

Interview with

Joan MacDonald

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 Senior Lecturer Michael Kahan and team from Stanford University.

Mountain View Historical Society
Mountain View Public Library

June 29, 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



Joan MacDonald is a 90-year-old Mountain View resident. She has been living in the Monta Loma neighborhood, a community of historic Eichler homes as well as homes built by developers Mackay and Mardell, since 1960. She has been involved in affordable housing, rent control, and low-income housing issues since moving to Mountain View. She was/is involved with the League of Women Voters Affordable, Housing Committee Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition, “No on 14” ballot measure and Advocates for Affordable Housing. She also helped pass Measure V in 2016, also known as the Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act (CSFRA), and various efforts to weaken CSFRA. She’s walked her precinct in every election but one since 1960 as well as parts of others when needed. Additionally, in a non-housing or political effort, she’s served on the board of CHAC, a local non-profit mental health agency since the founding in 1973.

Date of Interview: June 29, 2022

Interviewer: IdaRose Sylvester

Interviewee: Joan MacDonald

IdaRose Sylvester 0:03

All right, well, hello. My name is IdaRose Sylvester, and I'm an interviewer working with the City of Mountain View's Human Relations Commission in partnership with the Mountain View Historical Association and Stanford University on a project entitled "Understanding the History of Housing in Mountain View: Stories of Racism, Antidiscrimination and Movement Toward Inclusion". The purpose of this project 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 that we collect will be shared with the public at an event sponsored by the Mountain View Human Relations Commission, scheduled for July 26, 2022. Today is June 29, 2022, and I am interviewing Joan MacDonald. Joan has lived in the city for many years and has been known as a long-term housing advocate. For safety reasons during the ongoing pandemic, we are doing this interview over zoom teleconferencing, for the safety of all of those folks involved. Everyone is taking the interview from their residence in Mountain View, California. So before we can begin, Joan, can you please tell us your name to make sure we get it correct.

Joan MacDonald 1:12

Joan MacDonald

IdaRose Sylvester 1:14

Joan MacDonald. Thank you. Where do you currently live?

Joan MacDonald 1:18

519 Emmons Drive, Mountain View, 94043.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:24

Great. And how long have you lived in the city of Mountain View?

Joan MacDonald 1:27

Since March 19th, 1960.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:33

Great, phenomenal. You are so far my longest-term resident in the city that I have had the pleasure to interview. So I'm going to start with a couple of questions. One, I think we'll move along pretty quickly. I just want to confirm, have you ever personally experienced or witnessed housing discrimination in the city of Mountain View, separate from the work you've done as an

activist?

Joan MacDonald 1:59

Hm. I guess not. <inaudible>

IdaRose Sylvester 2:06

Great. We'll get there in a minute then. I just realized I had a few questions I meant to ask to sort of start us off on the right frame. So you've told us when you first moved to Mountain View, which is 1960, what brought you here?

Joan MacDonald 2:19

My husband took a job in the rehab department of the then-newly opened Stanford Medical Center.

IdaRose Sylvester 2:28

That's great. How did you find your first home here, which I assume is the home you live in still today?

Joan MacDonald 2:35

It is. And we lived in San Francisco and had a diverse group of friends. Actually, I had diverse family friends from the time that I was born. And we were looking for a diverse neighborhood to start our family.

IdaRose Sylvester 3:01

By diverse - I don't mean to interrupt - but what did the two of you mean by diverse when you were talking to each other about that?

Joan MacDonald 3:08

Everything; diverse in race, in religion, in socioeconomic levels.

IdaRose Sylvester 3:20

Great. So what was that process like for finding housing in what you consider to be a diverse neighborhood?

Joan MacDonald 3:29

Well, we couldn't find any diverse neighborhoods. They were all really White. And we said out loud to somebody, and I wish I could remember who that person was, that we were disappointed because we couldn't find any diverse neighborhoods and that person said, "Oh, that's easy. You just have to stick to Eichlers". And we said, "What are Eichlers?" And that person told us, and thereafter we just followed the ads for Eichlers.

IdaRose Sylvester 4:08

So not a specific neighborhood, but the housing brand known as Eichler.

Joan MacDonald 4:13

Yeah, Joe Eichler was the developer and he had housing in Mountain View and Los Altos and then Palo Alto. And we found that his homes in both Palo Alto and Los Altos were more expensive than the same homes in Mountain View. So that clinched [it for] Mountain View. And we found this house and we definitely had diverse neighbors. We had a Black family living behind us. We've had an Asian family diagonally across the street [and another up the street]. We had two Latino families up the street on the other side, and that was just a start.

IdaRose Sylvester 5:05

And that neighborhood, or that diversity, was unique in Mountain View at the time?

Joan MacDonald 5:11

Absolutely. It was unique and all of them - in fact, the neighborhood Monta Loma¹ had three different developers by Eichler², Mackay³, and Mardell, All of the homes had racial covenants including the Eichlers, because that was [true statewide.] But Joe [Eichler] refused to enforce this. And I think the other two developers didn't necessarily enforce their covenants, but the realtors just wouldn't bring minority families to the homes [of Mardell or Mackay.] They just sent them over to East Palo Alto.

IdaRose Sylvester 6:09

Did you hear that from your own realtor? Or how did you learn about how realtors were selecting people for neighborhoods?

Joan MacDonald 6:18

Heard it from the same person who told us to look at Eichlers; and that was reinforced when I was asked, by an organization that I belong, to be a representative from them to an organization called Fair Play Council⁴.

