

Interview with

# Leonard (Lenny) Siegel

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 Association  
Mountain View Public Library

Conducted on 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



Leonard (Lenny) Siegel is a longtime resident, activist, and Ex-Mayor of Mountain View. Since moving here in 1972 after being suspended from Stanford, he has been involved in various grassroots activist groups and movements surrounding housing rights and rent policies. He has also had a large hand in national environmentalist movements, including that of building housing on contaminated lands. He gives a unique perspective as a student becoming an activist becoming a local politician and the difficulties that come with establishing trust in and serving a community.

Date of Interview: June 29, 2022

Interviewer: IdaRose Sylvester

Interviewee: Leonard (Lenny) Siegel

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 0:02

Excellent. You will probably get a message asking you to accept. Well, hello everyone. My name is IdaRose Sylvester, and I'm an interviewer working with the City of Mountain View's Human Relations Commission [HRC] 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, Anti-Discrimination, and the Movement Towards 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, some of the information collected will be shared with the public at an event sponsored by Mountain View HRC on July 26th, 2022. Today is June 29th, 2022, and I am interviewing Lenny Siegel. For safety reasons during the ongoing pandemic, we are conducting this interview by Zoom recording technology from our own private residences in Mountain View. So Lenny, can you please tell us your name to make sure we got it correct?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:06

Well, officially it's Leonard Siegel, but I'm known as Lenny.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:11

Thank you for the clarification. And where do you currently live?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:14

On Loreto Street in Mountain View.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:17

And how long have you lived in Mountain View?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:19

Since 1972.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:21

Wow. I think you have some of the most longevity in the entire city in terms of people living here. So I'd like to start asking you some in-depth questions, but I'd like to remind you that we're here to hear your stories. I'm not here to do a journalistic style interview. So please, share freely and don't feel that you have to be limited to the specific questions at hand. We'll start with the softballs. When did you first move to Mountain View Lenny?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:52

June 16th, 1972.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:55

And what first brought you to the city of Mountain View?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:58

My wife. She was living with her family in Mountain View and I was living in a house in East Palo Alto. We decided to move in together. And so we moved in so that our - we just celebrated our informal 50th anniversary. We moved into an apartment on Mountain View Avenue. We told the apartment managers, who are living in Ohio now but still friends, we'd lied and said we were married. And they were disappointed when we told them the truth, because that shifted the balance to unmarried over married, living in their apartments.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 2:37

Was it a problem for them in any way?

**Lenny Siegel:** 2:40

No, no, it was just... Then we actually became apartment managers there, before moving to the apartments that are now the Creekside or Avalon Creekside. And then we bought our house in 1979.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 2:57

Great. In all of those different locations, starting with that first apartment, when you were married, unmarried, what were your neighbors like? What were you, what was your neighborhood like?

**Lenny Siegel:** 3:08

They were primarily young people, many races and I don't, I only really remember the two couples that we're still friends with. So I don't remember that much about them. What I can say is that people did not stay in the apartments long.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 3:43

And it sounds like not much has necessarily changed.

**Lenny Siegel:** 3:48

Right, right. We had two different owners for the apartments on Mountain View Avenue. It was an apartment building of like eight apartments and then an old house that had been divided up. And the first one was a Stanford professor. He was really fair, with the tenants and then he sold because, they - I don't know if they do it anymore, but in those days, people would trade or sell apartments every seven years to get maximum tax advantage. We knew that the new guy, basically when we said, "Gosh, you're really raising the rent a lot". He said "If they don't like it. They can move across the street".

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 4:34

Interesting. Did people move across the street?

**Lenny Siegel:** 4:37

Well, people moved out before the rent. But we did a lot of hands-on work, we did the painting. I think I did more of it, 'cause Jan had a more regular full-time job, because my job was more flexible. And I remember cleaning the pigeon shit out of the rain gutters was one of my jobs.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 5:06

I don't know if tenants do that as much these days or not.

**Lenny Siegel:** 5:10

I was a manager.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 5:11

Ah, you probably were a very good manager. I'd like to shift gears just a little bit into what you may have witnessed or faced personally about any discrimination in Mountain View at any time that you've been here. Have you ever witnessed or faced discrimination in the city?

**Lenny Siegel:** 5:32

I can't recall anything. When I get to talking about condo conversions, there was condo conversions in certain buildings, heavily fell on older residents, retired people, who were living in apartments and weren't about to buy; they're converted units [right]. But other than that, I had no recollection as, as you know my wife is mixed race, but first, most people don't realize she's mixed race. And secondly, we didn't face any discrimination when we were moving in.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 6:22

And through the multiple properties you've lived in.

**Lenny Siegel:** 6:24

Right.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 6:25

Have you witnessed, discrimination against others? I know you mentioned older people, not being able to pay for condo or not wanting to pay for condo conversions, but have you witnessed any other forms of discrimination among other groups in the city?

**Lenny Siegel:** 6:39

Not directly.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 6:41

Great.

**Lenny Siegel:** 6:42

Now, as a council member, we were always aware of the demolition of Royal Viking apartments which was heavily on people of Spanish dominant heritage. But no; the discrimination is more around money that people are forced out of Mountain View because they can't afford to live here. Rather than somebody telling them they can't live here.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 7:15

Interesting perspective. A lot of people feel there's probably a correlation between economics and race and ethnicity.

**Lenny Siegel:** 7:22

Absolutely. But if a rich African-American or Mexican American wanted to rent an apartment, as far as I know, they didn't have any problems doing it at the time I was in Mountain View. Now that doesn't go back to home ownership and the issues around whether people can buy a house, which I believe my wife's family, whose father, her father was visibly African-American, they bought an Eichler and thus were able to buy in the Monta Loma<sup>1</sup> neighborhood around 1960, maybe '61.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 8:07

So [do] you happen to know they chose Monta Loma because of racial inclusion and acceptance?

**Lenny Siegel:** 8:14

We don't know.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 8:17

We certainly hear from others that Monta Loma and Eichler himself was considered.

**Lenny Siegel:** 8:22

I mean, I've read on the web about Eichler.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 8:25

Yes.

**Lenny Siegel:** 8:26

And talked to Joan MacDonald about it, who was living in the neighborhood at the time and was a friend, my wife babysat for her kids. So I'm aware of that, but in terms of personal experience, Jan's parents never passed along any information about why they chose the neighborhood.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 8:49

Interesting. Well, in good news, we'll be talking to Joan MacDonald who was a matron of Monta Loma. Right. So I'll get a lot more information about what she remembers from that neighborhood. And from what Eichler himself talked about at the time, tipping the hand that we've heard some mixed reviews, we've heard that there are racial covenants in some parts of that area. So we are on the hunt to uncover history that could quickly fade away if we don't cover it. But excuse me.

**Lenny Siegel:** 9:22

Just in terms of racial covenants, I come from Culver City. Grew up there, which is the poster

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<sup>1</sup> 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.

child for racial covenants. It's featured by Rothstein in his book. When I was Mayor, Rothstein spoke at a conference of mayors, I was sitting next to the Filipino mayor of Culver City when he talked about it. So we knew exactly what he was talking about. The first Black people in Culver City that I know of were all-star professional athletes who bought in the most expensive part of town. Zelmo Beaty, Brooks Robinson, Frank Robinson - people, big name athletes bought in Culver City. Not too far away where my wife grew up, in the West Adams<sup>2</sup> area, you could find things. It's also called Sugar Hill, where Hollywood stars broke the ban on home ownership for African Americans. And it was kind of, sort of a wealthy African-American enclave near basically the same school she went to, but not the same street she lived on.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 10:30

Oh, interesting. Interesting, interesting.

**Lenny Siegel:** 10:34

We're both aware of the history of racial covenants, but it didn't affect us directly.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 10:42

Yeah. It sounds like perhaps you came in on the tail end. It was certainly illegal by that time, but what was legal.

**Lenny Siegel:** 10:51

So in 1964, when I was probably a high school sophomore, I worked on the Prop. 14<sup>3</sup> campaign, which was statewide. 14 was a statewide measure to overturn the Rumsfeld Fair Housing Act. And I organized kids from Culver City to go to Watts and help register voters.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 11:17

That's phenomenal.

