

INTERVIEW WITH

DOUG VINEY AND BILL RANSDALL

FOR

THE SOUTHWEST HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE LOG HOUSE MUSEUM

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BY

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The first taping took place at Doug Viney's home on Pine Lake in Issaquah, Washington.

JonLee: Today is September 29th, 1999. I'm with Doug Viney and Bill Ransdell. I'm taping for the Log House Museum.

Doug: I happen to be one of the few people in captivity who has "Alki Bathhouse" written on their birth certificate. Sometimes I have a lot of explaining to do. People back off when they see that, or hear about it. (chuckles). My father, Hessel B. Viney ran the Alki Bathing Beach (Alki Fieldhouse), about 1926 through 1946, about twenty years. I wasn't actually born on Alki Beach, I was born in Seattle General Hospital, but they listed that on my birth certificate as my residence. From then on, the reminiscences start there. The first few years, I can only remember through my mother's telling me what a

sweet, cute little baby I was. But, until then, until I actually felt the sand between my toes from Alki Beach and felt the salt water coming in from low tide.. Those are my first reminiscences, wading in the sound, and all of the activity on the beach, especially during the summer. It was rather tumultuous at that time, in those days. As probably you can garner from photographs, you can see people come in, in droves on the streetcar, car Number 1. And they were all dressed rather properly. What we call casual today, didn't exist in those days. They all wore their Sunday best. In the summer was a lot of straw hats and the men wore ties, and those that actually went swimming, went in the fieldhouse, which we called the bathhouse in those days, and rented a suit. I forget which denomination, let's see, the suits were 25 cents.

Bill: 25 cents.

Doug: 25 cents got you a towel and a suit, which was, in those days, as I recall, a very heavy woolen suit and a locker, and you had a locker number with a big brass pin, which you would pin on your bathing suit.

Bill: Do you remember what the fare was on the Alki Number 1 trolley car?

Doug: I have no idea.

Bill: I remember for kids it was 3 cents.

Doug: But, the few people who did go in the water usually didn't go out very far. It was mostly a spectator sport in those years, as far as the well-dressed crowd was concerned. Later on came the Alki Natatorium in 1934. Those that couldn't stand the intense cold of Puget Sound, probably for a quarter could go into the Natatorium. They were actually, one, two, three, four pools in the Natatorium. There was one that wasn't exactly 50 meters, but it was close to it – the large pool. There was what we called the children's pool at one end, and in the middle the ladies pool, which was quite warm, and then on the very end was the cold plunge, which was water fresh out of Puget Sound. It wasn't processed through the boilers. That got all of your attention.

Most of our activities in the summertime were oriented toward the beach.

Bill: This is interesting, because I'm often asked how much fun it must have been swimming in Puget Sound in those days, say in 1936. You remember the pollution, as we all do. And we always kidded each other about the Duwamish River power stroke

that we had to learn. And that was simply a matter of swimming an overhand Australian crawl that would clear the path through the water.

Doug: It meant just brushing the sewage out of your way (laughter), that's what it meant, because some of the outfalls, all of the effluent of West Seattle came out close to where we grew up there.

Bill: Every tide. There are two tides a day. Each tide carried in creosote, garbage, and raw sewage.

Doug: And during fleet week, there was a lot of condoms.

Bill: Condoms, driftwood, and the lifeguards had to use heavy rakes.

Doug: Yeah. That was one of their duties in the morning.

Bill: It's kind of interesting, because in those days it was a municipal bathing beach and all those lifeguards. You had a lifeguard out in the boat; you had a lifeguard up in the tower watching the beach. And we had all this pollution. (Laughter). Today, the beach is not polluted, it looks like a lake in the Swiss Alps by comparison, and yet there's no swimming, and of course, no lifeguards, and no one swims there, which is kind of ironic.

Doug: Ironically, we survived it. We didn't come down with any terrible diseases. Maybe the sewage was a little more healthy in those days. I don't know.

JonLee: I figure you built up your immune systems.

Bill: Could be.

Doug: Yeah, we could go into any kind of pollution these days and survive.

Bill: I was born August 15th 1925. We moved to Alki in 1933 and we moved to the Alki beach area in 1934. I was asking Doug if you remember the 4th of July at Alki beach? There had unrestricted sail and use of dangerous pyrotechnic technique.

Doug: The cherry bomb was the ..

