

**Joan Menken Oral History Interview**  
**Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories & Memories Oral History Project**  
**November 16, 2018**



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## **Abstract**

As part of the Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories and Memories Oral History Project, Grace Bell interviewed SE Como Neighborhood Resident and engaged community member Joan Menken on November 16, 2018.

Joan was born November 20, 1938 in Storden, MN to Woodrow and Estella Piper. Joan attended high school at Windom High. In 1958 she graduated and married classmate Richard Menken. The couple moved to Minneapolis, where Richard could pursue studies in Civil Engineering.

The couple first resided in the married student housing on Como Avenue. When Richard graduated from the University of Minnesota, he and Joan rented a home in Southeast Como from landlord Joe Russell. Joan attributes Mr. Russell with initiating her civic engagement with the neighborhood when he encouraged her to serve on the SE Como Improvement Association Board. Joan has continued to serve on that board and has worked on both the Housing and Zoning Committees for the neighborhood. Later Richard and Joan bought the home she lives in now on 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast.

Joan was employed by Minneapolis Public Schools for 37 years and has three children that attended the neighborhood schools (Michelle, Wendy, and Jennifer). Additionally, Joan served on the PTA at Tuttle School and was the Community Coordinator at Marshall U High School. In the interview Joan discusses the impacts on the neighborhood and her family of the closing of Tuttle Elementary School, Marshall -U High School, Central High School, and West High School.

Joan's involvement in the neighborhood association overlaps with her connection to affairs at the University of Minnesota. She has served on the Stadium Area Advisory Group and volunteers in the University's Restorative Justice Program. Joan discusses the University's impact on housing and development in SE Como.

# Southeast Seniors Neighborhood Stories & Memories Oral History Project

Interview with Joan Menken

November 16, 2018

Grace Bell, Interviewer

Grace Bell: **GB**

Joan Menken: **JM**

*Track 1*

*00:00*

**GB:** I'm here with Joan Menken. It is November 16, 2018. We're doing the Neighborhood Memories and Stories part of the oral history project through Southeast Seniors. My name is Grace Bell. I'm a volunteer through the organization and the interviewer today. So thanks Joan.

**JM:** You're welcome.

**GB:** Do you want to start telling us a little bit about where you were born, your early years, and how you came to live in Southeast Como?

**JM:** I was born on a farm in Southwestern Minnesota. My address was Storden [Minnesota], but the major school district was Windom, Minnesota. So I graduated from Windom High School with my husband. We got married the summer we graduated from high school. My father, one day, went down to the store where my husband was working. He had gone up and got a transcript from the high school. He brought my husband to the Cities and registered him at the University of Minnesota. He didn't tell us he was doing this. We were young and we were both going to work, but it changed our lives. So we moved to Minneapolis in 1956 and, by 1957, we were in the University married student housing on Como Avenue. It was the Second World War Quonset Huts. And we were there for about seven years until he graduated from the U [University] with a degree in engineering.

**GB:** Did he choose that degree in engineering or was it—

**JM:** He got the degree in engineering. I had worked.

**GB:** But it wasn't your father who chose the degree for him.

**JM:** My father did not choose the degree. My husband chose the degree. But it was a life-changer.

**GB:** So you lived in the housing and then from there—

**JM:** Once he got his degree, then we moved and we rented from a fabulous landlord, Joe Russell, in Southeast Como. And he's the one that later, after we bought a house in 1972 where I still live, he's the one that came to me and said, "Joan, you got to get on the board. We need people. We need young couples. We need people to get on the Southeast Como Board." And so that's how I got involved with Southeast Como.

**GB:** So he was your landlord and a rental between the student housing and buying a house.

**JM:** Right. It was about 14 years renting before we bought a house.

**GB:** Do you remember the address of the rental.

**JM:** Let me see—I think it was 1051—I can't quite remember, but I think it was 1051 18th Avenue Southeast. It was right across the street from Tuttle School. The duplex faced Tuttle School which was great because that's where all three of my children went—to Tuttle School until they closed it. But it was also my new connection to families and new friends and involvement with the schools and the PTA. And it was just a fabulous place for all new families, but for the whole community because there were many activities there that were—it was the center of the community.

