

Interview with

Betsy Collard

conducted by IdaRose Sylvester

for the “Understanding the History of Housing in Mountain View: Stories of Racism, Anti-Discrimination, and Movement towards Inclusion” project by the City of Mountain View’s Human Relations Commission,

in collaboration with Professor Michael Kahan and team from Stanford University.

Mountain View Historical Society
Mountain View Public Library

Conducted on July 10, 2022

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of “Understanding the History of Housing in Mountain View: Stories of Racism, Anti-Discrimination, and Movement towards Inclusion” is to document the history of discrimination and efforts to fight discrimination in housing in the city of Mountain View, California. Some of the information collected was shared with the public at an event sponsored by the Mountain View Human Relations Commission, held on July 26, 2022. In order to make the interviews available to researchers and members of the public, they will be added to the historical collection of the Mountain View Historical Association (MVHA) and/or the Mountain View Public Library (MVPL) and made available for public use. They may also be shared with other libraries and collections, including those at Stanford University.

BIO

IdaRose Sylvester was an interviewer on this project representing the City of Mountain View Human Relations Commission, as Vice Chair, and the nonprofit Mountain View Historical Association, as board member. She has lived in Mountain View for almost 25 years, and works as the executive director of a local nonprofit. She lives in the Varsity Park neighborhood of Mountain View, the development of which played an almost forgotten role in exclusionary zoning practices south of El Camino Real.

ABSTRACT



Betsy Collard has been a Mountain View resident for over 50 years. She has served on Mid Peninsula Citizens for Fair Housing (MCFH), the League of Women Voters, the City of Mountain View's Human Relations Commission (HRC), and was chair of the appeals board for the State of California for redlining. In this interview, she outlines her personal experiences with housing issues in Mountain View, particularly her time with the MCFH and the California appeals board. She highlights specific experiences that she has with redlining and purchasing a family home in Mountain View.

Date of Interview: July 10th, 2022

Interviewer: IdaRose Sylvester

Interviewee: Betsy Collard

IdaRose Sylvester

Good afternoon. Before we start the interview, I'd like to go over a couple of things. First of all, my name is IdaRose Sylvester, and I'm an interviewer working with the City of Mountain View's Human Relations Commission. We are in partnership with Mountain View Historical Association and Stanford University on a project entitled "Understanding the History of Housing and Mountain View Stories of Racism, Anti-Discrimination and the Movement Towards Inclusion." The purpose of this project is to document the history of discrimination and efforts to fight it in the city of Mountain View. Some of the information collected will be shared with the public at an event on July 26th, 2022. Today is July 10th, 2022, and I'm interviewing Betsy Collard. For reasons of safety during the ongoing COVID pandemic, we're conducting this interview via Zoom teleconferencing. So Betsy, before we start, could you please tell us your full name to make sure we got it correct?

Betsy Collard [00:00:59]

Sure. My name is Betsy Collard.

IdaRose Sylvester [00:01:00]

Great. And where do you currently live, Betsy?

Betsy Collard [00:01:05]

I live in Mountain View. I live over on Sherlund Avenue, but I've lived in a number of places in Mountain View.

IdaRose Sylvester [00:01:12]

Oh, for how many years have you lived in Mountain View, cumulative?

Betsy Collard [00:01:15]

Let's see, since 1968. So that would be, I don't know, over 50.

IdaRose Sylvester [00:01:24]

54 years. Wonderful, that is a wealth of experience and knowledge. Before we start going into some specific questions about housing, I'm going to ask you just a little bit about your experience living in Mountain View. So you first moved to Mountain View in about 1968. What brought you here?

Betsy Collard [00:01:41]

Well, I got married and my husband was working at AIMS and so we looked for a house close by so he could ride his bike to work.

IdaRose Sylvester [00:01:52]

That's great. You were looking for a job - or I'm sorry, a house near where he worked, so he could ride a bike. What was that first house like? What was your neighborhood like?

Betsy Collard [00:02:04]

Well, we lived in the Monta Loma neighborhood, so we lived in one of the Eichlers, and it was great. It was a very friendly, child-centered place and it was great. But then, I had always loved old houses and so I would go looking... At the time, the way it was, my son was young. I would get out at night by being the observer to the city council. That was my night out, and my husband took care of him. So I got to know the council well. It turned out that one of them was moving- so that's how we found our house on Mariposa, a big, old wonderful house.

