

Interview with

Tom Myers

conducted by IdaRose Sylvester

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

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

Mountain View Historical Society
Mountain View Public Library

July 11, 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



Tom Myers is a 62-year-old White, gay man who has been an on and off resident of Mountain View for 50 years. In this interview, he speaks about his time working with the Community Services Agency (CSA) and his lifelong interest in affordable housing, redlining, and housing discrimination in Mountain View.

Date of Interview: July 11, 2022

Interviewer: IdaRose Sylvester

Interviewee: Tom Myers

IdaRose Sylvester:

Hi, hi Tom!

Tom Myers:

Hi!

IdaRose Sylvester:

This is Ida Rose Sylvester, and I'm an interviewer working with the City of Mountain View's Human Relations Commission in partnership with Mountain View Historical Association and Stanford University. We're doing 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 that in the city of Mountain View. Some of the information collected will be shared with the public at an event sponsored by the Mountain View Human Relations Commission, scheduled for July 26th, 2022. Today is July 11th, 2022, and I'm interviewing Tom Myers, the current executive director of Community Services Agency¹. For safety reasons during the ongoing pandemic, we're conducting our interviews by Zoom teleconferencing, tele-technology from our own places of residence or work in California. So Tom, can you tell us your full name to make sure we get it correct?

Tom Myers:

Sure. It's Tom, T-O-M. Last name is Myers, M-Y-E-R-S.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Thank you. And where do you currently live?

Tom Myers:

I currently live in Los Altos. I grew up in Mountain View and I am currently in Mountain View right now, my office is in Mountain View.

IdaRose Sylvester:

How many years did you live in Mountain View?

Tom Myers:

¹Community Services Agency is a nonprofit, provider of safety net services to low income and homeless people in Mountain View.

Because I would leave and come back and leave and come back. Approximately I have been, I have been off and on.... this is probably the best way to put it. I have been an off and on resident for about 50 years.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Perfect. Thank you. And you were born in Mountain View?

Tom Myers:

Actually, no, I was born in Lawrence, Kansas, but I only lived there for the first four months of my life while my dad was completing his studies at the University of Kansas.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Excellent.

Tom Myers:

But yes, for all intents and purposes, I am a Mountain View boy.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Wonderful. Thank you. We appreciate that. Let me see. Well, you and I have talked a little bit before this interview about your interest, how your interest in housing discrimination came about. What can you share with us about your early interest in issues such as redlining and discrimination in Mountain View?

Tom Myers:

I actually was very, very young when I first became interested in this topic, and it was because of a very good friend of mine in high school. One of my closest friends, his name was Kent. And he lived in the Monta Loma² neighborhood. And we were talking one time, how his family got to live in the Monta Loma neighborhood and what made them decide to move there? And he told me that, well, not every neighborhood, in the area and not every city in the area was open to his family because he was Black. His family was African American. And I was shocked. I absolutely was flabbergasted as a high school kid, very young high school kid. It was very early on in my high school years... that in this day and age, the 1970s at that time, in this day and age, that people wouldn't be allowed in certain communities.

And I learned from his parents actually, kind of the history of redlining and that redlining happened even in places like the Bay Area. And that redlining affected their decision to live in the Monta Loma neighborhood of Mountain View as opposed to some of the neighboring communities. That had a profound impact on me, being a young person in a... very young high school student. I have always been very interested in social justice issues, but I had never heard

² 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.

of redlining. Well, through my discussions with Kent and further understandings of, you know, how that happened, I came to understand, for example, that here in Mountain View and the people that we serve at CSA, we were dealing with a much higher percentage of African Americans among our senior population of people that were coming to CSA than in other parts of the populations that were coming to CSA. The data was showing this. And I was explaining it to a number of young people here at the office about the fact that redlining had an effect on the African American residents of Mountain View and why many of them were living in Mountain View and in certain parts of Mountain View as opposed to other places. I was surprised that a lot of the younger people that I was talking to had no idea what redlining was. So I very quickly gave them homework. Although I fully am cognizant that an executive director is not allowed to actually give homework; [laughs] I'm not their teacher, but I did give them homework. I said, "Okay, you guys, you need to learn about redlining because that actually has had a number of our clients, especially our senior clients, as to their choices of where they live and perhaps even their choices as to where they feel comfortable living". I think that it was that early understanding of redlining that I got from my friend and his family, that helped me have a very strong interest in the issue of housing discrimination. As I said, I've always been interested in social justice issues since I was a kid, since I was a very young kid. Been very interested in social justice issues.