Bill: The cherry bomb in a slingshot was the (Laughter), and how everybody survived without killing someone was amazing!

Doug: The geysers would erupt and explode when we would shoot the cherry bomb.. You know, we got our fireworks money by going up to Schmitz Park and peeling cascara bark. Cascara place was sold in, kind of a junkyard kind of place, down on First Avenue, near the old Sears store. We had to dry the cascara bark very carefully. Of

course, I dried it on the roof of the fieldhouse, because I had access to that. When it was first harvested, it was pretty heavy, but when it was completely dried, it was fairly light. So, we took it down there, and this fellow would run a poker through it and weigh it, because a lot of kids would put rocks inside to weigh it down a little more, so they could get a little more money. (Laughter). He knew all the tricks, so we couldn't get away with that. But we earned enough money just peeling cascara bark and selling it, to buy fireworks. We got a huge bag of all kinds of bangs.

Bill: I remember cascara was a laxative of course. But in those days when you caught anything, you were always given a laxative.

JonLee: And cod liver oil.

Doug: And cod liver oil.

Bill: I remember my mother used to dose up with cascara, essence of cascara every time we looked cross-eyed. I remember that awful taste of cascara! I'll never forget that.

Doug: I remember, left over on the beach after the 4th of July, was all kinds of rockets and roman candles. When I was a little kid I'd go along and try to light these, and one day I did light one with my bare feet! And one actually went off and kind of toasted my toes. (Laughter). I was in quite a bit of pain for awhile.

Bill: There was a fireworks company right inside the city.

Doug: Hitt's Fireworks.

Bill: (Spells it H I t t).

Doug: Yeah.

Bill: That's where we bought a lot of firecrackers.

Doug: I think so. The main building was over in Tacoma. I think my dad had a kind of an in over there, so we'd get some pretty good buys. Yeah, the 4th of July was an interesting time.

Bill: Walking along Alki beach after a night of fire building and beach fires – people would normally cover the fire with sand, a light covering of sand. (Laughter). So you'd have this Polynesian fire pit you could walk in with your bare feet. (Laughter). How many times have you stepped into one of those hot coal things/

Doug: Well, I think I learned once.

Bill: Yeah.

Doug: The field house and the lifeguards were all trained in first aid and they had a first aid station and they'd take care of all of the cuts from broken glass, which were, and all of these burns that you mention. They also had a device in there called a pull motor which is the...

Bill: A resuscitator.

Doug: Yeah. A resuscitator, that a drowning victim or a person could maybe be resuscitated by the pull motor. I was fascinated by the things that were in that kit in the pull motor. They had little things to break a person's teeth so they screw open a person's mouth and it looked like an ancient medical kit of some sort. (Laughter). D

JonLee: Why would they break people's teeth?

Doug: Some people might go into a seizure and swallow their tongue.

Bill: I think it was before the mouth to mouth resuscitation.

Doug: Yeah. Before they had any training in this kind of thing.

Bill: The idea was to force air into the lung.

Doug: I don't know if it was ever used, but I was fascinated by all of these medieval tools (Laughter) in the pull motor kit. The guards in the summer, as we said earlier, they had to clean up the beach in the morning, but it was kind of a two hour on, one hour off situation. For one hour they'd go up that fifteen-foot tower that was in front of the bathhouse and had a long brass pole on it like a fire pole, and they could make quick entry into the water in case they saw somebody in trouble. Then, the next hour they'd be in the boat. The lifeguard boats in all of the public bathing beaches were huge, clinker-built, very heavy boats. They were a beauty to row. They'd spend an hour there, and then have an hour off. So that's how they usually spent the day.

Bill: There was a commercial side to this beach litter thing. Remember we would go along and pick up resaleable, empty bottles? Beer bottles and soft drink bottles.

Doug: That's kind of ironic too, that during the Depression people wouldn't take those bottles with them and cash them in. There were a few people a little better heeled than others.

JonLee: Maybe they were a little drunk. If they came all the way out on the streetcar, who'd want to carry back a bag of bottles?

Bill: The return was about 5 cents, wasn't it?

Doug: I think so.

Bill: On a quart-sized soft drink bottle. That was a lot of money.

Doug: What did we use that money for?

Bill: Spud fish and chips.

Doug: And Scotty Wilbur's candy store.

JonLee: Would you tell about looking for the center, the pink?

Doug: Oh, well, the lucky bite. It was my first lessons in the evils of gambling, actually. (Laughter).