**GB:** The school.

**JM:** The school.

**GB:** Tuttle School?

**JM:** Absolutely.

**GB:** And you lived there when it closed?

**JM:** We were living in our house by that time, but yes—1987, I believe it was, they closed Tuttle School.

**GB:** Do you want to talk more about that?

**JM:** About Tuttle School? Well, the schools in general were a huge issue and still are in Southeast. Tuttle School, as I said, was the center of the community, not only for the students. And they had great summer school programs. They also had great community education programs. When you had meetings, you met at Tuttle School, not at Van Cleve Park at that time, but at Tuttle School. So it's where I met everybody. The fabulous thing about it at that time was we were a very diverse community. One of my great privileges, as I look at it, was moving into the Quonset Huts in married student housing, because it was like the whole world came there. It was an international community. They came from every country in the world. So it just opened up just a whole blessed view of what the world is really like. But we made great friends. I had to laugh when my father would come up to visit when we were in the Quonsets, and he was a very social, very out-going person, a farmer. And he discovered—or maybe they discovered him—a group of international students, mostly from India and the Pakistan area, that were there primarily—those students at the time were primarily there for agriculture. Now everybody comes

for techie-type stuff, but at that time it was agriculture. And they just glommed onto my dad because they knew he was a farmer, and they could sit for hours and talk.

So it was just a wonderful experience, I think, basically for our whole family. Tuttle School, as I said, was the center of the universe while they were in elementary school. And, from there, they went on to high school at Marshall-University High School.

**GB:** Can I ask you, your dad, did he ever live with you in Minneapolis?

**JM:** No, he lived his entire life on the farm in Southern Minnesota.

**GB:** And what's his name?

**JM:** His name was Woodrow Wilson Piper. And he said, if we ever named a child after him, he would disown us. Don't you ever do that to a child (laughter).

**GB:** That's funny. And so you were saying Tuttle School then.

**JM:** Right. And, from there, as the kids got older, Marshall-U became the focus. And Marshall-U was an incredible place. It had—I believe 50 years ago this year—there had been the merger of what was University High School on campus with Marshall-U High, and they were in Dinkytown where the current Marshall apartments are. But there were big changes at that time too because, in 1972—when we bought our house in the early 70s—was the building of the freeway, 35W. And it took out many, many houses as it went through Southeast. It also took out Marshall-U's playing field—high school playing field.

So, Southeast Como, in conjunction with the Minneapolis Public Schools, basically gave up a block of housing, and we expanded Van Cleve Park to basically a four-block area—closed 13th Avenue across to Como. And it became a major portion of that park. It would be the whole Northwest section of that park is fenced in. Right now, it is owned by Minneapolis Public Schools. It is South High's playing field. South High, although it's way out on 31st across Lake Street, did not have playing fields. So, when they closed Marshall, South High became our designated high school, which was a—it turned out to be a great choice. But, at that time, they did not have playing fields, so we gave up a great deal to ensure that that space would be kept for high school use. And we are still working on that issue. If South High develops new playing fields in their area, hopefully that will expand and become just part of Van Cleve Park.

**GB:** Do you remember the announcement of the closure of Marshall?

**JM:** I remember the announcement of the closing of Marshall. It was probably one of the most traumatic meetings I ever went to because they didn't just close Marshall-U High. They closed the three academic high schools in the city in one fell swoop. I was sitting in the auditorium downtown—I believe it was at the old civic center—I can't quite remember. But Richard Green was superintendent of schools at the time, and I'd heard from other people that he's made a promise to Central they'd never close it, but they went through and they closed Marshall-U High School, Central High School and West High School. As I said, those were really the three academic high schools in the city. And, if you look at a map of Minneapolis and you go straight

across the whole center of the city, they gutted the center of the city, which pushed—with the exception maybe of South High—it pushed everything to the edges.

9:58

Everything moved further south for kids or further north for kids. But they gutted the center of the city and it was a lot of students.

**GB:** What was the reason?

**JM:** We were never really given the reasons for closing them, although it was purported that one of the superintendents said that there was no way they would go to Southwest and tell them they were closing their high school. So politics obviously were involved, but it changed the format and, for parents, it changed the direction for Minneapolis Public Schools I think to this day. I don't think that they have ever, ever recovered from that decision. Many parents in my neighborhood left. And, particularly, after they closed Tuttle a little late. One of the advantages, though, for me was I got to know the—I was a parent coordinator—community coordinator at Marshall U at the time of the closure. And Pat Scott who ended up being I believe on school board or city council was the coordinator at West High. And we just all got together and said, okay, where do we go from here?

And you looked at the statistics on South High. It was basically at the bottom of the barrel in terms of test scores and everything. It was very, very low. It needed a bump. It needed people. It needed people to go in it. And, basically, that's what those three communities did—the Marshall-U, the Central and the West High—we just got together and we basically took over South High. It brought with us this Open Program from Marshall-U, but it was the Central High's magnet program that came with it. There's a wonderful Native American program at South High, and it's in basically their community. So, out of what was considered a horrible negative at the time, they did a great job of making it as positive an experience as parents and anybody.