**Lenny Siegel:** 11:19

Jan also apparently worked on the No on 14 campaign up here in the Monta Loma neighborhood.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 11:27

Excellent. As you know, it unfortunately did pass in Santa Clara County, by, I don't want to say a narrow margin, but more narrow than some parts of the state. It only failed, I think, in three counties total.

**Lenny Siegel:** 11:40

Then the courts overturned it.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 11:42

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<sup>2</sup> The West Adams area of Los Angeles, also called Sugar Hill, was an area where in the 1930s, upper-class Black people were able to purchase homes in a white neighborhood as racial covenants expired.

<sup>3</sup> A "yes" for California Proposition 14 in 1964 meant supporting creating a state constitutional right for people to refuse to sell, lease, or rent residences to people based on race.



Yes. But it says a lot about public sentiment at the time. It also says, of course, a lot about how people promote information.

**Lenny Siegel:** 11:50

And I was also aware of the activities that Mid-Peninsula Citizens for Fair Housing, which would send couples, both White and Black, out to apartments. I think it was for apartments. I don't remember buying homes maybe. Yeah. But they were out trying to root out the discrimination. And this would have been the sixties and seventies. I'm not sure exactly when I became aware of that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 12:20

Great. Well you, you are helping me switch to my next question, which is how did you first become involved with housing issues when you were here in the Bay Area, in Mountain View?

**Lenny Siegel:** 12:31

Well, it started when I was a Stanford student. I was a leader of the anti-war movement, but it was more than the anti-war movement. It was civil rights. And it was the birth of gay rights. And women's rights were important. Although you could argue that the women's rights movement was somewhat in reaction to male activists and their sexism. But at any rate, I was a leader of the movement and one arm of the movement was interested in Stanford land use. And so in 1968, '69, there was a committee at Stanford that said that Stanford should provide low income housing, so that people who worked at Stanford, maybe also who worked in the Stanford research park<sup>4</sup>, could afford to live near where they worked. And we formed a group in 1969 called Grass Roots<sup>5</sup> that was working to support those recommendations. And we did some organizing, we had some demonstrations. And by the way, two or three of the members of that committee were personal friends, activists: staff, and students. And what they wrote still is true today. I referred to it when I was on council and mayor, when I testified before the Board of Supervisors about Stanford land use. Stanford has known all along that they don't provide: They do great at providing housing for faculty, but not for their lower income staff or graduate students. Anyhow, we formed this group called Grass Roots, and we were building up some steam and then Nixon invaded Cambodia. And yeah, I actually found, in writing my history of the Stanford movement, I found a little blurb in *The Stanford Daily* saying that the Grass Roots meeting was canceled because people were working on the war as an issue. But I became very familiar and educated myself on the jobs-housing imbalance, because Stanford land is the original source<sup>4</sup> of the jobs-housing imbalance in the Santa Clara County area.

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<sup>4</sup>Stanford University created the Stanford Industrial, established in 1951, an innovative business-university partnership for its time, on Stanford land within the City of Palo Alto. It has more than 150 companies, including Hewlett-Packard and Tesla Motors

<sup>5</sup>A land use movement in the Palo Alto Area. It hoped "to bring an anticapitalist, anti-imperialist perspective to the 'ecology movement,' and projects a popular community-based movement demanding large-scale construction of low-income housing in the Palo Alto Area." See [http://a3mreunion.org/archive/1969-1970/69-70\\_land\\_use/1969-1970\\_land.html](http://a3mreunion.org/archive/1969-1970/69-70_land_use/1969-1970_land.html) for more background on Grass Roots

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 14:55

Excellent point, excellent point.

**Lenny Siegel:** 14:57

And back in that day, I have in my files some data that says like, of the people who worked on the Stanford lands, perhaps including the Stanford research park, 20% lived in Palo Alto and 21% lived in Mountain View. Mountain View was a bedroom community<sup>6</sup> for Stanford and Palo Alto to some degree back in that day.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 15:24

Interesting. Would you argue that that has changed?

**Lenny Siegel:** 15:29

Well, there's sort of a cascading effect where the people who work at Stanford, including Stanford faculty members, now live in Mountain View, and people who live in Mountain View live in Sunnyvale or San Jose. So there's this northward commute. But now Mountain View's jobs-housing imbalance has gotten a lot worse since its success, particularly of Google. But it may be that when Sun Microsystems<sup>7</sup> and Silicon Graphics<sup>8</sup> were the major employers in North Bayshore that the imbalance was similar.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 16:20

It's an interesting question. I think it was less than balanced then.

**Lenny Siegel:** 16:27

I've been running census data since, I don't know, 2008, 2009. So as Google grew, it got worse, but I haven't looked at the period before then to know how bad it was at that point, in 2003 or whenever.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 16:46

You know, that actually would be an interesting project to take on, for a variety of reasons. But let's park that thought. It's given me a lot to think about; I'm going to ask a question. That's a little off my script here, based on something you said. You felt that Stanford University, when you were there, had a responsibility to help provide housing.

**Lenny Siegel:**

Right

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<sup>6</sup> As defined by the Miriam-Webster Dictionary, a bedroom community is a small community that has no major industries and that is lived in by people who go to another town or city to work

<sup>7</sup> Sun Microsystems, Inc., was an American manufacturing company of computer workstations, servers, and software. In 2010 the company was bought by Oracle Corporation, a provider of database management systems. Part of Sun Microsystems headquarters was housed at the current Meta headquarters.

<sup>8</sup> Silicon Graphics manufactured high-performance workstations, software design, and supercomputers for professionals specializing in 3D graphics; it was founded in 1981 in Mountain View

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

Those who work there, are graduate students - and you mentioned Google has a sort of, to me, sounded like a very similar effect in the city of Mountain View. What is their responsibility, for a company like them? What is their responsibility in the city that they live in and bring people to?

**Lenny Siegel:** 17:29

Well, I think employers should work with the city to make it possible for people who work at the company to live nearby. Now, it doesn't mean everybody has to live nearby. You've got spouses and people changing jobs, but the imbalance in jobs versus housing is the major source of our housing shortage around here and the high cost of housing. And Google is more cooperative than most companies in trying to solve that, more cooperative than Stanford in my opinion - but they're still, they still have a major imbalance because what we're already doing is playing catch up on the projects that they're proposing.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 18:20

I think that is certainly true. I'm curious how what you asked Stanford to do 50-something years ago is different than what you think Google or a company like them could be doing today.

**Lenny Siegel:**

It's the same thing.

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

Is it actually, simply, building housing?

**Lenny Siegel:** 18:37

I'm really consistent.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 18:39

And that's a good thing, Lenny.

**Lenny Siegel:** 18:41

I mean, Stanford is building housing, but they aren't taking responsibility for the Research Park, which used to be called the Industrial Park.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 18:50

Oh, that's a good point.

**Lenny Siegel:** 18:51

And that is the root of Palo Alto's imbalance. In fact, since 2014 at least, been I've pushing Palo Alto to build housing in the research park.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 19:03

Right. Interesting. I think I mentioned to you an email that I'm very interested in, you know, how things have changed or not over time. And that's why an interview with someone like you is

so interesting because we're looking at how much things - in this case sounds like how much things have not changed, but we'll deep dive a little bit more to see what we, where we land on that point. So you worked with Grass Roots, the organization Grass Roots at Stanford, that sort of got consumed by the anti-war effort, which makes sense. By the time the war was over, I think you would probably have graduated and were on his way to Mountain View.

**Lenny Siegel:** 19:43

I was kicked out. I didn't graduate. [Laughs]<sup>9</sup>

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 19:47

When you left. How about that, when you left Stanford?

**Lenny Siegel:** 19:50

Yeah, so starting in 1970, I worked at the Pacific Studies Center<sup>10</sup> and was writing about foreign economic issues, a whole bunch of things, writing about, doing some of the original research on Silicon Valley. In 1976, I did a report for the US Civil Rights Commission<sup>11</sup>, "Background Report on Silicon Valley," where we evaluated the data on the workforce. And I did subsequent studies showing that basically white men were at the top and women of color, particularly Black and Hispanic and Southeast Asian, were at the bottom. There were exceptions where Japanese American men were close to the White men economically at the top, but the data on job classifications and income was very clear that we had a race and gender gradient in the Silicon Valley tech workforce.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 20:48

Very interesting point.