Bill: Describe Scotty Wilbur's store, first.

Doug: Scotty's Wilbur's store was just across from 60th, where the Taco Time is now.

Bill: On Alki Avenue.

Doug: And it was a little mom and pop grocery store. They just stocked the staple items that were required of a small community, because there were two other competitors on the Avenue, not to far from them. One was the Stop and Shop Market, and then further down, it was 63rd? The Elkin's Grocery Store. So this was kind of like AM PM kind of store, and in the winter they just have a few vegetables like turnips and potatoes and things like that, and a little meat counter that was refrigerated. The big thing in the store was the candy display. All the kids would admit that. I think that was their main thing.

Bill: And one of them, of course, was the Lucky Bite. It looked like one of these modern day mint patties. If it had a white center, you were out of luck. If it had a pink center, you got a candy bar.

Doug: I think they were a penny apiece as I recall.

JonLee: And you never got a pink center?

Doug: I never did. (Laughter).

JonLee: Did you know of anyone who did?

Doug: Oh, yeah.

Bill: Those pictures on the wall – “This man won a candy bar.” (Laughter). Like the \$1500 slot machine! I will always remember those little things of Scotty’s made out of wax. They were like a bottle or a coffeepot. It had some red liquid in it, and you drink the liquid and then you could eat the wax.

Doug: It would get bigger and bigger as you ate it.

Bill: And, that one was pretty cheap – a couple of cents.

Doug: Then there was the yard long candy that had these little candies. Do you remember those?

JonLee: No.

Doug: They were yard long and they had candies stuck to them. They looked like beads and you pry them off and eat them.

JonLee: I remember licorice that long.

Doug: Well, this was on paper. The little candies were on paper and you peeled them off.

Bill: Remember the licorice root that you could actually buy? The branch?

Doug: Do you remember the Granny Gump? (Laughter).

Bill: Yeah.

Doug: It was kind of a toy. And also there was a type of material you that you could, they had a little; it was something like a photographic negative.

Bill: Make sun prints.

Doug: Make sun prints with this photographic paper. And hold it up to the sun, and after you’d take it out you’d have a picture of the Statue of Liberty or Niagara Falls or something like that. It was another little item, I forget how much it was, a nickel or something like that.

Bill: Actually, the photographic studios of the day used sun prints as their proofs. It was a little pinkish, and it would fade out in daylight after a while.

Doug: They didn’t last too long.

JonLee: Like color prints today.

Bill: It was called printing out paper. Except that this was even more fragile. I remember my friend, Dennis Winter and I, who as nine year olds were interested in photography even in those days, and we decided that we were going to make a balloon,

and put a balloon up into the air, filled with hydrogen, to which a camera was attached, and photograph Alki from the sky. And we didn't get very far because we couldn't figure out how to make hydrogen. We got an old flashlight battery – we knew that had zinc in it, and we went to mix that with hydrochloric acid, and liberate hydrogen, but the local druggist wouldn't sell us any of the acid. (Laughter). So we had to give that up! The idea of using a kite, to which would have been more practical, we probably would have been able to get a camera into the air. But that wasn't exotic enough for our ten year old minds. We had to build a balloon, which we really never got...

JonLee: Like a weather balloon?

Bill: Yeah.

JonLee: Like the satellites taking pictures. Why wouldn't he sell you one of the chemicals?

Bill: Because it was dangerous.

Doug: If C.A. Ritchie didn't make a profit, he wouldn't worry about a thing. (Laughter).

Bill: Later on we decided to take up telegraphy. We could see Dennis's bedroom window, he lived on Campbell Place, which was up the hill from where I lived, and we could hang a light in our window. We attached a telegrapher's light to our switch, and we could send telegraphic messages, supposedly. We had to learn the Morse code. Again, (Laughter), like the hydrogen, we were rather casual about memorizing the code, so after a while we'd have to go down and call on the telephone to find out what we said to one another. So that was kind of a bad situation too.

Doug: This probably all originated from the Little Orphan Annie, shake up mug, and Captain Midnight's secret pin.

Bill: Exactly!

Doug: Or the decoder pin.

Bill: Exactly! Because we all would listen to the radio every night.

Doug: And the *Jimmy Allen Flying Club*, that was a big deal.

Bill: *Captain Cracker and his Crummy Crew*, that was good one too. (Laughter by all).

JonLee: I remember *The Shadow*, and *Sky King*.