IdaRose Sylvester 6:45

Fair Play Council. Excellent. Going back a little bit to this neighborhood, what did it feel like to live in this diverse neighborhood compared to where you had been living in San Francisco or elsewhere before?

Joan MacDonald 7:02

¹ The Monta Loma neighborhood in Mountain View was a residential neighborhood with Eichler homes, built by famous home developer Joseph Eichler; his neighborhoods had an established non-discrimination policy and offered homes to those of different races.

² Developer Jjoseph Eichler, post WWII real estate developer of [suburban] neighborhoods and homes that often did not have restrictive covenants, of which many Bay Area POC rented/bought.

³ John MacKay post WWII real estate developer of suburban neighborhoods and homes that often did not have restrictive covenants, of which many Bay Area POC rented/bought. He co-founded Mackay Homes. He also served on the board of directors for the Children's Health Council and was one of the founders of the Palo Alto Medical Foundation.

⁴ Formed in 1947 to assist with the relocation of the Japanese-American's detention during WWII. They are a charity organization with tax-deductible contributions.

Well, our neighborhood in San Francisco was not diverse, but our friends were, so that made us happy.

IdaRose Sylvester 7:15

Excellent. So it sounds like you obviously didn't face discrimination yourselves, but you knew of it in the context of looking for the house.

Joan MacDonald 7:28

Yeah.

IdaRose Sylvester 7:30

Well that brings me up to an interesting part of your story because you started, you touched upon it briefly. How did you become involved with the issue of housing, inclusivity, and discrimination in the city of Mountain View? What was your first foray into that? And when?

Joan MacDonald 7:49

In 1974, the Fair Housing Rumford Act event]had been enacted and there was a ballot measure to overturn it.

IdaRose Sylvester 8:04

We found your signature, on that initiative, by the way, in a box of archives.

Joan MacDonald:

[Laughs]

IdaRose Sylvester:

Sorry, I didn't mean to interrupt, but I had to share that tidbit before I forgot.

Joan MacDonald 8:19

My signature is all over housing.

IdaRose Sylvester 8:22

Yes. I'm sure there are many other places too. So there was the movement afoot] to overturn.

Joan MacDonald 8:29

And, I took a leave of absence from my teaching at Foothill in order to spend six months working on "No on 14"⁵.

IdaRose Sylvester 8:47

Okay.

Joan MacDonald 8:49

And when we defeated it, which was really very good news. I became active in Mid-Peninsula

⁵ A "yes" for California Proposition 14 in 1963 meant supporting creating a state constitutional right for people to refuse to sell, lease, or rent residences to people based on race.

Citizens for Fair Housing⁶.

IdaRose Sylvester 9:05

In what year did that organization come into being?

Joan MacDonald 9:09

Well, probably during the campaign. And so immediately after, we were both involved and I became a checker for -

IdaRose Sylvester 9:22

Tell me what a checker is, Joan.

Joan MacDonald 9:23

Well, I would get, every checker would get a role to play at an address where there had been a complaint of some kind of discrimination.

IdaRose Sylvester 9:39

In terms of housing, rental housing, or, purchase property housing?

Joan MacDonald 9:43

Well, I was involved only in rental housing. They did have cases in trying to purchase homes, but I wasn't personally involved in that. I hadn't been given those assignments.

IdaRose Sylvester 10:04

Oh, okay. Good. Good. Thank you for the clarification. Okay.

Joan MacDonald 10:07

So one case, which had to do with a Black woman being [refused] a rental of an apartment. So I went in, as soon after she had been rejected and I presented myself as a single mother with - which she was - with a son, and I was interested in their two bedroom apartment, which had been advertised and I was told it was available, but she had been [told] the previous day that it was not available.

IdaRose Sylvester 11:09

That's remarkable. How, what was the follow-up to discovering that the landlord had purposely not rented the apartment to the lack single mother? What happened next?

Joan MacDonald 11:21[A] pro-bono lawyer for [Citizens] for Fair Housing, property managers or the owners, I don't know which, and I don't know what they actually did, but in that case, he actually filed a suit or said he would file a suit, but ultimately, the woman found an apartment somewhere else. Not in that person's complex, however, they were very adequately

⁶ A fair housing advocacy organization that has since merged with / been taken over by ECHO Housing in Hayward. Believed in housing as a right that all hold, regardless of income, race, gender, etc. This was one of 2 main fair-housing organizations in the Mid-Peninsula area in the 70s and 80s, the other being Project Sentinel. Project Sentinel still exists.

warned. <inaudible>

IdaRose Sylvester 12:13

It sounds like you did that sort of, checking work on other occasions. Can you tell us all the stories you remember?

Joan MacDonald 12:21

Well, the other one that stands out is, I was asked to represent myself as a married woman with a son. And I went to this complex to ask about a two bedroom apartment that had been advertised. And I was told that our family had to have a three bedroom apartment. And I said, well, I don't know what your habits are, but my husband and I share a bed. So we don't need two bedrooms for the two of us. And my son certainly doesn't [need] two bedrooms for himself. And it would be nice if we had an extra room that was not a necessity. They said this was their policy. And they were standing by it. That particular case ultimately became a filed lawsuit.

IdaRose Sylvester 13:42

Oh.