And parents—once the kids got there—they loved it. They loved the diversity. Of course, it was during very interesting times too. So it worked. We're not in the same position anymore. A few years ago they made the decision, with the exception of the Open Program, the rest of the high school students from Southeast Como were taken out of the South High attendance area and put in Edison's attendance area. It's worked for some, but it did not work for all.

**GB:** And you have children. How did it affect your family?

**JM:** My two oldest children graduated from Marshall-U High, so it did not affect them, but my youngest one, yes. And, in fact, when they closed the high schools, they also changed boundaries for the middle schools. Well, when they closed Marshall-U, Marshall-U had a 7-12 program. It was the only high school that had 7-12. So, then they had to designate a middle school for those kids because they came from K-6 elementary and then would have gone on to the 7-12 high school. So they designated Northeast Middle School for the Como area. The rest of

Southeast went to I believe Sanford [Middle School]. So there was a real split in the direction kids in the neighborhood, and kids that had known each other for a long time, particularly those going to Marshall-U High had come from all three of the Southeast neighborhoods: Prospect Park, Marcy-Holmes and Como.

So that was the first real split where, suddenly, we were put in an area where we had no knowledge of at all—Northeast was our school. That was difficult, and the transition was difficult. And Northeast M. S. accepting kids coming from, not only our area, but they'd closed other schools in North Minneapolis too and taken a large portion of those along Olson Highway and put them at Northeast Middle School too. So kids were coming to Northeast Middle School from very, very diverse backgrounds—very diverse communities. Of course, the north area had the poverty which people talked about at the time. We were considered probably the working-class neighborhood in Southeast. We sit in the middle of a huge industrial area. We are sort of the island in the middle of industry. I've never looked at that as a negative. I've always looked at that as a positive—that's jobs. That's jobs for people. And many of them walked to work at the time. My neighbors walked to work. It was great.

**GB:** That's something I wanted to talk about. With the development of the neighborhood and just how walkability has changed because that was something you mentioned when we talked before.

**JM:** Right. It used to be walkable. I don't think I look at it the same way anymore. But jobs have changed. The direction of the city, of course, has changed. And people go in all directions now. I mean, I have a family near me that one works downtown, but I think the other one works out in Eden Prairie, but wanted to stay in the city. I think that's just the reality now. Mass transit has not kept up with that. If they want us truly to get out of cars, they have to do something about mass transit, but it's such a large, sprawled-out area, I don't know how you address everybody's issue with transportation—it's huge.

**GB:** Can you talk a little bit about walkability when you were a young mother with your children?

**JM:** Then I walked everywhere—a lot. We were a one-car family. So you walked to schools, both Marshall-University across the railroad tracks to Dinkytown. Tuttle School was right there. But we also had businesses on the corner in our neighborhood that are no longer there. It is really not a positive when you talk about shopping in your own neighborhood. We used to have a Fairway Food Store on the corner. We used to have a butcher shop. We still have Oaks Hardware. It is basically an institution in our neighborhood. It has been there forever. We had a drug store on the corner. You had the barbershop. We had a variety store. The kids would go to the variety store. It was just wonderful. It was really old school. It's like what it used to be like. So we had things right there. It was not critical. I could walk up to the corner and get basically whatever I needed.

And then we had some long-term restaurants—Manning's Café has been there forever; Sporty's is across the street. It's had several owners, but it is still there. I'm trying to think—now we have Black's Coffee on the corner which appeals to a lot of the younger people—kids come I've

noticed and to have their pictures taken in front of the Black's Coffee sign right there. And we have Blue Door which is very popular, but that brings people from all over the city and area. It is not just a neighborhood restaurant. It is a huge magnet. But we don't—right now we don't—there isn't even a grocery or a convenience store on the corner. They're re-doing it again for the umpteenth time. But they've spent more time selling hookahs and smoking devices and I think they still will rather than actual food. So there really isn't a great food supply. There is Joe's Market down the street. I think it's been renamed, but Joe still owns the building. But it is—you can get bread, milk and then sandwiches and stuff. But, in terms of actually being able to shop in my neighborhood—no. And I miss some of that.

