

## CONTINUUM HISTORY AND RESEARCH: TRANSCRIPTION

**INTERVIEWEE:** Ted Christensen

**SUBJECT:** Whidbey Island Hospital District, Coupeville History

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**INTERVIEW CONDUCTED AND TRANSCRIBED BY:**

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Continuum History and Research

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### SIDE A

**TC:** Ted Christensen

**T:** Theresa Trebon

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**T:** What I'd like to start with first of all, is basically a little background of how you came to Coupeville. Were you one of those born and raised Whidbey Islanders?

**TC:** No, we came to Coupeville because this was the only **drugstore** we could afford.

**T:** And whose did you buy?

**TC:** The man's name was **Harry Hurd**. When I was a senior at the university right after the war there was such a shortage of pharmacists that they let the seniors work as registered and I worked for Harry at the 15<sup>th</sup> and East \_\_\_\_\_? Mission Pharmacy. And ultimately, I went to Mt. Vernon to work and he opened a little store in Coupeville. He came to Oak Harbor first and then went to Coupeville. And then he came over to Mt. Vernon and asked if we'd like to buy the store and we didn't have any money but we did raise enough to make a down payment.

- T:** So was he actually operating a pharmacy? Out of this store?
- TC:** Yes. He had a pharmacy down about where the antique shop is, one of them.
- T:** So down on Front Street?
- TC:** Right on past there, next to the Sea Dog, or not the Sea Dog, the Captain's Gallery.
- T:** Was it Puget Race's old store?
- TC:** No, that was up the street.
- T:** So that was this way. Ok. So that was in 1950?
- TC:** 57. January 1<sup>st</sup> 1957 we came to Coupeville.
- T:** So did you get kind of sucked into this whole thing to get the hospital going from the get-go?
- TC:** The way that started, there were some ladies in Oak Harbor who decided that Whidbey Island should have a **hospital**, so they formed a guild. Wilma Patrick was one of them, and Evelyn Ferrier (possibly mentions another name here? can't make it out. Stop 23) And a girl named Patty Chapman, who's now deceased, and they decided that Whidbey Island should have a hospital and they raised some money. And, ultimately decided that they should hire a planning company or somebody. So they hired Arthur Anderson, I think it was Arthur Anderson, to do a study to see if a hospital on the island was feasible. And they said that yes, it was feasible, it would have to be in the center of the island, which was Coupeville. And, so the ladies in Oak Harbor, of course they were a little bit disappointed, but they didn't let that stop them, they went right ahead.
- So, then we had decided that we had to combine the whole island into one hospital district, so we had an election, to that effect, and at the same time elected three **commissioners**. One from the south end, one from the central part, and one from the north end. And **Jim Hay** was the attorney down in, I think in Langley, was one of the commissioners, and **Ed Adamson**, from Oak Harbor, was the other one, and I was the third one. So we formed then the hospital district- the island wide hospital district.
- T:** So the guy that did the feasibility study, was he from the island?

TC: I don't think so.

T: So he was from outside.

TC: I think it was Arthur Anderson that did it. I'm pretty sure.

T: And so the folks that were in Oak Harbor were really hoping it would be in Oak Harbor?

TC: Yes, of course, Oak Harbor wasn't really a big town in those days.

T: Right, right. And were they able to use the navy facilities?

TC: No.

T: No. I wondered about that, if they were able to use that.

TC: Well, I think they might have been able to, on an emergency basis, or something like that, but not on a regular basis. And at that time, we didn't have all that many doctors on the island anyhow.

T: It sounds like there was just one, in Coupeville. Was **Carskadden** still in practice?

TC: Yes, I think he was- shortly afterwards he retired, and Dr. Bailey and Dr. Goetz came to Oak Harbor.

T: Bailey and Goetz, OK. And then was there any doctor in Coupeville?

TC: Not at that time, no. We had a doctor, he passed away, when he was 47 years old.

T: Oh, was that...

TC: **Paul Bishop**. Yeah, he was a neat guy, too.

T: I've talked to his sons about other things, but I've never talked to them about their dad.

TC: The boys were quite young, most of them, when he passed away; two were in high school, but the others were much younger.