Joan MacDonald 13:44

Years later, after I had given an extensive deposition concerning this particular situation, I got a call from the lawyer asking me if I remembered that [case.] And that's when he said, "Tell me what you remember, anything you said. That's amazing, he said. You have a hundred percent memory of the deposition and we're going to work." And they won the case. Then the owner of the complex had to pay a penalty and was I think, monitored for, I don't know how long so that he would not continue to discriminate against families because that was considered discrimination.

IdaRose Sylvester 14:45

Absolutely. Do you have any sense at that time, why landlords discriminated against families?

Joan MacDonald 14:54

Well, there were apparently two major things. One was, they claimed that kids were disruptive and caused problems for neighbors because they were loud and they ran around playing and doing other things.

IdaRose Sylvester 15:18

Doing children's things. Yes. [Laughs]

Joan MacDonald 15:20

They were kids. That's what they were doing. They were being kids. And the other seemed to be, and I don't have any data, it's just gut level, like they really thought that they would make more money in the long run by having all of their apartments filled by couples or individuals. Since they couldn't tell a family with only one child that they had to be in a three bedroom apartment, they were kind of stuck. And they were trying to, it seemed to me, they were trying to find a

loophole.

IdaRose Sylvester 16:16

Indeed. So you did a fact-check case, one looking at the issue of race and then one looking at the issue of families, did you do any more checking where you addressed different issues? Or do you have any other stories involving race and families?

Joan MacDonald 16:39

Because of one other case about a single woman.

IdaRose Sylvester 16:46

Oh, okay.

Joan MacDonald 16:48

She was actually Asian.

IdaRose Sylvester 16:54

Hmm.

Joan MacDonald 16:55

Now that I think about it, I'd forgotten, she tried to rent a two-bedroom apartment. She was rejected and told that she didn't need two bedrooms. And I thought this was kind of comical because in another case it had to have an extra bedroom and here they were trying to shoehorn her into a one bedroom or maybe even a studio. And I honestly thought this was simply a way to fill the vacant apartments that were [marketed] to rent, then, the two bedroom apartments. But it was really, it seemed to me it was [absurd] that owners of apartments would be so discriminatory really. And [not] try to accommodate people who want to rent. And this was a time when there were significant vacancies; it didn't make any logical sense to me, but discrimination isn't logical.

IdaRose Sylvester 18:27

This is a good point. This is all happening during the 1970s. Yeah. What became of the case of the Asian woman trying to rent the larger apartment? Did that get investigated? Do you know?

Joan MacDonald 18:40

I don't really know.

IdaRose Sylvester 18:45

In all and total, how many times do you think you served as a checker and actually how many other people were doing this work with you in the city of Mountain View?

Joan MacDonald 18:54

I don't have a clue how many people were doing this. Sue Russell might know.

IdaRose Sylvester 19:03

I'll definitely ask Sue later.

Joan MacDonald 19:04

I probably did a dozen.

IdaRose Sylvester 19:10

Yeah. I mean, how did that work make you feel?

Joan MacDonald 19:15

Well, I was of two minds. One, I was happy that I could do this so that some of the discrimination could be corrected. And the other was, I was sad that I had to do it, because discrimination *was* happening.

IdaRose Sylvester 19:41

I imagine it would be very difficult, especially as you do more and more cases, to realize the degree of discrimination, of all different types that you witnessed. So moving kind of forward. So the seventies are happening. People are trying to stop landlords from doing what they do. When did you stop doing the checker work? And is that because things started to change for the better or what happened in the city of Mountain View?

Joan MacDonald 20:15

I think, well, first of all, there was more housing built and then there was a whole decade or 15 years by then, I think there was significantly less discrimination of these sorts because, it was pretty obvious that the Rumford Act⁷ was going to be enforced and that was costly [if they violated.... money is the bottom line.

IdaRose Sylvester 20:58

It sounds like money is the bottom line. And in two senses, if I'm hearing you correct, one is obviously if you get a fine, that's money, but it also sounds like more apartments were built. Maybe that there wasn't an adequate, or maybe even an oversupply of housing. So landlords - discriminating wasn't in the landlord's best economic interest.

Joan MacDonald 21:23

That's my guess.

IdaRose Sylvester 21:25

Yeah. I mean, I think the whole point of having these discussions is to try to uncover the nuances because sometimes we'll never know, right? We can't go back 50 years and start again or even 60 years and start again. So it's really interesting that the supply of housing increased dramatically at the same time discrimination seemed to go down. So after you did this work as a checker, what, what came next for you in terms of your, housing discrimination in housing work in

⁷ Passed in 1963, the Rumford Act (California Fair Housing Act, or AB 1240) was a law enacted to end discrimination of people of color who sought housing.

general? What kind of campaigns did you work on? What kind of affordable housing did you seek to promote? What happened next?

Joan MacDonald 22:07

That's interesting because there's a gap in organizational work, and I think you described why.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So sometime in the seventies until <inaudible>

Joan MacDonald:

I worked for both candidates for elected office at the local level and also at the state [], county [] level. And along with that, there were some pieces of legislation that worked their way through and either didn't get passed or did get passed. I'm trying to remember the year that Costa Hawkins⁸ came into being. I can't remember.

IdaRose Sylvester 23:18

I don't remember precisely either, but the Costa Hawkins time, was that sort of when you were renewing your political activism on the subject of housing?

Joan MacDonald 23:31

Well, I always was doing something about the subject of housing, not necessarily all through an organization.