I miss—Mattox Grocery was on the corner of 27th and Como. It is no longer there. But Hank Mattox kept more families going in the Village, in University Village, because he would start a—you could keep a tab. And you had your little folder up there and he'd pull it out and you'd pay at the end of the month or whatever or, "Do you need something right now?" He was just marvelous. He was absolutely marvelous. And he was kind of a grumpy old man, but he loved everybody, and I remember things like the fresh vats of pickled herring. Every holiday—the whole store just wreaked of the pickled herring. He would have slab bacon. He would slice it for you. But there were a lot of families that came in for something like that and you slice—and people would eat it raw to this day. Oh my goodness. But it was different times and different era.

*19:57*

But those were the people that sort of kept it going for so many years and then they disappear—things change.

**GB:** Do you remember when Mattox closed?

**JM:** I don't remember when it closed, but I think it was only open probably until the 80s.

**GB:** Did it seem like there was a flood of when things started to close or did it just—was it a gradual—

**JM:** Some of it was gradual. I think that when—the dramatic changes came with the schools because it was primarily a family neighborhood. We have lots of small, single-family homes, which in this day and age should be an absolute plus because that's what families are looking for. But now we have landlords and developers, and they have changed many of those single-family homes into rental. So the market is not as vibrant as it probably should be for those. And city-wide—those are the people that are looking for housing. There's a real shortage of first-time home buyers of those small homes. And I think that's very sad because we still have access if you're a young family to a great neighborhood-type school. It's in the Marcy-Holmes neighborhood, but Marcy Open School is a very popular—they just did an addition—a very popular program, and get your kids to South High School. So it should work as a plus, but we also have many students now in our area that go to charter schools. So that's something that has

changed. We did not have charter schools when my children were growing up, but my children are in their 40s, 50s and early 60s. So that has been a major change—plus/minuses I suppose, because it took kids out of the public schools. Tuttle school is still open, but it has a Heritage Charter School in it. The population is primarily Somali. And they come from all over the area, although we have a large Somali population in Como area.

One of the things that has really changed is housing. There's no doubt about it and the City is doing its best to change us in ways not everyone agrees with with the 2040 plan, but we went through some major housing efforts and we went through a Neighborhood Revitalization Program which was a city-focused plan. When they realized that the City basically and neighborhoods were deteriorating. And it was I believe about a \$ 200 million project.

**GB:** So you're talking about all these things. I kind of want to establish that your connection to them is through your involvement. Do you want to talk a little bit about how you're been involved in—

**JM:** Okay. What I have done besides the schools—and I was heavily involved in the schools—my first real involvement was with SECIA [Southeast Como Improvement Association]. As I said, my landlord got me involved in the 70s, and I've been on the board probably ever since. I even, many years ago, was president for a short period of time. And it's still the focus of the neighborhood. If you don't have a center—if you don't have an organization that can pull everybody together, neighborhoods kind of flounder. But it's where all the information—it's where the council members and everybody comes to if they need to bring something to a neighborhood. They generally take it to the neighborhood association.

Out of that came our NRP program which was the Neighborhood Revitalization Program, and it was city-wide, but it was a major, major project for the area because we had committees on every aspect of the neighborhood, whether it was housing or schools or transportation, green space, parks, environment, etc. And hundreds of the people in the neighborhood got involved in those committees. It was a great place to bring people together to figure out why they were there, what they wanted and—. So out of that came a plan.

Later came the Small Area Plan in the last few years, which we did the same type of thing. It was incorporated supposedly in the comprehensive plan, but now most of that is being, I think, overrun by the 2040 plan, which is a total city top-down project. But that's too political to go into at any length.

Other things that I was involved in was the Stadium Area Advisory Group [SAAG]. I'm still on that. And that came out of the TCF Bank Stadium funding where, okay, we're going to get a new major athletic venue next to the stadium and it's going to have implications for every neighborhood around and that. So there was a committee started and I've been on that committee since it's inception. And basically, it's there to—at the time, to respond to any kind of real issues coming out of stadium events and that type of thing. But it also had a program with it called the Good Neighbor Fund where neighborhoods, to this day, every fall or spring, can submit proposals for funding for small projects in their neighborhood for a year.

So we've done some wonderful things with that. A lot of it had to do with Van Cleve Park. Right now, we've got this cultural thing with bringing music groups in and performances. In fact, there's one tonight. So it was just a way to get us connected to the University, to allow us to fund projects that we did not have the money for—small projects. So, every year, we decide which groups get funding for these projects. So it's good.

I'm also been doing restorative justice for a number of years. And I got involved with that because of all the parties in the neighborhood. And that's a whole part of my history.