IdaRose Sylvester:

What inspired your early inspiration to be interested in social issues?

Tom Myers:

I think because I knew at a very early age, I was very different from everyone else. I'm a gay man. I knew that I was different than everyone else, and I knew that if that secret ever got out, I was already treated differently by people who kind of could perceive that. But if that secret ever got out, that I would be treated very differently. And understanding what all of that meant. And it meant that I, as a person who was different, had an obligation, had a desire, to stand up for other people who were different or who were not, you know, treated as fairly by society as other people were.

So, yeah, I've always had that very strong sense. I, as a gay man, I have a very strong sense of social justice and the importance of social justice. It's part of what informed why I ended up doing what I did, going into the Peace Corps, going into the social services field and the nonprofit sector, all of that very, very important.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Thank you for sharing that. Would you say growing up in Mountain View, you've hinted at it that it was very difficult keeping a secret about your sexuality. Do you feel that Mountain View's attitude towards the gay community has changed over that period of time or that it was ever better or worse here than it was elsewhere?

Tom Myers:

I think that over a period of, you know - I think if you'd have asked me this question five years ago, I would've given you a different answer. I think that growing up, we were in the Bay Area and I come from a more open minded family. The religious tradition that I grew up in, I'm an Episcopalian, and have been since -my family's always been a Episcopalian, and that tends to be a little more socially liberal than a lot of the other Christian denominations. And I think that was very helpful to me to start my coming out process when I was in high school. And that's when I started my coming out process. I felt like there was always a natural progression forward. Mountain View was not the most progressive community around, but it was also not the *least* progressive community around when it came to LGBTQ issues. And I think that there were some of us who in the eighties and nineties became very, very active here in Mountain View and were pushing for city ordinances and organizing social groups. We used to have a Mountain View lesbian and gay community picnic a couple of years and so forth. A lot of that kind of went by the wayside. Many of us that were organizing those things got very involved in other things. I became the executive director of CSA. You know, others moved out of the community or whatever the case. And in those days there still was a very strong attraction to moving into gay neighborhoods. So, you know, Mountain View, like any other suburb, lost a lot of our LGBTQ residents to the Castro and other communi-West Hollywood into other communities.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I was just going to ask if any of the suburbs near here, near Mountain View have anything resembling sort of a gay community or gay central?

Tom Myers: [00:10:25]

Sure. And it depends on what you define as suburbs. In the Bay Area, where there's lots of big cities and lots of suburbs and so forth. San Jose has always had a very active community. Certainly not as big or as active as San Francisco, but I was very involved in that when I was doing a lot of AIDS work back in the nineties. And very involved in the community down there but our community here in Mountain View has always been very suburban, which means in a lot of cases, very hidden. I think for a time I felt very positive about how things were going. More recently I've become very concerned. I don't know if you've seen the Mountain View Police. Think we've had two hate crime incidents against LGBTQ people in as many weeks, right? You know, two hate crime incidents in two weeks. That's not acceptable, and that's not what should be happening. I also, you know, heard things during the pandemic that were very concerning too. I heard stories about how - and isolation may have something to do with this - but I heard stories about, and anecdotes from folks that they were not feeling comfortable in their apartments, in the rental housing that they had.

Tom Myers:

And it wasn't necessarily harassment from landlords. It was more like overhearing anti-gay language from the other tenants and the fear of being exposed. I think that those issues were

deeply troubling to me that, you know, in 2022, in Mountain View, no one should be afraid that their neighbors might harass them or somehow look down their nose at them because they are, you know, LGBTQ and living in their apartment there. I think some of that might have been exacerbated by the sense of isolation everyone had during the pandemic. But these two most recent incidents of hate crimes against LGBTQ people really have me concerned that maybe we need to not be so quiet. For the last 20 years or so, we've been very quiet as a gay community here, and I think we may maybe need to be very quiet, very integration, very much a part of, you know, the everyday life. But I think maybe it's time for us to stand up and say, wait a minute. We're starting to see this resurgence of anti LGBTQ behavior, and in fact, in two cases of assault in the last couple of weeks that are very deeply concerning.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:13:26]

Thank you for, for sharing that. There's been an actually a tremendous rise in hate crimes against a variety of groups in the city of Mountain View. It's to the point where, you're right, it's almost a weekly occurrence, it seems.

