

Laurie Savran
Narrator

Rob Hahn
Interviewer

January 10, 2019

LS: Hi. I'm Lauri Savran.

RH: And I'm Rob Hahn. I'll be asking the questions. Today is Thursday, January 10, 2019, and we are filming this interview in Edina, Minnesota. Let's start with the basics. What are your first memories of coming to Dinkytown in the early '60s?

LS: Well, I remember very clearly coming to Dinkytown for the first time to buy my books at Perrine's Bookstore for my college classes and just walking around Dinkytown at that time and going to Bridgeman's because I loved ice cream—well, I still do—and just enjoying the scene.

RH: How would you describe the scene?

LS: It was like a little town. That's why they call it Dinkytown, I guess. It was just like a little village, you know, maybe like in Europe or something like that. It was very unique and quaint and there were no chain—or I don't think there were chain restaurants that much, anyway, at that time, but it was all individual, independent type of businesses.

RH: Had you been anywhere previously in your life that would have compared to Dinkytown or was this something brand new?

LS: I don't think so because I was only 18 years old at the time, so I don't remember anything like that.

RH: Let's go through some of the hangouts, the stores, the businesses, and tell me your memories of them. You mentioned Perrine's. What was that like?

LS: Well, you could buy your books there and they had used books. Of course, I was not wealthy, so I wanted to buy used books, and also there was another bookstore, McCosh's, which I'm sure everybody's talking about. Mr. Melvin McCosh was quite a character and I had lots of connection with him over the years because later I was in the book business.

RH: Tell me more about him. Give me a snapshot of what you observed and how you interacted with him.

LS: Well, he was the kind of guy that kind of looked at you and really assessed you and knew what kind of books you might like. He just was very intuitive about things like that. The store seemed like it was totally in disarray, but if you asked for a specific book, he knew exactly where it was. He'd go to the shelf and, sure enough, he'd have it.

RH: Walking, talking Phil Holland. When did you first encounter him and what was your reaction to him?

LS: Ironically, the very first day that I went to Dinkytown I saw Phil Holland walking around. He was a very unique looking guy. He was a little bit scary looking to me, an 18-year-old from St. Louis Park, Minnesota, so I thought, "Who is that?" It was like every time I went to Dinkytown it seemed like I'd see him. It was just uncanny, you know?

RH: Describe how he looked, because I understand he had a certain flair to him.

LS: Well, he was kind of a big guy. He had kind of a large face and he always seemed like he was in another world, you know? It just seemed like he was thinking about things that we had never even conceived of. I never really talked to him. As I said, I was a little bit scared of him, or in awe of him, one of the two.

RH: Tell me more about your experience then and throughout your life dining at Al's Breakfast.

LS: Well, at that time it was really fun to eat at Al's Breakfast. You had to wait in line and there were—I forgot how many stools. The food was always really good. I mean, it was just special to go to Al's Breakfast. Later on, I still go to Al's Breakfast and I decided since I'm in my 70s already I'm going to go as often as I can when I can still sit at a stool because a few years ago a friend and I went there and she couldn't sit at the stool. She was just not flexible enough.

RH: Let's switch gears a little and talk about kind of the social and political culture of Dinkytown. How would you describe it during your college years and shortly thereafter?

LS: During my college years we were just starting to protest and march in the streets and later on, of course, with the Vietnam war in full swing I was in Dinkytown more times for protests, the Red Barn protest, for example, which was not about the war, but it was about not building businesses in Dinkytown that were not in the image of Dinkytown.

RH: Let's go back. I'll re-ask you the question.

LS: Okay.

RH: Tell me your memories of the social and political climate when you were a student and then later, after you graduated. How would you describe the social and political climate of Dinkytown?

LS: The social and political climate that I was involved in was very alternative, which was great because I had gone to St. Louis Park High School, which was a really good school, very academically up there, but there wasn't a lot of social and political types of things, so when I got to college I kind of became more myself and found my people, who were more left wing and radical and literate and that type of thing. I don't remember really any protests during the years I went to college, '62 to '66. We called it the U. Maybe they still do. But later on I was still involved in social and political types of actions and I remember protesting in Dinkytown and going to the Red Barn protest and various other events that were more on the left wing spectrum.

RH: Were you part of the protest of the ROTC building after the Kent State killings?

LS: No. I was a young mother at that time, so I felt like I had to stay home.

RH: What was it, in your estimation, about the culture, the people of Dinkytown, that lent itself to being activists, being protestors?

LS: I think it was people who were looking for a new way to be in the world. We were hippies, you know, so actually it was more, to me, a hippie movement and it did involve smoking marijuana and eating foods that we had never heard of before. Dinkytown had a lot of foods from other countries that we just didn't have in St. Louis Park at the time. Now they do. It involved reading books that our parents had never read and being impacted by that.

RH: All right. Let's revisit the bookstore theme. Tell me about your relationship with Marly Rusoff.

LS: I knew Marly and her sister, Tammy Rusoff, from Sunday School, when we were in grade school, actually, at our Synagogue, Adath Jeshurun. When I got to the U, Marly and I became friends. We hung out together. She had wanted to work at Savran's Bookstore. At that time I was married to the owner, Bill Savran, and I worked there myself, so I introduced the two of them and they both really wanted to work together, so Bill hired Marly and she worked on the West Bank at the Savran's Paperback Shop it was called, on Third and Cedar.

