

Ardes Johnson Oral History Interview
Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories & Memories Oral History Project
October 26, 2018



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Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Memories & Stories Oral History Project

Interview with Ardes Johnson

October 26, 2018

Karen Murdock, Interviewer

Karen Murdock: **KM**

Ardes Johnson: **AJ**

Track 1

00:00

KM: This is an interview conducted on Friday, October 26, 2018 at the house of Ardes Johnson, 714 3rd Avenue in Minneapolis and this is part of the Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Memories & Stories Project. The interviewer is Karen Murdock and the person being interviewed, or the narrator, is Ardes Johnson. Ardes, you told me that you first came to Marcy-Holmes in 1953—

AJ: Yes.

KM: —to go to school as an undergraduate?

AJ: Yes, I was a freshman at the University [University of Minnesota] in 1953. I lived at Sanford Hall and the University was terrifying for me, but I survived the first year.

KM: Where did you come from?

AJ: I came from a very small town of 500 people. There were 27 students in my graduating class in Southern Minnesota, and so coming to the city and to the University was like a totally different world.

KM: What town was it?

AJ: Mabel.

KM: Near?

AJ: It's near the border with Iowa in the Southeast corner of Minnesota.

KM: It must be a farm town.

AJ: It is. Yes, it still is.

KM: Do you have a mill—a flourmill or something there or what do they—

AJ: They do—

KM: What do they do in Mabel?

AJ: Not a flourmill, but they certainly had a grain elevator and just small businesses for the farming community around, and it had everything—grocery store, clothing store, shoe store.

KM: Did you have a traffic light?

AJ: No, I don't think so, just stop signs.

KM: That's a big step up when a town gets a traffic light.

AJ: Only one street through the town.

KM: But you liked it here in Marcy-Holmes. Have you been here ever since?

AJ: No. Let's see—I was at the University—graduated in 1957, and then I went to Boston for a year of graduate school, and then I stayed out East. I taught school in Connecticut for two years.

KM: Where in Connecticut?

AJ: In Wilton, Connecticut. It's in the Southeast corner near the New York border.

KM: Southwest corner.

AJ: Southwest—okay. Anyway, most of the people living there worked in New York City.

KM: I was born and raised in Manchester which is eight miles east of Hartford, and my grandparents came from Fairfield County.

AJ: Oh, it's a beautiful state.

KM: Oh, yes.

AJ: Just fantastic.

KM: And then so eventually you came back.

AJ: Yes, then—let's see—I came back to Minneapolis for—I have to stop and think—I was here and then I got a job teaching in the Minneapolis schools. No, first in Wayzata, and then—I was in Wayzata for I think two or three years. I was teaching geography then, and then I needed to have emergency kidney surgery one spring, and so then I didn't go back to teaching. Then I went to graduate school to recover from the surgery and then I taught in Minneapolis schools for a few years. In my last teaching position in Minneapolis at that time was in Child Psychiatry at the University hospital, which was a wonderful job—very, very interesting.

KM: So that's where you got the e-mail, the U of M [University of Minnesota] e-mail. I wondered about that.

AJ: No, I think I got the U of M e-mail because, when I joined the Alumni Association and made the required contribution, you got a lifetime membership, and that included U of M e-mail, which I've had every since. It was a good deal.

KM: It was and you're—one of the most common last names, Johnson, but you're I think only number 97 of all the hundreds of Johnsons there must have been.

AJ: Really?

KM: So you got there early.

AJ: I did—yes.

KM: Before everybody knew what e-mail was.

AJ: Right—it was very convenient. And from there I—this was in the 50s, when there was all sorts of experimentation in elementary education and, at that time, in Marcy-Holmes in Southeast Minneapolis, they were going to have Marcy Open School and a Montessori School. I became very interested in Montessori education and in 1972 I went to London for the Montessori training at the International Montessori Training Center.

KM: You were on the cutting edge.

AJ: Right, I was, and so then, from there, I saw an ad in the paper—I think it was probably a Montessori publication—asking for a teacher to go to Ethiopia—Addis Ababa, Ethiopia to start a new Montessori school, Haile Selassie's granddaughter, Princess Elizabeth was going to start, so I'm sure I was the only one who applied for the job, and I was able to go to Ethiopia in 1973 and [that] was an incredible experience, actually literally starting this school with mostly children from upper-class Ethiopian families, none of them speaking English. I got a room with a Mennonite missionary and rode a bicycle to the school from where I was staying. Bicycles were rare in Addis Abba and this was extremely unusual, A. to have a bicycle and B. to have a woman riding a bicycle. So, when I would ride down the streets on my bicycle to get to the school, there were always hundreds of people walking on the roads because people didn't have cars or bus transportation. They would step aside and clap as I went by.

KM: The last time that happened, you were seven years old and it was your mother that was clapping.

AJ: Right—exactly (laughter). But that was also the year of the revolution and the overthrow of Haile Selassie, so the government kept sending threatening letters that I had to leave, and I kept begging them to let me stay till the end of the school year, which eventually they did. And then I went back to London and taught at the Montessori school in London before coming back to Minneapolis.

KM: Did Maria Montessori set up schools in England? She was Swiss, wasn't she?

AJ: She was Italian, and she set up schools in India and in Italy.

[Interruption]

AJ: And then it was some of her disciples who set up the school in London, and I think that her son also had something to do with the school in London, but it's still going.

KM: But, in those days, America hadn't quite discovered Maria Montessori.

AJ: No, you're right. There was a school in Washington D.C. and I think one in Southern California. But, you're right, Montessori was just getting started.

KM: And it was considered somewhat radical. Now it's considered very mainstream, but anything foreign was I think a little bit suspicious—

AJ: Right.

KM: —and possibly tinged with Communism or other dangerous foreign influences.

