

10-28-2011

Interview with Corby Wise

Trudy Andrzejewski

Corby Wise

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Recommended Citation

Andrzejewski, Trudy and Wise, Corby, "Interview with Corby Wise" (2011). *Interviews*. 6.
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PS-MS-TR-ANDRZEJEWSKI-102811

Interviewer: TRUDY ANDRZEJEWSKI

Interviewee: CORBY WISE

Date, Time: 10/28/11, 10 AM – 11 AM

Location of Interview: Sips Café, 101 S Main St., Mount Vernon, OH

Trudy Andrzejewski: We're starting to record if that's okay. *(Phone rings)*

Corby Wise: Yeah.

TA: Okay, if you could say your name and occupation. *(Phone continues to ring)*

CW: Corby Wise, Advertising Manager of *Mount Vernon News*.

TA: Okay, great. And how long have you lived in Knox County?

CW: Oh, god. Probably, what? Thirty, thirty-five years, somewhere in there.

TA: Do you have family here?

CW: Yes.

TA: Okay. Have they been in the community for longer than that?

CW: Yes.

TA: Okay, um, so did you go to high school in Mount Vernon?

CW: I did.

TA: Um, do you remember in high school having any spaces that you would go to after school? What would you do after school?

CW: Parking lots, mostly. Skateboard, parking lots, that kind of thing. Um, various parking lots all over town *(laughs)*.

TA: What kind of things would you do?

CW: Um, just ride the skateboard, and hang out with friends. Make fun of each other, that kind of stuff.

TA: Okay. Um, so now where do you spend time outside of work or home?

CW: I spend it in local businesses, restaurants, and walking –and uh, mostly in town though. I don't really get out of, out of the area that often. So I do spend most of my time in Mount Vernon and typically, you know, if I'm out with family or friends we're at the Alcove or Flappers or some place like that.

TA: So, just for context this interview is taking place on Main Street in Mount Vernon. Do you want to talk a little bit about the businesses that are around this area?

CW: Sure. Um, I am a big proponent of downtown Mount Vernon and Main Street, I've always been, you know, kinda pro-"Main Street." My family had a restaurant on Main Street for twenty years.

TA: What was that?

CW: Sweet Williams. I guess, yeah, probably twenty years, somewhere around there. And uh sort of grew up around it and, and in that business and the local business community. My friends' families had Main Street businesses so we were all sort of in and out of each other's family business from the whole time growing up. It was fun, you know, and it was definitely a space where, you know, you could come downtown and go to the Electric Animal and play, you know, Donkey Kong, Pac-Man and, you know, walk over to, you know, your family restaurant or whatever, have a snack and then go up to the Alcove where, my friend's dad owned that, have another snack and then get on the skateboard and go to the... I mean, it was fun. It was really, really fun and still, you know, Main Street for me is Mount Vernon and it has nothing to do with Coshocton Road or, or any of that mess. I mean, it's about, you know, the downtown area and the immediate neighborhood surrounding, you know. That's Mount Vernon to me. You know, that other stuff could be anywhere and, uh- but this is the part that I identify with as Mount Vernon, so.

TA: Can you talk a little bit more about the place that you played Donkey Kong?

CW: Sure, the Electric Animal. Yeah, it's where Flowers-for-You is now and it was only open probably three or four years but you'd get an allowance as a kid and it would go straight from you know mom's pocket to the Electric Animal's coffers in about forty five minutes. Yeah, it was just... and we would go in there after school, it was middle school. So the middle school at the time was on Mulberry Street so we would walk, we walked everywhere. You know, we'd walk to middle school everyday and then walk home. And I grew up on East Gambier Street so it was sort of a little bit, you know, on the way to come up Main and swing by Jay's Records and stuff which was just down the street from Electric Animal and then go into the Electric Animal and play some video games. And buy some Duran-Duran pins or whatever at Jay's Records and stuff (*laughs*). For the record I never bought a Duran Duran pin (*laughs*).

TA: (*Laughs*) Okay, I'll make sure to take note of that.

CW: Yeha. Can we put that on the disclaimer, the release? (*Laughs*) Anyway.

TA: So, do you have kids now?

CW: Yes.

TA: How old are they?

CW: She's eight. I have one, one kid.

TA: Would you say, does she do similar things after school?

CW: Her life is more restrictive than mine was because I'm a helicopter parent that can't let her out of my sight so, you know, I do think she's getting a little bit more freedom here and there so. But I'm an overprotective parent. So she doesn't and probably never will have the freedom to roam about town like I did, no.

TA: Do you see a lot of kids around the neighborhood doing that? [approx. 5:10]

CW: Sure, yeah, I mean there are still folks running around doing things. Maybe not like it was but I think that it's, you know, probably just about as safe as it was then. I mean, you know, with media and people's wrong doings being more present and up front with, you know, lists and those things you have a better understanding of who's in the neighborhood. And maybe you don't necessarily, you know- you're aware of those things whereas thirty years ago you wouldn't have had a clue and, you know, you leave your door unlocked and it's definitely different than that. I mean you don't leave your door unlocked anymore, your car unlocked with your checkbook sitting on the seat with a hundred dollar bill sitting on the, you know. You just don't do that stuff anymore. *(Laughs)* So, but it's still pretty good. Eleanor doesn't get to roam about like that but I foresee at some point she'll start getting a *little* bit more freedom to do things *(laughs)*, so.