**GB:** Through the Neighborhood Association?

**JM:** Through the Neighborhood Association, through the Second Precinct. Walt Dziedzic at the time—and he was our councilmember in the 70s—basically helped us get connected with the Precinct, get the University involved. We had serious issues. Southeast Como had parties—unbelievable parties—where you would have 100-175 people at one house. And drinking is a major, major issue. It is still an issue but, at that time, there was so little response and there was so much damage done and there were families that left. It became so threatening and so violent at times. But out of those conversations with the University came the Student Code of Conduct at some point. Also, party task-force where the police then did respond. Action was taken. Landlords were contacted. And so—

**GB:** So your involvement did have implications [unintelligible].

**JM:** Absolutely. And then, shortly after, that came the Restorative Justice Program and we decided—Southeast Como decided to get involved. And it's a purely volunteer thing. There are several people from my neighborhood that still volunteer. But I got involved because of drinking, and I had had a brother with an alcohol problem I remembered. But we were curious also about who are these kids that get cited and why. And so I do still volunteer for sessions with kids that are cited. There are lots of young women that are cited. And that kind of in my mind at least was a focus. But it's all of them. And how prevalent it is. We are now a society that doesn't go anywhere where alcohol is not involved. You used to go to family restaurants and it was coffee and tea. Now there really isn't any place now that basically doesn't serve alcohol, whether it's just wine or something very mild or hard liquor. But it's a reality, so how do you deal with that? But I was really concerned about the welfare of kids that are cited and their future. What I found was some really dramatic cases, some very touching.

Since then, people have tapped me on the shoulder at a store saying, you were at my session. It's just kind of interesting, but to get them to do something besides go to court. If they go through the restorative justice process and we give them some community service or something that they have to do, they can then have this expunged from their record which is a total positive in my book.

30:04

But it's also taking responsibility and looking at yourself in that. And there were many kids that, over the years, that there were some real mental health issues that we have directed kids to. So there out of it for me is the positive.

And just meeting them and figuring out what's going on with these kids and what—many of them are so inexperienced. And you walk into the University—this huge 52,000 student campus where all of this is going on. Some of them for the first time. They go with friends. They get in situations that are not positive, and for some of them very frightening and, out of that, you want something positive to come. You want them to at least back up, take a good look at this. This is not where you want to be.

I've also been—there are some things that used to be in the neighborhood that are not anymore. We had a First Southeast Corporation. This is a number of years ago, and I can't even remember exactly when—which was we all invested—we basically bought stocks I think at the time. My husband and I put in a couple thousand where they bought up houses and redid them, and then sold them to families—houses that were deteriorating, houses that had been run down by landlords, houses that just we wanted to save for the neighborhood. And we did that for many years. And then, tragically, it ended when there was a major fire that destroyed a whole house. And the funds were just not there to restart it again. But it was a great experiment. It worked at the time.

**GB:** Do you remember where the fire was?

**JM:** I know where the fire was. It was on 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast, basically right around the corner from us. And, of course, then I knew rental housing went up instead. But it was a great experiment. I also was involved in the SEMI area which is the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial area. That's basically the area between the University and the Como Neighborhood where you have all the industry and railroad tracks and all of that. But that has kind of gone by the wayside as far as I know too. We are also—Como is also the home neighborhood for the Mid-City Industrial area which is the major industrial area in the city. That is everything north of East Hennepin. And so you have all the industry going up to Industrial Boulevard to Northeast, to the city limits. But that is a major, major industrial area. And now there's housing along there. And, at times—I think they have now organized their own housing unit but, at the time, they were part of Southeast Como's housing group too if they needed something. As they developed housing along Stinson Boulevard, the apartments there, they would come to us for some assistance. But they now have their own group. But it is a major part—it's a major workforce area.

Also, we're very cognizant of all the changes coming along East Hennepin. For a long time, like many areas, it was sort of a neglected, just old industrial area, but along that area now is a total revitalization. I mean wonderful new investment at 15<sup>th</sup> and East Hennepin; you have Clockwork which is a major tech group that took over a gas station. And it is a wonderful sort of focal point because it's very colorful also. But the restaurant across the street—Nina Wong's restaurant across the street—is very, very popular, which used to be an old grocery store. But going down the street now you have housing in some of the—and lofts along East Hennepin there. So it's—and there's changes coming. We know that more and more will be investing in the area. People

like their old—they like old buildings. They still like their old brick buildings, and they like them for housing and all other uses. So it's a major change, but I look at it as a positive.