- T: It must have been so hard for his wife.
- TC: It was hard for everybody. He was a typical small town physician... he'd jump in his car in the middle of the night and go anywhere on the island. Not like they do now.
- T: Different times! It's amazing how fast its changed, when you think about it. It wasn't that long ago.
- TC: No. I can't remember if Dr. Mark Gabrielson came to Oak Harbor before David Goetz or shortly after. But then we had three doctors. It was funny too—at that time, Bailey and Goetz were going to Mt. Vernon, to the hospital, and they said they wouldn't come down here.<sup>1</sup>
- T: You mean if a hospital was built?
- TC: Yes, I don't know why.
- T: How strange.
- TC: But they did- as soon as it was built, they changed.
- T: Well, that's a long way. Especially if somebody is in trouble. How big was the Anacortes hospital? Was that a big facility?
- TC: No, it wasn't a big facility. As a matter of fact, when we finally got the hospital open we shared an administrator with them. We shared purchasing and things like that. It worked out pretty good, but then- well, [Dr.] **Mark Gabrielson** got elected to the board and he decided that we should have our own administrator and do our own work, we had a lot of heated discussions about that, but finally we decided that maybe that would be the best. I was still in favor of sharing the facilities- or not facilities, but purchasing and everything. As it turned out, I think he was probably right.
- T: Was this before the hospital actually got going, or once it did?
- TC: Once it got going.
- T: Once it got going. Because it sounds like it was pretty rocky.

<sup>1</sup> An oral history interview with Dr. Robert Goetz is part of the WGH Oral History collection.

TC: It took us a long time to get it going- probably the only way that we could finance a hospital here was **Hill Burton** or Hill Harris, they've changed it to. So we applied for those funds, we had to apply to the state board of pharmacies, or not pharmacies, but state board of health. And, we were on the bottom of the list of course, and they kept us there.

T: Now why was that?

TC: Well, I don't know. They just said that a hospital on the island wasn't feasible, and it would never go— they formed a Hill Harris committee in the state board of health, and I don't remember exactly how they constructed it, but 3 or 4 of the members of that Hill Harris committee were hospital administrators from other hospitals and of course they didn't want to see those funds-

T: Go anywhere! What exactly- I know Hill Burton was federal funding....?

TC: Federal funding yes.

T: And was it based on the size of a community, or the financial need, or both?

TC: Both. So we were fiddling around and we weren't getting anywhere, and the last time we were down in Olympia, I had a big mouth, and I said "All we want to do is get on the list- I mean, we don't expect any funds today or tomorrow," but they wouldn't even do that.

T: You had to go to Olympia for that.

TC: So, we didn't know what to do. We were just totally stymied at that time. So, we got a call from one of the guys that worked on the State Board of Health, I think that's what they called it.

T: I think you're probably right.

TC: He said he'd like to meet with us, sort of clandestinely, so we met with him down in Seattle. And he wouldn't even let us buy him a cup of coffee. He said- "I don't want anybody to think that you're..."

T: Buying him off?

TC: Buying him off! I don't remember his name, and it's not important, because he's long since gone. But he said, "You have one alternative- you can sue them."

**T:** For not getting you on the list?

**TC:** Yes. He said we could file suit against the Board of Health and the Hill Harris Committee. So we decided, maybe that's not a bad idea, so we did. I can't remember the name of the firm we hired, but the attorney was Lou Pritchard, whose still, I think, practicing in Seattle. And he was a big friendly, puppy dog type of a guy, and I don't know, maybe we'd made a mistake. But as it turned out, we didn't. Boy, he went right after them.

**T:** He went for it? Good for him.

**TC:** They had this committee that had to come to this hearing. And he'd ask how far is it from Anacortes to Coupeville, and they didn't even know which ferry you had to take—they didn't know much of anything.

Then I can't remember the other guy—the guy that was chairman of that Hill Harris Committee—the judge asked him to bring all the correspondence that he'd written pertaining to the proposed hospital in Coupeville, so he showed up the next day with one letter. I knew that there were more than that because I'd seen a couple of them that he'd sent up here to the people who he thought were opposed to the hospital. And it turned out that one of the persons he sent it too wasn't opposed so he showed these letters to me. So I told the judge that I think he has more correspondence than that, so the judge said "Mr..." whatever his name was and I can't remember, he said, "I want you to show up or be here tomorrow, with all of the correspondence, and if you don't I'm going to order a bench warrant for your arrest." (Laughter). The next day he showed up with a stack of papers about this high.

**T:** Good for him.

**TC:** But anyhow, as it turned out, the judge found out that we had been... I don't know how you want to put it, he found in our favor. He said that that Hill-Harris Committee that was within the State Board was illegally formed and had to be disbanded. And shortly after that, we got the funds.

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**T:** Was the guy that called you, and met you in Seattle, was he part of that committee?