TA: I would advocate for that. I'm just kidding, it's easy for me to say that now when I don't have a kid.

CW: Yeah, yeah. It's a different deal when you have a kid. It's, I don't know. It is for me at least. So.

TA: So, on weekends, would you say there's a regular place that you or your family frequent?

CW: Um, we hang out at our house a lot. And, you know, our friends' homes. Just kind of, you know. I mean, yeah. There are places we frequent. I mean, we go to the Alcove probably a couple times a week. And, and then sort of pepper in various other places throughout the time but as far as, you know, places we go- we go to the farmers' market, we do lawn work and hang out at the house. That kind of thing. But we don't really, we're not the most social critters in the world so we do kind of keep pretty close to the, close to the home base usually.

(Manager brings us to coffees. Corby, to Manager of Sips) Hey Rusty, thanks,

Rusty: Did you have a mochachino too? (TA nods) I guess great minds think alike!

CW: No, she, she said that it's the best so, I always get just a regular coffee, so.

R: Or a chai.

CW: Or a chai, so,

R: You haven't gotten a chai in a while.

CW: I haven't gotten a chai in a while, yeah. You don't have my hemp milk anymore, right?

R: No, no...

CW: That's all right.

R: That stuff just got way too expensive (laughs), I mean, you know, over four dollars a quart.

CW: Oh god, wow, that'd be an up-sell then (laughs).

R: Well it was...

CW: Yeah .

R: But still I just, with what it cost, I...

CW: No, that makes sense, Russ [mumbles] Thanks.

TA: Is he the owner of Sips?

CW: Yep, yeah.

TA: So right now we're sitting in Sips Café which is at the corner of Main Street and...?

CW: Vine.

TA: Vine.

CW: Yep, West Vine.

TA: So would you say a lot of people...

CW: Oh, it *is* good!

TA: ...frequent Sips?

CW: Absolutely. I mean it's, you know, it's, it's right at an intersection of town. Lots, lots of folks come here, yeah.

TA: Do they host events and things like that here?

CW: Yeah, they have different things that they do. They have concerts and, and uh you know, various meetings here and there.

TA: Has it been in the community for a long time?

CW: Uh yeah, yeah I would say at least ten years. They started across the street uh where, oh, financial services. Next door to First Merit.

TA: Right, one of those brick storefronts?

CW: Yeah, yeah they were over there for a while and had sort of a knick knack shop in the front, coffee shop in the back.

TA: Oh, cool.

CW: So, yeah, so it kind of expanded from that just to coffee then moved over here when this space was finished. Because when the first opened it was Colonial Men's Wear in this area, it was a men's store and then when the Woodward Development Corporation got a hold of the Woodward and started the restoration the men's store closed its doors and, uh- which I think was more of a retirement than anything else, so. They'd been doing it for fifty years. And then when this space became available Sips moved over here.

TA: Has it been like a very popular business that whole time?

CW: Yeah, yeah absolutely. I mean it's, you know, is one of a few places where you can get coffee downtown and just walk in and get it so, yeah.

TA: But now I hear that there's a new business coming in? The Naz is putting in a ...

CW: They have a coffee shop in their building down there, yeah.

TA: Do you think that that will change how sips is viewed in the community or frequented?

CW: No, I don't think so. I mean, I think, you know, those kids that are down there that are using that sort of "educational block" if you want to call it that, probably end up in the Naz coffee shop a lot. I think they'll still funnel down here but. I think the as much as Sips has become as much a part of the community and town, I think that, you know, the regulars that come in here will still come in here.

TA: Uh, I, um, the "regulars," can you...

CW: Just, people that work downtown and people that live in the area and shop downtown usually end up in here.

TA: How frequently do you think they come in?

CW: Mmm, couple times a week I'd say. I mean, I don't know that's a guess but I know some people, you know, *The News* come here every day some a couple times a week just sort of depends on the person.

TA: You mentioned the Alcove a few times.

CW: Yeah.

TA: Would you talk a little bit more about that? [approx. 10:50]

CW: Oh, I'd love to. Um, the Alcove is sort of an institution, I think. It's been downtown forever, um, ever since I've been a kid, oh, uh, longer than that. But, you know, it's always been kind of if you had something to celebrate and had something that you were gonna, you know, was a big deal you would go to the Alcove. I mean that was sort of the, the place to go for stuff like that. You'd go in there and you know, its always been a little bit dressier than typical Mount Vernon. You know, it isn't, I mean it actually- it used to be if you weren't kind of dressed up a little bit you'd feel a little bit out of place there and it's not so much that way anymore. I mean you could go in dressed maybe not "Hobo" style but you know, not in your Sunday finest and feel very comfortable. But yeah, I, one of my best friend's growing up, his father owned the Alcove and we spent a lot of time in there and good friends have worked there through the years and always sort of, its been a part of my life in a big way for, forever. And when it closed that was, that was bad. It closed a few years ago, I don't know if you know this, um. A good friend of mine owned it in fact and uh couldn't keep it going and it closed down for maybe a few months and then some concerned community members, because of what it is and the institution that it is, you know, bought it back and have been running it ever since but that was one of those times when it was sort of an "oh shit" moment of, you know, "holy moley, the Alcove!" That's, that's a big part of downtown. It has, it's been here for 100 years. They're celebrating 100 years this year. Yeah, so that's, it's a real credit to those that stepped in and said, you know, we can't let this one go. **[approx. 12:48]**

TA: Absolutely. I think that definitely proves its importance in the community.