AJ: Well, I don't know, in London it was—at least at the school I was at, it was definitely a school for the upper class. I mean, they charged high tuition, and so it was a fairly select population. And that sometimes happens here in the States, too, because of the tuition.

09:53

KM: My church, the St. James Episcopal Church in South Minneapolis, rents out during the week to a Montessori pre-school which has very few kids, maybe 25 kids, and quite a few teachers, so the student-teacher ratio is very low. But it's considered mainstream now in the 21st Century in the United States. It would certainly not be seen as anything radical or anything untested.

AJ: No—right. And the year I spent studying at the Montessori Institute was very good. I learned a lot about teaching in general that I hadn't learned in my education classes here in America. I learned a lot about how to promote curiosity and learning by the individual child rather than teaching them something all the time.

When I came back here, I taught in Lake Country Montessori School when it first started down in a building by the Basilica in Downtown Minneapolis. And now it's in South Minneapolis, and a wonderful Montessori school, but it's become a pretty select student population, but very good. It's a wonderful education for those kids.

I left the Montessori school, partly because I was by that time my mid-late thirties and Montessori, if you're going to do it well, I think, becomes a way of life, not just in the classroom. And I just wasn't ready for that at that time. So then I went back to Minneapolis Schools and I taught at Patrick Henry [High School] and at Edison High School. I taught English as a Second Language.

KM: I want to ask you a few questions in the general area of transportation. Now, the [Interstate] 35W trench runs right through the neighborhood of Marcy-Holmes and it divides the neighborhood called Dinkytown which is largely inhabited by U of M [University of Minnesota]

students from the rest of Marcy-Holmes which is some students, but also a lot of owner-occupied houses. The interstate highway system in the United States was under construction in the 1950s. Was 35W there when you first came?

AJ: If it was, I don't remember. I lived in Prospect Park in an apartment on East River Road for many years, and then I moved to Dinkytown and I lived in Dinkytown for 23 years on 14th and 7th. And then was displaced by a student apartment building, and I just moved ten blocks west. I stayed in Marcy-Holmes. So I'm just on the edge now of Marcy-Holmes by East Hennepin.

KM: But you're living in an area with a lot more owner-occupied houses than in Dinkytown.

AJ: That's right. My heart is still in Dinkytown. I loved living in that area. I really promote senior housing in student neighborhoods. I thought living with students was great. You know, if you're out working your garden, they always stop and say hello and talk and say they're happy to see the flowers. The students really appreciated having some regular people in the neighborhood.

KM: And to them, of course, anybody over about 25 is ancient, so having grey hair is not a problem.

AJ: No.

KM: You're just part of that older generation.

AJ: Yes but, of course, now Dinkytown—I think there are maybe six homeowners on the east side of Dinkytown. It is students and rental property and student apartment buildings. And so 35W is a real wall that separates East and West Marcy-Holmes, the Dinkytown area and the residential on the west side. And it's too bad, really. You know, our neighborhood meetings don't have students. We don't—

KM: Neither do ours.

AJ: We don't make an effort to include students. Students are very busy, I understand. And also students are coming to this area from small-town Minnesota or from the suburbs and they don't really understand the concept of city neighborhoods. And so, to try to tell students, you live in Marcy-Holmes neighborhood or you live in Prospect Park Neighborhood or Como Neighborhood, they don't care; they don't understand. And I think that's something at least Marcy-Holmes is really trying to remedy. But students are transient and busy people and [at] a different stage in their life. But I think that, first of all, we need to—I mean, the University is the big white elephant in our area. It just has so much power and influence. And I don't want to get into the politics of all of this neighborhood stuff, so I'm sorry—I'll let you continue.

KM: Well, why not? Another, on the transportation theme, another major street or important street in Marcy-Holmes is Main Street—the rather unimaginatively-named Main Street, now called St. Anthony Main, which was completely redone just before I arrived. I came to the Twin Cities in 1980 and they were making a huge big deal about St. Anthony Main as this shopping destination. It really didn't work out that way.

AJ: No.

KM: But what was it before? What was the area along the river on the east side of the river like before this major redevelopment occurred in the late 70s?

AJ: I honestly don't know. I do remember going on Nicollet Island at that time and it was all very run-down houses, a lot of hippy communities living on Nicollet Island. I don't know about Main Street.

KM: The buildings there are old.

AJ: Yes, some of them are historically preserved. I do remember all the development and the attempt to have a big shopping mall center there which was beautiful at first but, at the time, and I don't think even now, there's enough population in the neighborhood, in the Downtown, area to support that.

KM: And they had no anchor tenant either.

AJ: No. Right.

KM: They had some very interesting shops. I remember going to a wonderful toy shop there—The Afton Toy Shop, which must be from Afton, but they had a branch in St. Anthony Main, and it was wonderful!

AJ: A huge bookstore.

KM: Wonderful bookstore.

AJ: And a market.

KM: But no anchor and virtually no parking.

AJ: And parking is still the issue.

KM: We could talk for an hour about just parking.

AJ: And of course now what's happening down on 2nd Street Southeast which parallels Main Street is a huge amount of development in that Pillsbury property. Our neighborhood is very divided about that because the city code requires that no building should be higher than 16 stories, the height of the grain elevators down there which are historic preservation. But, because the city now is on this high-rise, high-density policy, they just ignore any kind of codes or city laws about heights of buildings. So we just lost a battle, two battles actually, with Alatus which now is going to build a 42-story luxury condo on 2nd Street. And just across the street—I mean, on 2nd Street on 3rd Avenue, Doran is building a 25-story tower with townhouses. And no affordable housing in any of these plans.

KM: It sounds like some of the issues we have in Prospect Park. We've just had a big battle with a developer called Vermillion to build a building on University Avenue which is going to be almost as high as the tower—as the Witch's Hat Tower. That was a hugely divisive issue in our neighborhood, and the zoning called for 2 ½ stories, and they're going to build 13 stories.

20:00

So—the city is ignoring its own zoning codes.