IdaRose Sylvester [00:02:55]

Wonderful. I would love to hear more about that house. My understanding is that there are some stories about the process of acquiring that house that are relevant to our work here today?

Betsy Collard [00:03:04]

That's true. Yes.

IdaRose Sylvester

So you've identified this house because the city council council person was moving away.

Betsy Collard [00:03:12]

Yeah. My involvement in housing began before that, but do you want me to start where it began or just start with the house?

IdaRose Sylvester [00:03:21]

Let's start with where you began with your housing advocacy; what brought you into it? What made you interested? What made you interested in becoming a city council watcher? Tell me all about your early experience in housing.

Betsy Collard [00:03:34]

When I got married in 1967, we looked for a house in Mountain View because my husband worked at NASA and we wanted a place so he could commute by bike. And so we found that wonderful Eichler in the Monta Loma neighborhood. My husband had been active in an organization MCFH, Mid Peninsula Citizens for Fair Housing¹, and he and I were active checkers, which meant that we would - when someone felt they had been discriminated against - they would call him, MCFH or someplace. They would give us the role and we would go out. We didn't necessarily do this together. Sometimes it was an individual, sometimes a couple would try to rent the place. And of course it always, even though we portrayed exactly the same income and everything, there was a lot of discrimination. He had been on the board of this organization and then I got on the board after he finished. I did a lot about fair housing, but you can't just do fair housing without doing low income housing, so we were very active in that. Then while we lived in the Eichler, my heart always wanted an old house. I loved Mountain View and also the commute. My husband was very adamant about being able to ride his bike. So I kept looking, I would just drive the neighborhoods looking for old houses, but that never happened.

We had a young son and my one night out a week on my own was to go and be the observer for city council. And so I got to know the council very well. Bill Jelavich², who was a realtor and on the council, knew that I was looking for an old house. Well, it happened that the mayor, Ross Willard, was also the president of Pacific Press, the Seventh-Day Adventist³ publishing house. They were closing down and moving, so he was going to have to move. The house never went on the market - Bill told us about it, and we went and looked at it and made an offer. Now, this is where the discrimination on our side took place. We went and made an offer and had it appraised, and we were looking for a loan for less than the value of the land, contingent on the sale of our other house. The property had been rated and inspected to be an excellent condition. It only had two other owners and it had been built in 1916 and we were going to be the third owner.

IdaRose Sylvester:

This is 1970...?

Betsy Collard:

'76. I was only working part-time then because our son was young. And so my husband said, "well, why don't you just call around"? We weren't going through a realtor. "Just call around and see what kind of deal we could get from the banks". I started in on that. I called Wells Fargo and Wells Fargo said, no, they were sorry, they couldn't give us a loan on that because, it only had one bathroom, it was two at that time. And it didn't have an attached garage, and they only

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²Born and raised in Mountain View, William R. Jelavich was a Mountain View Councilmember from 1963-1968, and served as mayor from 1968-1970.

³ Pacific Press Publishing, established by Ellen and James White of the Seventh-Day Adventist Church, was a religious and commercial printing business. They moved from Oakland to Mountain View in 1905, to "leave behind the evil influences of urban life" and relocate somewhere rural. 100 families moved to MV with PPP, and they influenced the city greatly (*Milestones*, 82).

allowed that.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Did they say why?

Betsy Collard: [00:07:51]

No, that they didn't say why. That was just their policy. Then I called Northern California Savings, which is where we had a savings account for more than we were asking for the loan. And they said, no, they were sorry, but it was a very transient neighborhood of multiple use. And I said, well, multiple use, Los Altos has lots of multiple uses with flag lots and things. But no they were not interested. So then Bank of America - Bank of America said, well, they would consider a loan - this is really funny. They would consider a loan, but it would be, I think, two points higher or something like that. I think there was maybe one more, but by that time I was beside myself. I had never, as a middle-class white woman, fully employed, felt discriminated against like this. I was embarrassed by it. How could they be turning us down? It just happened that my friend who was also on the MCFH board called that afternoon, and I told her. She was just horrified. We had a board meeting that night.

MCFH is this little organization upstairs in the Presbyterian church in Palo Alto; all the chairs had bandages on it, it was very old. It wasn't a wealthy organization.

