeled into that [a restaurant]. And Pike, who we bought the house from-- we're the second family to live in this house. I always say that we were the first tract houses in Eugene.

KL: (laughs) Right...do you know which year the house was built?

GC: I don't. We were doing a garage sale here, and the grandson or great-grandson of Pike came by and gave me this photo. His last name is Spear. He still lives here in town, nine or ten years ago.

JC: So you don't know which year this house was built?

GC: Oh, I do, too; it's a hundred years old, this year [2010]. It was built in 1910.

KL: Do you think you could send that photo to me, since you already have it digitally? (pause) Are those fruit trees, behind the house?

GC: This whole area here was cherry orchard. All through here, down where we used to live in 1452 Moss; all these streets were cherry trees, down through here. And you go down Colombia Street side, at least from 15th to 13th, must have been an old apple orchard, because it was just full of apple trees. Oh, that's another Halloween story; I want to say her name was Elliot; she gave away apples for Halloween-- and this will blow your mind, too-- and she injected them with dye. So, it was such a cool thing, to go there, and bite into an apple, and not know what color you were going to get. "What color did you get?"

KL: Well, thank you guys, both so much, for taking the time to do this. [Unrelated talk about KL's background]

End of October 19, 2010 Interview with George Currin

Transcribed by Katherine Lieberknecht

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