AJ: It is, right. When I came to the University in 1953, there was still a streetcar running on University Avenue. That was the last year for the streetcars on University Avenue.

KM: And now, at a cost of zillions of dollars, we're building streetcars but we're calling them LRT [Light Rail Transit].

AJ: Right. But now the big change is bike lanes and, at our last neighborhood meeting last week, we found out that there are going to be two bike lanes on 4th Street and on University Avenue. And what they're doing is reducing the width of the car lanes and removing one lane of traffic on 4th Street. So the City is really trying to force people to use public transportation or bicycles and get out of their cars. We'll see what happens.

KM: One thing I've noticed in Marcy-Holmes that we don't have in Prospect Park is one-way streets. When did that happen?

AJ: I don't know—maybe—I don't know if it happened when they took the street car—no, it didn't—it was two-ways when they took the street car out. I don't know.

KM: But even these—not University Avenue so much, although that is one-way, but the 4th Street, and there are many streets in Marcy-Holmes that are one-way at least for a few blocks.

AJ: Yes.

KM: So you think it's always been that way? Do you think it's a traffic-calming measure?

AJ: I don't know of any one-way streets except for 4th and University. I'm just trying to think. Maybe—no. In the neighborhoods—I mean, many of the neighborhood streets aren't through streets which is very complicated, but I don't know about one-way streets. 8th Street, which is the main link from 15th Avenue over by the University over to East Hennepin, has just got huge amounts of traffic.

KM: Yes.

AJ: Which really—and that's another example of—the city has put in bike lanes on both sides of 8th Street from 35W to East Hennepin. And that was interesting politics. The neighborhood called meetings with the city about putting in bike lanes on 8th Street. I went to a couple of them, and there maybe were at the most six or ten people. Then, when the city decided yes, we are going to take away parking on one side of 8th Street and we're putting in two bike lanes connecting 15th and East Hennepin, there were 65 people all screaming, you're taking away our parking—our street parking. And that's the other thing—the city is trying to force people to not park on streets which is very difficult if you're by the University or Downtown. The city decided what to do, and that's what happened. But it was very interesting—I mean, I supported the bike

lanes on 8th Street and, at that meeting at the end, I was definitely in the minority. My neighbors would hardly speak to me after that. But, the city is looking to the future I guess or forcing a change of lifestyle, which would be fine if the city would provide more public transportation.

KM: Yes, it's one thing to say in New York that you can't have a car

[Interruption].

KM: Okay. But New York City has a superb system of public transport—

AJ: Right.

KM: —and thousands of taxicabs.

AJ: Right.

KM: The buses and the subways—nobody needs to have a car in New York. And hardly anybody does have a car. But it's completely different here.

AJ: Right. And also New York—I mean, if you want to park your car, it's like \$40 a day or more—it's very interesting to see how government tries to force a change in lifestyle. But I—getting back to the University in the neighborhoods, I just feel very strongly—and I'm working on this now in Marcy-Holmes—that the University needs to become much more cooperative and much more involved with the neighborhoods. And the thing that I keep referring to now at my meetings is the July 2014 University Regents meeting where they had a whole section on how they were going to increase their involvement and cooperation with surrounding neighborhoods with all sorts of resolutions for the benefit of residents and students, and we just haven't held the University to that. And now because Dinkytown is struggling to survive we are finally doing something about that.

KM: It's short-sided not to support the neighborhoods because if you let your surrounding area decline terribly—

AJ: Yes.

KM: —as Columbus, Ohio did, it costs a lot more to bring that neighborhood back than it would have cost if you had put some money into the neighborhood and prevented it from declining in the first place.

AJ: Right.

KM: New Haven is another example.

AJ: Yes, right.

KM: In the 1970s Yale students couldn't go off campus. It was too dangerous. And one or two of them were murdered by walking a few blocks off campus. I'm not implying that's going to happen here, but it's very dangerous for a University to let its surroundings deteriorate.

AJ: So yeah, I mean, when I was a student in '53 my freshman year, just to show you how things were at that time, in Sanford Hall, we had one telephone on our corridor, and it was just outside my door—I had a roommate. And so, when the telephone rang, somebody in the corridor had to go answer, find out who they were calling, then go knock on that person's door. I mean, it was crazy. And so, finally, I just decided I couldn't do any work at night because the phone was ringing all the time. People were outside our door chatting on the phone, so I started walking from Sanford to Wilson Library every night. And it was no problem. I could walk to the library—

KM: Wilson library or Walter?

AJ: Walter—wonderful Walter. And I'd walk to Walter and study and do my paper writing and walk home late at night, and I never ever was afraid or thought anything about that. But now that telephone issue is not a problem in the dormitories (laughter).

KM: No, I'm sure they've got other problems.

AJ: I do have a lot of contact with students. I work with Restorative Justice, and so I go to the conferences where students who have been cited for underage drinking come to talk about what happened in their situation and commit to some service in the neighborhood where the offence was committed. I don't have children and this contact with young people has been very good for me. I think that growing up now is so difficult and the pressures on young people are so much greater than when I was a student. And they're really good kids, and it brings up this whole issue—. I don't know if this is something you want me to talk about, but I do favor lowering the drinking age to eighteen.

30:02

KM: (Laughter).

AJ: Not to eight—to eighteen (laughter).

KM: Eight is radical Ardes.

AJ: Right, that's really—

KM: It was eighteen when I was in college.

AJ: I'm learning from working with Restorative Justice, that drinking alcohol is very common in high schools. And so the issue is, how in our culture and society do young people learn to drink alcohol if that's their choice. And learning from their peers behind closed doors illegally is not the way to do it. And the other issue—I mean one of the big, big changes in the neighborhood—in the Dinkytown neighborhood—is a bar—I mean a liquor store, Dinkytown Liquor Store is only there for the last 30 years.

KM: If that.