**Lenny Siegel:** 20:50

But I've got to say that anybody who lived here and had open eyes knew that anyhow. We just provided the data to reinforce that, who was working on the assembly lines and who was in

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<sup>9</sup> From Lenny: I was not allowed to register [for classes] because of anti-war demonstrations that I participated in, or that the Stanford administration thought I participated in.

<sup>10</sup> From Lenny: PSC was formed in 1969 by people who had done research and writing for the Stanford anti-war movement. Initially, it paid "subsistence" salaries of \$200 per month to several students and former students. PSC staff continued to write about Stanford and the War. As the 1970 Cambodia strike got underway, the Pacific Studies Center mass-produced a four-page analysis of Nixon's escalation of the War, "Operation Total Victory." We also published an 8-page pamphlet, "Engineering at Stanford," updating our critique of the Community of Technical Scholars. Based upon our understanding of SRI's interests throughout the Pacific Basin, we branched out to study other parts of Asia and the Pacific. In October 1977 the Pacific Studies Center shifted its focus to issues related to the emergence of Silicon Valley as a global tech Mecca. We convened a conference and published a pamphlet, *Silicon Valley: Paradise or Paradox*. Since about 2006, PSC has hosted the Center for Public Environmental Oversight (CPEO). See [www.cpeo.org](http://www.cpeo.org), a project that I joined around 1994 when it was affiliated with San Francisco State University.

<sup>11</sup> From U.S. Commission of Civil Rights website: "Established as an independent, bipartisan, fact-finding federal agency, our mission is to inform the development of national civil rights policy and enhance enforcement of federal civil rights laws. We pursue this mission by studying alleged deprivations of voting rights and alleged discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, disability, or national origin, or in the administration of justice."

charge. It was pretty clear. So I worked at the Pacific Studies Center and I stayed active at Stanford 'til the end of the war, but I moved to Mountain View and gotten somewhat involved. And then in 1976, seeing the data that a majority of the households in Mountain View were rental, I ran for city council, on the platform of engaging renters. And I came in 13th in a field of 13. And this was a matter of, I was a Stanford activist, transplanted into Mountain View without too many roots in the community. But I got appointed to the Downtown Revitalization Committee, and then in 1978 to the Planning Commission<sup>12</sup>.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 22:01

So tell me how that, tell me what work you did in housing. It was very different, those appointed commissions are very different than activism as we know. What kind of work did you do towards housing equality and housing in general at that time? I also have a question about some of the work you did before that, with looking at the labor force and who's on top of the pyramid and who's on the bottom, but I'll probably park that one for later. So remind me -

**Lenny Siegel:** 22:32

I have files and all that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 22:34

We might want to read some of your files, by the way. That's one of my questions later on in the interview - and we've found you in files by the way, we are not looking for you, but we've found you. So tell me, you sort of go from student activist to nonprofit activist, to more of an, I'm sorry to say, an establishment player. At least that's how I'm hearing it. You're sitting on Downtown Revitalization and then the Planning Commission. Tell me what you did and how that-

**Lenny Siegel:** 23:06

And then there's one more thing. I took part as a resident. I think this was when I was living in the apartments and this was called the Central City Plan [enacted in the mid 1970s] where the neighborhood basically argued to down-zone the neighborhood to preserve the older homes and to prevent Calderon and Dana from becoming four-lane highways. And this was a matter of not so much hostility to apartments – there are a lot of apartments in the neighborhood. But we were saying we wanted to preserve the older houses and the feel of the neighborhood. And, so in that sense, I perhaps have different attitudes than some of the YIMBYs<sup>13</sup>, who don't like single family homes and would like to see them all torn down. But anyhow.

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<sup>12</sup>From Lenny: The Downtown Revitalization Committee was an official, but ad hoc advisory committee charged with making Castro Street more attractive and vital. Today there is a standing Downtown Advisory Committee. The Planning Commission, now the Environmental Planning Commission, is a permanent advisory board that advises the Council on land use issues.

<sup>13</sup> A YIMBY is a person who identifies with the “Yes In My Backyard” movement, which advocates for new housing and construction in communities. From the California YIMBY website’s “About” page: “We focus on housing and land use policy at the state level to ensure grassroots organizers and city leaders have the tools they need to accelerate home building at the local level.”

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 24:07

But that's an interesting tidbit there about how you've evolved compared to maybe how other housing advocates have evolved in the city. You're giving me a lot to come back to. So I want to hear more about -

**Lenny Siegel:** 24:20

So one of the first things I did when I was pointed to the Planning Commission - and I had a support from another one, another commissioner - is I proposed a moratorium on industrial development in North Bayshore because it was not industrially developed. At the time we had the roller-coaster company [Arrow Development], theater, and farms. That was my biggest failure politically in Mountain View: industrial development in North Bayshore.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 24:51

Failure in that you didn't get it passed or failure that you now think you were wrong?

**Lenny Siegel:** 24:57

Oh, hm. I didn't get it passed. I'm not sure, it's one of those. It's there, it's like the weather, it happened. Anyhow. And so I was, as a planning commissioner, I would sometimes travel to conferences with the city council and got along with some of the city council members. The City council was generally more conservative, but we started with a base of people elected by the firefighters. We had a few people who were relatively progressive. We had one renter, Judy Moss, on the city council. I think she was the first renter on the city council in the history of Mountain View. And then Prop 13<sup>14</sup> passed. The Jarvis-Gann Initiative. And throughout the state, renters' groups formed or adapted to argue for what we called rent relief, to require landlords to pass on their savings from Jarvis-Gann, property tax savings, to their tenants. So we formed a group in Mountain View. I think it was called Citizens for Rent Relief. We had a new name after that and we circulated signatures, initiative petition, to get that on the ballot. And we needed 15% for a special election. And it turned out that the number of signatures validated that we had between 10 and 15%. And so the election was put off to the next regular council election, which was probably April of 1980. So this is something we did. It was unsuccessful because of, again, invalidated signatures. So anytime I'm involved with a signature campaign, like the referendum on the RVs, I'm always sensitive to needing a cushion, to make sure you could get enough signatures. And while I was on the Planning Commission, we were approving some housing. There was still vacant land in Mountain View and a lot of nurseries that were being built, being redeveloped. But, as a result perhaps, of the rent relief campaign and the organizing of tenants, a number of the major landlords started converting their apartments to condominiums. And most of those were accepted by the city council. They had to vote to support the subdivision. There were a couple of places where there were predominantly senior citizens

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<sup>14</sup> From Santa Clara County website (SCC.org): "Under Prop 13, all real property has established base year values, a restricted rate of increase on assessments of no greater than 2% each year, and a limit on property taxes to 1% of the assessed value (plus additional voter-approved taxes)."

living, and they were basically losing their homes.

So we collected signatures for another ballot measure that I believe was voted on in probably November '79 - I've got a file - called Measure C, to control condominium conversions, and basically said that condo conversions couldn't happen, unless Mountain View built more apartments. And that's still on the books, but Mountain View has built apartments, so it doesn't prevent conversions. And in fact, the owners of these buildings, some are interested in tearing them down, rather than converting, at this point. But I remember one of the activists was living at 500 West Middlefield, and she's actually still living there. She bought it when it was converted. But we actually won that election. The landlords only outspent us 50 to one, and we had support from, I think, a couple of council members. And then based on that, we worked on the, I think it was April '80, rent relief election. And we were just knocked out of the park by all the money spent on the other side. And also the fact that the measure was written for 1978 - '79; rent relief, not rent control. It didn't fit anymore. So we lost that. And after that happened, there was somebody who didn't like our group. So they formed a competing group that was around for a little while.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 29:51

On the same topic? Similar objectives, but different reports.

**Lenny Siegel:** 29:54

Yeah, because we'd failed. To some degree it was a personal attack on me. But anyhow, we circulated another petition for rent control. Actually it was two petitions: rent control and just cause eviction were separate measures and those were on the ballot in January of 1981. And we lost substantially again, the landlords outspent us a hundred to one, so we could manage at 50 to one, but not a hundred to one. But it wasn't close.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 30:37

Wow. And I'm sorry, that was 1981?

**Lenny Siegel:** 30:40

January 1981, Measures A and Measure B.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 30:43

A and B. Okay.

**Lenny Siegel:** 30:44

So, that kind of put a damper on future tenant organizing. Meanwhile, the landlords pressured, they had the council not reappoint me to the Planning Commission. I ran for council again, actually I think I may have run three times. The last one had to have been '82, because Jan was pregnant with our daughter. And the landlords actually funded a liberal - Marcy Freelen. There is an affordable housing complex named after her. She was pretty good, but they funded her to defeat me.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 31:36

But she was a liberal as well.