So, we had a board meeting that night. It went by, it was almost all over, and my friend said, well, tell people what's happened today. I said "oh no, no". Jane Lineman, who was the wife of the president of Stanford, and sort of the Eleanor Roosevelt of the Peninsula at that time (or broader), was at the meeting and she'd been knitting. She looked up and she said, "Well, what happened"? So of course I had to tell and a staff member said, "Oh, that's red lining. There's a hearing coming up on that".

I had never even heard the word redlining. And so she went in and she said, "just a minute". The staff member came back with a card and said, "they're holding their state hearing on red lining in two weeks". And I said, "well, I'm not, I'm not good at that". Jane said, "oh, yes, you are going to go, and we're going with you".

So my husband stayed home from work to take care of my son, and we went up to this hearing in San Francisco. Now, this is in the state building next to the opera house. I think it was like a commission for business and licensing, I don't really remember the name, but it was this cavernous auditorium. There were about 20 men all in brown suits with vests as far as I could tell, and then there were four of us women. They wanted to hear, and everybody stood up, the men all testified, "this is ridiculous. There is no need for any regulations. There is no such thing going on". And then they said, "There's a citizen who'd like to speak". So I got up and I had this spiral green spiral notebook that I had just kept all the notes in. I just got up and I read from my notes, and you could have heard a pin drop when I finished. Then we left and they closed the meeting, and I went home and my husband was there and he said, "I don't know what you did, but the phone has been ringing off the hook".

So Northern California savings - it's some other bank now, I can't remember the name - who I called, said they had found our savings account and they would be happy to loan us the money.

Wells Fargo didn't say anything. Bank of America - this is really funny - my husband went in to see them, and he came home and he was a very understated man, not given to exaggeration. I remember who the bank's vice president was. The vice president got on the phone and he would talk with my husband. "Oh, so then we can?", he'd say [her husband]. "We would make a loan. We'd be happy to make the loan," says Bank of America.

So when we realized it was redlining we went to the council. The Mountain View City Council. And they wrote a letter to all banks in Mountain View, saying this was not right. It would not fly. I think if I hadn't been a woman or if we had had a realtor, but I was a woman. Obviously they said things that I didn't understand, that they *thought* I didn't understand. Now all of a sudden, everybody wanted to give us a loan. And so we got a very good deal. But then Jane Lyman, the wife of the president of the university, writes to Ernie Arbuckle, who had been Dean of the Business School, but was now the Chairman of the Board of Wells Fargo. I have a copy of her letter. It said, "Dear Ernie, I know you will be as horrified as I am to hear..." and then went on about how we'd been [treated]. She said "And imagine Ernie, if you had been Black, how you'd feel". So Ernie imagined, and he sent down his two senior executive vice presidents to this little MCFH office, where they were sitting in these chairs that could've fallen apart in a minute. And they said, well, they had found out you're [Betsy] right, that *was* their current policy. They were embarrassed by it and wanted to change it. What would we recommend? Well, of course we had no idea what we were going to ... [laughs].

IdaRose Sylvester:

[Laughing] Just stop it, right.

Betsy Collard:

It was found out that part of the reason, at that time, there was a HUD requirement to have an attached garage. So that led to that. Then I got appointed to chair the board, the appeals board. for the state of California for redlining. And I guess I did that for a couple of years. And then I don't remember what happened to the board. But at the same time, I was called by HUD, and I went back to- actually, it was in Philadelphia, for a hearing. It was such a perfect case because here we were two fully-employed, well educated, dual income [people] that wanted to go into a neighborhood and could stabilize a neighborhood; which was true, there were lots of apartments and people running and moving in and out. It hadn't yet been incorporated... [inaudible] It was just a perfect case.

So now, I'm not saying red lining is no longer an issue, but it certainly is not the issue at least here. Of course the older areas of Mountain View back then were not how they are viewed today. People wanted to live out on Bavaria or Monta Loma...

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:16:48]

Tell me a little bit more about what, what different parts of town were like then.

Betsy Collard: [00:16:53]

Barbaria was certainly a hub for young, [inaudible] families and Monta Loma was as well. There were a lot of people who were very active in civic things and on committees and commissions that were in the Monta Loma Area.

I remember downtown as being rather sleepy in terms of involvement. There were a lot of older people, not as many people with families, that came later. And of course then there was HUF, Hooper, the HUF area that was - I don't even think I knew very much about it then. Later on I did...