AJ: Yeah, and when I was a student, there were family owned restaurants in both Stadium Village and Dinkytown, usually by Greek families. You know they were all related. And one of the great-grandsons of one of the restaurant owners in Dinkytown still owns a restaurant in Dinkytown, but they served 3-2 beer at the most. No hard liquor. And I am just amazed when I work with students with Restorative Justice, the alcohol drinking in the dormitories. I don't think that was ever—I mean, maybe I'm naïve about it—but I don't think there was any alcohol consumption in the dormitories when I was a student. I lived at Sanford [Hall] for one year, and then I moved to Comstock [Hall] for three. And I think alcohol has made a huge change in the student culture around the University.

KM: Well, I think the thinking in the 1970s had to do with the Vietnam War—in the 1960s. And the idea was, if you can be drafted, and go overseas and fight for your country and die at age 18, then—or come back here and be legally married at 18, then you should be able to drink at 18. And I think a lot of states lowered their drinking age to 18, including Vermont where I went to school—that this being in the '70s. And then the Vietnam War was over, and there was a swing in the other direction and now—also the Feds exacerbated the situation by threatening to withhold federal highway funds if states didn't raise their drinking age to 21. So virtually all states did. I think Louisiana was the only holdout and I think maybe even they have raised their drinking age now. But I think that making something forbidden makes it more enticing.

AJ: Right, and it's so cheap—vodka is as cheap as water. And, if you look in the Star Tribune every day, the paper edition, they have at least two or three full pages of liquor ads. I'm sure that the liquor ads are keeping the Star—the Strib going. And we can't advertise tobacco. Why do we continue? I mean, I enjoy drinking alcohol, and I remember when I learned how, in my 20s, but I just feel that the students are being exploited by the bars and the liquor store in this area. You know, it's changed the living in the rooming houses, the apartments. I think it's an issue that the University and the neighborhoods haven't really faced up to or the state of Minnesota maybe.

KM: I want to get back to the theme of transportation. One of the most dramatic events in the history of Marcy-Holmes in recent memory was the fall of the 35W bridge on August 1, 2007. Where were you?

AJ: Actually, I was at a neighborhood meeting at Starbucks, the coffee shop that's now Almas. Was that Starbucks then? I can't remember.

KM: I don't remember.

AJ: No, but anyway, I was at a neighborhood meeting on housing, and so I had ridden my bicycle under that bridge on 2nd Street just a half hour before. It was really a shock to the world actually. I had friends calling me from Australia and England. "Are you okay? Where is that?"

KM: Florence and Walter Littman were in Poland at a math conference, and looking at the images on TV with the commentator speaking Polish and there was their hometown bridge, the lead story in Poland and Australia.

AJ: I mean, it was unbelievable.

KM: You said you used to teach at Edison. Have you ever been to the Firefighters Museum?

AJ: No, I—

KM: You should go. It's right next door to the football field at Edison.

AJ: Okay.

KM: And it's only open one day a week—Saturdays. It's got old fire trucks and it's wonderful for kids. But they have a special display on the 35W bridge collapse which was one of the outstanding moments in the history of the Minneapolis Fire Department, and they've got some pieces of the wreckage and incredible photographs, so borrow a child and go there. You can go on your own on Saturdays.

AJ: Okay, thank you.

KM: But it's wonderful—it's been open since 2004, and I just heard about it.

AJ: Yeah, I've heard of it, but I just haven't—

KM: Well, the display, you'll spend some time in that display which was funded partly by the Minnesota Historical Society. So do you know anybody that was injured in that bridge collapse?

AJ: No, I don't.

KM: But some of your neighbors ran to help people.

AJ: Yes

KM: There's U of M students and other people who were just passing by rescued people from the river and pulled injured people up the banks and they=—of course, the professionals were on hand in a very short time, but a lot of civilian help. And I think that, when they rebuilt it, they built it so strong that, if every other bridge in the state of Minnesota collapses, the 35W bridge will stay there. So that's never going down again.

AJ: So now you think of it with the colored lights at night.

KM: It's pretty.

AJ: It is.

KM: And user-friendly. They want to forget the past.

AJ: Yes.

KM: I mentioned that two of the other people that are a part of this neighborhood memories project in—that live in Marcy-Holmes—are Joan Menken and Katie Fournier. You must know them.

AJ: I do very well, yes. I work with Joan on Restorative Justice and with Katie, we're both on the University District Alliance Livability Committee, so we meet once a month at the University. The neighborhoods send reps [representatives] to talk about issues, again, that the

University and the neighborhoods, the kind of problems and cooperation that should be going on between [the] University and neighborhoods. It's really a struggle. I feel, again, getting back to the students and how they're exploited. They're exploited by these apartment owners. I've hardly worked with a student that lives in a student apartment building in Dinkytown who hasn't said that the noise through the walls is just awful because they're so poorly built. You know, they just—the developers who built them—

KM: Toothpicks and bubble gum.

AJ: Right. Twenty years is what they hope for, nothing substantial.

38:52

And Doran who sold all the apartment buildings he built in the Dinkytown area said, managing a building with students is too hard. "I was very glad to get rid of them." Well, you know, he made his money and left.

KM: Other famous people besides you and Katie and Joan that live in Marcy-Holmes, I think of Arvonne and Don Fraser.

AJ: Oh, yes.

KM: Now many cities have—very large cities have an executive mansion where the mayor lives, but Minneapolis has never, as far as I know, had an executive mansion, so the mayor gets to live wherever he or she wants to live, and Don and Arvonne Fraser lived in Marcy Holmes—

AJ: They did.

KM: —for decades. Arvonne died recently, but—

AJ: They lived in a family home over on 6th Street, I think, by the Freeway.

KM: Yeah, just by the 35W trench.