**Lenny Siegel:** 31:38

Yeah. But not pro rent control.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 31:40

Understood. Interesting play on their part.

**Lenny Siegel:** 31:43

So I lost again. And, meanwhile, my environmental work was growing. This is when we discovered all the toxic contamination underlying the semiconductor plants. And so that became more a focus of my local work, as opposed to housing as an issue. And so I didn't work as much on housing. When something came up before the council, I might write a letter to the council. When the Madera - Prometheus proposed the Madera apartments<sup>15</sup>; I guess that was around 2010, I don't even know exactly - there was a debate in my neighborhood, where the anti-housing people took over the neighborhood association. But the council ended up reducing the size a little bit, but approving the project. But I would write things about that. And it was interesting that in old Mountain View there are a lot of people who are not professional advocates, but understand new urbanism. Those people were, it was a healthy debate about what kind of housing should be built. That housing was built on the former Minton's lumber site, the hardware store, which was sad because Minton's built our house, much of the neighborhood, and they had the right fixtures to replace things when I needed to replace them. So it was sad to see Minton's close, but it did not involve the removal of any of the existing homes in the neighborhood. And so if you follow what I've been doing recently, I keep advocating to build housing on commercial property, what has been commercial property and not redeveloping, either single family homes or apartments. So that kind of set the tone for that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 34:10

We're in the 2010 timeframe or so about now, right?

**Lenny Siegel:** 34:16

Yeah. So sorry, I jumped ahead because I didn't do as much on housing other than reacting, and writing things [like] "I support it". So in '96, I helped form, or I formed, the anti-air cargo campaign that launched Sally Lieber's<sup>16</sup> political career. So I worked on that issue. And some of that has to do with the environmental work I was doing brought me to Moffett Field, which is a

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<sup>15</sup> Madera Apartments, on Evelyn Ave, Mountain View, were built by Prometheus Real Estate Group

<sup>16</sup> Sally Lieber is a Mountain View City Councilwoman and was a Democratic California State Assembly woman and former Mountain View City Councilwoman and Mayor. From Lenny, about her campaign: NASA, the Air Force, and several private companies proposed to open up the Moffett runways to air cargo companies, including those that fly at night. We formed the Alliance for a New Moffett Field to oppose this proposal, eventually prevailing with the 2 to 1 "No on J" advisory vote in Mountain View in November, 1996. Sally Lieber was a leader of the ANMF.



Superfund site. I got involved nationally, on some national committees; I was a principal proponent of public involvement at military-based cleanup. And that grew out of a friendly base commander bringing the troublemakers to the table at Moffett. So anything having to do with Moffett since '90 - '91, I would get involved in whether it be the wetlands clean up, Hangar One, or air cargo. I did always advocate [for] building housing at Moffett field from the date that Moffett was proposed for closure as the way of countering the jobs-housing imbalance. But I moved away. So my local work moved away from the focus on housing into more environmental issues.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 35:56

You're describing it now a little bit around the intersection of the two.

**Lenny Siegel:**

Yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

So fast forwarding back to the work on some of the environmental issues started to go away a little bit, and then you started to become politically or well interested in more issues and more politically active on a city level somewhere in the early 2010 timeframe. Tell me what happened. This is why you need to do all the talking. Tell me what happened that sort of got you shifting your focus and being re-interested in running for city council.

**Lenny Siegel:** 36:39

Yeah. So a couple of other things that kept me busy: One is we had two kids in the '80s. So I served on some school task forces and committees, as one normally does when your kids are young. I was on the committee that was looking at which school to close. Yes, it was tough. I was involved in other local things based upon what was going on in my family's life. The other thing is my environmental work really became national. I would be on an airplane once or twice a month, visiting contamination sites, military bases, from Puerto Rico to Alaska, and going back to Washington a lot, working with Congress on environmental stuff. To some degree I was not consciously getting away from local housing issues, but I had this other avenue of activism grow. And I actually started getting paid for it around 1993.

But what happened is around 2013, 2014, I noticed that the city council was working on the North Bayshore Precise Plan that would allow somewhere between 13,000 to 17,000 new jobs and no housing. So in 2014 - oh, step back, one little thing. So I mentioned my environmental work involved me around Hangar One. And through that I met John Igoe, who was Google's major property manager locally. And so I was involved with [Congresswoman Anna] Eshoo's office and people I knew in high levels in the federal government in enabling the competitive leasing of Moffett field to Google. And I played an important role in that and got to know some of the leadership at Google through that. So in 2014, I noticed the council was working on a Precise Plan for North Bayshore that didn't include housing. And I went around to various

groups saying, “Hey, isn't anybody gonna do anything about this?” And nobody was. So I formed the Campaign for Balanced Mountain View, and we allied ourselves with people working to save the Milk Pail around the San Antonio Center, but the focus was North Bayshore. And there was a very conscious decision to focus on North Bayshore because it wasn't in the backyard of most of the single family homeowners in Mountain View. So while they might've opposed building lots of apartments in Waverly park, Varsity Park, they didn't - or even in Old Mountain View - you can build in North Bayshore and that doesn't bother us.

So we built up some momentum. When I announced for Council, since I couldn't get anybody to run, I decided to run again. I wasn't initially, not really optimistic 'cause I'd done very poorly back in, 30, 40, I don't know how many years ago, decades ago.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 40:29

It shouldn't count.

**Lenny Siegel:** 40:32

By the time the election rolled around and the campaign really rolled around, there were nine candidates - one of whom I wouldn't consider seriously, didn't consider seriously, who didn't raise any money - running for three open seats. There were four people who were for building housing in North Bayshore, and four people who were against it, that was the principal issue in the campaign. And we came in first, second, third, and fifth. Now the lobbyists, or I don't know, the executive officer of the realtors group Silvar for Mountain View and Los Altos, later told me they'd done some polling before the election, before the campaign. And I had been in first place in the polling. And that's because, I think, my name was in the paper, *The Voice*, around the environmental issues and Hangar One and stuff like that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 41:29

You were well known and credible and had been helping the community.

**Lenny Siegel:** 41:34

I remember the first door I knocked on, which was on Sleeper Avenue. I bicycled up on the trail. I think it must've been opened by then. Anyhow, the first person said “I don't know about housing, but Lenny, I really appreciate what you've been doing on Hangar One”.

So I don't know to what degree my position was based upon housing, but what happened is the landlords spent \$90 million of dark money, as it wasn't clear who was paying for it, on the campaign. And they supported three candidates. They didn't do any negative campaigning, which was interesting, but they basically copied things from the websites of Ken Rosenberg<sup>17</sup>, Pat Showalter<sup>18</sup>, and probably Ellen Kamei. And that campaign probably pushed me down by elevating the others. I ended up in third place in the election. I did go for an interview with the landlords. And I remember that, one guy said, “I remember when you were fighting my daddy

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<sup>17</sup> Former councilmember and Mayor of Mountain View

<sup>18</sup> Current City Councilmember of Mountain View

back in 1978,” so they clearly weren't going to endorse me because they felt that I'd be for rent control.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 42:58

Here's the downside to the longevity in the community, right?

**Lenny Siegel:** 43:03

There was a pro-rent-control group that held - I remember they did something in Trinity [United Methodist] Church and they asked all their candidates' positions on rent control. The only candidate of the nine that supported rent control was Greg Unangst. I said, “I'm ducking that question because the people I'm working with to build housing are on both sides of that issue.”

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 43:26

Right.

**Lenny Siegel:** 43:28

But I was honest, I was ducking it, and I'm not against rent control, but this isn't - I'm not running for council because I want to achieve rent control.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 43:37

Right. You were trying to balance the needs of the city, of all its constituents.

**Lenny Siegel:** 43:42

And I've always believed that rent control is a band-aid, that the solution is building sufficient housing. So my position has been clear and consistent on that, but when people started coming to the council - I want to go back to this, back to the votes in '80 and '81.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 44:06

Excellent.