Tom Myers:

Well, in fact, we had situations here at CSA that we had to deal with anti-Asian and we never it never rose to the case of an assault, thank God, But we had to suspend two of our clients from services because of anti-Asian abuse. In both cases, the abuse was directed toward volunteers, from our clients. And if they're saying that to our volunteers, who knows what they may be saying outside of the community. But in both of those cases, and, it was a situation where we needed to suspend people from services.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Thank you for sharing that. And actually thank you for bringing this back to the work you currently do. I know we've talked a little bit offline about the many forms you witnessed discrimination among your clients. I would love you to tell stories that you have, you know, from as long back as you wish to the present time. Because you've mentioned in this conversation quite briefly about the LGBTQ seniors who are facing discrimination, but I know you've mentioned that you've had many other case or incidences that have come to mind, so please.

Tom Myers:

Sure, sure. And unfortunately it seems to cross all segments of our society and all segments of our community. But we've had situations where landlords will be harassing particular tenants that they want to leave the building or that they somehow want to make move out of the building. We find that oftentimes landlords will deal with us very differently than they will deal with their clients. We will see communications from landlords that go to clients, and the way they interact with our clients is very different than the way that they will interact with CSA staff. And I think that it's a position of power, whether that power is based on race or not, or perceived

status or not - I'm sure that even though I think most people in Mountain View know that I'm gay, I don't know that the landlords that are dealing with us know that I'm gay. To them, you know, I might be in a position of authority. Even many of our, most of our case managers are people of color and they get treated very differently than our clients get treated. So I think it's a perception of power that has a lot to do with how people are treated by landlords. And if you are dependent on that landlord for your home, and you're dependent on that landlord to be able to stay in that home, you're in a very different power position than CSA who can swoop in and pay the rent.

And you know that that makes things very different. I think we do have a reputation in the community because we can pay, you know, everyone can come to CSA for services. It doesn't matter what your immigration status is. It doesn't matter what your race is. It doesn't matter what your gender is. It doesn't matter what ages, whatever the case may be, people can come to CSA, and I think that because people know that including landlords, that gives us a certain level of power in that relationship because we can pay the rent. But when you see how the landlord may be dealing with CSA as opposed to how they are dealing with our client, their tenant, it can be very eye opening sometimes, and very discouraging sometimes. That unfortunately is the reality that we deal with.

IdaRose Sylvester: [00:17:46]

Can you share, um, anecdotes about what kind of discrimination those landlords are showing those tenants that hurt your clients that they're not telling you directly? And also do you feel like that's - how is that changing over time? Is it different kinds of discrimination you're seeing? And are you seeing any kind of increase or decrease in those kinds of complaints from your clients?

Tom Myers:

I think that it goes, it ebbs and flows and unfortunately our clients who come to CSA because we do verify income and we do verify that we are dealing with low income individuals. We know that our indiv- the people who come to us are in fact those folks who are dependent on our assistance, perhaps, in order to make a bad situation go away, but I think a lot of it is economically based. I think that race and economics, and sexual orientation, all of those things, are - gender - are all tied up in economics. And unfortunately when a landlord feels like they want to get rid of a tenant because they want to rent out the apartment for a higher price or whatever the case may be, that unfortunately adversely affects more often than not, people of color, women, LGBTQ people, and seniors, and others who are not economically powerful.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So, I think you've just implied that you've seen an increase in this economic discrimination in the last, some number of year.

Tom Myers:

Right. I think that it's a safe bet that the, when prices are going up for apartments, you're gonna see more and more people who are at the lower end of the economic spectrum. Again, that's gonna be people of color, women, queer people, and seniors. You know, the people that are at the lower end of the economic spectrum, those are the folks that are gonna get hit with that kind of thing. So when rents are going up, that's when they want to get rid of those folks in order to bring in folks that they see as being able to pay.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So two follow up questions. What role do you at CSA or does CSA play in helping those folks, and generally, what are the outcomes for those people who are being displaced by these economic forces?