Bill: That was much later.

Doug: Well, there was *Red Tales* and *Black and Blue, the Detective*. I listened to those on crystal sets, actually. (Laughter by Doug and Bill).

Bill: We had crystal sets that didn't require any power, we could just turn them on. Except that when the local, amateur radio man, Mr. Barnes that lived up on the hill, the ham operator. He would turn on his amateur radio set and drown out every crystal set. We could hear everything he said. (Laughter by all). We couldn't hear *The Devil's Scrapbook* which we wanted to listen to. (Laughter).

Doug: That was one of my favorites. We had to listen to it on crystals, because my mother wouldn't let me listen to it on the radio. I would hide under the covers with my ear phones and crystal set, trying to find a hot spot on the crystal so we could hear *The Devil's Scrapbook*. It was on about 11:00, so it was late.

JonLee: Your mother wouldn't let you hear it, why? Because it came on too late?

Doug: That was the main reason. I don't think she was worried about the content, but the fact that I'd stay up that late. What are we going to do with all this dead air here?

Bill: I don't know, rattle some dishes, anything! (Laughter by all). I'll tell a joke.

JonLee: When you met, what kept it going? (The friendship). You met at Alki.

Bill: I first met Doug; I saw Doug. Realize that nine and ten year old boys don't go out and introduce themselves. That was not done. We were more animal-like. (Laughter by both). We kind of smelled each other. And you kind of maneuver around. Anyway, I saw Doug and he had this bicycle with a bell on the front. I didn't have a bicycle. I didn't have a bicycle until 1937. But, I admired his bicycle. I honestly don't know how it happened. I had already met a friend, Dennis Winter, who was also a friend of Doug's, and he lived closer. We went through the smelling each other stage, and we decided to hang around and follow each other around. And after the second day you start speaking to one another.

There was another friend named George Walker, who lived just a block away. And then there were other kids who were in the neighborhood, and every night, it seems like there

was always some kind of an activity, either in the street or at the play field. That's how we just gradually got to know one another. And, as I say, this was what? 65 years ago!

Doug: You know, it's strange how friendships develop amongst kids. Some of them are just brief meetings, of course. Some of the ones that grew up on Alki, that you went through high school with, I haven't seen again. But there's a certain group, a certain core of us that kind of clicked together and always stuck together. We did everything together as kids. Depending a lot on the age group. If they were two or three years older than you, you probably didn't speak to them, and they didn't speak to you. And, it went the other spectrum as well. So it was kind of a close-knit thing that you had with just a few people.

And fortunately, we've hit it off all these years. Of course, we've married and had our families. We went apart at different times of our life, and then come back together again, and ..

Bill: There were times as young adults we didn't have the same life style. Doug was married and had children right away. We didn't have children for ten years. Therefore, a lot of our friends were older, and we did different things. And then, gradually, as Doug's kids grew older, and then we had kids, and then the two kids got together and we did little nutty things in our life, that we recall as teenagers. For example, there was a certain ceremony called, grabbing the cake, and we saw that in a 1942 movie. We were all sixteen year olds and we went to the Admiral Theatre. This was in 1942, shortly after it opened. And there was a film there called, *The Forest Rangers*.

Doug: With Fred McMurray and Paulette Goddard.

Bill: Very big, classy movie. But, quickly, the man married a different person; his friends thought he had married someone else; and there was this mix-up. They had to put up signs in the area, **Welcome Home Fred and Nancy**. And then he didn't marry Nancy, he married Charlotte. So, they arrived, and immediately they had to run around and tear all the signs down before they saw them. And they got the signs torn down, except the wedding cake. And they had this big **Hello Nancy** on the wedding cake. And they showed a close-up of the wedding cake, and all of sudden these hands came out of nowhere and destroyed the cake where it said, **Nancy**. (Laughter).

And the four of us sitting in the Admiral Theatre that night thought that was the funniest thing we had ever seen in our entire lives. That was over fifty years ago. And every since then, (Laughter), we have been grabbing cakes. Not wedding cakes, but usually birthday cakes. We started doing that when our kids were little, and they thought that was the greatest adventure! A cake that they could actually destroy with their hands. My wife sometimes used to make two, one for grabbing, one for cutting. That was a tradition that went on, even up through our adult -- I have a grand-niece, my nephew's daughter, who e-mailed me from Pittsburgh, and she said, "Would you please describe the cake grab, because my teacher wants me to write a paper on it." She thinks it's the weirdest thing she ever heard of in her life. (Laughter). I had to e-mail this long recitation on how the cake grabbing evolved.