**Lenny Siegel:** 44:08

We collected thousands of signatures. We made copies of the signature pages. And then we went to contact the voters, the people who'd signed the petition, to get them to vote. And what we found was that a third of the people who had signed the petition, let's say three to five months earlier -this would be the '81 vote- had moved. So when rent goes up - and this is the fundamental challenge of organizing for rent control - when your rent goes up, you'll sign a petition, but then you have to move. So a lot of these people moved out of Mountain View. As you may know, people move from Mountain View to Sunnyvale, to Santa Clara, to Palo Alto, they move.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 44:58

Subtle movements, right?

**Lenny Siegel:** 44:59

That was my analysis about why we didn't get enough. We did much more poorly than we

expected; people had moved, people who needed rent control most couldn't last until the election.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 45:15

Ironically. Right?

**Lenny Siegel:** 45:17

Yeah. So, coming back to tonight to 2015, 2016, I met with the rent control group. It may have been Mountain View Tenants Coalition<sup>19</sup> at that time. I'm not sure. And I said, look, I can't see how this is going to happen. We lost two to one, 65% to 35% back in the day. I'm not optimistic at all, but if you want to get rent control, then you got to get people to show up at the city council and make your case. And that's what they did. And they only influenced one council member, Pat Showalter. But when the measure went on the ballot, I endorsed it and worked for it and was able to use my position on the City Council to help it pass. I'm probably leaving something out. It passed, and there was a court case. And, by the time the landlords decided to circulate their own petition to undermine Measure V, the 2016 rent control measure, I was mayor and I used my position to label it - it was an interview with the *Daily Post* - saying, this is the "sneaky repeal."

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 46:46

Right.

**Lenny Siegel:** 46:46

And that stuck. It's not often that a landlord petition - where they're paying \$40 a signature - doesn't make the ballot that they intended to make it. And I enjoyed it. At least seven times - it was eight people - seven times someone knocked on my door to get me to sign a petition, which they said was for rent control. And I took out my Mountain View Mayor business card. The success of passing rent control helped overcome the problem from 1981, which means people don't have to move. So all of a sudden you have these people whose ability to stay in Mountain View is based upon voting for rent control. So that built the support for rent control. Plus the fact that the landlords were duplicitous. They got it on the ballot, the council put it off and put on an alternate measure, and measure D was defeated. So, measure V passed, like with 53% roughly, and measure D was defeated by 70 or 71%. That established... and then the political momentum that was built helped elect other pro-rent-control people to the city council, although I don't think anybody knew that Alison [Hicks] was pro rent control and Lucas<sup>20</sup> didn't highlight that in his campaign materials. But we basically got in, developed a - well, by that time we were doing appointments for the rental housing committee in 2017, I guess.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 48:50

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<sup>19</sup> 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."

<sup>20</sup> Lucas Ramirez, current Mayor of Mountain View (2022-2023)

I think so.

**Lenny Siegel:** 48:50

Yeah. Pat was supportive, and Ken Rosenberg economics professors always told him that rent control was a bad thing, but he basically was sympathetic to renters anyhow, and it helped us appoint some good people to the Rental Housing Committee, which was critical. But then with the 2020 election we had a slate, the Housing Justice had a slate of four people they supported, two of them got elected and now we have a pro-rent-control majority on the City Council. And that, again, it took a long time to get, and the bitter pill was, I lost two elections in a row. Lots of theories about why.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 49:45

Yes.

**Lenny Siegel:** 49:47

I'm a little worried if Sally has to resign, if she's elected to the Board of Equalization, what will happen to the balance on the City Council.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 50:00

I think that means, I think the answer is that it depends; on a variety of factors, which we could certainly talk about.

**Lenny Siegel:** 50:10

So, I think rent control is here to stay. The battleground will be appointments to the rental housing committee.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 50:18

Interesting. That brings us to almost the present time, but I happen to know you're still very active in housing related issues. So you lose the election, but rent control is here. And you made that impact, but then, where are you now? Tell us where you are now.

**Lenny Siegel:** 50:46

What happened is the campaign for Balanced Mountain View diminished as an active group.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 50:54

True.

**Lenny Siegel:** 50:55

After we took over the City council and the Planning Commission... take over is really not fair, it's that we ended up having a pro-housing, not rent control, but a pro-housing development majority on the council that included people who were against rent control, like Mike Kasperzak, so there was little need to do as much organizing. And so we kept the group alive to some degree, and its discussion list has been really valuable in having people with varying ideas on housing development to interact, but it sort of fell apart and other groups emerged. The Coalition

for Sustainable Planning got more robust. There's a YIMBY group. Silicon Valley at Home<sup>21</sup> gets involved. I did some work, getting organized labor to support housing development in Mountain View. Basically Mountain View has a pro-housing Council. And when I was mayor in 2018, Liz Kniss, the mayor of Palo Alto, asked me, "Well, who in Mountain View is not pro-housing?". And I gave her the two names of the council members, but I said, "But in Palo Alto, they'd be considered pro-housing".

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 52:33

It's amazing, one town over and there's that distinction.

**Lenny Siegel:** 52:36

So my role has been to write up what are the upcoming issues on housing that are coming before the Council and to some degree, other people do a lot of the speaking and writing letters and stuff, but there's a loose coalition of people who back almost any major housing project in Mountain View.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 53:06

Fair points.

**Lenny Siegel:** 53:07

With that and the fact that the people we've elected to the council, Mountain View is a leader in building housing. And that's a result of the organizing we started in 2014. There's more sympathy now than in those days because everybody in the Bay Area knows we have a housing crisis, where it wasn't as clear back then. But if you look at Palo Alto and Los Altos, and Saratoga, there are a lot of communities where the city council is not trying to make things work. One of the first things we did when Ken, Pat, and I were elected to the council is we reopened the North Bayshore Plan. After the election the council had enacted it. And so when we were elected, it gave North Bayshore housing a majority support, particularly Kasperzak [Mike Kasperzak]<sup>22</sup>, but I think Chris[topher] Clark<sup>23</sup>, supported building housing there. And I, when I met with city staff - the Randy Tsuda is the one I remember, maybe it was Martin Alkire. I said, are we a problem? You know, we've just elected a group that's telling you to reverse your direction. And what Randy said, no, we had proposed housing in North Bayshore, it was the Council that took it away. So we basically developed momentum on staff. Public housing. Wayne Chen, who I met at regional housing meetings, came to Mountain View because he liked what we were doing.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 54:51

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<sup>21</sup> From about page (<https://siliconvalleyathome.org/about-us/>): they are "Driving the creation of affordable housing for a more vibrant and equitable Silicon Valley"

<sup>22</sup> Michael Kasperzak was a city councilmember and mayor of Mountain View. He was elected to city council in 1998 and reelected in 2002, 2008, and 2012. He served as mayor in 2008 and 2012.

<sup>23</sup> Christopher Clark was elected to city councilmember in 2012 at age 29, making him the youngest and first openly LGBT elected official in the city's history, according to the *Mountain View Voice* and the *Mountain View Patch*. Clark was also elected mayor in January 2014.

I didn't realize that, that's interesting.

**Lenny Siegel:** 54:54

We still have that momentum, and I expect it will continue for a while. I don't think we'll win every battle. We lost some on the demolition of existing apartments, but by and large, Mountain View is building new multi-family housing, primarily in commercial areas. It's slow when you want to do a project of the magnitude of North Bayshore, but I have every reason to believe that that will be built out. Still won't be enough.

But, when I was on on council, developers, when they have a project, they always want to meet with council members. And instead of meeting them for coffee, like at the Bean Scene<sup>24</sup>, which Chris Clark did, I'd invite them into my living room. So we would have discussions in my living room. And it was very clear that developers were looking to build in Mountain View because we had a housing-friendly council. You know, they weren't proposing much in Palo Alto because they knew they weren't going to get very far. So it was a turnover in attitudes, not just on specific votes that has allowed Mountain View to build new housing. The difficulty is new housing is expensive.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 56:28

I was just about to ask if we accept that new housing is good, does new housing automatically make Mountain View more inclusive or what does it take to make sure Mountain View is more inclusive? I would love to hear your take on not just more housing, but the inclusivity in our community.

