

LANDMARKS SOCIETY ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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Transcription of Taped Oral History

SIDE A

Narrator: Chris Morrison

Interviewer: Jeanne Ortalda

Date: Sept. 7, 2000

This is an oral history tape for the Landmarks Oral History Program. My name is Jeanne Ortalda and I am going to interview Chris Morrison who will be the narrator. The interview is held at 78 Main St. in the Phillips Library on Sept. 7, 2000.

Chris, will you tell when you first came to Belvedere and about your life in your early years in Belvedere?

Ok. Here's what we'll be covering: 1956 to 1962 and we moved here from southern California. My parents bought a house up on Beach Rd. The address was 288 Beach Rd. and they paid \$17, 500 for it then. And it was beach front with a spare lot on the side and a mother-in-law unit which my father built in about 1957. And Joyce Wilson, a school teacher who was famous at Reed School for years and years, was our tenant.

My first school experience was out at the Marin Country Day School where I went to nursery school. Do you know why it was called Marin Country Day School?

No.

Because it was in the country! And on the back side of Tiburon there were absolutely no houses back there and there was this little school out in the country and the bus came to pick us up at the house and take us over there.

What was the address of this school? What street was it on?

It's still there; on Paradise Drive.

Then, after that, we went to Belvedere School. My brother, Kevin Morrison, and my sister, Daren Morrison, the three of us went to school on Laurel Ave. to the Belvedere School.

Was your brother older than you?

Kevin was two years older and Daren is four years older.

It was an interesting town back then. Imagine a six year old being able to walk out of his house and up the stairs and walk about a mile down to the Boardwalk Shopping Center with a little bag of pennies and go into Arnold's new Corinthian Pharmacy and he had a bank of old gumball machines that were a penny each (I think some were a nickel). And I think one of my favorite memories was - inside those gumball machines were little Japanese lighters about a half inch high and a quarter inch wide and they really worked!

Cigarette lighters?

Cigarette lighters. For kids! They were miniatures. People complain today about cigarettes being bad for kids. Imagine that! So we'd go down there and spend all our money. They'd put one at the top, but they didn't know that we'd saved all our pennies and hit the machine all at once. My brother and I would drain the machine so we could get the lighter. At a garage sale about five years ago I was able to buy two of them.

How much did you have to pay?

About a dollar each, I think. We took those lighters home, borrowed our parents' lighter fluid, opened up the back with a dime, put the lighter fluid in there and it already had the flint and we had a little lighter we could play with. [Laugh] I might add in here that during the time between 1956 and 1962 they had the lowest arson rate in Belvedere. And the reason being was (we heard through the grapevine) that one of the boys had set a fire up on Belvedere and burned some open land and Bunk Mersereau, who was the old-time volunteer fire chief,

tough as nails, arrived at the scene, put the fire out. The boy had been caught and was standing there and Bunk walked over to the young man and he said, "Young man, have you ever seen a fire burn twice?" And the boy said, "No". "Well, let me show you." and he took the boy's matches that he had and he lit the match and he blew it out and he stuck it on the boy's hand. And the boy screamed and then word got all over town about this incident. And as far as I can remember there were no incidences of our little lighters or of arson after that in Belvedere. And I bet we had the lowest arson rate in the State. And that was a true story; Bunk was a tough guy.

Perhaps you'd just like to tell about various people that you knew and I'll just listen.

Louis Soldavini worked for the Public Works for Belvedere. I guess he started during the Depression some time. In the thirties. I knew him probably since I was three years old. In 1956, when we moved there, he used to run the street-cleaner up and down the island and we would follow the street-cleaner for sometimes half an hour and pick up the little metal brush pieces. I hate to tell you what we used to do with those [Laugh]. They were sharp on one end and flat on one-sixteens of an inch and stainless steel about six inches long. And we would collect those like kids collect Pokemon cards now. Your status around town was how big a sack you would have. One day Louis made the mistake of parking the street cleaner right next to Belvedere school and the kids went in there and plucked his street cleaner like a turkey. [Laugh] I don't think he ever knew that; I'll have to tell him that. We used to follow the street cleaner and (oh gosh) about every fifty yards we'd find one and collect them. We'd take a rubber band and hook it on the top of one to the other. Some were sharp and some were just flat. So, we'd take the flattest one to make the bow with the rubber band and then we'd take the sharp one and play bow and arrow with it. And we'd pick a target about five feet way and I'm telling you, those things would go through - they'd stick into wood. And nobody got hurt but it was another dangerous episode.

Our neighbor was Mrs. Huntington. I remember going over and seeing this stately old woman sitting in a chair. We'd go over there every so often and visit her because the yards of our houses were actually joined. Our pathway went into her pathway and then we'd be on the property. And I became friends with

her son, John Huntington, who just recently died in later years and she was a very interesting lady. She never married and adopted two children from England. I think it was John and Anne. They had this huge house with just beautiful gardens. At the house which is there now, the yard is less than half of the original size.