CW: Yeah, abs.- It certainly does. And uh, those that did that, I mean, I know they're probably not, you know, raking in the money off of their investment to bring it up but, you know it's certainly an important part of Mount Vernon and to have folks that feel that strongly about, you know, just a restaurant in town tells you the amount of love that goes into this town by, you know, the folks that live here, so. Anyway, it's just a cool thing.

TA: So, yeah, that's just amazing to me that they could like rally together to support a local business.

CW: Yeah.

TA: Do you think that a lot of the community shares that support with the Alcove or Main Street in general?

CW: Uh, I would say a lot of the community does. I would say a lot, you know, maybe Main Street isn't necessarily the focal point of some folks and their experience here. But, you know, I think that for the people that have been here a very long time, Main Street is an incredibly important part of Mount Vernon.

TA: If we were to come to Main Street maybe like 10 years ago, or even 20 years ago, how would it be different?

CW: Well, um, 20 years ago it would be significantly different; 10 years ago, not so different. 20 years ago, though, you would've had a giant building right over here. First Knox, in fact, built that, that building and they took down a block more or less to build that so you would've had you know, that; obviously the fire that destroyed the building

down here. You would've had the most magnificent bar where I spent lots of my money, down at the corner of Ohio Avenue & Main.

TA: What was that?

CW: The Corner Grill, um, which is a great bar. Uh, you know more businesses were occupied, you had a department store downtown 20 years ago. Actually, you may, 20 years ago you may have had two department stores downtown. You may have, have Ringwalds and Ruedens or, at that point it was probably Stage? Stage. Which was a, or Almonds, even... I'm getting, getting way back there. But uh, you know, you had two, two department stores downtown. You had a shoe store; you had two men's ware shops. You had a bookstore, which wasn't Paragraphs; it was a different bookstore at that point. It was called Second Chapter. You had an ice cream store, so. Yeah it was, uh, Rainbow Alley, which was down where the glass shop is now, where Coleman's is. Um, yeah so it was significantly different. You know, Buckeye Candy was still Buckeye Candy and uh you wouldn't eat any candy out of there if you'd been to the warehouse part. You can leave that part out of there (*laughs.*)

TA: I didn't know that. [approx. 16:03]

CW: Yeah it was kinda... I mean, it was really cool, it just gave you that sort of old school feeling but it just didn't necessarily make you think that it was clean (*laughs*). But uh it was cool I mean it was just, yeah you know and if you go back even further you have places like Zincs Market and I mean these are places where you would walk in and you would know whoever's running the store. I mean everybody totally knew everyone, I mean, it's it sounds like a cliché but back, back then it was just, I mean, "Hey, how you doing? Oh, I'm doing alright today!" You know, it was, it was, you know, everything was a conversation. Everything was, you know, it was really a neat place. It still is a neat place but not so far removed it was, it was *that*. I mean, you had a movie theater downtown, um, (*interviewer points around the corner*) No, actually you have to go further back for that movie theater, you're talking about the Vernon. The, just down where COTC is, was a like a two movie theater. I saw the, uh, Rambo there (*pause, silent laugh*). And, and any other, you know, I had to wait in line to see Rambo (*laughs*).

TA: The line was out the door?

CW: Oh, yeah, yeah, it was up the street to go see Rambo.

TA: Did people of all different ages come in for stuff like that?

CW: Uh-huh, oh yeah. Yeah, absolutely. You know, you'd walk by and there would be people standing there dressed in like a vest with bowtie, clip on bow tie, yeah.

TA: When did that leave the community?

CW: Oh, probably 95, somewhere in there, 94, but when I was in high school you'd go there and you know of course your friends worked there too so when the last show would be over you'd go cart a twelve-pack in and you'd fire up whatever movie was on, have some beers watch a movie and you know, it was fun.

TA: That is so cool.

CW: Yeah, (*laughs*) anyway.

TA: What was the, did the community react at all when the movie theater left? How do you think that impacted...

CW: Um, well I think it impacted downtown in a negative way because it was bringing folks down but not, not in a scale that would save anything. I mean it wasn't, it sort of went out with a whimper to be honest with you. I mean you had Newark put in their mall which is now failing, but at the time it was all, "let's go down to the Indian mound mall!" you know, "it's named after Indian mounds so it's gotta be good" (*laughs*) so you go down there and uh you know trump through a Lazarus before you go watch a movie and uh have a food in a proper food court and that that sort of was the beginning of the end for that. And then Columbus started getting closer and closer and closer, which as a kid you know Columbus was like going to the moon. I mean you, you, if you went to Columbus it was, it was like a treat, or a holiday type of thing. Now it's just, "Get in the car! We're going to Columbus," you know, "We need to get some socks!" But back then it was, you know, if you went to Columbus it was really you know, something that was, you know, it was special. It wasn't something you just did. You know, really, I mean just like three times a year, Columbus. Now, now it's just... You'd go to Newark or Mansfield if you had to go there because we were all too scared to go to Columbus very often. It was like one of those, "Oh, I can't drive to Columbus, good God." Um, but seriously (*laughs*) but you know so Newark or Mansfield and then and then those communities sort of started to fall a little bit too as Columbus got closer and closer. So now it's like forty-five minutes to Columbus you know, it doesn't take long at all.