**Lenny Siegel:** 56:50

So in places like San Francisco, a lot of housing activists opposed market-rate housing, and they said, just build affordable housing. And in Mountain View, we took a different tack. We said, and Google has said the same thing. If Google builds what it's planning to build in North Bayshore, it will build more subsidized housing, or maybe the same amount, given the numbers have changed in the last couple of years, that Mountain View has built in its entire history. Because we lobbied the state to allow a requirement for inclusionary zoning, that is, at least 15% of new apartments or condos have to be affordable. Now, there was a question about how, which income level do you serve and, there are a lot of details about it. But basically, if you believe that building subsidized units is a way to help people stay in the community, then it turns out the building market rate units is a way to make that happen because the value of the market rate units, which like the rent or purchase prices that people pay to live there, subsidizes the other people who are going to live in those buildings. So even if you think affordable housing is the only way to get subsidized housing is the only way to keep people in Mountain View, building market rate housing is a way to do that. Secondly, I believe in the law of supply and demand. Now we don't totally control that because other cities are building more jobs and creating more employment and not building housing. But basically, my goal was to at least have new housing

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<sup>24</sup> Local cafe in the Performing Arts Center in Mountain View

keep up with new jobs. And actually before I was on council I think, I proposed linkage, that is, that new employment should be linked to new housing. And that finally got included in the East Whisman Precise Plan<sup>25</sup> as a formal policy. Now, the problem with East Whisman and North Bayshore<sup>26</sup> is they basically break even. We don't know about COVID and remote work. We don't know exactly how it'll all play out. So we're counting on housing development elsewhere in Mountain View, like on El Camino, to overcome, they have to try to overcome the historic deficit. And at this point, I'm almost happy if we keep things from being worse. The problem is, and it's very clear in the data, that the increasing cost of housing in Mountain View has led to a decline in our low-income, particularly Spanish speaking, residents. And that's the form in which - and probably African-American as well, but we have so few African-Americans in Mountain View. It's statistically hard to measure. Clearly we have a reduction in our Spanish-speaking population. I think maybe a majority of the people living in RVs are Spanish-speaking or Spanish-dominant. So, it's not overt discrimination, but financial discrimination. And that threatens, to me, the diversity of Mountain View. Now, if you think that having Chinese tech workers living here is a way that we stay diverse, then we're okay because we've had a growth in our Asian population, growth of our high-income Asian population. I think it's important to maintain economic diversity and the best measure of that is the Hispanic population. But it's not exclusively that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:01:36

Those are some really interesting and very challenging points. It goes right to the heart of what does diversity and inclusion mean. And I think in part it's, what does that mean relative to past? And what does it mean relative to what you personally care about the most? So I want to thank you for sharing that, that's actually extremely on point with an issue I think we're trying to uncover, right? What does diversity mean? And to whom and why is it important? So thank you for sharing that.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:02:05

Mountain View, both formally and informally, has treasured diversity, as long as I've been living here.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:02:12

Absolutely.

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<sup>25</sup> From Mountain View government website: “On November 5, 2019, the City Council adopted the East Whisman Precise Plan to implement the 2030 General Plan goals and policies for the area allowing new residential land uses and expanded commercial land uses, open spaces, and multi-modal connectivity in the area. The General Plan identifies East Whisman as a highly-sustainable, transit-oriented employment center with a diversity of land uses. The new Precise Plan includes development standards, such as building setbacks and height limits, allowed land uses, urban design guidelines, locations for new public open space, and other public improvements for the area.”

<sup>26</sup> From Mountain View government website: “On December 12, 2017, the City Council adopted the updated North Bayshore Precise Plan to implement the 2030 General Plan’s policy direction for this area. The 2030 General Plan identifies North Bayshore as a special place that protects and stewards natural habitat and species in the area, while envisioning highly sustainable and innovative commercial and residential development.”



**Lenny Siegel:** 1:02:14

And so it's a question of how you define that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:02:19

I think a lot of people will agree with you. but I think a lot of it it's intuitive. So when you say that we treasure diversity, two things, what does treasuring mean? And how has the face of that changed since you've been here?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:02:37

Well, we've, I mean, we've seen a reduction in the Spanish-speaking population and an increase in the Asian population. I would say there're more tech workers here. Now. One of the years I was campaigning, I knocked on an apartment door and this guy started swearing about all the Googlers moving in and how they were terrible for Mountain View. Turned out he worked for Hewlett Packard.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:03:03

Interesting.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:03:04

So a lot of the people on my street who are now retired or approaching retirement, are earlier generations of tech workers; managers, and people from the semiconductor industry. But the semiconductor industry had manufacturing. So there's been a wholesale shift in it. And this is what I tracked and all of my studies of the demographics of the workforce here - there's very little manufacturing done in Silicon Valley. The government statistics are useless because Apple is called a manufacturing company and Google is not.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:03:47

Right.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:03:48

But they do the same things here. So, part of it has to do with the fact that software and computer services are considered a service. And when in fact they generate value, just like manufacturing does. They're different in terms of the workforce. We lost FMC [Food Machinery & Chemical], which was a military - made tanks, armored personnel carriers for the military. We lost Ford and GM Ford, in Milpitas. So we lost, and I can't say how much this applied to Mountain View - all my data was county-wide - that blue collar manufacturing jobs were a way for low-income and Hispanic families to climb the economic ladder. So somebody, if you were an auto worker, you got paid well, your kid could go to college. And that middle tier of economic activity went away. And that appears to have contributed to what we call the hourglass economy here, where you've got a lot of people at the bottom and a lot of people at the top. And I think the data supports that there's economic inequality. I was on a panel at a church in Saratoga and a friend of mine who is an economics professor at Santa Clara actually dug out the data, but even the Silicon Valley Index points this out. And so again, by eliminating manufacturing, physical manufacturing, we

lost this ability for people to be upwardly mobile here. Construction may provide that particularly union construction, but that meant the loss of that. Those kind of steady manufacturing construction is not steady work. So steady manufacturing work is gone. But I don't know about Tesla. I think about it, but I don't know how many people they employ, how many people they fire, what they're paid, anything.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:07

How long they'll keep people here, get what their dedication is to manufacturing here, I think is, is questionable.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:06:13

But that transformation, along with the increased cost of housing, has changed our community. And, so a lot of the people living in RVs, we know they're in construction and restaurants, right? Those are the major avenues. Healthcare is a growing field and there are a lot of mid-level jobs in healthcare, steady mid-level jobs in healthcare. My wife's observation is that younger people all have to commute great distances.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:52

How great?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:06:54

Tracy.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:06:55

Whoa, okay. Two to three hours.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:07:00

Yeah. People drive to work early and sleep in their cars. A lot of them live here too, but they have to live in smaller homes or apartments too. Teachers too. Teachers in my generation could afford to live here, now they can't. So we've lost a lot of our mid-level, not just low income, but mid-level people from our community now, the mid-level people probably could afford to live in, in slummy apartments. But if you figure, if you've got a college degree and a professional job, you want to live in something better, so they will fight the commute.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:07:49

Right. Especially if they have kids or bigger households, fair point. Slightly strange question. But as we talk about the hourglassing of Mountain View, and the sort of shift to the top of that hour glass, I think, how would you say the character of the city is changing? How does that change who we are as a collective?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:08:22

That's hard to say because the high-income people around here tend to be politically progressive. When I moved to Mountain View, the people who lived in the more expensive houses tended to be small business people and politically conservative, now, for a variety of reasons, on issues

around immigration, around gay rights, women's rights, Mountain View is overwhelmingly democratic and liberal. And there are plenty more people that I would consider politically radical, like my history, here than there were when I moved here.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:09:19

That's really interesting, actually.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:09:21

The other work I do is anti-war and all these other things. So back in the day, the sixties and seventies, maybe even the eighties, if you wanted to go to an anti-war demonstration, you had to go to Palo Alto or Stanford. In '91, some of us said, we want to do something in Mountain View about the Persian Gulf war. And we actually had a great turnout. People on my street showed up, that I had no idea had any similar political sympathies, just by having something in Mountain View. So now it's not surprising. Whether it be impeachment, abortion, gun rights, that Mountain View has demonstrations now. So it's no longer Stanford-centric. Mountain View has become a more progressive town. I don't know whether that's a self-fulfilling prophecy, the changing demographics. I think back to the SDS<sup>27</sup>, the one branch of SDS in the sixties had this concept of the new working class, which was basically professionals. That didn't work for me too well, but when Trump took office and he almost immediately declared the Muslim ban, Jan and I went up to the San Francisco airport for the protests. And it was one of your great lively San Francisco protests. You know, there was a brass band, lots of signs, and a lot of gray hair. The next day, or maybe it was two days later, I was invited by Google management. There was this, I guess I was vice mayor at the time. I was invited by Google management to speak at a rally at Google. About 2000 people. I wasn't there when Sundar [Pichai] spoke – the CEO. But the signs were the same. The enthusiasm was the same, but there was very little gray hair.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:11:50

Fair points.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:11:52

And immigration - because so many of the people in the tech workforce are foreign born that has pushed people to the so-called political left. And in this area where the Silicon Valley leadership, the big business, the Mountain View Chamber of Commerce, labor, everybody supports immigration because that's our lifeblood. And because the Republican party and Trump has defined themselves as anti-immigration, that has made people more liberal. Now it's more complicated than that, but that's part of this change where every member of the Mountain View City Council for the last few years has been a Democrat, to my knowledge,

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:12:48

I believe that's correct.

