

Oral History Interview with Jerry and Mary Stadstad
Morris Hill Neighborhood Association History Project

LMK: Today is Tuesday, July 2nd, 2013. This is Linda Morton-Keithley interviewing Jerry and Mary Stadstad for the Morris Hill Neighborhood Association history project. [To] set the stage, if you would, what was going on with your parents, at the time, before they moved over to Boise in 1961, and what brought them over here?

JS: Well, my parents, Glen and Margit Stadstad, lived in Vancouver, Washington. My dad worked at the shipyard during the war, and after that, he got a job working for Grover's Electric and Plumbing Supply there in Vancouver. He worked for a number of years there. At that time, Grover's were expanding throughout Washington and into Oregon, and Dad come up where he had the opportunity to get a position where he could partner with Bob Grover to start another store. They looked over part of Oregon and Washington and, anyway, they discovered Idaho. Came over to Boise on a trip and they discovered that the only place to buy plumbing and electric stuff was at Sears [12th and State St.]. And, there was McCaslin Lumber [2619 W. Fairview Ave.] at that time. So they thought this would be a great place to start. They found the building that was for sale over on Orchard Street; they bought it and started out with Bob Grover's good credit; and then they just, sort of, almost on a shoestring, started the business. I moved over here with them – very reluctantly. That was the summer between my junior and senior year in high school. And, I thought Boise at the time was terrible; now it's wonderful. I worked there in the store. Anyway, it turned out to be a wonderful opportunity for my folks to get that started. That's the initial "how it came to pass."

LMK: The building that your dad purchased – could you me tell me about that?

JS: Well, it initially was a grocery store. Out there on Orchard at that time, when it was built, was probably a lot of orchards and stuff. Out there it was pretty rural. Anyway, they bought the building, and Pay & Pack [708-710 N. Orchard St.] was there for a good number of years, 10 years. Then they build this store that's over there that's now called Grover's Electric and Plumbing Supply [5730 West Franklin Rd.]. Dad sold out his interest.¹ And, part of his compensation was he received that building, plus another building, in Twin Falls he received that was a Pay & Pack also. Then [after] Grover's moved out and over the years there have been a lot of different businesses have come and gone through there. One of the longest was a stereo store, in there called Sound Pro and they were there for – it seemed like forever. Then, they closed up, and there was multiple other different businesses over the years [that] have been there. Adjacent to that 708-710 N. Orchard St. store is 712 N. Orchard St. [that] my parents acquired, much to the chagrin of my mother. That building – initially, Union Farm and Garden was there. They moved out of there because it wasn't big enough, and they moved over and built the store where now Idaho Youth Ranch [250 N. Orchard St.] is in there. Anyway, that building had diminished in stature greatly. It had worked its way from a restaurant, down to a bar, and then it was a less-respectable business upstairs that involved hot tubs and ladies. My dad bought it, out of protection, because it was a

¹ Following the interview, Jerry clarified that his father sold out his interest several years after moving to the new location.

horrible neighbor. My mother didn't agree with that, and so he paid sort of dearly for that for a while. But anyway, we remodeled that and turned that into a nice facility. First renter was – Nadine Miller Drapery was in there. And, over the years it's been different things. Right now Crone's Cupboard is there and they've been there for seven or eight years now. So, that's turned out to have been a good asset over these years.

LMK: The building that you were in, have you... Excuse me, let me start that over again. Do you know what grocery store there was before?

JS: I want to say Okay Food Store, but I don't know [Okay Food Center, 706 N. Orchard St.].

LMK: Okay...We can actually check city directories to figure that out.

JS: They had already moved and I don't know if that...at that time I didn't pay any attention. It might have been that they moved up. There was a shopping center at Franklin and Orchard and they may have moved there. But, the building was vacant when we came in 1961.

LMK: Do you know some of the things your father may have done to the building to remodel or get it ready for the type of business he was going to be running?