IdaRose Sylvester 23:43

Ah, so you were a solo flier.

Joan MacDonald 23:47

Well, because there wasn't any real activity through organizations for a while.

IdaRose Sylvester 23:55

What's really interesting - Costa Hawkins, by the way, was in 1995, just to put a fork, a stake in the road right there. So we know where we are.

Joan MacDonald 24:04

And when that came into being was simultaneously, a time that Roy Hayter activated a group called Advocates for Affordable Housing⁹, and that was sometime in the mid to late eighties. And then in the meantime I had been working on one of the city created committees on the

⁸ According to costa-hawkings.com: "The Costa-Hawkins Rental Housing Act is a California state law that exempts certain kinds of residential rental units from rent control ordinances and allows landlords to reset the rental rate on rent-controlled rental units where they become vacant or where the last rent-controlled tenant no longer permanently resides at the unit (including where they move and leave behind subtenants)."

⁹ Housing Advocacy group formed by Roy Hayter (another interviewee), along with others from various churches across Mountain View, and sponsored by the Community Services Agency (CSA), to (in the words of Roy Hayter) "advocate effectively for the housing amendment and deal with... the housing issue".

Housing Element.

IdaRose Sylvester 24:46

Ah.

Joan MacDonald 24:47

And you know, that covers an eight year period. And a number of us who were on that committee were really furious because we worked very hard at looking at what was real and what needed to be changed and so on and made all kinds of recommendations. And the consultant's report with our committee was totally demolished.

IdaRose Sylvester 25:26

Just for clarification, your committee. this wasn't just a group of concerned citizens. This was a group of people working on behalf of the city, or?

Joan MacDonald 25:36

Yes.

IdaRose Sylvester 25:37

Okay.

Joan MacDonald 25:40

[N]one of the recommendations that we [made] found their way into the consultant's report.

IdaRose Sylvester 25:51

Oh, okay. Wow.

Joan MacDonald 25:53

We were furious. And I said to somebody, "I want to work with a group that isn't just gaslighting, essentially". And somebody told me about Roy Hayter¹⁰ starting Advocates for Affordable Housing. And so I called him and I said, I want to join [], and this is why and what I've been doing. He said, "Great, our next meeting is such and such." And I've been a part of Advocates for Affordable Housing ever since.

IdaRose Sylvester 26:34

Excellent. I just want to understand a little bit more about the commission. What was the initial promise, I guess, by the city of this commission? And how long did you work on that commission to create the recommendations that were -

Joan MacDonald 26:53

Once a year; you know, maybe nine months to a year? It wasn't a commission, it was a committee.

¹⁰ From Sue Russell (other interviewee): Roy Hayter was a founder of Advocates for Affordable Housing in MV and an active member of our LWV Housing Committee for many years. Lives in MV.

IdaRose Sylvester 27:00

Ah, okay.

Joan MacDonald 27:03

And we didn't actually ever report to the city council. The consultants just took what we recommended and gave a report to city council.

IdaRose Sylvester 27:21

Minus everything you had suggested.

Joan MacDonald 27:23

Right.

IdaRose Sylvester 27:23

Well, that sounds incredibly frustrating, Joan.

Joan MacDonald 27:27

It was. And a number of us went to the city council to complain about this. And most of the recommendations were related to affordable housing leads, most particularly for low income, or low low income.

IdaRose Sylvester 27:56

Right. Do you know if a copy of that report still exists anywhere?

Joan MacDonald 28:03

I don't.

IdaRose Sylvester 28:05

Yeah. I haven't, we haven't come across it yet, but I would love to find it if it did.

Joan MacDonald 28:13

Yeah. This was before computers.

Joan MacDonald 28:18

Or before sophisticated computers, and we didn't have email then, or it was in its infancy.

IdaRose Sylvester 28:35

I'm not so sure. We're always really good with our digital archives either when we have everything on email, we just assume it will always be there. With that said, I had a question about, one of, you said you were looking at the need for low income housing. Did you look, do you remember if that report looked at racial and ethnic inclusion and the role of low-income housing in that?

Joan MacDonald 29:00

Well, that was one of our concerns. And then that reminded me that one of, several of the things that I did, not with a formal organization, but when things just raised their ugly heads, I would

walk through where I lived, [for every] election and, I would try to get people to register, to vote. And around the corner from us on Junction, I found a whole slew of shacks. It turned out that all the people who lived in shacks were Latina, Latinos. These were actually chicken coops,

IdaRose Sylvester 29:58

Oh my. And on Junction Avenue, or... where is that? Is that in the Monta Loma area?

Joan MacDonald 30:11

Yes, it's right around the corner.

IdaRose Sylvester 30:13

Okay. I think I know where, oh my.

Joan MacDonald 30:16

A block between Rengstorff and Thompson. Off of Thompson. What was <inaudible> field. These people didn't have running water inside and they didn't have electricity. They were working for farmers either on a ranch... I was appalled. And I mentioned it to somebody in city hall and they could care less.

IdaRose Sylvester:

What year was this? Approximately.

Joan MacDonald:

It was in the late seventies, early eighties. And, I thought it was a public health problem and I didn't get anywhere because there were questions about whose jurisdiction...

IdaRose Sylvester 31:34

Oh my gosh.

Joan MacDonald 31:36

And you know, it was one of these, if they closed down these places, where would these people live?

IdaRose Sylvester 31:46

Right.