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<sup>27</sup> Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) was a left-wing student activist organization of the 1960s.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:12:50

Where that wasn't true, for many of the years, that definitely wasn't true back when I first got involved. Of course, the Republicans have changed. I mean, we had -

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:13:03

Good, point that out.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:13:04

So we had people who are moderate Republicans, Pete McCloskey<sup>28</sup>-type, pro-environment, maybe even anti-war. There really has been a change here that's political. The demographic change has something to do with it, but by and large Mexican immigrants don't vote at the level that other people do. When I was knocking on doors for measure D, against measure D, it was just before the pandemic, so who knows what's happening now? I mean, the November 2020 election may have been influenced by the exodus, but I was knocking on doors in apartments, half the people were not citizens.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:14:00

I remember that.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:14:02

And this was true. And I guess in some of the townhouses too, right, rent control didn't pass just because we have a lot of renters, it passed because we have homeowners that voted for it.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:14:24

Excellent point.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:14:24

It's not a majority of homeowners, maybe a third, but that was enough with the renters who could vote.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:14:39

I'm trying to tie this all together.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:14:46

It takes years to tie it all together.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:14:50

Brings me to two related questions about tying it all together, and one is very personal. So you're welcome to ponder or to think about it. I know you have a lot more advocacy work ahead of you. You're not done yet, but up to date, what do you think your most important or impactful - and I'll let you decide the definition - accomplishments have been around housing and inclusion in

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<sup>28</sup> Paul McCloskey Jr. is an American politician who represented San Mateo County, California as a Republican in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1967 to 1983.

Mountain View.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:15:19

I think the organizing that I started, thousands of people were involved at a certain level or another, shifted Mountain View to become a pro-housing community. And by making it pro-housing, we will hopefully have a chance to maintain our diversity. It turned out that we needed rent control to help people stay, but in the long run, people move. You need to have affordable housing, but I think that was in the beginning of 2014, there was a permanent shift. It's not just the organizing, it's the problem getting worse, that employers realized they needed more housing if they were going to continue hiring people. So it's a confluence of factors, but I think the organizing that we did and that I initiated, made a huge difference. And just look at the surrounding communities and where they're stuck. So that's my biggest contribution. I think I've done a lot on the toxic stuff, but that's not necessarily local.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:16:52

Thank you for sharing that. It actually makes a lot of sense, and I hope sharing that made you feel good.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:17:01

I'm reluctant to say those things publicly. It's not very modest.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:17:12

It's your truth. I mean, modesty aside, I mean, we could argue that definition too. It's your truth. It's what you did. It's what you feel was impactful. We don't have to agree with you, right, for you to feel that way. So please, please don't feel that.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:17:27

So one linkage, I just mentioned the environmental work. One of the reasons that I've been working on toxic cleanup is so we could build housing on contaminants safely, build housing on contaminated property.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:17:46

Not the way we did a few years ago.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:17:48

And that's actually what my professional expertise is now. And I'm involved in a fight in San Francisco to try to get some property cleaned up where they're building affordable housing. But when I was on the Mountain View council, we routinely approved housing on contaminated property in a way that will be safe for the residents. And there's one property, it's being built on, on Evelyn, where I actually argued successfully over staff to move a project forward because it would lead to the cleanup of the property.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:18:26

Oh, wow. So a twofer.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:18:30

So the environmental stuff isn't just protecting people who have been exposed or might be exposed, but how do we take brownfields and Superfund sites, military bases, and make them safe for people to build residences.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:18:54

I love that.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:18:55

That's, that's been my national professional work

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:18:59

Great.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:18:59

For years.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:19:02

It's very interesting. I've heard all of this in different pieces. I've never heard it tied together. So it's really interesting to hear it that way. It gives me a lot to think about. It feels like I get to know you better because of it. That's great. Thank you.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:19:16

So, as Einstein said, everything is relative.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:19:20

[Laughs] Yes.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:19:22

You know, things are, I don't know if you follow the [mysteries of Tony and Anne] Hillerman, as legendary Lieutenant Leaphorn says<sup>29</sup>, everything is connected.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:19:33

That I agree with; and hearing how you talk about it, it's very eloquent and very obvious, which is great. I promised you no more than an hour and a half. I still have a couple of questions, more quick ones. They're more like, yes-no type stuff, but I don't want to keep you longer than you promised to not be in your good graces anymore. Sorry, just trying to dig through a huge pile of notes. Two things, sort of about this project. Do you think there's anyone else we could talk to that we may not know about already? Who could talk about housing inclusivity in Mountain View? Not necessarily from an activist perspective, a living-here perspective and any perspective.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:20:15

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<sup>29</sup> Refers to mystery writers Tony and Anne Hillerman and their protagonist Lieutenant Joe Leaphorn.

I've sent you the name Betsy Collard.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:20:17

Yes. All roads lead to her. And I have an interview scheduled with her.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:20:21

And Marcy Fein died<sup>30</sup>.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:20:23

Yeah.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:20:25

So I'm not sure. Kasperzak may know people.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:20:36

I voted for him when he was a Republican, because he was pro-housing.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:20:40

Fair enough. I haven't thought to talk to him per se. I will reach out to him. Thank you. That's good.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:20:49

Ask him, people who've been around a long time.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:20:54

Right. I mean, it's not just people who are deep dive into housing. It's people who've been here and watch the evolution of our city.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:21:01

There are people around like Glen Gentry, who was the planning director back in the seventies. These are people who, and is someone who was on the council back then: Dick Wilmoth; Les Nichols, retired judge, was on the council.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:21:22

As far as we know, alive, and here.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:21:26

Glen Gentry contacted me about the redwoods that Google was cutting down.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:21:32

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<sup>30</sup>According to Obituary.com: Marcy Fein moved "to Mountain View in 1979, Marcie continued her work in the fair housing sector at several non-profits. Marcie may be best known locally for her work in the early 80's as Director of Midpeninsula Citizens for Fair Housing. In 1991, she became the first Director of the Affordable Housing Network of Santa Clara County, where she played a critical role in developing this non-profit organization that works to preserve and expand the supply of housing affordable to low-income people in Santa Clara County. Marcie also served the City of Mountain View as a volunteer mediator in the City's Rental Housing Mediation Program for 1980-1984.

Glen, you said?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:21:33

Yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:21:34

When was he planning committee, you said seventies.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:21:37

He was planning director. And I think in maybe seventies and eighties.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:21:42

I would love to talk to him actually just from that, because that's a unique perspective right? Inside out.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:21:50

These are all people who thought I was a dangerous radical - and they were right- back in the day, but came around to basically supporting me in one way or another.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:22:02

I don't think people get more conservative when they get a little older. I think they actually, typically, get more progressive. So at least around these parts,

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:22:11

But to some degree it has to do with the growing recognition that we have a housing shortage.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:22:19

Excellent point, excellent point.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:22:22

Their basic attitudes may not have changed, but the world changed around them.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:22:27

Sure. And they're all smart enough to sort of see that and what things to change for the better, because they can influence that. Right. Would you be able to share Glen's email or contact?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:22:38

I'll look for it.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:22:39

Cool. I had not thought about the inside out perspective. So I would love that. You also mentioned you had a whole bunch of files. I really don't want a whole bunch of files, but, well, Mountain View Historical Association might be interested in taking a longer dive, but do you have anything that sort of pops out, like really interesting articles, copies of editorials, copies of -

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:23:07



What I think would be most useful, because it's pre-web, are my files on the campaigns in the late seventies and early eighties.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:23:16

That's what I'm thinking, actually, that would be really interesting. And if we could at all help digitize that, we'd be very interested in that too.