**GB:** So Joan, in terms of development and economic growth, can you talk about some of the controversy around that?

**JM:** The primary controversy I think in our area is housing and the direction of housing. As I said, we have a lot of small, single-family homes, and that's a population the city talks about all the time. Where do we house families? And there are many that would like to buy. And we know that from realtors and others too. But they are money-makers for landlords, and so they are often—don't even go on the market. A lot of times they contact people personally. I personally probably get eight to ten letters a month from developers that want to buy my house. I have started even to get personal telephone calls. And I've asked where do you get my name? Who gave you my name? Asking me to sell my house. I happen to have a house with a double-lot, so it would—I know that the lots are probably worth more than the house.

**GB:** What is your address? I don't think I asked?

**JM:** 1067 14<sup>th</sup> Avenue Southeast. So the pressure is there all the time, but there is a whole group of people that would love to have lived in the—or stayed in the neighborhood, but the option is disappearing. We are starting to have houses torn down and mega complexes put in. It's certainly happening along our corridors—will happen sooner in 15<sup>th</sup> Avenue right across from Van Cleve Park, but also on my blocks behind me on 13<sup>th</sup> now are two major developments that will take down older homes for rental. Rental is good, but rental is not diverse. For a city that talks about access and affordability, we're not there. This is a direction for one population. It is for either student and it is for profit.

So, for us, it's not turning out to be necessarily a positive. It's kind of interesting too considering all of the development along the light rail lines and through the University campus and near the Dinkytown area that—all of this housing and, yet, the population at the University of Minnesota is not going up. I mean, it's maintained around 50,000 for a long time now. But I don't know the reasons for this type of development and who they are targeting. But that's a major issue.

The other part of that is the City and the City's enforcement of codes, and that's been a negative for a long, long time. We've watched houses just deteriorate into the ground with absolutely no enforcement. So that makes them very vulnerable properties. And that's been a concern for a long, long time now. On the plus side of housing is that we do have some major developments and developers that have been excellent. We have PPL [Project for Pride in Living] and we have Rivertown Properties. And we have Elmwood Properties that have all built—and these are large complexes—basically Como Avenue—it would be 13<sup>th</sup> Avenue—a large Somali population in the PPL properties, but Rivertown now is developing a new complex. They are across from Van Cleve Park near the railroad tracks. PPL is taking down the silos which we had the grain all over the Bunge Silos. Bunge—the head house will remain. It is a focal point. It's sort of a storied focal point for the neighborhood and is observable from the freeway and everybody knows where the Bunge Tower is. That will remain just as a visual focal point for the area, but the silos are coming down and PPL is adding major housing for that area.

40:05

And that's not just—it's directed not just at students—they're also looking at the working population, the singles in the neighborhood or couples because that's not a focus of the landlords. And then artists also. So we certainly haven't opposed housing in the neighborhood on that level. It has been done thoughtfully and very targeted population. So all of this though probably will have some implications for a place like Van Cleve Park. We are the major Southeast Park. We are the one community park—Luxton and Marcy-Holmes have small parks, but the major park is Van Cleve for, not only young children, but for everybody. We wish that there was more access to the Minneapolis Public Schools property which is basically fenced in, looks wonderful, but goes unused 90 percent—95 percent of the time. But maybe that will come too if South High develops their own playing fields over there.

But anyway—so housing is an issue, but we also have the married student housing at 27-28<sup>th</sup> and Como. But that's also separate. We are just now starting to build some kind of a relationship. And that came out of—because I don't think it's managed anymore by the University of Minnesota. I don't know about Commonwealth [Terrace Cooperative] here, but married student housing used to be managed by the University of Minnesota. That is no longer true. So a company now runs these housing complexes.

**GB:** I think they're student co-ops—

**JM:** Student co-ops.

**GB:** That they hire a management company to oversee.

**JM:** Yep. And so—but we have not had a contact with them for quite some time, and because of the situation with—I believe with daycare there and issues with daycare—they came to Como with some concerns because neighborhood people also use that daycare center. So we've been working with them on those issues, so hopefully we'll build a more direct contact with them over a period of time that we can maintain. But, like every other student center, the clientele changes, the people in charge change, so it's a matter of keeping up all the time too. You don't always have the same contacts.

But in housing, real concerns about the city's focus. As I said, there was a great deal of talk about aging in place. And yet, I think, as a senior, and I've heard this from so many seniors, feel that the city just wants us all to go away. Diversity—we certainly lack that in terms of our single-family units and that type of thing. But affordability, green spaces, kids—I'm not sure that we've done a very good job of looking at those particular issues. But that's a top-down thing. That's a political thing. And I think that everyone now feels that almost everything that is done in terms of housing or city planning is top-down.