I know this is probably off the subject, but I called the person that I knew who knew a lot about schools. Our house, our Mariposa house in the passcode of the school district. I wanted his advice and he said, "Oh, no, I don't think you should buy there, the school is not very good". Very low income. He happened to be on the school board at that point. He told me that. I went over and sat in classes and I thought the teachers were excellent. I thought "This is a lot of baloney". People just didn't feel that that, particularly our area, of the side of Shoreline - it was called Bailey then - merited much attention, because they're [the schools] low income and not certainly what you would want for your child, if you had a choice and were White.

That was the Mariposa story. And of course now, that house, we paid the same for it as we sold our Mount Loma house for. Now, of course, it's almost twice the value. And not because - I mean, certainly the house people have, the subsequent owners have done a lot to the house that it just makes it even more wonderful.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:19:40]

You've moved at least one more time after that house on Mariposa.

Betsy Collard:

Yes. My husband had died, and the house was just too big. It required too much money, also, to keep up, in the landscaping and everything. So I bought a townhouse over on Sherlan Avenue here in Mountain View, which I love, and I've been here for 15 years.

IdaRose Sylvester:

That's great.

Betsy Collard:

Still somewhat involved in low income housing, but more peripherally. Some of the housing, or low income housing that's being built and working on some committees there.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:20:24]

Great. Let's talk a little bit more; let's actually walk through all of that. You have a mix of professional and volunteer experience. You mentioned working with the state appeals board. You'd already been on the Mid-Peninsula Board before that, but then I think your experience probably led to getting on the appeals board and then working with HUD. But tell me, just walk

me through all of those years of experience. And then what came after working with HUD. Bring me up to the present.

Betsy Collard:

Before that I was the observer for city council for the League⁴ and [was] active in housing things that the League did. And then after that guy told me this about Castro [Elementary School - refers to the anecdote above where someone told her the school near Mariposa was not good] I thought, well, the best way to make sure things are good is to run for the school board. So six months after we moved into the district, I ran for the school board. I was on the school board and we did some things that we thought would really improve, like changing the superintendent, which wasn't easy. Then I left that, but I *was* on the HRC... I don't know when it was, but it was a long time ago.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Did you serve two terms on the HRC, or?

Betsy Collard:

I can't remember.

IdaRose Sylvester:

It's now a maximum of two four year terms in a row.

Betsy Collard:

I wouldn't have done more than that. No, I didn't do more than that.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I'm really glad we share that little bit of a unique [background]; former chairs unite.

Betsy Collard:

I'm much more active now. Actually I was on it after 9/11.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Oh.

⁴ Referring to the League of Women Voters, presumably the Los Altos-Mountain View division; they are an organization "working to expand and protect voting rights"

Betsy Collard:

[Inaudible] discrimination and we did some public forums.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Oh, that was a remarkable time for the HRC, actually.

Betsy Collard:

Yeah. So anyway, I don't know. Other things professionally that I did are not really housing related. The other boards I was on, like Red Cross, that really wasn't housing.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:22:48]

Tell me a little bit about, a little bit more about the California state appeals board. When you worked on redlining, tell me what those issues were like.

Betsy Collard: [00:22:57]

I couldn't remember very much. I think it was a three person panel. And we would just hear cases that were being appealed because they had lost and they were appealing that decision. But I think one of the things... when the state put in these laws - and I can't even remember what exactly the laws were that they put in - but redlining really declined, as things started to change in housing in general, particularly around here. I just really think, when there was a realtor, realtors were able to make deals, and if they wanted to, they could do it. In a way, it's discrimination, it's very much discrimination again.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:23:58]

Tell me more about what the realtors have been doing that's discriminatory but under the radar of the law.

Betsy Collard:

I don't mean that they were doing anything illegal. What I meant was there was sort of like - it wasn't just boys, the old boys network - but from realtor to realtor; they knew the banks and the mortgage people, and they could make a deal, if they wanted to. If they wanted to keep it non mixed, if they wanted to keep it White, they could keep it White. I'm not saying that has anything to do with ours - it did, of course, because we were white - or anything about the realtors in this area. I just think, we were doing it on our own and that we didn't know what we were doing, except being honest about it.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Understood. A couple of questions to go back into some of the things you talked about. One is maybe it's an apocryphal story, but people have told me about a limo that came to your house from a bank after the hearing in Sacramento. Is that true or is that now an urban legend?

Betsy Collard:

A limousine... with what, somebody in it?

IdaRose Sylvester:

I guess, with a loan officer and papers to give you the loan. Or is that just a story?