Tom Myers: [00:20:43]

Well, we will, we are... our role here is to help people find _____. We've been very lucky, especially over the last couple of years during the pandemic that we've had a lot of economic resources that have been available to us, to the point where virtually everybody who has come to us and needed assistance with rental assistance or other kinds of assistance has been able to. Which is good. There are times in -not recently, but in the far past where we did not always have the resources to help everybody, but that, those days are long gone, thankfully. So, yeah, we, our job here is to do service and to make sure that we help people get stabilized and that's the goal of every case manager, unfortunately. And this is something that needs to get talked about, unfortunately. And it's not our choice when we're at working with a client to stabilize them. They may decide that that stability for them is moving to another community. And I, that breaks my heart. As someone who considers Mountain View Home, I always want people to stay. But it's up to them. It's not up to us and it's not up to anyone else in the community. It's up to them whether they, you know, whatever, to be able to do whatever it is that they need to do. That's why financial assistance and especially direct financial assistance is so important because it gives people the freedom to choose for themselves and for them, their families, what's right for them.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Do you feel that the number of people who are choosing to leave Mountain View, is that increasing over time?

Tom Myers:

Again, it increases when the rents go up. It's pretty straightforward common sense in looking at that. When the rents go up and it becomes harder and harder to live here, that's when we see more and more people. Because of the amount of assistance that went into the community rental assistance, direct financial assistance, and other forms of assistance from CSA and from many other groups too. I shouldn't - this isn't just CSA work, this is everybody's work. All of that going into the community helped a lot of people be able to stay in Mountain View. And that was really nice that we were able to do that, but I would imagine is that that money starts to dry up and we

know it will, dry up, things like that go in cycles, especially funding. A lot of that funding came from government sources, and government has already indicated they're starting to tighten their belts. We may find that that's gonna be more and more difficult for people. But, so, it goes in cycles when the rents are going up, that's when people are forced to leave the community. Our preference is always though, to stabilize family in Mountain View, if at all possible.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Great. Follow on to what happens though... What do you think the impact is on the community when we lose these people? Who are your clients who either choose to leave Mountain View or simply can't find a way to stay here? What is the impact on all of us?

Tom Myers:

Well, one of the reasons why my family chose to live in Mountain View when I was a very young kid. If you can believe I was a young kid at one time, yes, I was a young kid at one time. And one of the reasons why my family chose to live in Mountain View was because of its incredible diversity. And I think that when we see people leaving the community and the people who are being forced out of the community are people who enhance our diversity, our race diversity, our economic diversity, our employment diversity, all of those things make a community strong and vibrant. And we all know that we wouldn't be a part of, of this community, and we wouldn't be a part of making things happen in this community if we didn't already see things like that. So, yeah it as far as I'm concerned, like I said before, it breaks my heart. When a family chooses, now they -it's their choice. It's not my choice. It's not anyone's choice. It's not the donor's choice. It's not the volunteer's choice. It's that client's choice, as to whether or not they can stay in Mountain View. But it does break my heart when a family chooses to relocate out of Mountain View because I think it harms us as a community.

There's a lot of talk about gentrification and things like that. And I understand that's an important thing to think about, but I think it goes much deeper than just gentrification. It speaks to the very soul of the community. And as someone who off and on has lived in this community for 50 years, when you see that economic and social diversity are changing, it does make the community different. There was an article - and I wish I'd have saved it cuz, but it's burned into my brain - there was an article in the *Chronicle*, some years back about how the Bay Area was more integrated and less segregated in 1970 than it is today, 50 years later. And I remember, think I remember thinking, "wow".. But I thought back to that and, yes, because Mountain View was so much more affordable and much more able to take people who maybe couldn't afford to live in some of the neighboring communities, I think that it really did make the community more diverse. So, I don't know, I didn't take to deep dive into data or anything like that, but when I read that article headline about how the Bay Area was more diverse and much more integrated in 1970 than it was today, it actually did not surprise me that much. And I think that a lot of that boils down to the economics of being able to live where you wanna live. So we started the conversation, you know, talking about redlining and how redlining had that impact on why a lot

of African Americans chose to live in Mountain View. I think that it really is fascinating to look at how many of the economic policies and economic conditions here in our local community are a new form of redlining, if you will, and understanding what that means.