It used to be neighborhoods. There were these conversations. There was action—there were plans that came up out of this, whether it be the NRP or [unintelligible] plans or whatever, Small Area Plans. Now everything is top-down—the 2040 plan on the books right now. And I'm sure

that they will pass 95 percent of it if not all of it—is a total top-down. And basically it says we're going to rezone the entire city, but no one's explained that, where it came from, whose plan this really is. And is any of it enforceable. So there's lots of questions coming this way for our small neighborhood but, basically, for the whole city.

The other thing that we've discovered is getting people involved is always hard because people are really busy these days. They're not just doing one thing anymore. They're going in so many directions, so I think one of our efforts in—and my efforts is to get us to focus and to respect people's time. I want them involved, but let's focus and get the job done and move on and get them out of there. Sometimes we ramble too long at meetings. At the same time, it's just a great place. We had our annual meeting the other night—met new people—met wonderful, young, new people. Talking to them, they're busy. But can we get you involved in one or two things. Would you come to a special event?

That's the other thing that we've been very lucky at. We have had a couple of—our annual event is the Como Cookout every September. It's a weekend every—in September, and that is a neighborhood—basically, it is a cookout. We have great food, we have entertainment, we have bands and other things. And we just, “Come on in.” We go out on the street and say as students are walking by, “Come on in.” And they're just amazed—first of all, there's free food. If you give them free food, they'll come to almost anything. But it's just a great way to expose them through tables to different things going on in the neighborhood. And even the University—the University will come with their tables of things that they want kids to know about—student engagement comes, and they're a major part of that event. Sometimes the Bell Museum will come. Other places will come—although the Bell now has moved off-campus. But it's focusing on things that they need to know about—getting access to things—student safety is a priority. The Minneapolis Police Department comes.

But that's our one singular event every year that is just really, really important. And then they're working on trying to have more special events like the entertainment events that came through the Good Neighbor Fund—three bands, series, entertain people at Van Cleve Park. So we work on this. We work on this all the time, but in some—almost everything is successful. It just depends upon how you—how many people you actually get depends on who sees the announcements. That's the big problem is communication. How do you get those—because there's so many students involved. Neighborhood people probably would look at the Como tidbits and maybe even get the door-to-door mailer that comes out.

**GB:** What is the Como Tidbits?

**JM:** It's called—Tidbits is online on Como's online—you can go through Southeast Como and hook onto the Tidbits. The commotion comes out—I think it's every month or quarterly. And that is delivered door to door. That goes door to door to all addresses in Southeast Como. So we do our best at trying to get the word out at what's going on and who to contact and, if you have a problem, we work hard to try to get our councilmembers involved. Cam Gordon from the Second Ward has been very, very responsive—not much contact with First Ward councilmember—basically does not come to any of our meetings or anything. But that's—we're

split into two wards—part of North Como—the north side of Como—only part of it is in the First Ward. The major part is in the Second Ward though, so there's always issues there. I don't know—

But housing is probably the most divisive issue. It's also basically they—it can be a positive too if we could see direction growth going in the direction that we had hoped on the corridors. Right now it's all being developed basically for more student housing. But we had hoped for more diverse housing along the corridors so that people could stay—not only to age in place—I'm not talking just seniors—we have a lot of single people; we have a lot of University workers. I mean, the University is a major, major employer in this area, but we also have the industrial areas and, a number of years ago, there were industries around us—New French Bakery came into the neighborhood; Murphy Trucking has been there for a long time.

50:02

Now I think it's owned by the University of Minnesota—that property. But there were major industries in there that said, is there housing for families? And some did probably move into the neighborhood. But we have never developed the type of housing probably that's needed for the industrial areas—families, workers—I don't think that we have done—not that we could do the job, but we have never attracted the type of developer that would want to focus on something other than student housing.

**GB:** So, aside from what hasn't been done, I wonder if maybe we should end on, as far as your accomplishments, is there anything that stands out for you?

**JM:** That stands out for me.

**GB:** Remarkable, noteworthy, things you're really proud of.

**JM:** Well I'm happy for the people that have stayed. I have three daughters that—two graduated from the U, one from Macalester [College]—they all three bought houses in Southeast, two of them in the Como neighborhood, one in Marcy-Holmes and loved the neighborhood. But two of them work at the U too, so that's that person that has a direct connection that we didn't always look at. But it was a wonderful neighborhood for me to raise my children in. It's very close to everything. It is close to downtown and the freeway and shopping and concerts. I loved living in the area. You know the University of Minnesota was also sort of our entertainment center. The wonderful concerts at Northrup Auditorium that I went to during the protest wars of the 60s with Joan Baez and everybody on stage, I mean they were all there. The Metropolitan Opera came. The New York Metropolitan Opera—live performances at Northrup Auditorium. It was fabulous. We've always loved sports. My husband loved sports, and we've been season ticket holders. Now he's deceased—season ticket holders with the women's basketball team. And so we had a thrilling event the other night with Lindsay Whalen coming back as the coach there.