Do you know the address?

We were at 288 Beach Rd; that would be 290? The house has just been put on the market probably for three to five million dollars. [Laugh] I was invited to a party there about a year ago. It's a beautiful home; it's all custom-made like a ship's cabin upstairs.

And on the other side we had the O'Connors and they had lived there for years and their family members still live in town.

It was a very interesting neighborhood; everybody looked out for everyone else. If I was walking down Beach Rd. to go to school, one of the other moms would pick me up even if it was one we didn't know. Neighbors would pick us up and bring us back. So we walked to school almost every day and then once in awhile my mother would take us if it was raining or something and we would pick up kids along the way. Part of the traffic problems on Tiburon Blvd. now are caused by parents taking one child to school; there's no carpooling anymore. Then, our car was absolutely full by the time we got to the bottom of the hill.

There were no seat belts in those days.

Jam them in there. And everybody got along and took care of everyone else. It's kind of too bad, you know, the worries about being kidnapped and things like that. Polly Klaus changed this town because people, and rightfully so, have to watch out for their kids.

It was pretty amazing. The only place we absolutely couldn't come down to was Main St., Tiburon, because all the businesses that were kind of people-oriented, hardware store, grocery market and Arnold Vasa's [drugstore] all moved over to the Boardwalk. And so, Main St. was kind of seedy with bars and the railroad workers would come over and get drunk and soldiers would come over from the Presidio and start a fight. It's kind of funny that some people ask me, as an old

time resident in town, "What was Main St. Like?" and I have only one or two memories. My first restaurant meal was at Tiburon Tommie's. And Tommy Cox was a part owner with Johnny Wong. And my first time there was about 1957. When we used to come down there for dinner, there was a man there who sat at the front of the restaurant on a bar stool and he looked like Salvadore Dali and his name was The Professor. His mustache came out four inches on either side of his face. And he would greet people there. And what was interesting, if we hadn't been there in a year or so and then came back, he'd say "Oh, hi, Chris. How are you doing?" and "How's your modeling kit going?" "Oh, and how are you doing, Keith" "And Daren?" He had a photographic memory. We moved away in 1962 and then came back in 1966 and went to Tiburon Tommie's after four years and he remembered us. He was instrumental in keeping that place packed. Everybody loved The Professor. If you didn't get there early for dinner that restaurant had a line down the street to get in there. They had both floors going. The waiters that worked there for 30 years became good friends of mine; very interesting place. Other than that, we were banned from Main St. I don't remember walking down there by myself even once. It wasn't until I was in high school that I ...

But you could still go over to the Boardwalk?

Oh, absolutely. Or anywhere on Belvedere Is. I would go to stay with friends at age seven and walk home in the early morning with my suitcase. With my toys in my suitcase. Nothing ever happened. If a burglary happened on the island, it became huge news. I remember walking home one day with my sister (I guess this was about 1959) and we walked on the back side of Barn Rd. where the old fire department was. It was abandoned at that time and there was a ramp up the back where the fire engine would come out. A little ramp and then inside was a garage where they kept all their equipment. We walked by there one day and I looked up there and there was a pile of wallets. About seven or eight wallets just piled in a pile. My sister walked over and opened them up and there was no money but I.D. cards and everything. Evidently, a pickpocket had gone over to the City and had been driven back to Belvedere or came over on the ferryboat, the commuter boat, had picked pockets all day in the City, came back and took the money out and dumped them right there. We called the police and it was a big news story. And our house was broken into about that same time. And

several others on Beach Rd. It had been the first burglary in years. They never caught the guy. He just rumaged through the downstairs and took a few things. That was a big news story. Because, literally, we had no locks on the doors.

When was that?

About 1959 - 60. Soon after that we started putting locks on the doors. The little nail lock that you could screw in and put it on the bottom. Because a lot of the old keys - our house was built in 1892 and it was a McLean house. An interesting sideline was that my great uncle, Oscar Olson, worked for the McCleans about 1917 doing electrical installations on the homes up on Belvedere Island. Before he died, he told me a fun story; they would gauge what time they could come over here, in 1917, by the tides because you could get across Beach Rd. at low tide or medium tide but at high tide or if there was a storm, you'd have to come over by boat. And he always thought that was funny. That was his little side job - putting in electrical installations. And two years later he was drafted and was on Angel Is. for a few months.

But, back to Belvedere - I have a few other memories of Main St.: Rooney's Cafe used to be called Christopher's.

Is that the same Christoher's that used to be across Main St.?

