

Marcy Johnsen

Interviewed by: JonLee Joseph

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2nd Oral Interview

Seattle, Washington

JonLee: Twelve fourteen, 2000.

Now, you e-mailed me with a story I just love about Charles Ritchie(?), 'cause I have never heard any Charles Ritchie stories in the times that I've been doing the oral histories. I remember the drug store myself. So would you tell that story?

Marcy: I love the drug store. Seaside Pharmacy. I mean, we went to the Pharmacy to buy Cokes, and we went to the Pharmacy to buy little sundries and of course the bus stop is right there, still is. But, so it was, and, and it always opened early so no matter how early you had to go to school or to work, the Pharmacy was open and people could come into the counter cause there was a soda fountain, a cafeteria-like counter, and have coffee. I don't remember when they opened, but it was early.

JonLee: Did he keep a lot of photographs up on the wall, or something, of customers and people?

Marcy: Gosh, I, maybe. I just remember, you know, the space is pretty much the same as it is now. And, kind of triangular, and so the

store was narrow when you walked in but then bloomed out. And so, there was quite a bit of space. An the fountain was to the left as you came in. And cards and magazines and things were to the right, and then, you know, counters here and there, and then the Pharmacy was way in the back. And that was the Pharmacy that everybody got their, well, I mean, everybody, lots of us got our prescriptions filled because there wasn't any place else on Alki.

JonLee: Did they both work at that Pharmacy, Mr. and Mrs. Ritchie?

Marcy: You know, I don't remember Mrs. Ritchie. Bella, worked at the counter. Don't remember Bella's last name. But I understand she's still around. And I should visit her, that would be fun.

JonLee: If I find her I'll let you know where she is.

Marcy: Yeah.

JonLee: Now, would you tell the story about going in and looking at something you were going to buy for a gift?

Marcy: I have two really good memories about the store. One is when I was a little older, one I was younger. Which do you want?

JonLee: Both of them, please!

Marcy: Well, I had a cousin, Anne, who, she was like a third cousin. But she and her mom lived on Del Ridge and they would come over every once in a while and visit, or we would meet up in the Junction, but that's a whole 'nother story. But Anne would come

over and we would play dress up. We just loved to get in our mom's old clothes because they were clothes from the Forties and earlier Fifties, but especially the stuff from the Forties.

JonLee: Satin dresses?

Marcy: Oh! And velvet gown things!

JonLee: Silk velvet.

Marcy: Oh! Lovely things!

JonLee: Before there was rayon velvet.

Marcy: Fancy things.

JonLee: And shoes with heels on them.

Marcy: And rhinestones.

JonLee: And hats.

Marcy: And hats.

JonLee: And gloves.

Marcy: And gloves. And so, they were in boxes my mom was going to give all this stuff away and it was on the porch for some reason, of the Log House. And Anne and I would go through it, picking out stuff and we would find some get up, you know, some outfit to wear like,

you know, a gown and heels and hat and things. And we would go walking down the block to Seaside Pharmacy and sit at the fountain and order, just like little proper ladies, you know. It was fun. And we would be treated so, you know, properly, and so well, that we were learning to be grown ups. I loved my cousin Anne. She and I had a birthday, we both had birthdays in December, in fact, I think yesterday or today is her birthday. And we just had lots of fun together doing that. And we would do that, you know, until finally the clothes had to be sent away. Oh, we had great fun. It was a very sad to me when the fountain went away from the Pharmacy.

JonLee: The fountain left before the Pharmacy did?

Marcy: I think so. I think so. I think they finally, you know, it was just fading away. And I think so. I could be wrong. But that was--

JonLee: I don't know. It was part of the neighborhood.

Marcy: Yeah. Well. And lots of times, of course, if you went to the bus early and it was, you know, you'd sit at the fountain and have a cup of coffee or a Cherry Coke or a, oh, Green River, which I hated, it was so sweet and green! But Chocolate Coke? Cherry Coke? Man. And right from the fountain. That good tinny, tingly--

JonLee: With the syrup on it and they'd pour seltzer water--

Marcy: Yeah!! It was good. So, I spent my life, you know, running to the drug store for this, that and the other thing. Or wandering around, you know, if you're waiting for the bus and you didn't have any

money to spend, you just wandered around and looked at stuff and you know, kind of bide the time. But as I was a little bit older, I had several steady jobs and you know, eventually was earning kind of a little steady income and at that point was, you know, thinking more and more about Christmas, especially. You know, where you're wanting to give. As a child you're given to and receiving so much and so you get to a point where you want to really give back and buy things. Not just make them in school and come home and like we all do. So I remember, yeah, being in the drug store and Charlie Ritchie, both Ritchies, the elder and junior Charlies, worked in the Pharmacy at different points. But, eventually, the older Mr. Ritchie quit working and it was primarily younger Charlie. But he was a very nice man. And I think ran a very good store. And I can just remember this so clearly. I was wandering and just really looking at everything trying to figure out how to spend my money so carefully and how could I spread, you know, a certain amount of money over ex amount of people in my family, and whatever. And I must have been just there forever and ever and ever, because finally he came up to me and he asked me if he could help me. And I said, "Oh, you know, that I was trying decide what to buy." And I think he asked me some questions about, you know, "Well, did I know how much I had to spend" and "What was I really looking at?" And so we had some kind of conversation like that and finally he offered that, you know, because he'd asked me if I had a job. And I said, "Oh yes I've had blah, blah, blah jobs." And he said, "Well, if you find that you want something and you don't quite have enough money for it, we could open an account for you." And then he explained, what a, you know, kind of a charge account was. Huh! I was like in heaven! You know, I must have been about fourteen, probably