Through my involvement with the Stadium Area Advisory Group, got tickets to the Rolling Stones 2015—someone—my friends at work, because I worked for Minneapolis Public Schools for almost 40 years. We're just astounded that I was actually at my age going to a Rolling Stones Concert, but they were there the night my oldest daughter graduated from Marshall High, and her friends went and she didn't because all the relatives were here for her graduation, and so she didn't go. So when they—I had an opportunity to get these tickets—I said we're going and went to the Rolling Stones—and had to prove it to my friends at work. This is just an aside—prove it to my friends at work. So during one of the songs—I Can't Get No Satisfaction or something like that—I took my cellphone out and dialed my number at work, so it went to my answering machine at work so I could prove the next day that I was actually at the Rolling Stones. Anyway, kind of crazy.

So it's also an area that has so much to offer. Yes, there are problems that come with it. Dinkytown used to be a major attraction. It no longer is I think for many of us, but it no longer has the types of places that we used to go to which was they used to have the drug store—Grays Drug on the corner. These were all active businesses at the time—a fabulous bakery, Gordons [Campus] Bakery, and Vescio's. You know, these are institutions there. And so as the—and House of Hanson on the corner. These are all places that are gone now. But there just isn't the type of shopping there that I need. We also then go down the street because you have a Lunds and Byerlys down the street. But that was one thing basically throughout Southeast that we were—really fell short on was grocery stores. And that was all three neighborhoods until Lunds came in and now New Thyme up on—

**GB:** Fresh Thyme.

**JM:** Fresh Thyme up there on University. I've not been there yet. But we go north to the quarry. You know, it's Cub Food or—I am a member of the Eastside [Food] Co-op, so very much involved with the co-ops too. You know, that's a priority of mine. So things change, but I have loved living in the neighborhood. To this day, I am not afraid of living near students. I have said and I've said this many times—if I didn't want to live by students, I would have left 50 years ago. I'm not going anyplace. Things change. You just hope that they make changes that maybe some are lasting, but that are good for everybody, not just one population. And sometimes I feel that that's been the thing that has happened. It has been—development has been for one population and one population only. We'll see what direction the City takes. I don't know—I think the 2040 plan is going to have implications for every single neighborhood in the city. So we will see—and it depends upon how responsive the City is to those [unintelligible]. Don't know.

The negative parts we've gone through I believe—went through probably the hardest years—were with housing, with landlords. But with—in terms of the University, which is a difficult institution to get your hands on—it is so big, but the student engagement office has been a major plus—Kendra Treone and, before that, people like Jan Marlock who's now retired were just major, major contacts for our neighborhood, maybe for all neighborhoods, but for my neighborhood. They changed so many things. When we had the riots in 2009, the hockey riots were turning points in many ways for all of us—Dziedzic I believe was the councilmember at the

time, but I'm not sure about that. But the riots in 2009 for me was a major change. It's the first time I ever made a citizen's arrest—been so threatened—went out to help neighbors. But there was so much damage done. Damage done in Dinkytown was devastating, but the fallout into the neighborhoods was just about as bad, but out of that came some real positives.

The Student Code of Conduct came out of that. But out of that also came enforcement, which we had not seen before—had never seen before. But they didn't have the people in place to do it. And I think, until then, they didn't realize how devastating it was. But, at the time, I wrote a letter—I still have it—to the Board of Regents and to the University president and to councilmembers and everybody involved and there was a huge meeting that came out of it. And even students reading my letter were just shocked because I detailed the events of that night and its implication. But the final line in it basically is, "I have asked my neighbors to trust us that we will get these things solved. I no longer have that trust, and I don't know what to tell them anymore." So when you reach—that was the lowest point. That was absolutely the lowest point. And I really thought maybe we had lost it at that point, but out of that came this total turnaround with the student's engagement and the whole focus of teaching kids to live responsibly in a neighborhood, but also putting some pressure on landlords for the behavior, and you're not here just to make money. You're also responsible for what goes on in your houses and that type of thing. But, other than that, I have loved living in the neighborhood. I'm not going anyplace. I will die with my boots on (laughter).

**GB:** Thank you so much Joan. This has been wonderful.

**JM:** Did you get what you needed from me?

**GB:** Got what I need. Thank you so much.

[End of Interview]

Total Interview Time: 0:59:52