Doug: In other words, we never grew up.

Bill: That's right.

Doug: (Laughter). We're still in that state of mind, I think. Which I think is great.

Bill: My daughter's going to have her 40th birthday. Do you know what she wants? She wants to grab the cake!

Doug: JonLee is going to have a birthday shortly. I think we ought to have a ceremony.

Bill: The idea, of course, is not to let everybody in on it. For example, the three of us would be in on it. Well, your parents would be a good foil. (Laughter by all). You bring this beautiful cake that says, **Happy Birthday JonLee** on it, and you say, "Come on in guys, come on in and grab a piece of cake before you leave!" (Laughter by all).

Doug: And then we go and shake hands with them.

Bill: And then we look over at your parents, and they're just horrified! (Laughter by all).

Doug: We had several people out here.

Bill: It was like desecrating a church.

Doug: My uncle said it was defiling my grandmother.

JonLee: Well, we could always take this part of the tape, when it gets transcribed, and have it as a family recipe. (Laughter by all).

Bill: My 70th birthday, my daughter had it made. It's just a huge cake! We brought it out on that lawn and just destroyed it.

Doug: We've got the video tape. (Laughter by all).

JonLee: That lawn is fed by cake. (Laughter by all).

Bill: The dog came out and was licking your hand! (Laughter by all).

Doug: It was a wonderful way to get your hands clean! (Laughter by all). The neighbor's dog.

JonLee: So, your wives went along with this.

Doug: They put up with a lot of foibles.

Bill: Looking through the album the other day, I have some shots of your kids and my kids. They were around this cake with this maniacal gleam in their eye. You know damn well they're just getting ready to grab it.

JonLee: So, after the children (raising families), you just kept in touch?

Bill: Oh, yeah, sure. We had a very close friend, much older than us, a good 20 years older, as sort of a mentor in a way. And he was someone that Dougie and I admired very much. He was a man we first met when he was in his 40's; we were in our 20's. This was just after World War II. He was one of these guys that loved life, and he loved everything new! He was an accomplished artist and photographer. Anything new he wanted, he'd be right in the middle of, so, all of the things that came along at that time recording— we started recording on discs. This was before the tapes were available. We would write scripts and we'd do them. We did a lot of stuff like that, so

Doug: Mort Gundy, here' to you! He had a very playful mind, and he was a wonderful man!

Bill: He lived to be 87.

Doug: Yeah.

JonLee: Did he live in West Seattle?

Bill: Yes.

Doug: He lived above the steel mill. I don't know what the street was, off 35th and Webster.

JonLee: Was he a teacher, is that how you met him?

Bill: I met him when he was an instructor at our photography school. And then later I started in my business. He was working for a company that I paid rent to in my studio. I just got to know him and as a matter of fact, I named my children. My daughter is named after his wife and my son has his middle name, Morton.

Doug: You know, as kids on the beach, we met a lot of older people. People a lot older than Mort that kind of took us under their wing, and were kind of a godfather-like arrangement.

In my close proximity to the beach, there's this group that used to sun themselves on the west side of the field house. They were all characters, and they'd come all summer long and they were from various walks of life and from various ethnic groups, but
(side two of Tape, 9/99)

JonLee: People like that are guardians. Because they're there, and they keep an eye on things. They might not interfere or intervene, but they're there as a witness.

Bill: Maybe that's true. For example, one year we decided, what are we going to do at New Year's Eve? This was in 1955. This was long before the rush down to Reno and Vegas and all the Indian gambling casinos. And we said, let's have a party where we have all this gambling apparatus, and we'll print up some toy money and we'll give everybody money and we'll gamble for prizes. We didn't know anything about a dice table or a roulette wheel. We went to the library and got all this information. Mort was also a skilled woodworker. The roulette wheel was turned on a lathe at James Madison Junior High School. (Laughter), by the shop teacher, who was also a friend of ours. In his spare time, he turned this wheel. And then Mort constructed the wheel. And we made a dice table and a roulette wheel and we printed up money.

I shared office space with a printing house, so we able to get money printed up. And we had our wives' pictures on the money. We would give everybody money, and they could take as much money as they wanted and it would be recorded, and people that won the most money would win a prize. We did that for several years, principally because gambling was such an exotic thing. Most people thought it was illegal. And I guess it was everywhere. Most cases it was illegal, except for Reno and Las Vegas. And of course, now it's old hat. You can go anywhere you want. We did that for awhile.