TA: So you mean like physically getting closer, with like, Easton and...

CW: Yeah, yeah, yeah- absolutely. Yeah because if you, you know, even back in the 90s the fringe of Columbus was probably ten miles in from where Polaris is, you know, so it was a little further to get to and people were terrified of the big city, you know.

TA: "The big city," (*scoff*)

CW: The big city, that's right. Columbus, the Cow Town, the big city. I hate Columbus but that's just me.

TA: I'm not too fond of it either. But that's cause I'm from Cleveland, so

CW: No. Cleveland's a real city. Columbus is a Cow Town. It is, it is, I mean, it just...

TA: What do you mean by "cow town?"

CW: It's just all, like, where it used to be a cornfield you know and there's really no, like old traditions or it's just, you know... The biggest thing that Columbus has going for it is Ohio State and the fact that for some reason it's our state capital. Apart from that it's, really it's better than it used to be. I really gotta, I gotta stop being so critical of it, it's better than it used to be but really I just hate it. I like Dayton better than Columbus.

(Sniffles) I do. Well, I went to college near Dayton so I get around there a little bit more, but.

TA: Oooh, yeah, that makes sense.

CW: Yeah.

TA: Alright, good excuse. But um, back on like the twenty years ago, ten years ago, do you think that the visual aspects of Main Street have changed a lot? Like, the people, are there as many people on Main Street as there used to be?

CW: No, no. No it's changed, definitely, it's changed. I mean its, you know, that might kind of come back with putting colleges down there on South Main that might change but no, there aren't as many people just walking about as there used to be.

TA: So do you think the community is affected by that, like, less strong?

CW: Um,

TA: Do people know each other now? [approx. 22:02]

CW: I don't know, it's tough to say, um. The downtown community I think is still pretty strong. I mean I think we all kinda know each other, for better or worse (*laughs.*) Um, you know I think the neighborhoods surrounding downtown are very tight knit. At least, I think, I feel mine is incredibly tight knit. I feel like we all really, you know, look out for one another and are all friends. And you know they get together a couple times a year to talk just as a neighborhood, you know, functions and things like that. People have different...

TA: Where do people do that?

CW: Different houses, or at one point their closed down Vine Street from a certain section of my block and had like a block party type thing. It's an ice cream social more than a block party I shouldn't, shouldn't sell it like a block party, but it's fun you know the kids get out and run up and down the street and play football, basketball and stuff. It's good. Yeah.

TA: Um, okay so along with that are there any other kind of community events that are sort of emblematic of Mount Vernon?

CW: Well, we have our Dan Emmett festival. Formerly known as "Dixie Days."

TA: I've never been to it. Will you...

CW: You've never been to it? Um, well it's, it's changed a lot over the years too. As a kid I remember them having, you know, uh, like the Scrambler out here and McGuffy Lane performing on the hill over here. Which, McGuffy Lane is sort of like a local cover, not so much local- regional, how about that? Cover band of like classic rock type stuff. And uh, you know, but that's going back probably to the 70s, early 80s. And, uh, you know so it was that. And then is sort of morphed into this art festival type thing where

they have booths with different things you can buy. And, uh food obviously, and then music. Usually the music's some sort of 50s or 60s kind of person that, you know, usually bands, you start getting back into that age where one guy that was in the band then three whipper snappers that kind of have the old guy's back but, you know, it's popular. A lot of people come down to that. And we have our Christmas parade, which is a tradition, I think, that's good.

TA: When is that?

CW: It's actually the, it always used to be the Saturday following Thanksgiving but in the last couple years and this year its going to be the Sunday following Thanksgiving because as dumb as it is, we don't want to compete with the Ohio State Michigan football game.

TA: That's not dumb, actually.

CW: Yeah, so. You know, I mean I wouldn't want to miss it for a parade; I like watching that every year. But anyway uh as much as I still hate Columbus, I do love watching Ohio State football. Anyway.

TA: O-H

CW: I-O. There you go, you see, I know. I know these things. Um. So it's gonna be on Sunday. And then we have the Christmas walk. Which is, just, it was always the day after. But now we've combined those two events and last year it was crazy I mean we had probably five or six thousand people down on Main Street just I mean it was, I do the announcing for the parade and we had the announcers station at the foot of the square looking down Main Street and the crowd was like undulating (*hand motions, in-and-out*). I mean, it was just cool, to see that many people downtown for a parade coming up. I mean it really looked like, you know, it turned by the Buckeye Candy Company, or, building, and came straight up Main Street and there were just so many people that it was just like this breathing crowd and it was really nuts to see that downtown Mount Vernon. So I'm hoping this year we get that again. Last year we had this carousel downtown for it and like little, a little train that people could right around the square, little kids could ride. It was a much expanded event last year, really cool. And so then we also lit the Christmas tree for the first time that I can remember, which was great. Or it's not a Christmas tree, it's just a big pine but uh we've never done that. It's 75, 70 ft. high so, so anyway that's something we've been doing.

TA: Where, where is the Christmas tree? At Public Square?

CW: Yeah, it's on the public square. It's a big old pine tree that someone planted a long time ago in the 60s to be the Christmas tree for Mount Vernon and, and in my lifetime I can never remember it being lit except for last year. And we put the, we put the lights on the tree with the local tree company and the fire department. It took every bit of ladder and every bit of everything to get to the top of that thing. I mean, It's just it was fantastic. I don't know if you remember it, it was great. You could see it from... a lot of different points in town. It was really neat.