No. They were from Texas. No relationship. I remember having brunch at Christopher's [Rooney location] at an early age with a famous cabaret singer named Mabel Mercer. She was pretty big in the 50s and friend of my parents. My parents were kind of Bohemian types.

It's very interesting. Beach Rd. was not like people who would be reading this transcript would think it was. Inexpensive homes that used to be summer homes back in the 1890s and 1900s had kind of fallen out of favor; they were maintenance traps. People really didn't want them. It's hard to believe but people would move here, get a job in the City, come over to Belvedere, look at a few homes and say, "No way". The hills are too hard to walk up and down. So then they'd move to Terra Linda and, for about the same price, buy an Eichler home in Terra Linda. When we first moved here, Dave Allen met my father who said we were interested in that old Victorian up on the Island and Dave said, "You'd be much better off on the Belvedere Lagoon. We'll build you a house; I

can sell you a lot for \$5,000 and can build you a house for about another \$15,000. And my Dad said, "Well, we really like this house up there." And Dave said, "But there's a lot of stairs up there." "Oh, well, we like it" So they ended up buying the old Rotchy house at 288 Beach Rd. And it was a mess. It hadn't been lived in years. The windows were broken out. My father did a lot of repair work. But Dave Allen never let him forget that. He said, "You really got yourselves over-extended on it." Which they did because the fixing up was just horrendous. I think there's 112 stairs from the top [street] down; we were almost at beach level.

An interesting sideline: we went to this famous children's doctor in Los Angeles in [probably] 1960 for a check-up. And he gave a physical for each one of us and he came back to my parents and he said, "I have never seen such leg development in three children in all my life. I have looked at over 2,000 children and your kids are like track stars. What's going on here? And my mother said, "Well, there's a 112 stairs and they go to school. And when I got home we had groceries to take out of the car. And so when you add that up, with the kids helping with the groceries, one trip up the stairs, one trip back and then another trip up to get the groceries in the evening. And then we'd go play with friends. Sometimes we'd make six trips. I was talking with a doctor the other day and they're doing a study on people who lived on hills in Sausalito and they're finding out that they live healthily to a ripe old age. They've got a lot of people in their late 90s like Vera Stump who used to be the Spanish teacher at Tam High. She was a friend of mine; she just died last year at age 99. She got the flu and didn't take the flu shots; that kind of did her in. She was strong and in perfect health. It's good to live on a hill.

Other things we did up there: we did a lot of beach combing. We'd take hours and hours and go the whole length of Belvedere Is. all the way down to the San Francisco Yacht Club. And beach comb and bring back driftwood. My sister even found these Japanese floating glass balls from fishing nets because the tides come in here. It's very rare that you'd find that. I think she found two or three; I never found any glass balls. We found a raft that had been thrown off one of the freighters that they were bringing in the Golden Gate. They used to bring them right through the pass here; right between Angel Is. and Tiburon. These old World War II derelicts, the staff that would be on there cleaning up and throwing them off would throw C-rations and stuff as they were coming in. So this stuff would be floating up and we'd find C-rations from the Korean War

with the date on them and some of them from 1946 - these little bread things float. Soldiers would not eat those. I talked to a few of them and they said it was the worst bread they ever tasted; it tasted like gasoline. But we'd find them on the beach and collect them. We had a little collection of C-rations and floats and other things; it was sort of like Robinson Crusoe. We had forts up in Mrs. Huntington's yard that she didn't know about. We had all this stash. There's a breakwater in front of Mrs. Huntington's house that when I give tours on the ferryboat and we go around Belvedere Is. I mention, "See that blank area there? Well, my sister and I and my brother were out with a hammer one day and we broke open one of those rocks and these were breakwater rocks that were brought down the Sacramento River. We opened it up and it was a beautiful crystal. I'm ashamed of that [laugh] the next few months we got sledge hammers and little hammers and we worked on that like a Sing Sing rock pile. There's a fifteen foot area across that beach that is completely broken down. We broke these boulders that would be the size of a large chair; 3 feet by 3 feet. And we broke them down into little pieces, collected the crystals and brought them back to our house and made a rock garden.

Was that quartz crystal? Did you find any gold in them?