Betsy Collard:

That was before - and I don't really know if it was a limousine - but it wasn't after the red lining board. Everybody wanted to give us a loan, every single bank.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Interesting.

Betsy Collard:

They were talking to my husband saying, well, of course we'll give you a loan. There's no problem. They weren't even gonna look at the house, they were so excited to give us a loan. That was somebody who brought the papers over. I can't remember whether it was a limousine, but it was just after. It was just that hearing.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Interesting. A lot of people remember a story about a limousine that they've told me -

Betsy Collard:

Maybe it was.

IdaRose Sylvester:

It was so fantastical, I just have to ask.

Betsy Collard:

That's funny.

IdaRose Sylvester:

It is funny, but I think what's more interesting is the fact that every single bank chased you down, trying to give you a loan at that point.

Betsy Collard:

They were embarrassed and the city was on their case.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Yes.

Betsy Collard:

Because it was... to have the mayor's house redlined, and have Bill Jelavich, who was a power, they weren't going to fool around with that.

IdaRose Sylvester:

That's a good point. It's a great story, 'cause it *was* the mayor's house and the timing was perfect.

Betsy Collard:

Yeah. And it was at the same time that Mountain View downtown was being revitalized. And there were a couple of people buying houses and fixing them up and turning them around in downtown, down by Castro. So it was a time of a lot of change.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:27:58]

What other steps did the city take around that time to encourage banks to do the right thing, to encourage people to move into neighborhoods. What was the role of the city at this critical time in the process of increasing diversity and removing red lining?

Betsy Collard:

I don't remember that they had any other role.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Well, it's a very big symbolic role that probably did a lot.

Betsy Collard:

It did a lot. I'm proud of the city for what they did. But the city was very progressive in low income housing. Marcy Freeland... there were a lot, the one over on San Varone and all of those.

They are very supportive of that. Marcy Freeland was a teacher at Mountain View High and [a part of] the community; after old Mountain View High closed, whatever they called it, [she] was a real believer. She was on the city council. She did a lot for housing, and to bring low income housing.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So that started in the seventies and eighties? Or when was her time in office? Everyone seems to have a little bit different opinion of that, but everyone speaks extremely highly of her.

Betsy Collard:

She was quite a force. She was a wonderful woman. My sense of time... I don't know. It was definitely in the seventies and early eighties, but I don't remember. I don't know, she died in the late eighties. There were three women, Emily Lyon and then Judy Moss, and the women were always very out there for the housing.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:29:35]

Why do you think that is? Why have women been so predominant in these efforts?

Betsy Collard:

I don't know.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Because it's remarkable. We're speaking to our women and they always refer back to other women they worked with.

Betsy Collard:

One of the things, this is not in defense of men, but back then, most women were not working.

IdaRose Sylvester:

That's a fair point.

Betsy Collard:

They were at home - now that wasn't true if duty fell, it wasn't true of Emily, she had three kids. The volunteering was a very big part of women's lives. The League of Women Voters, both in Mountain View and Los Altos, was very, very important because it was the one avenue that women had to get together on something for the study and the benefit of community, and also just friendship. So it was an important thing back then. Now, I don't know that it isn't valuable

now, but it doesn't have the same amount of strong volunteerism because women don't have as much time.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:31:06]

I think every organization around town is complaining about a lack of solid or consistent volunteers.

Betsy Collard:

I know a number of men who were very sup- I don't know. Maybe I won't say that. The women were.

IdaRose Sylvester:

There's probably socioeconomic reasons, but there are probably some others, but we'll leave it for now. I think it's really interesting that so many of the people I've talked to are women and the names I hear are women. Just an aside, to me it's very interesting. I want to go back to the time you and your husband served as checkers, and you mentioned, I think, had different experiences from each other. What were you experiencing? What were you checking on - discrimination against families or single women, or what was your role, your different roles?

Betsy Collard: [00:32:01]

Well, it was either single women, single men, or a couple. I don't remember any families, there probably were, but I don't remember that. And what typically would happen is that MCFH would get a complaint from somebody. They would document their income level, their kind of profession or job, a little bit about them. And then they would tell the checker, and you were to go out within 24 hours and do it and then document it, write it up and give it to them. And then if there was a case to be had, then there were attorneys, local attorneys who would take the case - resolve it or take it to court. There were a lot of things, they took a lot of things to court.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I've heard mixed things about the results that they had with that because people with deep pockets would fight those cases.