thirteen, fourteen, right around in there. So, to think about having a little charge account was like, "Whoa!" I mean, my mother had a charge account at Rhodes and the Bon and I think MacDougals was already gone, but of course, you know, families had their accounts because, I guess it was the thing to do. At least, that's what our family did. So, I was thrilled. And he opened an account in my name and I began to, you know, then it was like, "Oooh. What can I buy!" So I picked out the things I wanted, and paid him what I had and then began to pay him so much per week, until it was paid off. And I kept that account for, probably until I left or the store closed. You know, one or the other.

JonLee: Your first charge account.

Marcy: Yeah! And I'd completely forgotten about that until I started thinking you know, about different things. It's great how things'll come back up. Yeah, my first charge account was at Seaside Pharmacy.

JonLee: That's great! Were there other stories that you remembered that you wanted to share for this.

Marcy: [pauses] Well. I was thinking more about the Brownies and how I was in the Brownie group, probably second or third grade. And the two Brownie leaders were Mrs. Sears and Mrs. Smith. And their daughters, I went to school with one of their daughters. Joyce Smith was at Alki. Jan Sears, however, was at Holy Rosary. And that was, you know, that was the place I wanted to steer clear from. But it was nice to know somebody who went to school there and she was very, very nice. She lived up at the top of, I think its

Hanford, the street that goes up top of the hill, off of Admiral and then Joyce's family up the street from them. So, they bordered Schmitz Park. And that's where, I think in Brownies, that we finally took some walks into Schmitz Park and it sort of felt okay, then, once we went as a Brownie group and learned some of the native stories and started learning about trees and plants and things. Yeah. So. By the time I got to junior high and then we were walking to and from school, James Madison, through the park. It was, I'd been there. You know, it was perfectly fine. And it's wonderful how you can remember people because one of the openings at the museum, I was there helping to docent, and it was like my first time so I was a little like, well, this is so odd, 'cause it still kind of felt like my house but not, and you know, I hadn't been in it for years, of course. But memories still feel fresh and other people are claiming that for their own. But this woman and her husband came through and I instantly knew that I knew her. And sure enough it was Jan Sears. And I hadn't seen her oh, probably since 1964. And this was, what, 1998 or something.

JonLee: Isn't that funny.

Marcy: Yeah!

JonLee: Don't you think people retain their kind of physical gestures even though their looks change?

Marcy: Yeah.

JonLee: The way that they have of moving their hands and legs and body.

Marcy: Yeah. She just moved in a very kind of upright way and I just had this, yeah, sense of recognition. It was great. Oh, the beach. The beach was a wonderful place to go. My mother worked days and my dad worked too, so us kids were, somebody had the key to the house during the summer, around their neck on a chain and it was invariably was my brother and he would lose it. So he used to have to climb up the logs to the second story to get in the window. I tried it once and I think I got up to the roof and at that point, you have to, you really have to have some strength and fortitude to get over the eave and I didn't have it. I chickened out. So I think I spent the rest of the afternoon in the yard waiting for somebody to come home. [laughs]. But the beach was a wonderful place as a kid. Gosh. The bath house was alive with life guards for one, you know, it was a manned beach and I don't think it is any more. Yeah. So there were always things to do, something going on there. And the raft. The big goal was to swim out to the raft. And I had really balked at having formal swim lessons, because I think naturally I paddled around and I felt that was fine. I didn't want to be told what to do and how to do it, *ever*. Odd. But. So, trying to take lessons at the edge of Alki Beach, with it's seaweed and rocks and things, was, I did it for, like, two days and that was enough. But as long as I could paddle and prove that I could paddle, and you kind of had to do that, I was allowed to go out to the raft.

JonLee: Oh, it was, access was controlled in a way.

Marcy: Well, the, oh yeah, the lifeguards would be in their little boat and they would, I can remember many times, the life guard was paddling right next, the little boat, next to me because, if I went

down, they were going to be right there. I was not that strong a swimmer. But I had a lot of determination. Later, and I mean, like five to six years ago, I took adult swimming lessons, to learn how to over hand swim and breathe at the same time. It's fabulous! [laughs] But that's been in Ballard Pool, you know, nice clean water. But I've swum all my life. Keeping my head above water.

JonLee: Were there two rafts? One farther out?