Joan MacDonald 31:47

So some of them were undocumented. They were afraid they wouldn't have any place to go. And so personally, as an individual, I didn't want to take the responsibility of kicking them out of the only place they lived when there wasn't anything, you know, any alternative. Simultaneously, shortly after I learned about the onion fields workers. And that was from the other side of 101

IdaRose Sylvester 32:32

Right, [101].

Joan MacDonald 32:36

Before all of the electronic people. All the high tech. It was just onion fields. And the families lived in homes close to the freeway. It wasn't a freeway. it was just a road. And the men worked in the fields. The owners of the onion fields made sure that they stayed in the shacks at the far end of the onion fields, six days a week. And they weren't able to visit with their families except on Sunday. And I thought this was horrendous. Nobody in city hall that I could find cared a bit about this. And I thought these are two public health hazards, and mental health hazards going on. One of them, a couple of blocks from where we lived, another one, less than a mile.

IdaRose Sylvester 33:54

Unbelievable. So you mentioned earlier you were concerned about not wanting, particularly the women, to lose their homes who were in the shadows. So you were very concerned, but you did still bring the issue to city hall, which said, who, which said nothing to you in return. What did you wind up doing next?

Joan MacDonald 34:20

Unfortunately, I had to let it go, because I couldn't find anybody who was even interested in listening to the problem, much less doing anything about the problem. Along with [these problems, [I don't recall] what year this was, the city decided to create what locals here in Montaloma called New Middlefield, as opposed to Old Middlefield Way. And in doing that, they were going to demolish three or four homes in the Shoreline area.

IdaRose Sylvester 35:08

Right.

Joan MacDonald 35:10

And a group of us mothers from the [Whisman School District] decided that we would lobby the city hall to save those homes and move them so that -

IdaRose Sylvester 35:30

Wow.

Joan MacDonald 35:30

-the families actually got some kind of help for housing when the houses were moved and then some of us helped to move back into them. And those houses are still there.

IdaRose Sylvester 35:52

Where did they get moved?

Joan MacDonald 35:54

They moved to a side of the new Middlefield.

IdaRose Sylvester 36:03

And do you recall the ethnic makeup of the people who lived in those?

Joan MacDonald 36:09

Most of them were Latinos.

IdaRose Sylvester 36:13

Wow. And the group of you that worked to save their housing and have it moved, were parents in the school district, you weren't a separate housing organization. You were a group of activists, who became activists over this issue through the school?

Joan MacDonald 36:30

Yup. Because those families' kids went to the school.

IdaRose Sylvester 36:35

Great. Which school was that?

Joan MacDonald 36:40

Most of them went to Crittenden [Middle School].

IdaRose Sylvester 36:42

Aha.

Joan MacDonald 36:43

Some of them went to other schools, but most of the kids went to Crittenden.

IdaRose Sylvester 36:49

So I'm always curious how groups of people come together to work on issues. How - was this through PTA? Was it through friends of yours, friends you had at the school? How did you all even start talking about it?

Joan MacDonald 37:03

Just by word of mouth, not PTA.

IdaRose Sylvester 37:11

[Laughs] Good point. interesting. Interesting. So I'm trying to figure out, I'll have to look. I don't remember when Old Middlefield was, when that split happened. A lot of this, a lot of your stories are happening in a very concentrated period of time, a lot of change, in the eighties timeframe. So what happened next? Do you want to go talk about your work with Roy Hayter and his organization, or other projects you've worked on; 'cause we got years of activism to cover all the way up to the present, Joan.

Joan MacDonald 37:49

I'm trying to think of when Sue Russell retired from working with Mid-Pen¹¹ because that's when she activated or reactivated the League of Women Voters¹², affordable housing committee.

¹¹ Referring to Mid-Peninsula Housing Coalition, a Nonprofit Housing Developer in the 1990s.

¹² 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"

IdaRose Sylvester 38:09

I'll ask her for sure.

Joan MacDonald 38:12

Because that's when, Roy and Sue¹³, kind of put the membership of the two groups together, we worked in harmony. And what was great about that is AAH [Advocates for Affordable Housing] had no restrictions about what they could advocate or criticize, and the League had to follow what positions the [LWV] had already taken, or do a year's study in order to create a position. So if something came up that didn't jive with any [LWV] position, AAH, as an ad-hoc group, would run with it. So we [complemented] each other significantly. And Roy was particularly skilled at putting data together. So he brought slides to city council meetings to show them how many housing units had been built over a period of time and then broke those down to how many were above median income and were at median, how many were at low, low-low, and extremely low. And it's not a surprise that there were for many, many, many, many years, *absolutely no* units [for] low, extremely low, or low-income.

IdaRose Sylvester 40:14

Wow.

Joan MacDonald 40:16

And today it's the same thing. The new apartments are overwhelmingly for the top echelon. It's true that the city has built several - or they had nonprofits build some affordable housing units, but there's still a lopsided number of units for [higher] income.

IdaRose Sylvester 40:54

Would you say, it's almost as extreme as it was back in the eighties and nineties or - I'm just trying to, it sounds like you think it's still pretty bad. I'm just wondering as a magnitude, have we improved?

Joan MacDonald 41:15

Well, the problem is that as we've improved, our population swelled, the result is pretty much the same as it was.

IdaRose Sylvester 41:31

I'm curious, how do you think the population has also not just swelled, but how do you, or *do* you think the population has changed demographically?