Betsy Collard:

Yeah they would. There were notable people who did that. But I'm not, this wasn't just Mountain View, it was Palo Alto and Mountain View.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So, kind of catching us up to today what, what are the, what roles do you play in housing now? You mentioned you're still involved in thinking about these issues. What are you doing now?

You mentioned working in some low income housing advocacy.

Betsy Collard:

I've gotten involved with Alta, it's now called Alta. Besides just being supportive and a donor and that kind of thing, I serve on it. There's a wonderful committee that they have to provide scholarships for people who live in the housing to go on with their education. This is a scholarship review board, we determine who gets the scholarship. So I'm doing that. Otherwise, I don't think I'm doing anything. I'm not doing anything really in Mountain View on housing except, you know, being supportive of what people, active people, are doing.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:34:24]

Maybe a bit of an unfair question or a difficult one. How do you think Mountain View - well, a couple of questions. How do you think Mountain View is doing now in terms of housing inclusion, racial inclusion, economic inclusion; especially compared to when you were doing a lot of work in the seventies and eighties, how have we changed?

Betsy Collard:

Well, one way we've changed is that what used to be just everybody was white or they were, Hispanic, Mexican-American primarily. And it was a very active and just great Mexican-American community that was politically active. The first mayor of course, first Mexican-American Joe Perez⁵ was during that time. And I don't know, there was a long lapse then before anybody else. But now, and maybe it's partly a factor of where I live, in a townhouse, infusion of all, just much more diversity. And when you see that 40% of Santa Clara county was born outside this country... So it is, yeah, it's just very different that way. So that's one thing. And then the cost of housing has gone up so that it just makes it prohibitive. If we don't find some better solutions.... and Mountain View, I've always been proud of Mountain View and loved Mountain View because of its diversity and its inclusion. And I think that's why I don't want to live someplace else. I want to live here, but I'm not sure that we're as inclusive as we should be in terms of income. Diversity of ethnicities is one thing, but income is different.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:36:40]

What do you think we need? What could we do about that? I know it's not all solvable at the city level, but what could the city be doing? What can we all be doing to at least improve economic diversity?

Betsy Collard:

Well, you need housing to increase the economic diversity. You need the low income and you

⁵ Became Mountain View's first Mexican-American council member and mayor in the 1970s. Was also a Club Estrella (Mountain View non-profit Latinx social club, established in 1948) member. "Plaza de Perez" on El Camino Real is named in his honor.

need the space. So I think Mountain View was on a very progressive when Lenny was on the council and all of that, and it's taken a step back, but still compared to others communities, I feel that it's - certainly for me - I don't want to say its part because I think nobody is doing their part. But that's part of the problem. I don't know what the answer is. I don't know, we're in this conundrum. Increase density and increase pricing at the same time.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Right. So that does seem to be a little bit of what's happening.

Betsy Collard:

Well, I'll tell you one thing.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Pardon me?

Betsy Collard:

I'll tell you one thing. The city could give up that plot of land next to Questa Park and build low income housing, or if it's more tenable, senior housing, low income. That's certainly, I mean, for families, that would be a wonderful place.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I could probably talk ad nauseum about that, but I'm supposed to stay objective as an interviewer, but it's hard to, with all the things I do. I live actually very close to the annex, on the other side of Miramonte and I can tell you what my neighbors think.

Betsy Collard:

No, I know. I know someone who's very supportive of low income housing, but lives right there.

IdaRose Sylvester:

They want the low income housing, I assume. But they just don't want it here. That's always the challenge, right.

Betsy Collard:

And I just think we have very, not a whole lot of space anymore.

IdaRose Sylvester:

True. We are a fairly small city.

Betsy Collard:

This is probably, you can cut this, but back when North Bayshore was being, going to be developed, this friend and I were hired - I mean, we didn't get paid, we did it through the League - to do a survey of the residents who lived in North Bayshore as part of the ERA⁶. We were just, you know, there was people living out there who were doing the toilets, and then there was a rancher and I mean, we met all these people. It was fascinating. But what came out was a very strong opinion that the area, the environmental impact, that it was not safe for housing, because of a hundred year flood⁷. Right?. Which is partly why I think it's still difficult, except to say the housing. I guess that's why, but you never hear anybody talking about it being dangerous out there now.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Not as much.