IdaRose Sylvester:

How would you explain what that new form of redlining is and the impact on the community? If you were sitting down talking to someone who shrugged when you said that phrase.

Tom Myers:

Could you repeat that? I wanna make sure I answer what you asked.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Sure. Well you talk about how there's this new form of redlining, obviously not, you know, not illegal and sort of being done economically? And if someone walked into your office and said, "Well, I don't understand what you mean by redlining and I don't understand the comparison". How would you explain it to, you know, the people in the back.

Tom Myers:

Ok.

IdaRose Sylvester:

How can you understand what you're talking about and how can you explain to them the impact on the community?

Tom Myers: [00:29:13]

Yeah, I think, you know, We've got such a, we have such an economic disparity going on between those who have economic means and those who have not got economic means. And unfortunately a lot of that is based on race. And a lot of that is based on gender. Queer people are more likely to be economically disadvantaged. But I think that it also ends up being an age thing. And if you were lucky enough to have certain economic means, you can live in this community and if you were lucky enough to have those economic means, you can't live in this community. And to those who would say, "Okay, well that's fine, go live someplace else where you can, you know, where you can afford it". I say that's a problem. If you do not see the economic viability of someone else in our community tied completely with the economic viability of yourself in this community, then we've got a problem. There are communities that are getting to the point where all of their low income workers are being bused in from Tracy and Stockton and places like that, because that's where they can afford to live. And how long will people - and so think of it in these terms: how long do you really think people are gonna get on a bus and commute two hours to go get a minimum wage job? Not very often. They're gonna stay out in Stockton or Tracy or Modesto, where their dollar goes further and they don't have to deal with the traffic and the commute. So I think, you know, if someone says, "Well, that's fine. If they can't afford to live here, let them live someplace else". I say, "No, you gotta look at it from a holistic point of view".

Communities that are healthy are communities that are economically diverse. It's just that simple.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Excellent. Thank you. Well, the prescriptive question has to come next. What do we, we as a city, as a community, do to sort of stop this economic diversity from, you know, getting even worse? What do we do to turn that around to, so we have that vibrant community?

Tom Myers:

You're talking. I think it's a difficult discussion, because there's no easy answers to that. But I think that one thing that is absolutely clear is that we need to have more opportunities for affordable housing. And I think that this city does better than a lot of other cities around it when it comes to its supportive, affordable housing. And we should be not just constantly putting pressure on our elected officials, but also thanking them for the fact that they are such supporters of affordable housing because that is key. Without affordable housing, it doesn't get done. But, you know, as something else that I think is really important that not enough people talk about and that is how do you help a family remain stable if the rent is always gonna go up? How do you help a family remain stable if the rent is always gonna go up? And I think we need to. If you'll excuse the expression, get a little radical here and start thinking in terms of how do we get the keys of ownership of a piece of property into the hands of the low income people who are going to live there? And that's something that I don't think gets talked about very much is how do you keep it from being - someone owns the home and then you pay rent in order to live there. Whether that rent is going to a landlord or to a government agency that owns the affordable housing, it's still money going out of the family and into some other entity. And so I think we really need to start radically thinking, okay, not just about affordable housing, but how do we get ownership of that housing into the hands of the people who are gonna occupy it? Because that's how you turn an apartment into a home. If that family owns that apartment, that becomes their home. And it's a whole different mindset and it's a whole different way of looking at things and that's how you keep economic diversity permanent in your community.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Any thoughts about any radical ideas for how we do this?

Tom Myers:

Well, I think it takes a shift in thinking. I think that it takes a shift in understanding that affordable housing isn't just providing a place to stay, that affordable housing is providing homes. And if you really are talking about homes - now, obviously there are some people that need permanent supportive housing and all kinds of other services that go along with it, and that's all good and well. But for a whole lot of [people] providing affordable housing that is permanent, because they actually own the housing, that can be a game changer. And that's how you help make economic diversity in your community permanent, when the families that live there are actually the families that own the housing.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Excellent. I'm going to, you've been great at answering these questions. I wanna - I like being great on a Monday.

Tom Myers:

Being great on a Monday. That's really cool. I'm usually barely functional on a Monday.