No gold but there was fool's gold (which we thought was gold) and quartz and pyrite and to this day I'm still a rock collector but it's kind of funny, you go along the beach there - lucky it didn't cause any erosion or anything - there's a 10 to 15 foot section in front of 290 Beach Rd. that 's just estimated. It's gone! [laugh]

But I have a sad story. As a five year old and six year old, I would set out to the beach there and, in different seasons, watch the birds fly in and I'll tell you without exaggerating, the sky would turn black when they came through the pass. And they'd fly right through there. I don't know if they were mallards or the ducks that you would see out at Richardson Bay. They're less now but, depending on the time of year, they would just fill up Richardson Bay. I'm telling you the sky turned black and you'd just sit there and the Canadian geese and birds would fly and you'd just sit there and all day long there'd be just millions of them. I'm not a big ecologist but I'm becoming one. I've joined the Audubon Society; I'm on their advisory board. We are in big trouble. The Bay is as clean as it has ever been. You can see down three to four feet now but it is more toxic

than ever. And the fish are gone. And the shells are gone. And the starfish are gone. These are things that people don't [know]. Only someone who grew up on that beach - for six years I knew where all the starfish were. The periwinkles, the coolie-hat shells were all over the rocks. There was an amazing array of starfish; different colors from purples to blues to dark reds were all on the pilings at low tide. You would fish and always catch fish. Smelt, rock cod within a few minutes of putting a line in. And that's all gone. I talk to people who fish on Elephant Rock now and they'll be there for hours before they get anything. And the selenium levels are outrageously high. I talked to one of the directors out at the fisheries and they're coming out with a report about the rock cod population in the Bay and along the coast; it's been devastated.

You wouldn't want to eat the fish with all that selenium.

No. I won't eat anything in the Bay now and that's sad because people would go fishing and bring fish back and cut them up and fry them. There was an abundance of sea life and birds and that's all gone. People just kind of missed it and it totally disappeared. People move in and everything else suffers.

What about seals? We counted about fifteen on Sunday.

Now that's interesting because I don't remember seeing a lot. Occasionally one would come in. And I think the seal population is way up. And the sardines are back. And they were fished out. In the 1950s the Bay was pretty toxic with raw sewage coming from Treasure Is. and the Navy ships. They just dumped raw sewage in. The houseboats in Sausalito were all dumping sewage in. The Bay was brackish and the sardines and some of the fish didn't survive. At that time they were fished out. The shrimp population, too. We used to get shrimp that was washed up. Live shrimp. So certain segments disappeared and now they are coming back. But the overall fish population is way down of the larger fish. But, hopefully, people are working to fix this up so maybe in ten years we'll get our fish back.

Do you have some more stories to tell about your life in Belvedere?

Early memories. One night I was awakened by my parents and came up into the living room where we had a beautiful view from the San Francisco Yacht Club all the way over to Angel Is. And out in the midst near Corinthian Is. was this huge yacht. I don't know the size of it, but over 50 ft. sailing vessel that had caught fire. And the brave captain started the motor up while the fire was going, took the yacht full speed ahead and landed it right on the beach next to the breakwater on Beach Rd. right where the breakwater starts for the yacht club. There's a house there. He hoped the fire department would come and I think they were there but the flames coming out of that fire I remember as clear as if it were yesterday. It lit up the whole sky; it was beautiful. A huge ship and it burned to the ground. I don't think anybody was killed or anything. Back then there were a lot of boat fires, it seems; I remember at least two or three. The fires that start in these little motor launches and the engines would blow up. It was not as safe then as it is today.

This is another memory: I remember getting up late at night one night and the Air Force had announced that they were going to launch a missile from Angel Is.. A Nike missile.

What year was that?

I don't know. I'm thinking it had to be around 1957, 58 or 59. Somewhere in there. And they launched one and it went right in between Corinthian Is. and Belvedere up and out to somewhere near the Farallons. Obviously no missile in it but it was an experiment. I remember going out and watching it. We had the binoculars and we could see the flame. This was the time when the space race was going on with the Russians about 1960. So that was exciting seeing the missile trail. But I've talked to a lot of people in town and nobody remembers it! The people on Angel Is. should know about that; we should check.

I've always liked Angel Island. One of the reasons we moved up here was my Dad had a school boat, a converted sub-chaser and he brought his class, the sea-students, up on that boat in 1948, came into Tiburon and moored over at Angel Is. He saw how beautiful it was and that was one of the reasons we moved here. My grandfather was a major in World War II and was Inspector-General for the hospitals on the West Coast and came to Angel Is. with my grandmother in 1944-45. And my great-uncle whom I mentioned, Oscar Olsen, was drafted and I had a tape of him and his experience on Angel Is. in 1918-19.