Betsy Collard:

Yeah.

IdaRose Sylvester:

It is such a big chunk of land. I think people's risk assessment may have changed a little bit.

Betsy Collard:

I think that's true, but this is before -

IdaRose Sylvester:

We are building the big levy out there, so -

Betsy Collard: [00:40:25]

Oh, they are? I didn't know that.

IdaRose Sylvester:

⁶ Could be referring to EIR, an Environmental Impact Report, which are reports produced by the state, county, or city if a project has a significant environmental impact.

⁷ This is the term for a flood that will happen on average once every hundred years (or, more accurately, that has a 1% chance of happening in any given year).

Yeah. Pat Showalter⁸ talks a lot about it. Pat being a hydrology engineer talks a lot about that.

Betsy Collard:

That's great.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:40:36]

Not many people talk about it and I can't talk very eloquently about it myself, but it's being built there to protect the city of Mountain View, and by extension, North Bayshore, for sure. So I think the risk is extremely expensive to overcome, but it is a very large chunk of land. And as several people have pointed out, there's not too many people who will oppose low-income housing there because there's nobody there to oppose it, right. They don't wanna live there. You know, it's sad, but true. [Laughs] Sad, but true. Mountain View can be a very big hearted community. But like any other community, people are vested in their own very personal self interest.. Yeah. I got involved in a conversation. There's a Friday night club that meets - I live next to Varsity Park, it's a a little teeny pocket park. There's a little club that meets every Friday night and they pulled me in as I was walking by to talk about, "Have you heard, they want to build low-income housing where the Safeway is", like, yes, that center is horrible. It would be perfect.

Betsy Collard:

Where do they want to go build?

IdaRose Sylvester:

So on Miramonte and Questa there's an old, old, old plaza, Blossom Shopping.

Betsy Collard:

I know, I know. I know where you mean now. I just didn't know which Safeway you meant.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Yeah. So, you know, big, huge surface parking lot, wasted space. The buildings are literally collapsing in on themselves.

Betsy Collard:

Is that right?

⁸ MV City Council member and former mayor (2016), former member of the Environmental Planning Commission

IdaRose Sylvester:

It's probably time.

Betsy Collard:

Wow. That would be, that'd be exciting.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:42:13]

You know, there are probably better places. It's a little far away from transportation. But it's not terrible. I think this neighborhood I'm in, Varsity Park, would benefit from, you know, if they did ground floor retail, brand new shopping, didn't have roofs caving in and stores having to close down. Anyway, people are short-sighted. I have all kinds of videos, but I'm trying to keep people's - this project is in part about helping people open their minds to the realities. Like how did the past influence... how do people think about the past? What were people concerned about 40 or 50 years ago? And how does that influence Mountain View today? And just sort of making people wake up.

Betsy Collard:

Well that would be wonderful.

IdaRose Sylvester:

We're trying, we're trying.

Betsy Collard:

We used to say we counted our achievements by what we prevented than what we actually could - this is MCFH, you know, we fight and fight for a housing site and, then... anyway. Thank you for doing what you're doing.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Thank you. I appreciate that. I really enjoy it. You know, for me, this is, since it's the Mountain View Historical Association and the HRC, it's this lovely mashup of, you know, past and present meeting up. It's great work and thank you for being a member of MVHA, recently renewed. So thank you.

Betsy Collard:

Yes, definitely. I'd lost track completely. And one other thing - I mean, we can cut this off - but I am so happy to see younger people, young people like you, really come forward. Because there seemed to be a gap for a while to me.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Arguably we still have that. I only got involved fairly recently. When I realized there was a problem with the association and met a lot of members. There was a gap, there was a generational gap and nobody had been filling the pipeline with new members. We're trying to. The biggest thing we face as an association is, we say, "Hey, will you please join? It's \$30 a year?" Why, why do you need money? \$30 a year? It doesn't matter. We have a lot of young people, younger people, um, fight with us about why they...ugh, it's ridiculous.

Betsy Collard: [00:44:57]

I should really probably talk to somebody about this, but there are some wonderful stories of the older Mexican families in Mountain View that I wish the Historical Society or someone - I used to try and get the ReView⁹ to write something. There's the family that owns the corner of Mariposa and California, that little grocery store. That was a man - a Mr., I'm sure he's dead now. He came from Mexico and I believe he had 11 children. 10 boys, and the last one was a girl, and he was a food service worker at Stanford. All 10 boys graduated from college. All of them, some of them have owned, one owns a burrito place and one owns the store and they're lawyers and real estate people and all sorts. And the girl went to Stanford. And this little store thrives there and it's such a great, it is a great family.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Thank you for saying things like that, because there was a huge push in the 1970s to do oral histories, including some of the original Mexican American families. We have them fairly well archived, but that work.