Joan MacDonald 41:42

Almost no Black residents. We never had a huge number. Socioeconomically minority groups have diminished significantly in our population and obviously low-income people are now commuting long distances to work here [or are living in RVs or cars or are on the streets.]

¹³ Sue Russell, another interviewee and member of Mid Peninsula Housing Coalition

IdaRose Sylvester 42:23

Yeah. So there's a few things, obviously, you're talking about how demand, how supply hasn't kept up with the need because of the overall swelling population. And that has, I believe, caused a series of demographic shifts, including the lack, the loss of ethnic diversity in our community, as well as income diversity.

Joan MacDonald 42:50

Yeah. It was in 1960 when we moved here, it is just kind of a sleepy [] little town, but it was working class, a lot. And 30,000 people, now we've got 75,000.

IdaRose Sylvester 43:07

I think we're, we're pushing 85,000 now. [Laughs]

Joan MacDonald 43:13

There's a lot more people who come into work.

IdaRose Sylvester 43:19

A fair point. It would be interesting to look at that, that sort of data from the time you moved here; what percentage of people were, you know, how much did our daytime population increase in 1960 compared to what it does now?

Joan MacDonald 43:34

Probably almost none since 1960s.

IdaRose Sylvester 43:36

Interesting. I wonder if there was a net outflow in the 1960s.

Joan MacDonald 43:43

That's a good question, I don't know.

IdaRose Sylvester 43:45

Still. interesting, 'cause that also has huge ramifications on a city in many, many ways, including how it feels for the people who live there and experience and live life in it. But moving back, you have done so many different things. I'm having trouble keeping track, but I'm working on it. So the 1980s, people are starting to realize that we're not built, some people are starting to realize we're not building enough low income and low, low income housing. What work do you continue to do with Roy [Hayter's] group, with other groups, to continue your activism into the eighties, the nineties and two thousands?

Joan MacDonald 44:28

Well, from the nineties on, there were very few city council meetings that I missed. And I'm not saying that with great pride. It's just that there was always something that was concerning and as ordinances came into being, there were more things to work on. And the situation got so bad that it actually, in 2014, a group of us started meeting informally, wondering what, if anything, we

could do about the lack of affordable housing and the fact that rents were going up at a rapid rate; two and three times a year, people would get rent increases, and way above CPI. And by 2015 we had kind of formalized our group and we decided we needed to kind of, well, we needed to find out how the individuals on city council felt about this issue and how they felt about possible rent stabilization, which is different from rent control. And when people think of rent control, they think of the old standard that New York City had, which nobody has anymore, but that was something hard to explain to people. Anyway, we discovered in our individual interviews with each of the city council people, there wasn't one single member of the council who was the least bit interested in any kind of rent stabilization; that that was a market issue and the market would take care of it. And we kept saying, well, the market hasn't taken care of it, as a matter of fact, the market has created the problem, but nobody listened to us. We decided we had to create an ordinance of our own. And we found Juliet [Brodie]¹⁴ of the Stanford Community Law Clinic in [East]Palo Alto and Daniel Saver¹⁵ of the Community Legal Services in East Palo Alto. And together with our much-expanded group, we collaborated on [writing] the ordinance. And of course at first, nobody [in city hall or outside] was concerned about this [ordinance,] because they were sure we wouldn't get enough signatures. And then we got one and a half, 150% of the number of signatures we needed. And then they were sure we wouldn't win the ballot issue. And an alternate measure was created at the last minute by the city council, against Measure V¹⁶. So they went to the election, then they were both on the ballot.

IdaRose Sylvester 49:08

Right. And I remember that well.

Joan MacDonald 49:12

Yes. And we won. And so Measure V came into existence and that meant that there was rent [as] CSFRA, which has been working very hard [and] well, since 2016.

IdaRose Sylvester 49:48

And that organization that founded to do that, I think I know who it is, but can you tell me who, which organization founded -

Joan MacDonald 49:57

But what came to be, for Measure V, was Mountain View Tenants Coalition¹⁷.

IdaRose Sylvester 50:08

Okay. Just wanted to make sure, because at the same time the Balanced Mountain View was sort

¹⁴ Juliet M. Brodie is the director of the Stanford Community Law Clinic (CLC)

¹⁵ Assistant Director for Housing and Local Planning at Metropolitan Transportation Commission

¹⁶ On November 8, 2016, Mountain View residents voted to enact Measure V, also known as the Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act (CSFRA), to stabilize rents and provide just cause eviction protections for certain Rental Units in Mountain View.

¹⁷ Taken from their facebook page in 2022: "A coalition of tenants, homeowners, activists, people of faith, business owners, teachers and tech employees seeking stability and dignity for renters."

of spinning up and spinning up. There were a lot of -

Joan MacDonald 50:17

That was, Balanced Mountain View didn't start until the next stage.

IdaRose Sylvester 50:23

Ah, okay. Got it. Yeah.

Joan MacDonald 50:26

But the Day Worker Center¹⁸, was active in the Tenants Coalition.

IdaRose Sylvester 50:38

Ah, okay. So very different groups of people take a look at similar issues at around the same time.

Joan MacDonald 50:44

And then after, when we had to fight against Measure, which one was it - Measure D? Mountain View Tenants Coalition, and some other people who've been part of it kind of split and Mountain View Housing Justice, which had a much broader scope in its mission. So we pushed through all the attacks on CSFRA¹⁹ and so far we're still okay. And I applaud [the] staff because they have done an incredible job. And the rental housing committee²⁰ faced a very difficult time and has some of that still to deal with, but at least a good many people have been protected.