Oh, so there, you didn't have to tell history. Now someone's going to say, "Oh got Tom really didn't think you -

Yeah. Catch him on a Monday. He's an easy target.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Amen. Well, I, like I said, rather than just me asking you all these questions, I know you have examples and things you'd like to talk about. So what have, what are we missing here? What have I not asked you? What would you like to tell? Turn the tables and answer the questions you would like to answer.

Tom Myers:

Well, I think I probably introduced something that no one else introduced when I talked about families actually owning the housing that they live in. You can build affordable housing that's also ownership housing. And I think that that's a pretty radical idea, and I think it's a wonderful idea to make economic diversity in your community permanent. I think the other other thing I want, I'd like to, you know, really talk about is the fact that economic diversity is tied up in all other kinds of diversity. There's a reason why we make sure that we have a racially and ethnically diverse language wise, culturally competent diversity group of people at CSA working here. There's a reason why we are very into, attuned to the issues around gender and gender equity. There's a reason why we've always [had] a larger number of queer people on staff than I think you'll find almost any other employer in town, . And it's because we know that these issues are important and those are the folks that are usually going to present with economic challenges at our front door, whether that be homelessness, housing insecurity, or other kinds of assistance that are needed.

I think we often don't talk about seniors. I will tell you - and this is not just 'cause my hair is gray. It has nothing to do with that. I've been saying this for years. We do not pay attention to the fact that we have a whole class of people living on a fixed income with no possibility of that income increasing. And that's our seniors. And so we need to pay attention to that because our seniors are con- that not only should they be honored for the contributions that they've given to our community, seniors can still be very much contributors to our community. So I think that that's really important to bring up.

And then I think the other issue is we need to keep an eye on is hidden forms of discrimination

that can present themselves. There's a really insidious thing happening in housing sales, and I know we're not gonna be talking a lot about housing sales right now, but there's a really insidious thing going on in housing sales right now. The whole idea that you send a love letter to the seller. You send a love letter about how much you love the house, and you include a photo of you and your family and all of this kind of stuff. And unfortunately I think that that right there is just ripe for abuse. How many people did not get a house because the picture of the family was two men, right, or two women? How many people did not get a house because it was, you know, they were not the race that the seller wanted to have in that neighborhood. I think that's a huge issue around - hidden ways, and there are other ways, but hidden ways that people can be discriminated against. Some people you can't tell what their ethnicity is because of their last name. Some people, it's real apparent what their ethnicity is from their last name and, you know, that's another way that discrimination can be hidden. So I think that it's very important for us to keep an eye on those ways that the discrimination can be hidden.

IdaRose Sylvester

It's certainly our understanding that there is a lot of hidden discrimination in, in housing sales is where we hear it. Right? This sort of modern version of redlining or just exclusionary . I've heard the love letter being blamed before.

Tom Myers:

Yeah, cuz I'm not surprised. I've heard about these love letter things going on and I'm like, "Are you kidding?" Yeah. You know, as someone who would be presenting themselves as someone who could potentially not get a house, because there's a picture of my husband and me, that's a real giant red flag.

IdaRose Sylvester:

And as far as I'm concerned -and of course the last name thing is almost impossible to avoid. I've certainly heard anecdotally that a lot of people want their house to go to people who are like them. And there's a deeply, deeply unconscious bias for a lot of people for that, right?

Tom Myers: [00:41:14]

Sure. Well, as someone who's, I mean, if my husband and I were to go try and buy a house, the seller wanted to make sure that they, you know, that they had sold it to someone who was like them. You know, there's not a whole lot of neighborhoods where there's a lot of interracial gay couples around . So we would be in trouble. We would be in trouble.

Ida Rose Sylvester:

Yeah. This is very, very true. Yeah.

Tom Myers:

So for us to think that, "Oh, the laws have passed and so everything's wonderful". That's... the laws have passed, and that's a legal recourse that people have, but that should not give anyone

the impression that these kinds of things don't continue to happen on a regular basis.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I've heard one or two of our respondents posit that the fact that the laws have been passed make all this discrimination become sort of underground, informal, hidden. People assume it isn't happening. So the fact that they're - the laws actually made it worse. Yeah. Cause it's common to be super, super subtle, in ways you can never prove in court. You'd have to do a lot of data analysis to say, "Well, it looks like nobody's ever selling to a gay couple who are interracial", you know?