JS: We have some pictures of the way it looked back then. There was a very large sign in the center of the building, and my dad created this logo that actually, I thought, was kind of creative. Pay & Pack was the name of the thing, and he had this old miner and he had a mule with a tub and a toilet and a sink tied on the mule. They were very into signage and so all across... Let me take some of this back a step. There was just a flat metal canopy that went around the front – provided shade to the front windows. They got an architect and contractor to come in, and they built a whole, more contemporary canopy around the front of where the windows were and entrances on either side to make it look a little more modern. Then they had all kinds of signage they put on there. Must not have been too many rules back then because they had a lot of signs-- water heaters and all different things that they sold in there. Anyway, that changed the appearance of the building greatly. The interior always was one big space. After Pay & Pack moved out of there, that got divided into two halves because that was a pretty big space for just one tenant to use. That's sort of how it evolved to what it is now.

LMK: What were some of the other businesses that were in that area of Orchard when your dad first set up there?

JS: McDonald's [510 N. Orchard St.] had just opened up; it might have been in 1960 or just maybe it was that brand new when we got there. And, of course, being 16 years old, a hamburger stand would interest me. In the building, just immediately to the south, there was a barber shop there that I remember going to [Arch's Barber Shop, 618 N. Orchard St.]. There was an elderly fellow there by the name of Archie; he was the barber there. Him and his son—can't remember his name—that worked there. Anyway, the barber shop is still there. And, Potter Drug [610 N. Orchard St.] was there, which was kind of an interesting store that had a – it wasn't just a drug store but had an eclectic mix of things that they sold out of there. I was friends with one of the fellows that worked in Potter Drug at that time. I remember my folks, they were working around the clock there, seemed like, almost living there at the store. Come time for dinner and seemed like we had to go down to the Golden Star [1142 N. Orchard St.] to have dinner there. So, I finally couldn't take that any longer. Anyway, farther on down at Fairview was the Arctic Circle hamburger stand [4822 W. Fairview Ave.] and so I'd frequent that. Over where St. Al's is now –

that was the fairgrounds over there. Beyond that, I can't think of any businesses that I paid attention to at the time.

LMK: You also mentioned earlier that there was only a couple other places in Boise to get plumbing and electrical supplies.

JS: For do-it-yourself-type environment[s].

LMK: How was the response to that concept?

JS: I'm sure that they didn't care for it. A pretty serious competitor showed up, and they had the very good ability to buy things at a pretty good price. And, so I think they were pretty competitive when they came to town. There just wasn't much competition there. And, I don't know what plumbers and whatnot thought that was such a great idea, I mean, the concept of do-it-yourself. They made a point of hiring [experienced] people... My dad was very knowledgeable about plumbing and stuff, and Grover was very knowledgeable about building codes and whatnot. So, they knew what they were talking about when they would give people advice on how to re-plumb, remodel a bathroom. People were building cabins or whatever and they would tie everything on their car it took. It grew into be a pretty good business. I do remember when we very first started – I had mentioned this – where we took the plumbing pieces out of the box and then set it on the empty box so it made it look like we had more stuff than we did. There was an older fellow that came in, and he looked around. And, he told Dad he didn't think he'd make it until the end of summer.

LMK: But he did.

JS: He did.

LMK: So, good response from the public for having that kind of store in town?

JS: Yes, their business grew rapidly. I wasn't involved with the – I worked there for maybe a year, and then I got a job in a gas station. My dad thought that was great because he thought it would be good for you to work for somebody else and see how that works out. Their business grew rapidly, and it allowed Mom and Dad to go from renting a house to – they built a couple of them. So, economically it was good.

LMK: And, from what you said earlier, it sounds like your mother had an active role in the business as well?

JS: Yes, she did. She worked in bookkeeping and dealing with... We did everything in there when we first started. I can remember there was a store over on Vista and Overland, and they had had a fire in there. We bought the shelves and they were all smoked up and dirty and everything. We hauled them over there, and Mom and I were the painters. We painted the inside of the building, and we painted all these shelves, and stocked stuff. And, later she would work in the office. Then they had other ladies in there, too. I don't know if you'd call Mom "boss" but she was over there working with these other ladies in the accounting end and stuff. It was a team effort.

LMK: Good. Understanding that you were a young man at the time (so this may just be more of your sense)...the business atmosphere in Boise at that time?