IdaRose Sylvester 52:24

Excellent. So taking us up to today to the, in 2020 and onward, which organizations and which issues do you see yourself focusing most on right now? And, where do you think that will be in the future for you?

Joan MacDonald 52:43

Well, [AAH] and the League support housing and monitor every noticed development to make sure that there are the required number of BMR units. And sometimes we lose, we to try to get the goal of the city council, which is zero displacement.

IdaRose Sylvester 53:20

Right.

¹⁸ From dayworkercentermv.org: "The Day Worker Center of Mountain View is a non-profit organization that connects the day worker community to employers in a safe and reliable environment in addition to offering various programs for workers and community members such as providing healthy meals, ESL classes, technology classes, providing workshops about worker's rights and much more."

¹⁹ Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act

²⁰ From City of Mountain View website: "The Rental Housing Committee (RHC) is established by the voter-approved Community Stabilization and Fair Rent Act (CSFRA), and consists of five members and one alternate member. It is tasked with implementing and administering the CSFRA the Mobile Home Rent Stabilization Ordinance (MHRSO)."

Joan MacDonald 53:21

But unfortunately there's been a lot of displacement and the tenant's rights have been increased in some ways when they've been forced out of their places, but as affordable, separate [complexes] are demolished, there are fewer and fewer and fewer.

IdaRose Sylvester 53:57

What impact do you see that the displacement and the destruction of naturally affordable housing, what impact do you see on the demographics, including the ethnicity?

Joan MacDonald 54:07

What's happening is we're again losing the very people we need, who work in low-paying jobs, and either they're going far away and commuting and increasing the pollution, or they end up getting jobs where they have moved. And that rips families away from their churches and their schools. The kids have to start all over and make new friends. It's very distressing. And now we actually have a state law that says you can't be displaced, but there's no way to go back and find the people who have been displaced. And I am not sure that the non-displacement issue is resolved just because there's a state law. So we work for candidates who support our views on -

IdaRose Sylvester 55:47

Joan, I sense, you're not about to stop. [Laughs]

Joan MacDonald 55:51

I figured that I was born into a family that worked on issues of social justice, whatever that happened to be. And that's just the way I'm going to live my life until it's over.

IdaRose Sylvester 56:10

We need more Joans in the world, but I've told you that before. You know, as we sort of wrap up some of the stories, obviously I've learned a lot about you and I thought I knew a lot about you already. So I have thoughts on this question. I'm curious, I guess it's a two-part question or a two-pronged question: What impact do you think you've made on housing diversity in Mountain View over all of this period of time? And what do you think your most important achievements have been, in that regard? So what's the impact of Joan MacDonald on housing in general, but what's the most important accomplishments inside of that?

Joan MacDonald 56:57

Well, I've probably made myself to be a pest, for city council and some staff. I think the most important accomplishment, if you want to call it that, has been CSFRA (pronounced "sifra") and all of the ramifications of that from the very beginning through today. Because we've protected thousands of people, but it's not over.

IdaRose Sylvester 57:49

You definitely are one of those people that the more that you achieve, the more you need to achieve, which is great. So that leads me to a follow up. You talked a little bit about it, but if you

could see one big achievement, one more big achievement, what would that be? What would really be the next big boom in protecting Mountain View housing diversity?

Joan MacDonald 58:19

This is probably - I would really like to see some affordable housing created on the southwest side of the city, so that we become a more diverse city as a whole, because most of our diversity, both in racial and socioeconomic levels, are on the northeast side of the city. And, you know, I say that with full awareness that there would be a lot of pushback, but I see the creation of a city like that to be healthier for everybody. Kids who live in little enclaves of wealth, really understand the real world and kids who live in a place of low wealth and poverty, don't recognize what the real world is. And we know for instance, that kids who live in a neighborhood or a zip code that has higher wealth, I don't necessarily name billionaires and millionaires become more aware in school. They become more aware of their own potential and what they can give back. And if they stay in their pocket, they love that area. When I taught for 45 years, and I know that's [a fact] and I've been on a school board for 22 years, and I know that that's the case.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:01:06

That those are some very, very eloquent words. And as I look back on this interview, I suspect those might be the ones I wind up quoting the most, you know, either for the event or another context later on. So thank you. Thank you for taking the hard question and making it look easy. Whew. I do have a few more questions and I know we're starting to go a little bit long and we could definitely talk forever. So let me try to get past some of the remaining questions, if you will. I'm gonna kind of wrap some things up in the form of a question. Do you think that Mountain View is more or less inclusive than it was when you moved here?

Joan MacDonald 1:02:14

That's really a hard thing to say.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:02:16

Oh yes. It's a loaded question on purpose, Joan.

Joan MacDonald 1:02:25

In some ways, there's more activism now than there was early on and that's good. And the activism that I see anyway is more diverse than it might've been.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:02:49

Interesting.

Joan MacDonald 1:02:54

We'll see whether it lasts, whether it succeeds, but I think the fact that there are watchdogs among us who really do monitor what city council does, is a very good thing. And they advocate for what will help us. I don't know if I really answered your question directly, but indirectly.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:03:38

You answered the question that needed to be answered, I think is the answer to that. There's no wrong and right. And there's no quiz, no wrong or right answers.