It was a kind of interesting family history. But that's how we came to be moving back here in 1956. And at that same time, Gordon Getty and I think his brother's name was Paul - the old man Getty decided he was going to teach his two sons, that were living with their mother in San Francisco, (They both married and I guess [were] in their twenties) - he wanted to bring them into the business. So he bought each one of them a home in Belvedere right down the street from us. We were at 288 Beach Rd. so I guess, 160 Beach Rd. And Paul had the other house; I don't know where that was. For both sons, the father built a gas station, a Flying A gas station right out where First Nationwide Bank is or used to be. So where you turn off of [Hwy] 101 onto Tiburon Blvd. where the bank building is there now, it'd be right to the right. That was the gas station; it was a custom-built gas station. J.Paul Getty built that for his sons. And they were there for about a year. My father was a student at San Francisco State and a janitor for the phone company, a part-time job. And he had a phone company truck and he would stop in there and gas it up and made friends with Gordon Getty. I remember being in the car and having this future billionaire coming out and wiping our windows down in his uniform and gassing our car up for us and saying, "Hi, how are you?" Because we were neighbors! He gave my father a credit card that my father had for years and years. It was so funny; we would travel across country and my dad would pull this card out and give it to them at the station and they'd about faint. We found out later that this card that Gordon had gotten him was a corporate card. Not like corporate cards today; this belonged to the Board of Directors! The owners! It had a little secret star on it that says, this is a VIP; take care of him. So we would get the golden treatment. I don't know who the young man was, I guess it was Paul Getty; his son was my age, the one who got his ear cut off and all the problems. Kidnapped. We played with him as a child a few times because they were next door neighbors. They were just there a short time and I think he moved them on to some other business area. It was kind of interesting, the Gettys living in Belvedere. Very nice man, Gordon.

Oh, I wanted to mention the root-beer bust. It was a huge civic event put on by the Belvedere Volunteers.F

Belvedere Fire Department?

Belvedere Volunteer Fire Department. It was a big party for kids they would have every year and they would give free Crackerjacks and free root beer. And the lines for that lineup was a hundred kids long. Maybe longer. Then upstairs where the Belvedere City Hall is now, they would show movies which was a big deal. Smokey the Bear movies and they would have some contests. It was a payoff every year to tell the kids how to behave and we all heard the Bunk story. And Jimmy Rey who was with the Volunteer Fire Dept. (Jane Rey's brother) I remember on numerous occasions (we'd go to every year this root-beer festival) he'd come up and tell us all to shut up and he'd start the projector. Belvedere had a wonderful fire-prevention [program] with tough-guy Bunk Mercereau running it and burying people's palms. And then this big payoff with the root beer bust. And they did that for years and years. And all the fire talk and talking about safety.

That's why it was so safe up there; everybody knew [about fire safety].

It was a great program and it needs to be noted.

Did you say that the fire department used to be where Belvedere Community Hall is now? Didn't it use to be a church?

Yes. It was a Presbyterian church and they moved that down and built the lower part of the building and put the fire department below. The church hall was used upstairs. I don't remember it being for city meetings but I guess it was. They kept renovating it and fixing it up. The whole downstairs was for the volunteer fire department.

They had the big fire engines in there?

Oh, yes.

How long did that last?

When they disbanded the fire department, I don't know when that was. Maybe 20 years ago? I remember in later years we had this fire cart that the Tiburon Volunteers claimed belonged to them and then Belvedere had the fire cart. It

kept going back and forth but Belvedere had it for years. And then they'd play a baseball game and Tiburon would win it and Belvedere would get it back. One day, I guess it was about 1976, Tiburon had had it for quite awhile so a couple of Belvedere Volunteers and a few friends, we decided to go over there and steal it back. . I came up with the idea. They had the cart out in the back of the fire department where the playing field was. Right next to the fire department was the Laundromat. At eight o'clock the firemen were having a barbeque, so we snuck around. We thought we'd make an attempt to steal it and they'd chase us off and that would be the end of it. We brought the Jeep over. We walked around to the back, the cart was just sitting there, five Tiburon firemen were at the barbeque with their backs turned. I looked at the other guys, "We can get away with it!" So we lifted [the cart] over the curb and quietly snuck it around the side of the Laundromat and walked it across Tiburon Blvd. where we had the Jeep over by Mantegani's old market, hooked it up and at about five miles an hour towed that back and they didn't see anything. [Laugh] It took us about ten minutes to get it back to Belvedere. We pulled out a fire engine, put the hose cart in the back of the garage, put the fire engine in front, shut the door, turned the lights out and laughed like crazy. Then we went home. I lived down San Rafael Ave. about a block away from the fire department. So I walked home and closed my door. At the exact moment my door closed, I heard a truck coming around the corner with about eight guys in the back of a pickup truck going about 40 miles an hour, ripping up to the fire department to find out where their hose cart was. And I didn't tell them who stole it. For twenty years. About a year or so ago I told them what had happened. And they were thoroughly embarrassed. They got it back, I think, on the next year's baseball game. The hose cart now is in the front of the fire department on display and they built the building around it so nobody can steal it again. It's in their front lobby.