TA: I'll look out for it next year. [approx. 26:47]

CW: Yeah!

TA: I feel like maybe, when was it lit?

CW: Uh, right around, yeah,

TA: Oh!

CW: Yeah, because we light it that night.

TA: Okay, so I would've been here for maybe two weeks.

CW: Yeah, yeah.

TA: And then, in the spring, as you know I was in DC so...

CW: Right, right. Yeah, exactly. So you would not have seen it then but we did not have it on then. So. But it was a nice thing to have just when people were, I mean I don't remember it ever being lit so it was one of those things where it was a big, big deal to the town to come around the corner and see that thing. Because it was just, it just glows. I mean (*sound effects and hand motions*). Anyway.

TA: Did it, did it draw more people to public square?

CW: I think so, yeah. Cause we have a, a "Caroling for Christ" (*pause*), and uh... (*smirk, snicker*), on the square. And basically, you know it's been sort of, the attendance has been sort of falling off year after year but with the Salvation Army band and you know, playing Christmas carols and people singing and we lit the tree. And it was, it was actually really cool. It was neat. So.

TA: Why do you think attendance has been falling off?

CW: Well, I would say that it was until last year. Every now and again you just need to kind of freshen something up and I think that's been going on for a long time and we used to decorate the Civil War monument, which you know if those guys were... Imagine hanging Christmas lights over the World War II monument, you know, that would go over like the like a led balloon. So it was sort of a little bit of a controversy cause it was, it was like this big skirt that they kind of put on the Civil War statue, made out of like PVC and I mean, it was really just really kind of "grrish" looking. It looked nice at night but still it was like this, you know, something that represents a horrible time in the history of the United States and so many people dying and, "let's hang some Christmas lights on it!" and, yeah, so anyway. It's where it should be now, its on the tree instead of the statue, but.

TA: Do a lot of people spend time, just hang out in Public Square?

CW: Um, I wouldn't say a lot but I'd say that everybody does at some point. You know, I mean if you're walking downtown it's always kind of a thing where you know, if you're on a walk or whatever you usually walk through Public Square. It's serene. It's nice. It's well kept. Um, but I wouldn't say a lot of people just go there for the sake of hanging out.

But some do. I mean, everyone does at some point but it's not like, "Hey, let's go down to the square." When I was a kid, they, they had "cruising" and, which was sort of a nightmare. Basically you would have tons of people from Mount Vernon and tons of people from, it was sort of a Coshocton townie and all these other places they would come up and they would just drive up Main Street. And to the point where if you were trying to get from point A to point B you would go way around downtown. You could not get through. There's a, I don't know if you've ever noticed it, there's like a yellow traffic thing down at the mouth of Main Street down here.

TA: By the bridge?

CW: Yeah, the "golden gate," as it was called when they put it up and that was to block Main Street from cruisers on Saturday night. So you would put the, you would flip the gate closed so they would have to go around Gay Street because they would back traffic up to McDonalds, Burger King, across the viaduct and people couldn't get through town. Seriously, I mean it was crazy and it was not something I ever got into. I mean it was sort the county fair on Main Street every Friday night. I mean it was totally that group of folks, the surly ones from the county fair. It was a lot of yelling and Mountain Dew and "I'm gonna kick your ass" type of stuff and, and uh, it was weird.

TA: Just for the sake of driving around?

CW: Yeah and they would park their cars all along the rim of the square and fight and talk and meet people, I don't know. I mean it was weird, it was a weird little thing. I uh, I actually one time sat on a bench down here with my thumb out to hitch hike with a friend of mine and I, we, we got picked up by these guys in this truck. And we were in the back and there was a guy and a girl in the back of the truck and the guy starts talking to me. He's like, "oh, try this" and he puts a firecracker in his hand and he lights it and it blows up in his hand and I'm like, "I don't think I'll try that." And he, he's like, "No, come on, try it! Try it." So he just keeps lighting firecrackers and they're blowing up in his hands he's like, "It only hurts if you close your hands on it." And I'm like, I'm not doing it. I'll just watch you do it. So he keeps doing that and that's the bulk of our conversation, him just trying to do this. And I'm trying to listen to what's going on with my friend Dave and the girl's sitting there going, "No. How much do you think I weigh?" and he's like "I...I, uh..." (*Shrugging motion, laughs*) and that's, that's their conversation going on. And finally he's like, "I don't know. 220." And she goes, "220." And she like taps on that guy who's lighting firecrackers off in his hand and she's like, "He thinks I weight 220." And the guy's like, "psh..." you know, and she's like, "250." (*laughs*) Anyway, so. That's that was my little episode of cruising, downtown, Mount Vernon, so. That was fun [*Hey, how ya doing? Woman: great! How are you! Good, thanks*] So.

TA: (*laughs*) That is a bizarre story.

CW: Yeah, it was weird. I mean, it was, and that was like, just a snap shot of the thousand cars that were down here, monkey-ing. Every, every Friday night.

TA: So that was, you would say, mostly high school students? Or college students, adults? [**approx 32:51**]

CW: Um, all. No college students I would say. (*laughs*) I wouldn't put college students in that group. But uh but yeah mostly adults and high school students, you know.

TA: And they would interact with each other?

CW: Yes. In like a Dazed and Confused kind of like more rural Knox County way.

TA: Right.

CW: Yeah.