And then we decided to make tape recordings. We would write scripts, and we would have parties and we found some records that had movie stars on the record then dead air space is where you could fill in your voice. They were called co-star records. And we did that. You could do a scene with Bette Davis or something. And we would make tapes of that.

JonLee: This was just for y our private entertainment?

Bill: Yeah, yeah. It was a carryover. Mort grew up; he was born in 1906. And it was a carryover from the days when you had to make your own entertainment. Instead of plunking down in front of the television set. So he was a good musician, and a helleva good guitar player.

Doug: A Renaissance man!

Bill: Yeah, he was really was. I played a little piano and Mort played guitar and someone else would play drums, and then we'd have some music, and then we'd make tapes. He taught us a lot about entertaining yourself, which is a heckeva lot more fun! Than watching someone else entertain you.

JonLee: That's a gift to have in your background. So, did you raise your children this way?

Bill: Sure, I did, so did Doug.

JonLee: So that they know how to entertain themselves, and be part of a group and participate at that level.

Doug: All my kids are well over forty now, so, but you always call your kids, "kids" no matter how old they are. My mother still regards me in that way, even though I'm 73 years old now. "Stand up straight; wipe your mouth, take off some weight." (Laughter by all). But, this goes on from generation to generation.

But I think one beach activity that we overlooked is adolescent teens. We suddenly discovered that we didn't have enough danger in our lives. So we'd go out at low tide with a bow and arrow, and we had a pair of field glasses, and we'd walk about, maybe 300 yards from one another, and the person with the field glasses would look to see how close the arrow from the bow and arrow of the other person would come. If you could see the side of the arrow, it was all right, it would go ffit. (Laughter). Next to you. But if you could see just the tip of the arrow coming down at you from about 300 yards,

you're supposed to step aside real quick and then pbtfff right along side of you so. None of us ever got impaled by an arrow, but it was just one our dare devil type exploits.

Bill: There was some form of organized sports at Alki Playfield, but organized in a very loose way. But, just go out and choose up sides, and play baseball, for example. I had an older brother who was a professional baseball player with the Yankee organization, and he would send me broken, cracked bats, from wherever he was playing – Joplin, Missouri, or someplace. That made me very popular at Alki Playfield, because I had bats. And the ball, Doug, you recall, was a baseball that had been repaired so many times with electrician's tape. (Laughter by both) You know after a while it got to be heavy as a shot putt. (Laughter by all). And it weighed several hundred pounds when you'd try to throw it. But once in awhile we'd get a fresh, brand new baseball.

Doug: Once in a while.

Bill: And that was something. Pilfered from the Park Department. Most of the time we'd play softball, because I believe hardball was outlawed at Alki Playfield.

Doug: It was, up to a certain time, and

Bill: The Field probably wasn't big enough. You can hit a baseball a lot farther than you can hit a softball.

Doug: Right. I was never so terrified in all of my life, when one of Seattle's Rainier's pitchers came to Alki Playground, and he actually pitched at us. (Laughter). We were supposed to stand in the batter's box. And, I've never seen a baseball come at me like that. (Laughter by both). It was a terrifying experience! I can empathize with these batters today. "Why can't you hit that ball?" You've never been pitched at by a professional.

JonLee: Was that when Sick's Stadium was active?

Doug: That was about the time of Sick's Stadium was, yeah. And of course, there was the old Civic Field, where the Seattle Indians used to play. And those are our first memories of going out to baseball games. That's where the Memorial Stadium is today. That was the old Civic Field. That's where the Seattle Ballpark was. End before then it was Dougdale Park, and as I mentioned, the voting machine that I ran was at that location. 12th and Fir. Fir is just one block the other side of Jackson Street.

JonLee: Was that before the projects up there?

Doug: Oh, long before then.

JonLee: I think this is good, gentlemen. I thank you! (Laughter by all).

Doug: We're sitting here spilling our guts (Laughter by all)

The second taping took place at the home of Bill Ransdell, Bill is playing the piano – show tunes. October 5, 1999.

Bill: There is very little resemblance to the bad boys of the 90's.

Doug: More of the Dead-end kid type.

Bill: More of the bully as opposed to the drug dealer type.