JS: You know, it was pretty small in town. I remember the sign coming in here was 32,000 people at the time so it was pretty small. Borah [Boise High School, 6001 W. Cassia St.] had just opened up; I graduated from Borah. I think the first year was '60 or '59, something like that. I graduated in '62. Business-wise, I went down and worked in gas stations downtown. And there were all kinds

of restaurants and bars downtown. It was – economically, I’m really not quite sure. I think the town was prospering. It was very isolated, I mean...no freeways. It was State Street/Highway 44, coming in and Highway 30 going south. The railroad was downtown. It turned out to be a fun place to grow up. I got my first car and we’d drive it around. Back then we’d go between Murray’s [319 S. 8th St.] downtown and the Howdy Partner [5220 W. Fairview Ave] up on Fairview. You’d drive back and forth in your car all night and everybody would put a dollar’s worth of gas in. [phone rings, recorder turned off and on]

JS: Got out of high school and took drafting and design at BJC [Boise Junior Colledge, now Boise State University]. Seemed like it was bustling at the time, but everything is in perspective. But, the town seemed like it was quite prosperous.

LMK: Do you know if your father was involved in any of the business organizations in town?

JS: No, I don’t think so. He wasn’t much of a joiner, and the store kept him really, really busy. I’m not aware of him doing that.

LMK: The one organization I was particularly interested in is one that was called the Bench Boosters, and they actually – I wish I could remember the actual year – but they had a little newspaper at one time that was kind of the, more or less, the Chamber of Commerce for the Bench area. So, he wasn’t involved in those sorts of things that you know of?

JS: If he was...I wouldn’t be surprised if he contributed or whatever. Being a beginning business, they were advertising any number of ways. But it’s not something we ever talked about so, I don’t really know.

LMK: Okay, that’s fine. When we chatted the other day, you were telling me about Orchard Road, what it was like back then.

JS: Yes, it was just a two-lane road and had all kinds of parking in front of the stores. Now they made it four lanes and at the intersection there at Emerald, it’s got turn lanes and stuff. Now we don’t have the parking in front like it used to. I have old pictures of the way the building looked after they put the signage and canopy on and whatnot. It’s interesting to see all the 1959-looking cars stacked up around there. Orchard was a good store because it had traffic flow. Now Orchard has more than you want. Like our particular parking lots at 5:00, it’s difficult to get in and out of there. It certainly wasn’t anything near that back then.

LMK: It was paved at that time?

JS: Oh, yes.

LMK: One of the other people I had interviewed actually had bought a home in that area in 1949 and they remembered on Orchard there were still a lot of residences. Do you remember houses mixed in with the businesses by ’61, when you first came?

JS: I’m sure there were. This was sort of a pocket there at Emerald and Orchard that was commercial then, just around that intersection. But, then farther down, I didn’t pay any attention but I’ll bet they pushed over a house in order to put McDonald’s in there. So I’m sure it was residential, but I don’t recall them.

LMK: Do you recall whether or not there was any public transit available at the time your dad had the store?

JS: I’m sure there wasn’t. You might be able to find a cab downtown but there wasn’t – I don’t recall a bus system. I sure don’t think so.