Marcy: You know, I vaguely remember two rafts, but more really one. And when the tide was going in at the end of the day, it was a longer swim back in. So, the interesting thing was you'd be, you know, really jumping off the raft and swimming around and getting up and doing that, you know, fifty to a hundred times. And then, it's time to go home and you have that long, you know, fifty or a hundred yard, whatever it was, swim to get in. I can remember coming in and saying my prayers for getting to the shore! [laughs] With the life guard paddling! [laughs] His boat along side!

JonLee: Do you remember the two lessons you took? Because Helene Madison used to teach at that beach. And I wondered if you had a woman teacher.

Marcy: Oh boy. I think so, I think so, but beyond that I don't remember.

JonLee: That may have been before your time.

Marcy: Now, we're talking 1959. Or maybe even the summer of 1960, because that would have been second grade.

JonLee: Yeah, I think she'd already gone on from then because I took swim lessons from her in the Fifties, the early Fifties at the Moore Pool downtown.

Marcy: Yeah, and I really, literally quit because sitting at the edge of the water, learning to kick your feet with the seaweed and the sand up your suit was *not* for me. [laughs]

JonLee: Thank you! [laughs] Were there any other stories that you thought of that you wanted to add?

Marcy: Not right off the top of my head.

JonLee: Then this is good.

Marcy: They just come to me, or came to me.

JonLee: And thank you for remembering the stories and being willing to tape them.

Marcy: Well, you're welcome! [stops tape] So, I wanted to know if anybody had talked to you about the Trig Grocery Store? Well, Trig Grocery Store, was right across the street from Seaside Pharmacy where Alki Café is now, that building of commercial on the bottom and apartments up above. And when we first moved to Alki in '59 there was the little Trig Grocery Store and I don't know what was behind it, because there was some space, maybe it was just a parking lot behind it and then next to it going along Alki was the delicatessen and the cleaners and something. But Trig Grocery took up a big portion of that corner. And so that was before the

grocery store was built on 63rd. And that was, I mean, we, I think my parents shopped up on the hill, whatever grocery store was there, Safeway or Thriftway or something. But, you know, if you needed something from the store right at dinner time or whatever, you ran down to the little store and I'm sure many people did lots of their grocery shopping there that didn't have access or didn't need to go a big supermarket. And I don't remember if that was his name, but that was the name of the store. Trig Grocery. And of course, then it was bought. But we would go into Trig Grocery or the delicatessen and buy our little penny candies or whatever. And one of the stories I can remember, and this is telling on myself. But my mother had showed me how to write checks. Because I was interested, I was always very good at math, well, you might not think so after this story, but really am fairly good with numbers. So, second, maybe third grade, but probably second, my mother had some blank checks that she wasn't using and I said, "Oh! What's that?" And she showed me how to write them out and I was as just fascinated because I knew I'd watched her write them out in the store and take them in. And so she said I could have them to play with. Well, I got it in my head that "Gee, you buy things with the check, you could just take a check and go on down to the store." So, I had some little playmate, I remember it being some little boy in the neighborhood. And I said, "Oh, well, gosh, let's try it!" So, I wrote out this check. [laughs] Oh, I told such a big whopping lie, fib, but anyway, so I wrote up this check for, my mother had showed me I think with five dollars. So, but I said, "Well, gosh, let's say ten." So, to Trig Store and I put the date and I wrote ten dollars and I signed my mother's name because it was, you know her name on the check But in the place where you write it out, where you actually have to write "Ten dollars." I wrote, "five" because

that's what she'd written and I didn't, for some reason, I either just made a mistake or didn't transpose that you had to write the same number as you'd written. So I wrote what she had showed me. And I took it down to the store and said, "Well, gee, you know, we probably ought to buy something, you know, believable." I knew I was pulling a fast one. I didn't know how bad I was trying to pull it off. But, so, Mr. Trig, looked at the check and he was so nice and he said, "Well, gosh, you know, this would be fine except that your mom made a mistake on the he check and she'll have to initial it or correct it." And he explained what was wrong and I was horrified. I thought, "Oh my god, he's being so nice and I'm lying through my teeth and I'd been found out." So, of course, I had to hide my tail and go, "Oh, you know," I don't think I fessed up. I had to hide my tail and go home and like, "Whew." And I don't know whether he ever called my mother or not, I was like, "I am not touching those checks."

JonLee: [laughs] Thank you.

Marcy: My little experiences with the commercial, you know--

JonLee: That's how we learn,

Marcy: Oh boy.

JonLee: Lots of things. Now, I'm going to be speaking to a Mrs. Watt(?), who had a little grocery store at 63rd before the Alki Grocery was there, must have been in the Fifties. A little Asian woman. Do you remember that store?

Marcy: Well, there was C & H Grocery that still exists, now, and it has on the corner of 62nd there is a restaurant. It used to be a laundromat, but it's a restaurant now. And then there was C & H Grocery, which still exists as a little grocery store and I think a take out Chinese now?

JonLee: Is it the Golden Sun?

Marcy: Yes.

JonLee: 'Cause she owns that.

Marcy: Did she own the same spot?

JonLee: I'm going to ask her.

Marcy: Yeah. And that was the first Chinese take out down on Alki, that was great.

JonLee: Okay, thank you very much,

Marcy: You're welcome.

End of interview



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