We did have a fire over on the west side of West Shore on Belvedere Is. I'm a little sketchy on this but I think it was the Hobbs' fire. A lady had been smoking in bed and the fire started and Mrs. Hobbs burned up in bed. The fire department went over there, they had pulled out the body and a newspaper reporter from San Francisco with one of those big old cameras they used to have in the fifties with the flash, put the camera right at the charred body and took a picture while they were taking her out on the stretcher. Bunk Mercereau turned around (he was an ex-boxer, a bare-knuckle boxer, so strong you couldn't believe his strength; when he shook your hand it's hurt for days). He took this

guy up by the back of his belt and the back of his neck and with his camera walked over to the edge and threw him off this ten foot cliff into the Bay. With his camera. And that was another famous Bunk story. And because of what the photographer had done, he got away with it. And he did the right thing. Another time they had a fire up on Bella Vista on the Island and somebody had parked his car by a fire hydrant. So Bunk came over with an ax and broke out the driver's side window and then went around and broke the other side and ran the hose right through the car. Instead of breaking a wing window and taking the car and pushing it out of the way, he decided to teach him a lesson. And that got all over town about the ten foot limit. It was kind of interesting back in those days. [Note: the ten-foot limit refers to a law in Belvedere that states that parking is allowed only within ten feet of the curb in marked parking spaces.]

SIDE B

Chris, tell about the Crocker Bank story.

Ok. Crocker Bank was where Wells Fargo is today [Boardwalk Shopping Center] and as a young child I used to save up my money. In 1958 I remember going into the bank and plopping down a bunch of coins and buying silver dollars. They used to have them over to the side there and every so often I'd get a 1921 vintage silver dollar.

Was this the beginning of your coin-collecting interest?

Yes. And we used to buy rolls and rolls and rolls of pennies and look through them. Every once in awhile we'd find an old Indian head penny prior to 1909 and we'd collect these pennies. We'd drive the tellers crazy because we'd go buy a roll and go outside and look through it and come back and the rolls would be miscounted. The bank manager there was famous for his touch. He used to be able to line up those penny rolls and tell you if it had 51 cents in it or 49. He was never wrong. He was trained in the old bank accounting ways. But I get a big kick that; we could go down and buy a silver dollar for just a dollar. And another shop we used to frequent down there was the music center. Paula Porter (a lot of the old-timers here in town will remember her). She and her

husband ran the music store in the inner courtyard of the Boardwalk right where the barbershop is today. She ran that music store there for years and years and then she moved it out onto the main part of the Boardwalk I think where *The Ark* newspaper is now. Lovely lady. Inspired a lot of children. They'd have guitar classes there and music classes.

I remember that store there; I came here in 1971 and I remember that store.

Yeah, she was wonderful. And then there was a clothing store (I can't remember the name; I think it was Carl's). And he was there for years and years also. Maybe 20 or 30 years; we bought all our clothing there. And every Christmastime he got one of his friends up in the attic there, in the store, to dress up as Santa Claus. And we'd go up there and sit on Santa's lap and tell him what we wanted under the Christmas tree.

And then the Five and Dime was there; the same family ran that for years and years. I used to buy my baseball cards and *Mars Attack* cards (that were banned later on. That set is now worth \$4,000.) If you can find it.

Now you are the only one who maintains a store that kids can go into to buy cards for their collections and play games.

Somebody came to one day and said, "Aren't you upset that the Five and Dime is selling baseball cards and competing with you?" "Well, I have to admit I was a customer there when I was five years old and they were definitely here first." And I started my store in Tiburon in 1976. And next year on April 21 will be my twenty-fifth year. And I'm the second oldest merchant on Main St.

Your're kidding! And you're still a kid!

Well, I feel like one! I'm a product of my environment. But I've had that collector shop since 1976 selling baseball cards, postcards and collectibles, stamps and a little bit of coins.

Well, it's a center for kids; it's a safe place for them to be. I think you are known for that; having a safe place for kids to go.

When I was a kid we had many places we could go. Nowadays, kids have no place to go. I should mention that when I was growing up we had Raydeen's Skating Rink in Corte Madera; we had the bowling alley in Larkspur at Drakes' Landing. We had numerous stores where kids could buy things; there was Gunnings in San Anselmo and Spauldings. There were a lot of places for kid to go. The Five and Dime on the Boardwalk.

Isn't it ridiculous that we don't now have a Five and Dime in the entire town? Either town?

Yes, it's true. But we lived there; we'd go every day to the Boardwalk. Paula Porter was very friendly and had lots of kids in. A lot of other shops did too. It was very interesting. Kids' businesses have kinda disappeared in Southern Marin.

How about the TPC that was supposed to be a Southern Marine recreation center?