Doug: I think kids are still afraid of going to school because of the school bully.

Bill: Sure, remember the Chambers boys?

Doug: Yeah. The Chambers Gang.

Bill: They would extort lunch money from the kids.

JonLee: What did they do with it?

Doug: I don't think they bought drugs in those days. (Laughter).

Bill: We had a special rapport with one of the principals that replaced Cassidy, and that was Frank Brock. Only out on the soccer field.

Doug: What did Frank Brock later become? The Superintendent of Schools.

Bill: Yeah.

Doug: Well, of course, he was young in those days. Most of these principals work their way up from the teaching profession. He had a pretty good rapport with the kids at Alki in those days.

Bill: At our last meeting, I told you that the present principal at Alki School was a young man, in his early thirties, from New York. He's new to the area.

Doug: It's funny. You hear the story I wrote to him about the school, and you said he was asking why they didn't put in more about the scholastic standards and so forth.

Bill: Yeah, he gave the standard..

Doug: No, kids didn't think about that. Who committed a scatological error in the hallway, something like that. That stuck in your mind. But as far as the scholastic – these are the things that little kids..

Bill: Also, he made the – he doesn't know us. He thought we might be a couple of strait-laced old codgers. (Laughter). He thought if he got flippant we might complain to the school board. They're all spooked.

Doug: They're pretty well spooked today.

Bill: So, I think if we ever met the guy, and personally I think he's a nice... But he was giving a standard answer that no one can criticize.

Bill: Well, one of the funniest instances that happened on the Manchester Ferry Dock. We were all gathered for, I think it was a kid's fishing derby, or something like that. And Bill, of course, was among the crowd, and this huge dog came walking up (Laughter), - we came up to, about his chest. And I was standing. This huge St. Bernard came up and lifted his leg and soaked Bill just up and down.

Bill: My pants leg from just below my hip all the way down to my shoes was wet.

Doug: The main thing is, he just stood there like Jack Benny milking a gag. (Laughter by both men), staring straight ahead. Suddenly Bill disappeared and came back half an hour later with a change of pants. That was the funniest part of it.

Bill: Yeah.

Doug: Just staring straight ahead while the St. Bernard soaked him up and down.

JonLee: Now when we were walking along there (Alki), you were telling me about a fishing derby you won.

Bill: Yeah. That was the very first one.

JonLee: Would you tell that story again for the tape?

Bill: It was a... The reason I won the derby is because a story blew up almost immediately from Blackie Meagher's Alki Boathouse. And there were two to a boat. And Doug's dad, Hess Viney was sort of in charge. He was overseeing everything. And as soon as the wind started to blow they immediately called all of the boats in, because it was getting choppy and dangerous. So, all the boats came in. After I pulled in this line I had this little dead salmon trout about eight inches long. As it turned out that was the

only species of salmon that was every caught that day. I was immediately proclaimed winner of the Alki kid's fishing derby. That night they had a big ceremony at the field house auditorium. Hess had arranged a throne with a gold crown and a lot of the kids had these big brooms and they were fanning me. And they had invited the parents to come. The parents, I think, tended to participate because they didn't have that many other things to do.

Doug: Yeah, the parents were pretty supportive. That was the only form of entertainment they had in those days except for families visiting back and forth, and radio, of course, but these kind of activities were well supported by the adults in the community. I don't know if it's true today or not.

Bill: The prize was a rod and reel, which I used long into my adult years, long after I was married. Since then, there's been many other fishing derbies. I remember one, one year. I don't remember if Doug's dad was still living. But anyway, I went down and made an appearance as the first winner of the derby. And then Doug's friend, Mrs. what's her name? Your neighbor, the one that was on the cover.

Doug: I just met her recently through my wife. Of course, she was younger in those days. Actually, my Dad taught her to swim the backstroke, I learned later, in the Natatorium. Peters..

Bill: Yeah, Mrs. Peters. And there she was on the cover of this little publication. She said, "My God, that's me!"

JonLee: The photo of the girl sitting in the boat.

Doug: Yeah.

JonLee: It got identified, wonderful.

Doug: Well as a matter of fact, she married Kingston Peters. The did the Kingston Village down here in the Burien area. I guess they subsequently went over to France and bought a yacht, which they lived on a yacht for about fourteen years. A 128' yacht. And she's now living out near us, toward the Beaver Lake area. Nancy met her through the aerobic swim, and she recognized the name Viney and said, "Are you any relation to Hess Viney?" She (Nancy) said, "My husband is his son." And so forth.