Joan MacDonald 1:03:49

There's no grade at the end.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:03:52

Everyone gets A+, it's a participation thing. Shame on me. I can't believe I said that. A couple of really sort of tactical questions we got out of the interesting stuff I'm afraid. I know your deed, you cannot find your deed. I remember you saying that, but do you have any kind of materials or records that you think might be interesting for us; clippings, anything you may have kept?

Joan MacDonald 1:04:28

The only thing I have, I think, is the ad for the Eichlers when they first started, which was when we bought our house over 70 years ago.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:04:44

Did the ad call out inclusivity in any way or?

Joan MacDonald 1:04:50

It was a strange thing: it didn't, and I don't think that they were trying to hide it. I just heard of them. The other thing that's really important Eichlers is that real estate in the sixties and before was a man's plaything. And what I heard is he created a sales force so that nobody could buy or sell in Eichler except through his sales force and his sales force were all women.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:05:38

Oh.

Joan MacDonald 1:05:41

who were in Echlers. Which makes a great deal of sense when you think about it. If somebody lived in a house they really loved, they're going to be great salespeople.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:05:58

That's phenomenal. Oh boy. I actually might, if you could get me a copy of that ad easily, I'd be curious because some of the ads I've seen for real estate around the same time, I mean, they don't talk about inclusivity and there's some code language in some of them that are exclusive upper class, blah, blah. So it might be interesting to compare it to a sort of neutral versus loaded language. Add up if it's easy to snap a photo and send it over, please do, if not, maybe I could come by next week or something and take a look. Because I always like showing up unannounced at Joan's house. Couple more of these sort of tactical questions. You've answered this a little bit for me in the past, but now that we're talking, do you think there are other people we should talk to, to talk about some of these issues. Obviously I'm talking to Sue [Russell], hopefully I'll be talking to Roy and some other folks too, but is there anyone else you can think of?

Joan MacDonald 1:07:26

Donna [Davies] is active.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:07:29

She has turned down our request for an interview saying she wasn't really involved in this area.

Joan MacDonald 1:07:37

Well, she wasn't, actually, she's very relatively, she's very new.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:07:41

True, but, okay.

Joan MacDonald:

A lot of people have died.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Yeah. A lot of people have a list of people we've missed for a few years. I'm forgetting the names off the top of it. There were a couple of guys, that were realtors, that were involved, against Prop 14. They were activists, really realtors. I was wondering if any of them are still alive and if you happen to know that.

Joan MacDonald: 1:08:23

Do you have the names?

IdaRose Sylvester: 1:08:25

Let me, where, I'm sorry, I'm on two different computers and I can never find the stupid file when I need it. You know what, let me send them over to you after this call. There were a couple of guys, total activists. No one seems to remember them, but they were certainly pretty popular in the newspaper. Ran an office front on Castro, against Prop 14. If either of them were still alive, I can't even imagine that conversation. That would be...

Joan MacDonald 1:09:02

Yeah, that would be great. Sue Russell would know.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:09:06

Good point. I'll run it by everybody. I'm a little worried 'cause nobody's ever brought their name up to me, so I'm worried, but you know, short of a séance, I'll do just about anything to find them. So with that said, I have a couple of remaining demographic questions, if you might, and then we'll turn off the recording and we can talk for a few minutes about everything else. What would you say is your racial or ethnic identity?

Joan MacDonald 1:09:37

Well, one of my parents came from Odessa and the other one came from a small town near Kyiv actually.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:10:01

So would you consider you're a...?

Joan MacDonald 1:10:05

First-generation.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:10:07

So you consider yourself white of, first-generation white American of Ukrainian heritage, exclusively Ukrainian heritage.

Joan MacDonald 1:10:20

Well, Odessa is technically Moldova when they were there, but I don't know, I always thought that it was Ukraine for both.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:10:34

Interesting. And what would you say is your gender identity?

Joan MacDonald 1:10:39

Female.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:10:41

And if you don't mind, would you tell us your age or an approximate one?

Joan MacDonald 1:10:45

92.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:10:48

Oh, Joan, I think everyone knew that.

Joan MacDonald 1:10:55

When I'm 95, I'm gonna have another birthday party.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:10:58

I'm inviting myself. I've already RSVPd way past inviting myself. Excellent. I look forward to it. I learned all the words to the Cal drinking song this time. Do you have anything before I turn off the recording? Do you have anything else you'd like to share, like a question I didn't think to ask or anything else on this particular topic?

Joan MacDonald 1:11:22

I am happy to say that my son and daughter-in-law are involved in housing issues in West Marin²¹.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:11:35

²¹ Referring to West Marin County, a county located in the Northwestern part of the San Francisco Bay Area, across the Golden Gate Bridge from San Francisco.

Generational.

Joan MacDonald 1:11:36

Yes. And, that makes me feel very happy.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:11:42

You should be happy, but you should also be proud of yourself for making, being an inspiration to them.

Joan MacDonald 1:11:49

Well, my son, our son, chose exactly the right person to marry.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:12:00

Would you like to elaborate or is that just a statement in of itself that says it all?

Joan MacDonald 1:12:06

[That says] it all, I mean, they found they're like-minded, they are activists. They care about social justice. They're good people.

IdaRose Sylvester 1:12:19

Also role modeled. They saw a couple like that, that worked out. So your son did. So it's just no surprise. I flipped off the recording. This has been absolutely delightful. Don't go away unless you want to.