**Lenny Siegel:**

Sure.

**IdaRose Sylvester:**

Now again, which hat am I wearing? Mostly HRC for the point of this conversation, but the Historical Association is co-sponsoring and providing a lot of the data.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:23:35

I don't know what, I don't know how much they'd have.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:23:38

Historically, that's a really good question. We have a lot of data. We have a lot of data around families, sort of early history as a history of Mountain View. I don't think we have, and I could be wrong. I don't think we have a lot of political data like political campaigns. So anything you have that you're willing to share, I would love to at least take a look. I don't want to inundate you. But if you have anything easy, let me know and I'll come by, grab it and take a look at it.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:24:12

Well, I'll have to dig, and dig it out of my library, which is on Old Middlefield.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:24:19

Well, we are running up against a deadline. So if you happen to be going over to your old library, anytime soon, let me know.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:24:26

I will do that. But it's not about, I mean, you're running against the deadline, but the focus of your event is on discrimination.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:24:37

Well, we are looking at historical context and that includes it all right, including things like rent control. So we are looking at issues beyond just the really narrow focus because they all count. And we're trying to draw that picture of how everything is connected. Because we believe it is. So let me know if you have time and you can, and it's not overwhelming to you.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:25:04

I go over there once a week. I was already over there today. So it'd be next week before I pull the, pull the stuff out.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:13

No worries. I will remind you about that for sure. Because I, as a history junkie, I'm *very* interested in how we, what, what we keep and how we document what we keep and then what we do with it over time. Anyway, newfound passion of mine. We can talk about that some other day. I have three short demographic questions before I let you go. I think I know the answers, but you have to tell them to make, what would you say is your racial or ethnic identity?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:25:43

I am an Ashkenazi Jewish White man.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:46

Great. What would you say is your gender identity?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:25:49

Male.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:50

And do you mind telling us your age or approximate age

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:25:54

73.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:55

Great.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:25:56

Thank you.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:25:58

Yeah. Close enough.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:26:00

Well, I always, I always have to subtract to make sure I get it right.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:26:04

Many of us subtract a little bit off the top. They're letting us know.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:26:08

To make sure I kept that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:26:11

I get it. Is there anything else you'd like to share before we part ways? If not, I'd like to thank you profusely, but anything else you'd like to share?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:26:20

So one thing I was thinking about when we're talking, I'm always interested in the fact that there

are so few Black people in Mountain View, and Sunnyvale, and Los Altos, and Palo Alto. And when I went to Stanford, when I was active at Stanford prior to Mountain View, I lived in East Palo Alto, which was predominantly Black at the time. And that was a ghetto way that Black people were shunted.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:26:52

I remember East Palo Alto when it was predominantly Black.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:26:56

Yeah. But I think that the difference between the East and North Bay, Vallejo, Fairfield, et cetera. and Silicon Valley has more to do with the time at which they developed. The East Bay, the shipyards, those were developed during World War Two, where there was migration from the south to work here in the military industry. Silicon Valley didn't grow until the fifties and sixties. And so the people who played the same economic role were people, Mexican and Central American backgrounds. I'm sure that was discrimination. We know there was discrimination, but the major difference had to do with the timing of the development to some degree, because this was an agricultural area. We had inroads of Mexican American agriculture workers. We were the home to Cesar Chavez. You know, this is looking at it broadly. What's the difference between different parts of the Bay Area. Unless you dig up a whole lot more about overt discrimination. That to me is the principal explanation, the difference between the two sub regions. Now, if you wanted to talk to somebody who could help answer that better, you would talk to geographer Richard Walker at UC Berkeley. He did a book called *Pictures of a Gone City*. He knows all the data on the Bay Area historically, and puts it together well, from a leftist perspective. I don't think, I mean, to some degree, communities are self-perpetuating, that if you have an area that's predominantly Black, Black people will migrate there. If you have an area that's got Spanish-speaking grocery stores, Mexican-Americans will go there. And I think that to me is the principal explanation of the difference between the two areas, knowing that there's discrimination against both groups. And in Culver City, they did not discriminate against Mexicans, always Mexicans, but no Blacks.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:30:10

I see the subtlety of thought. You encourage us to think. These things are very nuanced and very, very, very layered, especially around here.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:30:21

But I think what you're finding is the difference between Monta Loma and your neighborhood or Waverly Park, where if indeed there were, the racial covenants played a role in who was first able to move to south Mountain View explains it. Very visible difference between Monta Loma and the south part of town. You drive around old Mountain View - I'm not sure it's probably not as appreciable as it was a year ago. In Old Mountain View and Monta Loma, you see a lot of Black Lives Matter signs. You see fewer of them in south Mountain View.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:31:12

You were opening up a can of worms. Most of my neighborhood and Waverly Park was built after racial covenants were outlawed. The sort of discrimination you saw was indirect and different, especially my neighborhood, the tension between my neighborhood and Los Altos, because we're right on the border was huge, is huge. Probably still is huge. My neighborhood, specifically Varsity Park, was highly controversial because it was small lots, small homes for poor people, so close to Los Altos and it was considered extremely controversial and progressive.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:31:51

I didn't know that.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:31:52

In some ways, yeah, it's fascinating, this is what you get when you research. I found out my neighborhood at one time was extremely controversial. 'Cause you look at it now and you go a little bit just to, half a mile to the other part of Mountain View or halfway all the way to Waverly park, half a mile over to a Springer Trees, it's 12,000-square-foot lots, bazillion-dollar homes, relatives that houses are 4,000 square feet. Mine is not, but it's an interesting time because when this neighborhood got developed, it was happening at the same time. Los Altos was trying to figure out its own identity as a rich white suburb. And we were highly controversial, because of that Los Altos didn't want people like whatever was at the time, 70 years ago, so close to then, and people in Mountain View didn't want us encroaching here. So all of south of El Camino is not the same. We now can talk about how that evolved, right? Obviously we've become a much richer, much, much less white part of the town. I think what you have to think about it. We were robbing all White when this neighborhood was built. I don't know that for gospel. It certainly isn't that anymore. And it's changing fairly rapidly.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:33:10

This reminds me of one more racial thing. I asked a couple of developers this: why do we have in some of the new townhouses, like off the Ferguson drive, overwhelmingly recent Chinese immigrants who paid \$1.8 million to move in there. And the percentage of those people, not the percentage of Asians, but the percentage of recent Chinese immigrants, in Old Mountain View it is much lower. And they said, "feng shui."

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:33:57

Because those units are built with that in mind?

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:34:03

Because they're new **and** they're built with that in mind.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:34:06

Fair. We have a lot of Chinese immigrants in my neighborhood now. Very recently in the last five years, it's gonna be a big, big push. We do see a lot of those houses get remodeled. I suspect maybe for that reason, but also some of the housing stock here that hasn't been remodeled at 70

years old is especially remember it was built to be middle income or lower housing. So a lot of the housing stocks...

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:34:36

My neighborhood is older. My house was built in 1927.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:34:37

You have your deed by the way, because it probably has a racial covenant in it. We've been looking for all the Minton neighborhood. It's really hard to find deeds. I'll tell you, we learned the hard way how badly those have been...

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:34:52

I would have to look.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:34:55

I have been dying.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:34:57

It's in the safe deposit box if we have it.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:34:59

Yeah. We've been dying to find one in that neighborhood because we know the neighborhood was certainly marketed in certain racially questionable language. So we're curious. And you might be surprised to find what's in your deed.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:35:15

Yeah. I don't think I have a copy of the deed.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:35:20

Yeah. It just FYI.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:35:25

Check that out.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:35:26

Yeah. So lots of subtlety and a lot of change over time.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:35:32

My bank has moved since -

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:35:35

Ah.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:35:36

-Since I last looked at my safe deposit box.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:35:41

Oh boy. I was going to say, well, they should go check it.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:35:47

Well, good talking to you IdaRose.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:35:49

To you too. Thank you so much. This has been very interesting and very illuminating. I hope the same for you. I hope it's been, if nothing else, cathartic.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:35:57

My problem is I like telling old stories.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:36:00

You know, they're invaluable for history, so thank you. We love them. We care. Hopefully see you on the 26th.

**Lenny Siegel:** 1:36:07

Yeah.

**IdaRose Sylvester:** 1:36:08

Bye-bye.