AJ: Right, and then about three years ago they moved to the high-rise apartment down by the river—I can't think of the name of it now—a very nice one. But Arvonne—both Arvonne and Don continued to be very active in the neighborhood. Don organized the committee representatives from each neighborhood on SEMCOL (Southeast Minneapolis Council on Learning) and we worked for supporting the schools in various ways of book sales or we—oh, encouraging the State to advocate to support kindergarten for four-year-olds. That was a big issue for Don. But Don, even as Mayor, had been very active in supporting the schools. And then Arvonne was very active in the neighborhood—Marcy-Holmes organization. She was the head of the Land-Use committee for many years. She was very tough on developers. They were amazing.

KM: Speaking of books, I think one of the first times I ever met you was when you brought a bunch of books to the Fire and Ice Festival at Luxton Park and I think you'd gotten those from the Southeast—

AJ: SEMCOL—right.

KM: SEMCOL? It wasn't from the Southeast Library?

AJ: No, they were from this group that Don Fraser started, SEMCOL, which had representatives from each neighborhood to support the schools, and that's—it was from SEMCOL that we got the books.

KM: Well, another woman in Prospect Park and I have carried on this tradition of giving away books—

AJ: Yeah, you're wonderful.

KM: —by going to Goodwill and buying stacks of books and then giving them away, which is important, I think, particularly for Glendale Neighborhood, which is largely immigrants and they probably—that kids don't have that much access to books, so it's a pleasure to give. It's always a pleasure to give books away, but particularly to kids and particularly to kids that otherwise might not have books in their house.

AJ: Right, just watching them touch them and look at them is so great. Thank you for continuing that. And this reminds me about another group that I work with. I'm on the committee for Friends of Southeast Library and we are—

KM: It needs all the friends it can get.

AJ: Right. We are so elated that Hennepin County has decided to preserve Southeast Library. It's going to be closed in December for nine or ten months for renovation. Architecturally, it's historic.

KM: Because Ralph Rapson designed it.

AJ: Right. And it's brutalist architecture and there are very few such buildings remaining anywhere, and—

KM: Luxton is another example of brutalist architecture.

AJ: Ah.

KM: That was done by Hans Hodne's father who was an architect—I don't remember the father's name.

AJ: Oh, great. I'll have to look at that next time.

KM: You look at it from the backside.

AJ: I will.

KM: Well, I'm glad something is being done about Southeast Library because that's been a problem, mainly because of parking—extremely limited parking—and for a while there were very limited hours.

AJ: The merchants in Dinkytown could care less about having the library at that corner. They thought, let's put up a parking ramp. That's what we need, parking, not a book library. Anyway, but to the credit of Hennepin County Libraries, they have decided to spend \$13 million renovating that library and making it more accessible.

The basement can't be used because of asbestos, so it's going to be cleaned up a lot. Parking is going to not improve because the underground parking at that library can't be used. It's beyond code and the city won't let it—I mean, it would cost millions and millions to have underground parking, so that's not going to change. But the building itself and the architects are thrilled to be working on that building because of the architectural design. And, when it was first built it was a loan company, so there were offices that were walled off with brick walls, but those brick walls are not load supporting, so they're going to be able to take out a lot of those walls to open up the space in the library, and the bricks are going to be salvaged. They're going to be used for the elevator shaft and then maybe sold for historic memories, but anyway, it's going to be just great to have the library there again. It's busy—it's a very busy library. Unfortunately, it's only open three days, but we are really pushing to get a five or six-day library.

KM: Who uses it? Is it kids from the school?

AJ: Actually, when they did a survey, a lot of students, but they don't borrow books. They come there to study.

KM: Because it's too loud in Dinkytown because of these thin walls (laughter).

AJ: Right—exactly—and so it would be great if it could be open a lot more. And we want to encourage students to use it—the University students. It's really not an accessible library for the neighborhoods and parking is a problem.

KM: But at least you have a library. Prospect Park still doesn't have a library. We were in hopes of getting a new sort of library—a transit-oriented library at the LRT station and had a couple of meetings about that, but nothing came of it. It would be just for rentals of DVDs and things like that that you could grab on your way home, but we don't have a library. At least you have a library with all its problems.

AJ: Right. It's going to be renovated so that there will be meeting rooms and it can become more of a community resource than it has been. So it's great.

KM: Part of the problem is the meter maids; the parking enforcement in Dinkytown is absolutely ferocious.

AJ: It is.

KM: These are piranhas. I remember once I was five minutes late coming out of the bookstore—five minutes—there were two people ahead of me at the checkout. I had timed it. Five minutes and I got a ticket.

AJ: Yeah, I've gotten two tickets in Dinkytown.

KM: So they're absolute piranhas, and that's part of the problem. I don't dare use the Southeast Library in case I get interested in something and get ticketed.

AJ: And you know also in Dinkytown, the parking, I mean, for example, last night we had a—we always have different artists that have displays on the walls in the library, and we had a reception for the artist just last night—just wonderful display of textiles and garments from a woman at the Textile Center.

47:58

And, at the same time, there was a big concert at the Varsity Theater with hundreds of people lined up, so there was no parking anywhere in Dinkytown. And then the city allows—when there's a big band at the Varsity Theater—they allow them to park on 13th Street at the parking meters with their vans and they take up five or six parking spaces, you know, that's lost to the public. But anyway, 27 people showed up last night for the reception. It was great.

KM: Great. Speaking of parking, we have a huge issue in Prospect Park of students parking on the street and either walking or biking to the U [University] or even taking the light rail now. But you don't have—the light rail doesn't go through Marcy-Holmes. So do students still park—students I mean from Bloomington or Maplewood or something like that—do they still try to park on the streets of Dinkytown or the other area of Marcy-Holmes and walk?