Then she had the idea that she wanted to start her own bookstore with Bill and they found a location in Dinkytown right next to the Varsity Theater. Originally it was called Savran Rusoff Bookstore and it was a small bookstore focused on Marly's interests, a lot of which was literature and poetry. Later she decided she would try it on her own, so she became just Rusoff Bookstore and that place is where the Loft was conceived of Marly and Phoebe Hanson. That's when they first started having writing classes, poetry readings, and that type of thing.

RH: Who was Phoebe Hanson? That name rings a bell.

LS: Phoebe Hanson was a writer and a poet who died a couple of years ago. She was probably a mentor to Marly because she was older.

RH: I want to address a little bit about the organization Preserve Historic Dinkytown, its efforts and success in getting certain areas declared an Historic District. What does that mean to you, your involvement, your feelings about it, the historic element of it?

LS: Well, I could see that developers were creeping into Dinkytown and changing the whole look of Dinkytown and I was very unhappy about that because I loved Dinkytown the way it was. Even though some of the buildings may not be of historical preservation interest, just the idea of keeping old buildings and having a place that's kind of charming and unique rather than looks like every other place in the world, with Target and Walgreens and all that type of thing. I really liked the original Dinkytown and the way that connected to my soul.

RH: I know Kristen really spearheaded the effort to get the historic designation, but what was your feeling when you finally achieved that as an organization?

LS: I was at the city hall when that happened at the council meeting and I was very happy. I mean, it wasn't everything we had asked for, but it was enough so that we feel that we had a success.

RH: You had a sorority story you were going to tell me.

LS: Oh. It's kind of a sad story, but even though I was really alternative, I had this kind of feeling that maybe I should become more successful as a regular type person, whatever that means, so I decided to pledge a sorority called SDT, Sigma Delta Tau. It was a really bad decision and obviously I didn't fit in because they blackballed me and I felt really sad about that, but if that had happened, if I had gotten into the sorority I probably wouldn't be sitting here today talking to you because I'd be a housewife in Minnetonka.

RH: One question I like to ask people, especially those who experienced Dinkytown at what I'd call its pinnacle and are aware of what it is today. What has Dinkytown lost over the years?

LS: The most important thing that it lost in my mind was the Scholar, but that was a long time ago. One of the things I wanted to tell you is that I was friends with the original owner of the Scholar, Clark Batho. My friendship came later, when I was in a coffee group at Dunn Brothers and he was a member of that coffee group. He never really liked to talk about his time at the

Scholar very much, but I was really impressed to know that he was the guy that put that all together and had hired Bob Dylan to sing and all that type of thing.

RH: Anything else, in your estimation, that's really been lost over the last ten years, maybe three decades, two decades, not just maybe a place, but a feel?

LS: Well, now when you go to Dinkytown there still is kind of that feeling. You just feel like it's a marginal place, like it's not the usual mall or whatever, but there's still, you know, when you look around, just a block away you see these tall, brand new buildings, you know, that don't fit into the character of the original Dinkytown.

RH: When you look back at your time in Dinkytown as a student and in those years immediately following, what impact did that time have on your life?

LS: It totally framed who I am today, as a person who is really working for social justice and hoping that the world will become a better place based on the values that I learned about when I was a student and later on in the book business, the type of values that it seems like this country is being polarized by.

RH: Tell us about Marv.

LS: I could cry when I think about Marv. Marv and I were friends for many years and his girlfriend, Nancy Peterson, is one of my closest friends. He met Nancy Peterson at the Kaplans. Marv just loved to sit and talk at coffee shops and I would just be enthralled by Marv, because Marv had a mind and a way of thinking that nobody else had that I ever met in my life. He was all over the place. He wasn't just at Dinkytown, but he envisioned the whole idea of what Dinkytown was like. He was a radical. He wanted to change the world. He was against the war. He lived his life the way he wanted to. He was actually very loving and a lot of the people that he protested against were his friends on a kind of a personal level, which was kind of ironic. He knew how to connect with people and he was a great teacher and a great humanitarian.

RH: You've alluded to it in that answer, but maybe you could be a little more specific. How would you describe his impact on you specifically, especially now as you look back on your activism with social justice and matters like that?

LS: It's kind of interesting, because I was a math major in college and my first professional job was at Honeywell as a computer programmer when computers were as large as rooms. I had a twinge of regret taking that job, even though it was a great opportunity for me, because I knew that Marv was going after Honeywell for their producing bombs that were used in Vietnam and other places.

One time my cousin and I were at a coffee shop and we were talking about Marv Davidov and pretty soon an FBI agent came and interviewed my cousin, who also worked at Honeywell. That was kind of an interesting sideline, but Marv helped me realize that we can't run the world the way Honeywell was running their business at the time. We have to have moral standards in our business and I think Marv helped a lot of people come to those conclusions. It's not all about the money. It's about how we can be helpful to people rather than how we can make the big bucks.

RH: Describe the impact of and the interaction with the high school students from Marshall University High.

LS: I didn't have a lot of interaction with them, but one of my closest friends later on was a guy named Paul Davies, who died quite young. He had been a Marshall U graduate, so through him I

met a lot of Marshall High people and they were all very interesting, very dynamic people. Then one of the ways I got involved in the protest against the Red Barn was that I became friends with some of the students at the time who were a little bit younger than I was, but we had kind of a social interaction, so that's how I got over there and put my body on the line to protest.

This publication was made possible in part by the people of Minnesota through a grant funded by an appropriation to the Minnesota Historical Society from the Minnesota Arts and Cultural Heritage Fund. Any views, findings, opinions, conclusions or recommendations expressed in this publication are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent those of the State of Minnesota, the Minnesota Historical Society, or the Minnesota Historic Resources Advisory Committee.