TA: I love that movie.

CW: It is good, yeah. It's got monster, you know monster trucks. And like hot rods and hoopties and, I mean it was, it was crazy. You ever drive a standard transmission car?

TA: I don't think so.

CW: Like, with a gearshift and stuff?

TA: Oh, I've tried.

CW: Okay. You know how it jerks and stalls and stuff. If take one and you put it in first and or second gear and you rev the gas it'll go back and forth and screech the tires and it looks really funny outside I mean it looks like you just can't drive a car. I have an old Toyota and I went around the square one time during cruising doing that and you would not believe how many people threatened to beat me up. I mean it was just it was (*laughs*) it was just "learn how to drive or I'm gonna kick your ass!" It was just, I mean it was weird. It was definitely, it was funny. Anyway.

TA: That is funny. Um (*pause*) I'm just going to look through my questions really quick.

CW: Sure. Sorry, I get off on different tangents sometimes.

TA: I love learning about cruising. I don't know why you would apologize for...

CW: No, I'm glad it's over. (*Laughs*) They tried to bring it back a few weeks ago like some old timers that used to do it. They've discovered facebook and like had a, there was like a part of it that's something like "You Know You're From Mount Vernon If..." type of thing so on that they tried to organize a group of people to take over Main Street again and cruise like they used to. And uh it was funny seeing like some of the people that responded to it because they, we did a story about it in the paper just because I mean like it was a BIG problem. It was a huge problem here. You couldn't go to the Alcove on a Friday night and, and like get your old person up to, up to the door. You just couldn't do it. I mean it would take you ten minutes to get form Gambier Street to Vine Street. I mean it was that stupid. (*Laughs*) It was bad. And, and it got to the point where it was downtown and city council being like, you have got to do something about this. I mean it was just...

TA: It's just funny to me because it seems nice that so many people would be coming through the downtown.

CW: Right.

TA: But I, they weren't supporting the businesses?

CW: No, they were, they were in fact, I think the turn-around was Burger King. So they'd go through Burger King and like get their Burger King stuff and like drive back up through. Yeah, they weren't supporting downtown it was totally, you know, it was totally one of those things where they were, you know, supporting the fast food joints but not... just causing trouble down here. *(Phone rings)*

TA: Yeah.

CW: And you couldn't, you couldn't walk without being harassed either. You know, it was if you were walking by, even a little old lady or something is going to get some lewd comment yelled at them. I mean it was really, it was a disaster. It was good that it's gone. So.

TA: So, what did City Council do, the "golden gate?"

CW: They put the "Golden Gate" up. And I think they put a limit on like how many times you could go around the square. And I think it just kind of ran its course, too, you know, I think it was like you know it was a place and time when people liked to do it and that was it. So.

TA: Um, it's funny that you're talking about this because last Friday I went to the Knox County Historical Society...

CW: Yeah

TA: ...To look up, like, historic pictures of the Square.

CW: Mhmm

TA: Um, I'm doing a project on the Civil War Memorial for my art history class

CW: Oh, cool.

TA: Yeah, but these two war veterans, they like, fought in the Korean War...

CW: Mhmm

TA: ...Mentioned cruising as if I would like know what it was, but I...

CW: Yeah

TA: ...So it's a funny description. **[approx. 37 min]**

CW: Oh, yeah, no, it was awful. I mean, unless you were part of it then I'm sure it was wonderful. But it was really just, it was crazy. And it was totally one of those things where it was like, you know, these are the sort of, you know, the college, college-prone kids are the ones going that way were not down here doing it. So it was sort of an us

versus them thing a little bit of times but oh well. It was interesting. That's back when Sir Drugs was open down on uh, West uh, West High.

TA: What's that?

CW: Sir James. It was this uh a nightclub down there that everyone called Sir Drugs (*Laughs*) cause, uh... (*Laughs*).

TA: Self-explanatory?

CW: Yeah.

TA: I can't really imagine a nightclub around.

CW: No, you can't (*laughs*). You can't. You know, just, just imagine uh, a group of one hundred people line dancing to "Personal Jesus." (*Dramatic pause*) So, it was like (*pause*), a friend of mine got thrown down the stairs there one night. (*Laughs*) We were up there and he, I don't know what the hell he did. I think he was trying to dance with some, some lady and uh, the boyfriend threw him down the stairs. I ima... I don't think it was like this, but I imagine in like kind of by the scruff of the neck and the belt. (*Motions with hands, laughs.*) Anyway. But yeah, it was, it was an interesting place, too. And it was a big hit when it opened, like they had to have, um, a restaurant downstairs and a nightclub upstairs and they had like, has no windows in it. And it's some service building now, I don't know exactly which one but it's some service building, it still has no windows, it's really a hideous building. It's yellow. Anyway, um, you'd step, you'd walk down to go in and it was all these like plastic stained glass things with lights behind them. Sort of, you know, here and there, and really dark wood, and it had like a two-story opening with a balcony up top. And then it had a dance floor up top with like a DJ and it was, it was weird. Anyway.

TA: Are there any, kind of, bars around this area that people go to after work or anything on a regular basis?

CW: Um, you know, there's the Alcove, has the library which...

TA: With the saloon doors?

CW: Yeah, yeah. And some folks go there. Um, Flappers, people go there, uh, which is over here on High Street. Used to be the Silver Dollar. Um, that's a long time ago. Anyway, um. Those are the two places where people would go after work I would say. There's Banana Joe's over there which people go to, I guess.