**TC:** No, he was part of the State Board of Health.

**T:** Okay. So he was on the sidelines.

**TC:** Yes. He had attended some of the meetings. I can't remember his name. I think he ultimately became the head of the State Board of Health. But I'm not sure.

**T:** Wow. That's amazing.

**TC:** Yeah, it was kind of fun. I attended all the meetings. I was the only one that could get away. They held them in the Smith Tower, down in Seattle. It was interesting. I'd never been in anything like it.

**T:** I'll bet it was.

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**T:** So at that time, if I understand this correctly, the north part of the island was part of the Anacortes [Hospital] District. Is that right?

**TC:** No, not really. There was no hospital districts on the island at that time.

**T:** Yes, but in terms of state funding, weren't they thinking that this part of the island was serviced by this area, and this part was...

**TC:** They said Anacortes, yes. But we maintained that there was a possibility that we couldn't get to Anacortes. That's another coincidence I guess. While we were maintaining that, the ferry slip went out down at the south end and a hay truck tipped over on the bridge and for about a day and a half we couldn't get off the island. I don't know if it was exactly that long but it was a fairly lengthy amount of time before they got everything squared away so you could get back.

Doctor Bishop, that was here at that time, and Doctor Purdy who was in Langley, they hospitalized their patients in Everett. That's a long ways.

[Ted mentions how bad the island roads used to be.]

**TC:** That used to be a terrible **road**. There used to be some 90 degree curves on that thing. Out by the end of the airstrip it came up just like this. And then there was a reverse curve farther down and that used to cause a lot of wrecks.

**T:** So, once you got the funds.... Did you get them quickly?

**TC:** Yeah, we got em fairly fast. I think we asked for a levy at the same time.

- T:** So, in 64, the Coupeville site was purchased, the bond issue was approved for purchasing the site and then the hospital commissioners create island-wide hospital service area...
- TC:** Actually, that took place when the people voted to have one hospital district. I negotiated the sale because I knew the guy that owned the property there.<sup>2</sup>
- T:** Meng?
- TC:** Harvey Meng.
- T:** What was he like?
- TC:** Well, he was a nice old guy. Harvey and Mable.
- T:** Was he a farmer?
- TC:** Sort of. I think he was pretty much retired and Mable Meng, his wife, raised some children that were more or less abandoned by their parents. They were good people.
- T:** I've wondered about the Mengs.
- TC:** Yeah, they were good people. The only thing he did that upset me is he told me he wouldn't sell the rest of the property to anybody else. And I said, "Why don't you let us buy it now and then we'll give you a lifetime tenancy." Well, he didn't want to do that. Ultimately he ended up selling it to Doctor Manor and Doctor Purdy. I don't know why but he did.
- T:** So did he own that whole corner?
- TC:** No, he didn't own quite all of it but he owned where the hospital is now and then I don't know if he owned the property behind that they bought later and put in the big parking lot. And then where Ruth is now is where the rest of it was. Where Doctor Ruth's clinic is.
- T:** And was there a barn, a house and a barn? Do you remember what it was like there? Before the hospital went in.

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<sup>2</sup> "\$10,000 paid for site of new hospital." *Whidbey News-Times*, 7-23-1964. This article reported that the hospital commissioners had ordered the H. J. Meng homestead to be purchased. On August 8, 1968, the newspaper reported that excavation of the hospital site had begun with the removal of the "old barn on the Meng property." See "Hospital Start," *Whidbey News-Times*, 8-8-1968.



**TC:** There was a house there but that house was about where the clinic is now. And if there was a barn we tore it down. It was really a pretty smart place to have it because it was in the center of town and it was marginal and it didn't grow anything. Mostly rocks and clay. So it was a good location. We considered three locations. That one, and one out towards Prairie Center and the other one on Parker Road where Lovejoy's Point is. I thought that was kind of nice. But we had a lady there, Miss Hollis, who said, "I don't want to hear sirens coming in here all night long." And she just raised hell so we kind of abandoned that. So we choose the Main Street one. It was only ten thousand bucks.

**T:** That's amazing. Even back then! And then what happened to the Mengs? Did they stay in the community?

**TC:** They stayed there until, I think, Harvey died. Harvey sold the property to Purdy and Knott, Harry Knott [?] and Don Purdy. I think they stayed there, I think they had a lifetime tenancy. They had a son too but I don't know what ever happened to him.<sup>3</sup>

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**T:** So you negotiated the sale for that for the hospital district?