There are a lot of bad feelings about that - what happened. My father and my mother were part of the original group that formed that. And they put in the sweat equity and built a lot of the facilities over there and donated money. And it was supposed to be available to everybody. And, I guess, the Judge Field across the street there was supposed to be donated to the children of the Tiburon Peninsula. And we moved away in about 1962 and when we came back in '69, I wanted to rejoin it. But "Oh, sorry. This is a private club. You have to pay a huge deposit to become a member." I'm just thinking, how could that happen? Like the Strawberry Rec. Center; that's like what was supposed to be there. How could that turn into a private club?

You never found out?

No! And some of the old-timers in town told me that some of the paper work had been changed or had been lost and it was kind of in limbo. Very interesting; needs to be investigated. And I never forgot about it because it's very interesting. I donated to the TPC a few years ago a lot of photographs of the work crew - of the people out there; they had them in their album. I gave them

about fifty photographs from the Van Deurs estate. He was a Vice Admiral of the Navy who lived in Belvedere and was an avid photographer. He took photographs of the facilities out there. On the other hand, I thought, too, that if that property across the street ever reverted back to the public entity, too much time has passed and I feel sorry for the people who have condominiums across the street or live in the apartments because if it reverted back, say, to the soccer league or a ballpark, the noise level in that canyon would be horrendous. And it's really not fair to those people who bought those homes and all of a sudden that something that has such low usage now would be turned over.

And it was interesting that the Town had a teen center there. They brought an old ark in and set up a teen center. And it was set on property that in the 60s and 70s was still in dispute. To this day it still is. The TPC has gone out there and put a few things. I don't know what the end result is going to be on that.

Of course they want to close the street [Mar West] and have all that space as well.

Yes, and I sent a cartoon to *The Ark* that was conveniently lost; I think it's too controversial when they said that they wanted to close the street temporarily. So I drew up a cartoon that showed Tiburon Blvd. looking right down the street to the TPC with a fancy archway being built out of stone. And it said, "The Tiburon Peninsula Club and there's two men standing in front, one saying to the other, "Oh, don't worry. It's only going to be temporary." I sent that to *The Ark* and it mysteriously disappeared before it was published. I think that kind of says it all. But I have mixed feeling about it: the land belongs to the public but it's too late to put the soccer fields in and allow the high use because of the apartments that were built after whatever happened.

What do you think about the proposal that St. Hilary Church made for putting in facilities for the CYO in their residential area?

Same thing; I think the property owners have definite rights there. It should be kept at historical level. If they want to build a facility, I think they have a right to build on their land. But I think you'll find they'll come up with a good compromise that'll be beneficial to everyone. And maybe some sound-proofing on the walls

to take some of that sound off the play yard that will be increased by the indoor facility. I think it'll work out.

Oh, by the way, I broke my arm on the slide when I was seven years old at TPC doing a dare devil stunt on the slide. I bounced on the slide, fell over and broke my arm. [laugh]

Going back to the shopping center, there was a barber there named Harry; he was a wonderful guy. Where the Chinese restaurant is now there used to be a wonderful kind of sandwich area, malt shop. We used to get malt shakes and milk shakes there. Wonderful place. [Herbert's Sherbet Shoppe]

Oh, and I wanted to just mention the earthquake of 1957 which was probably one of the biggest earthquakes since 1906 to hit our town. And our house - I was asleep downstairs at 288 Beach Rd. And my father just started working over at Connecticut General Insurance and he bought a new kind of insurance policy called "earthquake insurance" a month before. And the earthquake hit and our house was on mud. There's a mud area right underneath; when we dig out in the yard in the middle of summer, you could pull up mud that you could make clay figures out of because there's an ancient stream that goes right from our house all the way up to where the log cabin was destroyed - the old Christian Science Church. And then right up to the top to the Hahn house at the end of Golden Gate Ave., there's an underground spring there. When they built the Hahn house they put the foundation right on top of the spring which pushed the water over the edge. So there's underground water all year round.

Well, anyway, the earthquake hit, our house slid I don't know how many inches off its foundation and started to go down the hill. My bedroom was in the basement and the wall broke through and all this mud, just sludge, because of the liquefaction, all came through and covered me. My mother came down the stairs and pulled me out of the mud.

How old were you at that time?

Four or five years old. And do you know, to this day, I don't remember a thing about it. My father was going to school at S.F. State and that was just off the epicenter and he said a lot of the windows broke and everybody in the Library went over to the windows to see what was happening after the first shock wave. And the second shock wave hit and the windows broke in and a lot of the students were cut with glass. There was no other damage in Belvedere except to our house that I know of.

Well, was your house saved? I mean was there anything they could do for it?