AJ: Yes, because there are some parts of East and West Marcy-Holmes that don't have parking meters. And so I'm sure you're right about that. And then they continue to take the Number 2 bus. The Number 2 bus goes every ten minutes down 8th Street to the University. But I wish the city would have smaller buses, not these big things. I mean, in the winter, when there's snow along the curbs, it reduces the size of the streets and, if we have city buses, we have the Number 2 and the Number 4 going down 8th Street plus school buses. It's just crazy. If you could drive down 8th Street, you see lots of students waiting on every corner for the bus. I just wish that the University's got these smaller—what do you call them—shuttle buses?

KM: Yeah, like the one that runs between the St. Paul and Minneapolis campuses.

AJ: Right. I just wish the University and the city had more of these smaller shuttle buses circulating.

KM: And they're powered with natural gas too—they're not as polluting as the old buses.

AJ: Right, and they could circulate in the neighborhoods. And not just for students but for everybody, because the big buses, I mean, sometimes they're full, but a lot of times, they're not—mostly they're not, I don't think. So, I mean, this transportation issue is complicated.

KM: Before I leave the subject of noteworthy people from Marcy-Holmes, I do have to mention Bob Dylan.

AJ: Oh, yes.

KM: Who, let's just say, higher education was not his true calling, but he did live in Dinkytown for at least a year when he was going to the U of M [University of Minnesota] and supposedly he lived above Gray's Drug Store, which is now the Loring Pasta Bar, and played his guitar on the streets of Dinkytown. Now, I want you to tell me, Ardes, that you often stopped mesmerized and watched this young mop-haired singer play his guitar on the streets of Dinkytown.

AJ: I'm sorry, I didn't.

KM: Oh (laughter).

AJ: Would that have been in the 60s?

KM: Probably early 60s.

AJ: No, I just—. And of course, the big thing that happened in Dinkytown, besides Bob Dylan, were the Red Barn protests.

KM: That was a little before my time.

AJ: And the anti-war—I mean, I went on several anti-war marches from campus. That was a really big issue for the neighborhood and the campus.

KM: Was the Red Barn issue in Dinkytown?

AJ: Yeah, it was right on 4th Street, in the middle of 4th Street.

KM: I thought that was in Stadium Village somehow—in 4th Street?

AJ: Well they had—the Red Barn had a location in Stadium Village, so the one in Dinkytown was the second one for that, and then I think they—.

KM: Okay.

AJ: Well, the one in Dinkytown never got built, and the one in Stadium Village eventually changed ownership or—

KM: I think it's a Chinese Restaurant now; it's still there. I don't remember the—because I wasn't here—what the controversy was about that, but you were part of the protests?

AJ: I was, yeah. And also, I mean, that coffee shop where Bob Dylan played—I can't remember the name of it in Dinkytown—I had gone in there but, I wasn't into that scene. But I

did know a graduate student who lived—had an apartment above the coffee shop in Dinkytown. I mean, there was a real, real wonderful student culture in Dinkytown at that time.

KM: Well, there still is. It's almost all students.

AJ: Yeah.

KM: It's becoming somewhat crowded by the athletics side of the U of M—

AJ: Oh, right—

KM: Which I'm sure was nowhere near as big in the 50s as it is now.

AJ: No—right.

KM: And, just recently, the Athletes Village was finished right on the edge of Dinkytown right by the football facility so that the student athletes will be able to live and study and sleep and eat and do everything without interacting with the rest of the community.

AJ: Actually, that has—becoming a problem for restaurants and bars in Dinkytown that students are ordering in. They're getting take-out and not sitting down and eating or socializing.

KM: The one neighborhood business that has been there in Dinkytown for a long time is Vescio's, the Italian restaurant, and that goes back probably to the 70s if not earlier. Off-hand, that's the only Dinkytown business I can think of that's been—

AJ: But it's gone, you know?

KM: Oh, is it gone?

AJ: Yep. I think it closed in January.

KM: Oh.

AJ: I think it's becoming a Chinese restaurant.

KM: Well, we could always use another Chinese restaurant. Did the original owner die?

AJ: No. It was—I think Vescio's was started by the grandfather of the current owner, and he's quite elderly and just decided he didn't want to keep it open.

KM: An era passes.

AJ: Right. Yeah, a lot of those—I mean, Mama D's was on the corner of 4th and 13th and even—I can't remember the name of the restaurant, but there was a wonderful restaurant in the middle of the block on 14th between 4th and University Avenue that was a family-owned Greek family with wooden booths, if you can imagine. And there was a Dime Store in Dinkytown at one time next to the Loring Pasta Bar.

KM: I don't remember that, but I remember Annie's Parlor.

AJ: Right.

KM: I came to the Twin Cities in 1980, and that was still there. That had been the same for a long time.

AJ: There was a bakery on 14th, there was a meat market, there was Simm's Hardware store, and there was a Meyer's Grocery Store where the liquor store is now.

KM: I remember Meyer's. In fact, I knew the Meyer of whom that family owned several. In fact, they owned one in my neighborhood a long time ago. Of course, there used to be a lot more neighborhood grocery stores or corner grocery stores. And the question is what to do with them now, because grocery stores have gotten so big that there are no more except possibly in New York—these corner grocery stores. That's a term you don't even hear anymore. I'm wondering how you first got involved with the Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association?

AJ: I didn't start going to meetings until I had retired from teaching. I just—my teaching job just was all-consuming, and so when I started going to the meetings, and Joan Leigh, who had been at the University library school was the head of Marcy-Holmes at the time—wonderful woman—and she is responsible for saving the Stone Arch Bridge. So we, in her honor, the neighborhood has put a bench in her honor down at the entrance to the Stone Arch Bridge with the help of the city.

So then I started going to the meetings and there were never that many people at the meetings. And they always met in the basement of University Lutheran Church of Hope.

At that time there weren't the development problems that we have now.

Gradually, after going to the meetings, I started working on committees. I've worked with Land-Use for many years. I was on the Board for a while. But it would shift. Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Organization now is pretty much on the west side.

KM: Yes, because there's so few non-students in Dinkytown.