Tom Myers:

Mhm.

IdaRose Sylvester:

There's, it's really hard to study this.

Tom Myers:

Right.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So it's potentially easier to discriminate.

Tom Myers: [00:42:48]

Mhm. I would say that, yeah. I think that the laws are helpful in providing legal recourse for people who know they've been discriminated against. The problem is that so much of it is underground, undercurrent and difficult. And I think that goes back to my point about the really radical notion of having people who are low income, living in affordable housing, actually owning that housing. I'm gonna keep coming back to that. But I think that that's - I know it's a radical notion and I know that people look at me like, what do you mean? But consider the stability, consider the ability of that to com- to make the diversity; economic, race diversity, other kinds of diversity. Imagine the ability that has to make that diversity permanent. That's really, I think, quite intriguing.

IdaRose Sylvester:

It is. I think I wanna steer back a little bit to what your advice is for not, you know, the government to, to do, to improve communities like Mountain View. What can, you know, the average individual living in our community, what can we all do to improve or respect and value diversity better?

Tom Myers: [00:44:07]

There's no question that I think we need to understand, do we actually respect and value

diversity? Is that really something that we respect and value? Or are we just out for ourselves and out for our own? Is it really a desire to see this wonderful community made up of all different folks from the different parts of the economic spectrum? Do you prefer to be around people who are like you or do you prefer to be around people who are different? Do you wanna make sure that your community can function on an economic level too? And this goes back to the thing I said about people are not gonna stick around for minimum wage jobs if they don't have a permanent place to live. So I think that, I would say the most important thing people could probably do is make sure that their voice is heard. That they value an economically diverse community, to make sure that their voice is heard, that there needs to be more housing, and more affordable housing. And make sure that they can, that they are well versed in how to speak to that, to people who may not value that or may not see that as a priority. Know your arguments.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Excellent, excellent advice. I'm trying to think if we've missed anything. You've been very, very focused and direct, so thank you. [laughs]

Tom Myers:

I'm really nice, but I do get very focused, so I think I try to not be too, so diagnostic that people tune me out. But I also definitely have something to say.

IdaRose Sylvester:

That makes you perfect for this. Is there anything else you'd like to share before I ask you a few wrap-up style questions?

Tom Myers:

No, I don't think so.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I was expecting you to say something, but -[laughs]

Tom Myers:

No, I think we, in the last 45 minutes or so, we've covered a lot.

IdaRose Sylvester:

We actually have. It's been very, very rich too. Well, with that said, I know you know everybody. Is there anybody else you think we should be talking to about these issues?

Tom Myers:

Let me see, you've got everybody. I think *you* know everybody. I do think that... And specifically in Mountain View, 'cause there's people I know that I've talked to about the ownership thing, outside of our community, who are turning into apostles for that discipline? No, Evangelists. They're turning into Evangelists for this, because I really do think that that can be

the wave of the future. The problem is how do you get people to give money to give someone a house? Anyway.

IdaRose Sylvester:

I think from now I think we're gonna have to limit our study to Mountain View and - I think what comes out of this is potentially a whole bunch of other little research avenues. Hard to say. Um, so hold that thought for those people, 'cause it would be an interesting discussion, but that's its own entire discussion, I think.

Tom Myers:

Right.

IdaRose Sylvester:

So I do have a few demographic questions.

Tom Myers:

Sure.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Very basic, what would you say is your racial or ethnic identity?

Tom Myers:

I am white, Caucasian, non-Hispanic.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Great.

Tom Myers:

I just, I actually just had to write that on something. What was it? I can't remember. But I am Caucasian, non-Hispanic.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Very common on demographic intake forms from the government. .

Tom Myers:

Yes - oh, that's what it was. I finally signed up for something. So anyway. Anyway, M

IdaRose Sylvester:

Many different things it could have been... anyway. What would you say is your gender identity?

Tom Myers:

I am male.

IdaRose Sylvester:

And what would you, or do you mind telling us your age?

Tom Myers:

Not at all. I'm 62.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Excellent.

Tom Myers:

And I'm actually very pleased I've lived this long.

IdaRose Sylvester:

Imagine that. The world is a better place for it. I'm going to flip off the recording and we can talk about anything you'd like.