Betsy Collard:

Like the Siases.

IdaRose Sylvester:

We talked to... Gloria. Who lived over on Bailey Avenue that got torn out, we've talked to her for this project. So this is the first time I think anyone in Mountain View or Mountain View Historical Association has done oral histories, at least on a formal basis, not just on a one-off, since the 1970s. It's actually very powerful work. It's sometimes very overwhelming as we talk to people with these amazing stories. And then we realize how many we're missing and how we will miss them unless we do this now. So I think, not to be predictive, but I think this will be the start of something big that I would like to keep going on, well past this project. I love this kind of work. I love meeting people. I love meeting people passionate about the city I've called home for only 20 something years.

⁹ Newsletter of the Mountain View Historical Association

Betsy Collard:

That's a long time.

IdaRose Sylvester:

But I'm realizing what you're saying. There's that gap, you know that we have a lot of people - that is a long time for Mountain View, but there's this gap of people. Most people on the Historical Association, active members, are probably, well they're certainly 50 [years old] on up, and we're starting to get people a little bit younger than that, but they sort of, they don't quite get it.

Betsy Collard:

They're predominantly white.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Yes. Something we're actually acutely aware of.

Betsy Collard:

This friend of mine who lives in Palo Alto and very active in housing. And a lot of what they have experienced is, as the area has gotten more diverse, particularly from people coming from other countries, they don't have the same tradition of volunteering or being involved in the community in the same way. And in a way, I understand, their identity with this, from a historical standpoint, isn't the same. But it really affects the labor pool.

IdaRose Sylvester:

True. We're optimistic, we've done a lot, we've tried a lot of new things. Trying to encourage a wider audience like that, to get involved with a multicultural festival, a couple, a few, maybe three months ago, we did a map, a world map of "Where did you come from, where's your origin story?"

Betsy Collard:

HRC did this?

IdaRose Sylvester:

Mountain View Historical Association. So we said, let's bring your history current, right? We didn't know if we would offend people. We didn't know how this would land, but it turned out people from all around the world, including countries that maybe not that interested in - like you're saying, maybe not as vested in history - were like "Oo, wow, yeah". Like we have this

guy - I'll never forget - he had a little kid on his shoulder, he was like, "This is where I'm from, this is your story". And he put a dot on Taiwan and they're like "Oh, yeah". Like, the little kid was like, "Yay!" The little kid had never thought about a world beyond Mountain View. The dad was beaming. We have people from every continent.

Betsy Collard:

That's right.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So we think we can make some inroads, but it's hard work. And this project may open some doors to, to open some lines.

Betsy Collard:

So glad to meet you.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I'm very grateful for you. I'm so glad that, well, so many people pointed me in your direction. It was meant to be, but I did have a couple, a couple of questions - one, I hope it's a softball. What do you think your biggest impact has been on housing inclusion in the Bay Area, or in Mountain View?

Betsy Collard: [00:50:20]

I don't know.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I think that, hearing your stories, they're all intertwined and I think they together make your impacts.

Betsy Collard:

Maybe, maybe.

IdaRose Sylvester:

You mentioned you still have a copy of the letter from Arbuckle. I think he was Wells Fargo.

Betsy Collard:

I have a copy - if I can find it - I have a copy of the letter that was written, that she wrote. I'll try

and find it.

IdaRose Sylvester:

That'd be amazing.

Betsy Collard:

Might be something in my garage. Yeah, I have a whole file on it. So I should be able to find something. If I do, I'll let you know.

IdaRose Sylvester:

We would love to help preserve that. That is powerful. So thank you for thinking.

Betsy Collard:

Wait a minute - oh yeah. That's right. I did tell you that part. Okay. Good. Alright, well, this is fun.

IdaRose Sylvester:

This is great. It's wonderful to meet you, everyone spoke so highly of you, so I'm glad we can connect. And since we're, you know, not very far apart, I hope to actually get to see you in person soon.

Betsy Collard:

Thank you.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Have a great Sunday, bye.

Betsy Collard:

Bye.