- LMK: Okay...this is another thing I haven't verified the date yet. In 1961 I suspect that the area had not been incorporated into the city yet. Do you have any recollection of the status of any of the services up in that area – water, sewer, fire, police?
- JS: You know, I think every bit of that was in place, I think, whether it was the city or not, or whether it would be out there in the county. I'm going to guess that the city maybe ventured up there but not much farther. But, I don't know.
- LMK: That's fine. You also mentioned earlier that the fairgrounds was in that general neighborhood, a little further to the west and north. Any recollections of the fairground? It actually moved out in '66.
- JS: Yes, I can recall going there and enjoying the fair. There also was a drive-in theater out there on Curtis, just down from there. But I can recall going to the fair – thought that was pretty big stuff. It was close.
- LMK: Was it close enough that when the fair was on, it would have had any impact on the store? Maybe more people coming into town? Maybe traffic backing up? Anything like that?
- JS: I'm not positive, but I can sort of think that the fair was a big to-do at the time. And, it seems to me that they had advertising and things that were on sale to coincide with that. Again, I was only involved – worked for Dad, really – for only about a year. The fair was big stuff then. It was quite an event, so I'm sure there were some activities that would coincide.
- LMK: I'm sure some businesses might have advertised in the fair bulletin, things like that, perhaps?
- JS: They may have. I don't know.
- LMK: Do you know if there were any feelings – opinions – at the time the fairground was moved out to Garden City, where it is now, and the connector put in?
- JS: Well, the connector came quite a bit later. Fairview was the main way to get over to Meridian, and I don't know...by the time that occurred in '66, I was still in college then. That was about the time I went down to Idaho State to go to school so, I didn't pay any attention to why they'd go over there. It makes sense that they would, I mean, they just run out of ground over there and things were... I don't remember what went in there afterwards. It wasn't an immediate thing. I don't think they sold that to the hospital--that was much later where that ground was used for a better use.
- LMK: Right. Can you think of any changes over time – the sense of the business community? Was there some feeling of collaboration among the different businesses there? Has that changed over time? The business community, perhaps?
- JS: You know, things sort of evolved there. Orchard, I think, was a very viable spot, and then it sort of diminished and whatnot. And, we're sort of hoping to see a resurgence of the area. When Fred Meyer [5230 W. Franklin Rd.] came down there and put in a whole new complex in there, and Commercial Home Furnishings [104 S. Orchard St.], they're there. And, down at the other end, there are banks and offices and stuff. So, anyway, we're hoping to see things evolve for the better. Business-wise, I don't know. We've been fortunate that we've been able to have some good, long-term tenants. They have moved to, you know, bigger facilities, moved on, and we've had other tenants. At this moment in time, we have a vacancy there now and it's been that way for a while. Of course, having a big downturn in the economy and whatnot, came at the wrong

time. But the rest of the businesses are improving, doing better. We're hopeful; we like being part of the neighborhood over there.

MS: And, you're proud to be a part of that neighborhood?

JS: Yes, yes. It feels good to have a historical perspective there.

LMK: Mary, did you want to add anything else?

MS: No, just needed to add that little tidbit that it's nice to see a family carry through into those businesses. It's just nice.

LMK: Do you think of anything I haven't asked?

JS: No, I really can't. Anyway, it's nice to see Boise the way it has evolved. I thought it was a pretty Podunk little place and turns out, it's a really, really great place to live; a good place to raise kids.

MS: Tell the story of you bringing your mother in...and maybe grandparents. You came in and it was hot and windy.

JS: [laughs] We had this old 1950 Ford and here I had my mom - dad had already come over here with a bunch of stuff - so Mom and I - she's got all the house plants in the car and maps in the windows because the sun was shining on her and it was hotter than the dickens. My folks lived through the Dust Bowl and the Depression-type time. Anyway, we come in down State Street and here this big dust storm came through there and blowing stuff in every direction and my mom started crying, thinking, "gosh, we've gone back to where we were before"-kind of thing. Anyway, it turned out to be a wonderful opportunity for them. After we were here for not very long, my grandparents, who also lived in Vancouver, Washington, we moved them over here. They bought a little home over there behind that Hillcrest Shopping Center. There was a big store [Grand Central] there that sold all kinds of different merchandise. It's long gone. Makes me think, back here it is 110 degrees. When we first got here, it was over 100 for a week or so. No air conditioning. We thought, "Wow, is this a mistake?" But it turned out to be quite good.

LMK: Did you have any siblings?

JS: I have a sister.

LMK: Was she involved with the business at all at that time?

JS: No, she's three years older than I am, and she lived in Vancouver at the time, also. But she had gotten married, had three boys. So, she had her own life over there in Vancouver. So, she just came for visits.

LMK: And, how about the two of you? Do you have children?

MS: We do. We have two daughters. Amy lives here in Boise. She lives on Rose Hill, right off Rose Hill between Vista and Shoshone, that part. And, she helps us in our business. Our older daughter lives up in Seattle, so she's busy up there. No grandchildren; two granddogs. We used to have five grandchickens, but they have perished. We don't have any grandhens anymore. [laughs]

LMK: Anything else you can think of?

JS: It'll be interesting to see the final report and also to read about other people that you've interviewed.

LMK: Okay...we'll go ahead and turn this off.

END OF INTERVIEW

Transcribed by Linda Morton-Keithley, July 7, 2013; audited by Linda Morton-Keithley, July 8, 2013;
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