TA: A lot of different ages or like a specific group?

CW: Uh, Alcove would be older. Like, my age and older. Um, Flappers, all ages. Banana Joe's, mostly young. Then there's Rookies over here, which is sort of all ages, it's like a sports bar type place and then, uh, there's the Honey Buckets over here too which is like another sports bar type place. We don't have any like *bars*, well, we do, we actually do have some really good dive bars but they're a little scary at this point. We used to have

some good dive bars downtown but, but they're mostly pretty decent at this point. But we still have a couple really good dive bars like Dutch's- that's a good dive bar.

TA: Okay, do you think, are there regulars that go there?

CW: Oh yeah. It's open at like six in the morning. Like people getting off from like third shift or whatever, going in and having a beer. But it's, it's one of those places where unless you're a regular there the record screeches to a halt when you walk in the door and everyone's kind of looking at you.

TA: Really?

CW: Yeah, it's weird. It's, it's, I like it but I question, you know, my safety in there after like a certain hour cause it definitely has a reputation for fist cuffs. Anyway.

TA: Are there any, like, characters that frequent it or...

CW: You know, I've only been there a couple times. I like it, but I'm not brave enough to go often. Mount Vernon used to have some fantastic characters. Um, I can't think of any that we really have now that are, you know, really visible like we used to have them. We used to have Tobacco Joe.

TA: Who's that?

CW: Tobacco Joe was this guy and he would uh I think he, I don't know what his diagnosis was but he wasn't, wasn't uh all... He, he had a learning disability but he basically was taken care of pretty much by some folks who lived up on the north side of town and would come downtown everyday and he was always nice, he was always friendly. He would come into the bar and have a beer and stuff from time to time. And he would say "Hey, hey how you doing?" You know and he was called Tobacco Joe because he would pick up cigarettes off the sidewalk and either shake the tobacco out and eat it or smoke them. Yeah he's kind of, kind of a... and we had K.O., who lived up here and he would, you would hear, if you were walking by you'd here this (*sound effect*) ...and then he would hang out the window and he'd start yelling. And the, the mythology of K.O. was that he was a boxer and that he'd been knocked out too many times (*laughs*). "K.O." Yeah, anyway, so.

TA: Got it. When was this?

CW: Not so long ago I mean those guys were fixtures when I was a kid, I mean they were all over the place, all over town. Um, but Tobacco Joe died I think maybe around 2000, 2001, somewhere in there and he was still downtown, you know, going at it. K.O. either moved or died, probably around the same time. He lived across from the *News* so anytime you'd walk out of the paper you'd hear, "Hey there, what are you doing?" and, so, and those are just a couple. I mean, we used to have tons of them. We have a lady now who, who is somewhat of a character although she's sort of in her house mostly these days. But she came to the *News*, she'd arranged rocks in front of her house and in the driveway and stuff and with forty-ounce bottles and stuff from different places to make it look how she wanted it to. And our paperboy kind of knew that she'd spent a lot

of time on it and would ride his bicycle through it put on the brakes and slide through the rocks and then go on. So she came in and she was really irritated about that, which was fine, she should be, and, 'cause he was totally doing it to, to, make her mad. He knew was he was doing. So, she's basically saying, "Oh, I'm going to call the police if this continues and blah blah blah blah blah." So we get her kind of settled down, we talk to him and get this straightened out and she's like, "Okay, okay, may I use your phone?" Alright, so she comes around and uses the phone and she calls the police on us, from our phone! (*Laughs.*) Anyway. So, yeah.

TA: What happened, did you get in trouble?

CW: Oh, no, the police, they were just like, "Oh, we know who *you* are" kind of thing. So, anyway.

TA: That's funny. (*Pause*) I feel like that's most of the questions that I have. Do you have anything else that you can think of about, like, public space in general or Main Street.

CW: Um, I would say like, the, the future's pretty good for that. I mean, we've got you know we obviously have our great square, um, and some nice parks. And the parks are used like crazy, um, I don't know if you've... You're in here in the summertime but the baseball. I hate baseball personally I, I, I'm not good at it I don't like watching it I don't like anything about it, it's so boring to me but anyway but this town's crazy for it. And the parks are full. And soccer is becoming that way, too. Um, and to the point where, if like people, you know, uh, traffic, calling traffic signals and stuff to like keep traffic moving. I mean it's, so those parks are used like crazy. But then the thing I'm most excited about is Foundation Park. I mean that, that is just amazing and. There's a third lake on it that I actually didn't really even realize was back there. So there are two, two lakes in the front that everybody knows but then the city acquired a third lake, which is in, behind, and goes all the way to Harcourt Road. So it starts here, on, you know, by the depot over here, the "Station Break" I should say, and then goes clear over to Harcourt Road which is the edge of town. So it's like ninety acres and three lakes and they're really, really, really pretty. I mean, it's, you can stand up on the, there's a little, little hill on the last one and you know you kind of overlook the Court House is on the hill and it's just this big nature area. It's really great and I think that as the city kind of figures out how to incorporate that a little bit more and make it accessible to downtown because essentially it's just across the river from downtown. I mean, I can't imagine anything being greater than having that right there. Apart from, you know, getting in a time machine and, you know, keeping wrecking balls away from buildings that are gone. I mean that, that would be better (*laughs*) but since we can't do that we've got that thing out there and it, I think the future for public space in Mount Vernon is, is very good. We also have a really incredible park history that's really, um, made a ton of inroads in the last twenty years, too.