**TC:** Yes.

**T:** And then what was the next step after that?

**TC:** Well, then the bond issue passed and we got the Hill-Harris money, then we went ahead and hired an architect. That was the first step. **Mandeville and Berge** was the name of the firm. I don't know if they're still in business in Seattle or not. They were pretty nice guys. I think they did a good job on the original part of the hospital. Of course, there was some little things. Don Gilligan who was the... what would you call him... he took care of the mechanical... he was our guy. Not clerk of the works. He was hired as the head of the engineering department. He was pretty good at engineering.

**T:** I read in some of the old newspaper clippings that some guy from Langely was up in arms because the hospital was going up here versus down there.

**TC:** Oh yes.

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<sup>3</sup> Harvey and Mable Meng are buried at Sunnyside Cemetery: Harvey Meng 1883-1977; Mable Meng 1897-1978.

**T:** Was there a lot of that?

**TC:** Yeah. And I took most of the guff because Ed Adamson was a farmer up north, and he was difficult to get a hold of. Mr. Hay was always in court or something, nobody could a hold of him. But I was stuck in the drugstore in Coupeville. They knew where I was! [Laughs.]

**T:** “Oh we can go get this guy!”

**TC:** Yeah. I got a lot of phone calls. A lot of phone calls. We had one guy here in town that said “You guys are crazy!” We had decided we’d put in a **coronary care unit**, at least a small one.

**T:** From the get go?

**TC:** Yeah. And he said, “You’re crazy! That’s expensive and you don’t need it and yah-yah-yah-yah.” And the hospital hadn’t been open a month and he had a heart attack and went in there. And he did... he did come in the store and say, “You know, you were right and I was wrong.”

**T:** Well, that’s kind of gratifying you know...

**TC:** Yeah, right!

**T:** I’m glad he lived through it and was able to recognize that.

**TC:** I remember listening to a lot of complaining. Oh yeah, we took a lot of guff. Some of my best friends were dead set against it.

**T:** Because of the taxes?

**TC:** Yes. Mostly they were farmers and they thought the taxes would be outrageous. We didn’t have any money for a long time, the hospital district. We were eligible for 6/10 of a mil or something like that, a small amount. And we finally applied for it and we had a little bit of money. But, for the most part, I paid for a lot of the phone calls and stuff out of my own pocket. I was really enthusiastic about a hospital. I thought we really needed one.

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**T:** Did you have kids?

**TC:** Yeah. I had three, actually we had four. We were raising my wife's nephew.

**T:** So you knew what that was like to have children and not have...

**TC:** Well, for a long time in Coupeville, we hardly had a doctor. After Bishop died we had a doctor named Brobyn. People just didn't like him at all for some reason. So he left and then I think the next one was Doctor Manor. Manor was a good guy, he was popular with the people. But he decided he wanted to specialize so he went back to school, to ENT school. And then down to Portland where he finished his residency, and came back. He's here now but not as a GP. And then Larry Knott was next, he and Don Purdy kind of had a working agreement to take calls for each other and then Larry's wife didn't like small towns so he finally left. He's practicing now in Kirkland and my son still goes to him. My son lives in Bothell. He's a really neat guy, Larry Knott is. And I guess he's the last of the primary care physicians we had. We still don't have one here.

**T:** So everybody else is more....

**TC:** More and more specialists.

**T:** So then you got the funds, you got the architect and you started building. And did it go pretty smoothly up until the point where you were about to open?

**TC:** Oh, pretty smoothly.

**T:** And then you had the funding problem.

**TC:** Yeah, we needed a little more money for equipment so we had a levy for that and that passed easily. And then the hospital guild had something like \$50,000 bucks that they put into it and they bought a lot of stuff. And they still do!

**T:** I was stunned when I read how much money they were able to raise. Just through bake sales and...

**TC:** They used to have **carnivals** and bake sales and... the hospital carnival they had in Oak Harbor was a big deal. But the **hospital guilds**, they really, I mean they... without the hospital guilds, the hospital wouldn't be as good as it is today in my opinion. Because they really did a lot of work and they still are. They still have the ladies that volunteer up at the hospital.

**T:** I was talking to one the other day, I was up there, her last name is Loers, from Oak Harbor...

**TC:** Oh yes, I know Mrs. Loers.

**T:** And I said, "How long you been doing this." And she said, "Oh not very long, just since the early 80s." And I went, "Well, that's a long time." And then she goes, "But before that I was a member of the Oak Harbor guild from the late 50s."

**TC:** I can't remember all the ladies that were in there but I remember Wilma [Patrick] and Evelyn Koetje, Evelyn Farrier now, Patty Chapman, they were really the workers. Really gung-ho on the thing.