AJ: Right. And the ones that are there don't want anything to do with the neighborhood association. They felt that they made their effort, put their time in and they just feel that nobody listens. So I went to the general meeting a couple of weeks ago for Marcy-Holmes. The meetings are on this side of the neighborhood on the west side. Everybody on the Board of Directors is from this side of the neighborhood. All the officers are from the west side of the neighborhood. It's—

KM: So the people in Marcy-Holmes don't use the word Dinkytown—they use the word East Marcy-Holmes?

AJ: I do. They're starting to because actually the neighborhood has gotten a grant of money from the Good Neighbor Fund to try to work on issues in Greater Dinkytown.

KM: Greater Dinkytown—that sounds like an oxymoron (laughter).

AJ: (Laughter). I know.

KM: Like giant shrimp.

AJ: So part of it is that the City of Minneapolis, in its wisdom and because of a lot of work in Dinkytown—led by Kristen Eide-Tollefson, Book House owner—has designated the intersection of 14th Avenue Southeast and 4th Street to 13th Avenue Southeast for historic preservation.

KM: Okay, that is the heart of Dinkytown.

AJ: Right, it is. The problem is that the city has yet to set up guidelines about what that really means. Because of course the people that own those properties at that intersection feel that they're being deprived of their millions of dollars for selling their property for a hotel or whatever. So, anyway, we're still waiting. We have to get those guidelines now because for that block on 4th Street from 14th to 13th is historic. You know, it has the Varsity Theater, it has the bike shops, and from Varsity Theater to 13th Avenue which had all the shops, the sewing shop, the barber shop, the t-shirt shop, those have all been closed—they've all had to move. And the man who owns that property also owns 810 on the other side of the block on University Avenue—he is a very responsible landowner, I think.

KM: Oh, we can say his name then.

AJ: Oh, Brett Naylor, and he has come to neighborhood meetings. We spent eight hours last Saturday talking about Greater Dinkytown. All the people who had shops in those spaces had to leave, because the electrical wiring needs to be improved, the stairs, the lighting, everything needs to be improved in those buildings.

KM: There's probably an asbestos issue too, like with all these other older buildings.

AJ: Right, but he doesn't know how far he can go beyond the basic improvements of those properties, what kind of businesses can go in there because it's part of the historic area—that one block. And the city still hasn't come up with guidelines, but at our meeting last Saturday, one of the issues that we strongly started to work on was to have a branch of Boynton Health for the students in that area. Boynton Health is just over on the riverside of the campus, and when we were going to renovate the library, we wanted to do it in a big way. We wanted that whole block: we wanted library renovation, we wanted a nursery school, we wanted senior housing—everything and a clinic. And Boynton Health said, yes, there is a need for a student clinic in the Dinkytown area because of the thousands of students living there, and Asian students in particular who don't use Boynton Health as needed. And so Boynton Health wanted to go into that building on 15th where CVS went, but the developer was asking so much rent that the University said no, we're not going to do that. Well, the University has the money. It just depends on how they want to spend it.

KM: Football!

AJ: Right (laughter), but anyway, so we thought, okay, we are going to revive this need for a placement of Boynton Health in Dinkytown, because then there could be emergency services on weekends for students; there could be counseling services for students in that area. And so that's our latest big push.

KM: What is the issue with the Asian students using Boynton?

AJ: First of all, I don't know if they're reluctant to use medical care here.

KM: Bad feng shui?

AJ: As a group they use Boynton less than other group of students.

KM: So you've been involved in Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood Association for a long time. What are some other names of—big names—you've mentioned Joan Leigh. What are some other—living or dead—people who have been leaders in the neighborhood association that you remember?

AJ: Distad—I can't think of his name—

KM: Bob.

AJ: Bob Distad.

KM: Yes, I bought my house from his wife who is a realtor, Linda Messenger.

AJ: Oh, right. He's moved to California, but he was great in working in the neighborhood. And Melissa Bean who was the director of Marcy-Holmes Neighborhood [Association] for over 20 years was wonderful. She knew the neighborhood very well.

KM: Is she still here?

AJ: No, she's moved to St. Louis which is where she was from originally. I think I should mention Marcy School. I mean, we are lucky to have a neighborhood school. We don't have a lot of families and children in the neighborhood, but it is one of the factors that influences people to buy homes in the neighborhood.

KM: And we lost our neighborhood school for 20 years, Pratt School, and now we have it back. And you're right, it's an anchor of a neighborhood, and it's very important. Our school is saved by the Glendale Housing Project which has mostly Somali refugees or East African refugees, and that school is a naturally integrated school, which are very rare not just in Minneapolis, but nationwide to have an equal balance of white and black kids because you have all these East-African Somali refugees and their kids, and largely white kids from the hill area in Prospect Park. So it's a joy to watch those kids playing together.

AJ: I agree. I was at Marcy School on Thursday and all the after-school kids were there—lots of them—and what a beautiful diversity of children.

KM: I first got involved in the Prospect Park neighborhood association in the 1990s with the NRP Project. I had moved to Prospect Park in 1982. As I said, Linda Messenger, Bob Distad's wife was the realtor that sold me the house, but I was in grad school and I was busy, so it wasn't until the mid-90s when the Neighborhood Revitalization Program money came to be that I got involved in the neighborhood. Were you involved in the NRP?

AJ: I was—thank you. That's when I really got involved in the neighborhood. I worked with

Elissa Cottle who was—she was Melissa’s assistant. We had Elissa and Melissa. And Elissa Cottle was the director of the NRP projects, and I worked with her a lot.

KM: What big projects did you get done? In Prospect Park the biggest thing, I think three quarters of our money, went to rehab Pratt School to get it up and running as a school again, and that was money well-spent. What projects did you—big projects—that came out of NRP from Marcy-Holmes? It might have been little projects.