TA: "Park History?"

CW: Yeah. I mean our parks, we didn't really, we had Knox Woods when I was a kid, which was over behind what's now the jail. Um, and uh it's, it's still a park and it's nice

um but that was it. You know, now you have a bunch of different, you know, spaces where you can go. The Brown Family Environmental Center's amazing. Um, the park where that what do they call it, Honey Run or something out in Millwood. We call it the Caves, that's what everyone here calls it.

TA: The Honey Run...? Or Hazel...?

CW: Hazel Mill Road.

TA: Yeah!

CW: Yeah.

TA: Is that what you're talking about?

CW: Yeah.

TA: *So* beautiful.

CW: Isn't it amazing?

TA: Yeah.

CW: Yeah. We always called it the caves, but...

TA: We do, too. [approx. 48:24]

CW: Okay, good, yeah. But, uh, you know, that, that space, you could never have access to it legally I mean everyone did but, but you, know, so. All this stuff and the bike trails and you know it's so much better in that regard than it's *ever* been. You know, the put-ins that are in the rivers, I mean those are every few miles if you were into canoeing or kayaking. I mean that would be a great, a great thing. So I think they've done so much in that, in that regard that that's so much better and then with this park over here I mean that's going to be incredible. Or, I don't know, have you see the plans for it?

TA: No.

CW: For my liking maybe it's a little over the top but it's still, they've got like a carousel in the middle of it and like all these walking trails and, and like a, a access to the river, to the lake so you could canoe and paddle around in the lakes and have, get back on the river. So I mean its, it's really cool.

TA: That's for Foundation Park?

CW: Yeah, yeah. So.

TA: I'd love to see the plans.

CW: I'll see if I can find them and email them to you.

TA: Tom might have some?

CW: Tom has seen them, I know, I don't know if he has them. But he's probably seen them. Phil Samuel has, has them. Like, it's like this big mock-up thing.

TA: When is the?

CW: It's a long-term project for all that stuff. I mean, I think they're looking at it in like a fifty-year type of development thing. So.

TA: And the city owns the space?

CW: The city owns it, yeah. And it's, it's really out of the way, it's kind of difficult to get to. It's down, if you go out Main and across, before you get to Dutch's turn right (*laughs*) and then you kind of go back in by the old Pittsburgh Plate Plant, and it's in there. It's really cool, though, I mean it's really going to be fantastic.

TA: That's exciting.

CW: Mhmm.

TA: Um, but as for the, the other parks that are...

CW: Yeah.

TA: ...frequented, do you think people mostly just go there when there are events being held? Or do people just go to hang out?

CW: People go to just hang out. But, you know, the bulk of the traffic that those get would be from ball, I mean, it's crazy. I can't begin to express to you the amount of folks that are in those, using them for baseball. I mean it's, it's- and softball and whatever other old-time, "old-timey" ball. I mean they've got so many different things that they play, it's, it's uh. But yeah, they're really packed. But everyone uses them at some, on some level. It's just not, probably a weekly thing for most Mount Vernon people to go there but, but nonetheless I think everyone uses them at some time. Like, uh, you know, we take Eleanor to Philips Park from time to time or, or to um Riverside Park or sometimes even Memorial. I'm not allowed to take her to Memorial Park anymore because I let her ride her bike on the bike thing and she crashed, and hit her head, so.

TA: No helmet?

CW: No. I got in trouble for that one. (*Laughs*)

TA: And are a lot of kids normally hanging around?

CW: Um, yeah. I mean it sort of depends on what, what the park has going on but. We've got a great skate park now at, uh Memorial Park, which is really nice. You know, lots of ramps and uh some of those kids have developed some really good skills I mean they're really good, which is something that was lacking when I was a kid. Which was why I was in a parking lot, you know, so. But it, you know, it's really, it's great, um.

TA: Skateboarding, like, isn't very popular where I'm from.

CW: Yeah?

TA: So it, like, surprises me that, I don't know. It's been around for a while here, I guess.

CW: It has. Um, my, my uh, stepbrother when I was a kid was into it in the late '70s, you know when it was kind of first starting to, you know when you would, the biggest trick was like the "hang ten" and that kind of stuff. You know, it was totally, and it wasn't hugely popular then but then BMX kind of came in here too, which was another trend that I got hooked into when I was a kid. And we had a racetrack out um where Hospice is now (*laughs*). Yeah, it was the "Cam Ram Grotto" track. It was like, the they had some, I don't know something like the Elks or the Moose or whatever the Cam Ram Grotto folks are. I don't know what they did, they probably wore hats with feathers on them and danced around and stuff, but, um. But uh, they had a track there and we'd go there and race, race BMX bikes. I have a picture somewhere of Sam Miller ramping a Camero out there.

TA: What? (*Laughs*)

CW: The realtor. Yeah.

TA: Wait, really?

CW: Yeah!

TA: That's funny.

CW: Yeah, no. It's, it's great. It's good stuff. (*Laughs*)

TA: Cool. Well is it okay if I, like, listen and transcribe this interview and come up with more questions...

CW: Sure, yeah. Oh yeah absolutely. That's fine.

TA: Great, this is really cool.

CW: Oh, good.

TA: Thank you so much.

CW: Oh, anytime. [53:36]