Yes, there was because he had \$20,000 of insurance. And they came in with drills and drilled into bedrock and I told the current owner of the house and she was very happy because it adds value to the house. They drilled into bedrock and brought truckload after truckload of cement and rebuilt the foundation. And they spent \$20,000. Now \$20,000 in 1957-58 could buy you two or three homes in Tiburon or another home in Belvedere. So they spent more than the value of the house on the foundation. There were heating bills at that house that were running, at that time, close to \$300 in the winter in today's dollars because there was no insulation. And the expense of running the house just broke my parents. They sold the house at a substantial profit when we moved to Florida. But the expense of keeping the house running with repairs and plumbing... we had a personal relationship with the plumber! [laugh] Seriously. He was over all the time working on something.

And they sold part of the lot next door to an architect. I think he's the same architect that built Bell Market here in downtown on Tiburon Blvd. (Will Rand.) And Bank of America. While we were on vacation, he took his sewer line and plugged it into our sewer line, without telling us. And when we came back we were having all kinds of sewage problems with the backups so we called our good friend, the plumber. He came over, dug up the sewer line and saw what they had done and filled their line up with cement and capped it off. About four days later, their sewage backed up into their house and they didn't know anything about it. So they ran their own line rather than admit to what they did.

The architect, himself, was he living there?

Oh, yes. He was a so and so.

And he builds terrible buildings.

Oh, a lousy architect. And his house is ugly that he built up there. But what was very interesting was that he was too proud to come down and see what had happened. So he had to call up the plumber and reset his own line to the sewer connection himself; and he never said a word about it.

He'd have a lot of explaining to do.

Yep. Trespassing. Now about my friends: we had the Polhemus family. They lived up on the Island. I don't have the exact address but a lot of people in town knew the Polhemuses. There was a Dr. Sitkin that lived about four doors down and his children; we played with them a lot. The Simpson family. Marty Simpson, very well known, their two kids, Kurt Simpson and then his older brother, Whit. And they were kind of friends with the Brash brothers, Ted and Tracy. And I love a little side story there; I was over at one of the lunch places here in town one day and Ted was telling me about how when they were kids, they went up to Joyce Wilson's apartment and put a cherry bomb in mailbox and blew it up. And I sat next to him and I said, "Ted. She was our neighbor! That was *our* mailbox that you blew up." And we have been wondering for 30 years who committed that federal crime of blowing up that mailbox with the mail in it. And I said, "Ted, do you know that the statute of limitations, that there are none for a federal crime?" That poor guy turned white as a sheet. I laughed and said, "Don't worry about it. It's water under the bridge; we'll never say anything." And my mother was very upset about it. No one was hurt; it was just a practical joke.. But they got the wrong mailbox.

How old was the boy?

Oh, I think he was eleven or twelve at the time. And I think he's in his fifties now. He's a fun guy. But isn't that amazing, 30 years some years later you're sitting with some guy in a restaurant and he's bragging how he blew up the teacher who gave him too much homework's mailbox. My mother got a big laugh out of that when I called her and told her what Ted's face looked like when I told him there was no statute of limitations - which isn't true.

Belvedere got a little rowdy. One of my favorite memories was Halloween. The high school students from Tam High would have a rumble every year over at Belvedere School. And I remember coming to school the next day and the whole front yard off of Laurel Ave. at the school, every three or four inches would be a broken egg. Over that five thousand square feet. Toilet paper would be over every tree. Literally, a riot would occur between these high school students. Little kids weren't even involved in it. There was this rumble every year. They

would have to come in with hoses to hose down all those hundreds of broken eggs.

And there was a very nice janitor there named Gordon and he was hearing-impaired. He got the kids to do anything he wanted by pure kindness. He was the most amazing fellow. He was here in town for years and his brother lived here. I can't remember his last name. We always called him Mr. Gordon. He couldn't speak a word. He'd have a smile on his face; he would always watch after us and tie our shoes laces for us. He was a wonderful father-figure in the school. And he was there for years and years and years. I learned a little sign language later on and it was kind of nice to run into him around town when I was in my twenties and was able to finger-spell. He got the biggest kick out of that.

I went to Belvedere Nursery School and Margret Simpson was my nursery school teacher and Beverly Bastian was one of the teachers or administrators there. My father used to come down and help out with some of the painting at the nursery school. And I have fond memories of that. And it hasn't changed a bit; it's exactly the way it looked in 1957. Same building, same facility; I think they fixed the yard up a little bit and added a few more toys and stuff.

I think I'm through with information now. I'll try to end this with one story. I was at the Boardwalk a few years back, talking to one of the seniors that I just recently met and she looked at me and said, "Sonny, I'm an old-timer here. I've been here since 1965." And I looked at her and said, "Well, I've been here since 1954." And she just looked at me and said, "You can't be that old!" I said "Thank you for the compliment."

She didn't ask you how old you were when you came here.

Well, I'll end it on that.

Well thank you, Chris. This has all been extremely interesting and you filled in a lot of holes from other oral histories that we have done, telling us things that we have always wondered about.