So subsequently, Pat had giving me one of these (Memory) books, and I went out to dinner at their house, and took one and she (Mrs. Peters looked at the photo of the girl in the fishing boat derby), and said, "My God, that's me!". (Laughter).

JonLee: Does Pat know? (The Director of the Log House Museum).

Doug: Yes. As a matter of fact, when we had this Alki reunion, we brought her over here. But she's contributed quite a bit of material to Pat, I'm sure.

Bill: One of the interesting things about living at Alki as kids, it was about equally divided by those who belonged to the Boy Scout troop, and those who didn't. And we were wondering the other day, why Dougie and I did not belong. And yet a lot of our friends and playmates did, and were very happy. Troop 281. Denny didn't belong.

Doug: Well, there's a group of us, not including yourself that went hiking a lot. You remember the chant that you used?

Bill: Yeah, Fools! Fools Hiking Fools..

Doug: Subsequently in his old age he turned into a walked not a hiker. He aimlessly walked around Greenlake for ten years. But, no, George walker, Dennis Winter, Keith McGonagle and myself went on quite a few hikes in the Cascades and the Olympics. We had some great adventures in those days. And I suppose a lot of kids our age did that, but, it was a era just before World War II, that not too many people were participating in this kind of thing. It involved either hitch hiking all the way across Hood Canal, taking the ferries and hitch hiking to the river heads and hiking up, or getting a parent that would drive us over there, and of course, during the War the gasoline was quite short, so we did a lot of ferry riding and hitch hiking to our hiking spots. One incident happened during one of our hikes. George Walker was a real target for my type of humor and whenever I'd say something, he'd usually bust up and roll over, or something like that. But one morning, the last part of our hike, we were cooking mush. This was about the last thing we had left in our pack to eat for a two-week trip up the Dosewalups River, and so forth. And, (laughter), George started complaining that the mush was all full of lumps, and I said, "Well, Mushgod angry." And (laughter), he started rolling around on the ground and from then on, he coined the phrase, and called everyone in our group at Alki "Mushgods."

Bill: In fact, we have a certificate, we'll make you an honorary Mushgod.

Doug: Mushgodness! (Laughter).

JonLee: I like it! (Laughter).

Bill: Yeah, that's very funny. Someone asked me about this the other day. They asked me about the term I used, (Mushgod), and then I explained it. Cake grabbing. And I have an album full of pictures of Doug's kids and mine when they were little, all gathered and looking maniacally at this cake.

Doug: You see their eyes sparkling.

Bill: You know damn well it's just preparatory to smashing pieces with their fist. And we did that cake grab thing for fifty years.

JonLee: It's still going on?

Bill: My daughter is having a birthday and it's her fortieth, and she wants to grab a cake.

Doug: Don't you have a birthday coming up?

JonLee: The 22nd (of October).

Doug: Let's have a cake grab! (Laughter). Dracula (Bill) will make you a cake especially for the occasion.

Bill: Lately, well, I think the last few years, we try and reign people in who are not in on it.

JonLee: Perfect.

Bill: Not many, just a couple, and then (laughter), they just look horrified.

JonLee: My mother would be horrified.

Bill: Well, Doug's mother was horrified.

Doug: It's a form of sacrilege.

JonLee: It is. If they went through the Depression. I want to go back to, unless you have other things on the agenda that you want to talk about,,

Bill: No.

JonLee: To the walk that we did, down by where the Alki Bathhouse is now, that's an art studio. That's where the Alki Bathhouse was, the bigger one, with the ballroom and things like that. But, across the street, because you told about Frank Alger starting

Spuds. Would you talk about those businesses that were right there? There was Bloom's where Taco Time is now and Frank Alger started spuds.

Doug: Well, Bloom's came along later, the tavern. I think the Alger brothers started about 1934.

Bill: They opened in '35.

Doug: They were just, both of them were in college, I believe at the time. I don't even know if they progressed to that point or not, but they first were there in Alki. It was during the depths of the depression, when a dime a nickel were quite a lot of money to a lot of people. They made enough money to make a trip to Tahiti, both of them. Nobody could imagine where Tahiti was, at that time. They had that entrepreneurial spirit, I guess, that just caught on in the times when everybody didn't have anything and ... (end of Tape I. Side A).

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT 1998-99

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