AJ: Right, I’m just trying to think. I certainly remember lots of meetings where people would talk about the ideas of how to spend the money. There were housing loans and I think that money went to parks in Marcy. I don’t know if Dinkytown got any money or not. Dinkytown is a special commercial area for the city, and it’s very complicated. I don’t remember—I’m sorry I don’t remember any big NRP projects now, just lots of talk about what to do.

KM: Who have you—

AJ: Actually, you know, we had a lot of NRP money that we didn’t spend, and now it’s coming back into the neighborhood treasury, and that’s one of the projects now in the greater Dinkytown area that they’re going to use the money for.

KM: I just think the whole “Greater Dinkytown” is hilarious, but I’m going to start using that term. I think Prospect Park is in the greater Dinkytown neighborhood (laughter). It extends all the way to St. Paul.

AJ: And you know, quickly, I hope this doesn’t throw us off the track, but I’ve been a strong advocate for University alumni senior housing in the neighborhood. And, three years ago, the University Alumni Association had a big article in the Star Tribune about how they were interested in developing some alumni senior housing. Because, look, you’ve got sports events, you’ve got the theater, music, classes, University Hospital clinics—you’ve got everything—being close to downtown—it’s just a great area for seniors to live in.

1:10:06

Well, so then our housing committee contacted them and we wanted to talk to them about this kind of project and they said, well, we’re not ready to talk about it yet. I contacted the University Regent’s person, who is on that committee and the Alumni Association, and I got the same answer—we’re not ready to talk about that. Well—. And now I hear that they might do some alumni senior housing in the Motley area.

KM: Oh, yes. That’s a whole issue. We had a meeting about that and, first of all, it’s geographically confusing because what the Prospect Park Neighborhood considers to be Motley is not what the University considers to be Motley, but they’ve got big, huge plans for that area and near that new—

AJ: Clinic.

KM: —the new clinic that has gone in.

AJ: Oh, great.

KM: And all the way up to Stadium Village, but the residential neighborhood, which is largely students, between there and—

AJ: River Road.

KM: —and the River Road and the freeway—that’s what the neighborhood considers to be Motley, but the University considers it the area north of that. But they’ve got big, big plans.

AJ: Right. I see those houses are condemned on that street.

KM: As well they should be.

AJ: Right.

KM: The University has the power of eminent domain, and now we really should stop this Ardes, because we’ve been talking for over an hour.

AJ: Okay.

KM: But it always gets back to the University. There’s an old joke that says, “What time is it when an 800-pound gorilla sits on your fence?” And the answer—ha-ha—is, “Time to get a new fence.”

AJ: (Laughter). That’s great.

KM: You’re the sixth generation of people that have laughed, but that’s what the University is; it’s the 800-pound gorilla sitting on your fence.

AJ: Yes.

KM: It’s the Lord giveth and the Lord taketh away—the U giveth and the U taketh away. It’s always like that, and I’m sure it’s like this in every city that has a large university in it—that there’s always going to be a tension, to put it kindly, between the University and its neighbors because so many people that live in Prospect Park and Marcy-Holmes and Como—people that used to live in Como—work at the University, go to the University, are professors at the University or staffers at the University, and yet, whenever the University wants to take something, it just takes it.

AJ: Right.

KM: And usually without consulting with the neighborhood or doing it only in a perfunctory fashion. The way you talk about the University reacting to the neighborhood sounds exactly like the experiences I’ve had in Prospect Park on the other side of the U of M. So I guess it’s inevitable, particularly in the city.

AJ: Right, but the crazy thing is that, where I lived in Dinkytown for 23 years on 14th and 7th, and they built the student apartment there, the Radius, the University now is renting that

apartment building for millions of dollars because they're renovating Pioneer Hall, and they needed housing for students, so they're renting that apartment building, as well as the one on 4th Street that I can't think of on 4th and 17th, they've—the University is renting those two apartment buildings for students—it's become student housing, which actually is good for the neighborhood because the University organizes and monitors those student housing—

KM: It lives up to code, and it's handicapped accessible—

AJ: Right.

KM: —and not polluted with all sorts of things and not asbestos.

AJ: But the University should have built in that area themselves long ago. But, right now, I think it's critical for the neighborhoods to push the University for some more cooperation and interest because Kaler is leaving—the president is leaving next year. He knows the neighborhood. He lived in Marcy-Holmes as a graduate student. So this is our time I think. And the other thing is that Dinkytown is a real nostalgia area for alumni. You know, students who have gone to the University for years and years remember Dinkytown as an area where they—and they'd like to come back, but it's a problem.

KM: I remember when I first moved here thinking that Dinkytown sounded awfully pejorative. I don't know when the term came to be—maybe in the 1950s—but apparently, I soon discovered that people who live there do not consider it pejorative at all. There were t-shirts and sweatshirts saying “Dinkytown, USA,” right? And so to outsiders, it sounds odd, but it has, as you say, a nostalgic pull, and even for people who are undergraduates, they're perfectly happy to say that they live in Dinkytown, and it's got a center as opposed to say most suburban developments that have maybe a mall but don't have a center, Dinkytown has a center that pulls people in. I love the idea of alumni housing in Dinkytown.

AJ: Right, and it has a post office. The post office in Dinkytown actually makes money.

KM: The U of M is always going to be in tension with its neighbors, but the—maybe when alumni are actually living in the neighborhood, the alumni will have the time and the clout to push back against some of the things that the U of M wants to do. Well, I'm going to turn the tape recorder, or whatever this thing is called now, off because we've been talking for an hour and of course I came up with all these questions, but I knew we wouldn't have time, but thank you very much Ardes for your time and we'll get you a copy of the transcription of this tape or whatever we call it.

AJ: I hope I've answered the questions that you needed anyway.

KM: And even if you haven't, it was very good, the interesting conversation.

AJ: Thank you. I enjoyed it very much.

[End of Interview]

Total Interview Time: 1:17:30