As I said, we shared an **administrator** [with Island Hospital in Anacortes], his name was Jerry Koontz. And then he decided to go somewhere else.

**T:** Was he still jointly administering?

**TC:** Yes. Then we decided we should hire a new administrator and the Whidbey Island board got together and we had a big search all over the country. And we hired a guy that was a total zero and I can't remember his name. And we went through all this money to search the country to get this hospital administrator. And that's about the time that Doctor Gabrielson came on the board and after a lot of discussions we decided to go it alone and that's when we hired Bob Zylstra.<sup>4</sup>

**T:** Had he had experience in that field?

**TC:** Bob was working. . . I think he was in accounts receivable in Anacortes. And then when Jerry Koontz came, Bob became assistant administrator and spent a lot of time here too. So he was the logical choice. We should have done that the first time and we wouldn't have wasted all that money.

**T:** Well, that old hindsight is better than foresight.

**TC:** That's true.

**T:** So he came down here then?

**TC:** Yes. And he stayed for a long time. He just retired a year or so ago. Bob's a good guy. He did a good job.

<sup>4</sup> When Ted says, "go it alone" he is referring to Whidbey General severing the shared services concept of a joint administrator with Island Hospital in Anacortes.

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**T:** And how long were you a **hospital commissioner** then?

**TC:** I think fourteen years but I'm not sure. I quit because, at that time he was my son-in-law, he's my ex-son-in-law now, he had the grocery store...

**T:** In Coupeville?

**TC:** Yes. The building where the county is occupying now. He was selling a lot of stuff to the hospital. A lot of groceries. And I decided that sure as heck somebody's going to say it's a conflict of interest there so I resigned. And that's when **Edwin Sherman** came on board. I talked him into it.

**T:** You twisted Edwin's arm?

**TC:** Yes. Edwin was a good friend. Edwin was smart. He did a great job as far as I'm concerned.

**T:** I really regret that I never got a chance to [interview him.] He was on the list of people to interview... I've done the oral history program for Ebey's Landing Reserve since 95 and he was on the list. But then we heard that he was sick...

**TC:** He was one of the nicest guys that I've ever known.

**T:** He did a lot. He was on the cemetery....

**TC:** He ran that for a long time. He was on the hospital board, he was on the bank board, Whidbey Island Bank. Edwin was a great guy.

**T:** It sounds like he was really good at building a consensus.

**TC:** Well... he was such an outgoing and such a friendly guy and completely and totally honest. And people knew that so they'd listen to him. He was a good guy.

**T:** So then... let's see.... Were you also working as a **pharmacist** in the hospital?

**TC:** Yes. They had to have a consulting pharmacist and so I was the closest. So I did that for a long time. I'd get up and go to the hospital at 7:00 in the morning and stay there till 9:00. And then get out and open the store and stay there till 7:00 so that was a long day. Then, when I finally sold the drugstore, they decided that they should have a full-time pharmacist so then I took that job. And then I hired another

pharmacist so we ran that for a long time. Until [19]87.

**T:** And what kind of changes did you see over that time period?

**TC:** Oh all kinds of them. We went from just a, pharmacy-wise, we went from just more or less dispensing pills to a full-time pharmacy. We did all the IV solutions. We did the whole thing.

**T:** So you would actually mix them?

**TC:** Yes. We enlarged the pharmacy downstairs and we put in the flow hood, the whole thing.

**T:** A what?

**TC:** A Lamar flow hood. I don't want to say purifies but...

## **END OF SIDE A**

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## **SIDE B**

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**T:** The environment?

**TC:** Well, sort of. You'd have to always clean it with alcohol before we started. We did everything. We did total formulation and we did all the IV solutions. Except for outpatient, we didn't do outpatient pharmacy.

**T:** You mean so if people were leaving and they needed a prescription for codeine or something....

**TC:** Yeah, we sent them to the drugstore. We didn't do that. So we had just another pharmacist and myself and alternated. We worked 12 hours on and then we were off a day, and then the next time we worked 12. And we split the weekends. But it was fun, I enjoyed it because it was all together different than a retail pharmacy. Learned a lot of things. I'd never mixed an IV solution in my life except a little bit in the Navy.

**T:** Were you in the Navy during WWII?

**TC:** Yes.

**T:** Is that where you first got exposed to...?

**TC:** No. I had one year at the University of Washington before the war started. Or almost a year. And I was going to be a pharmacist. I worked in a pharmacy when I was in high school.

**T:** Where was that?

**TC:** Up in Morton.

**T:** Mount Rainier?

**TC:** Towards Mount Rainier.

**T:** Is that where you were raised?

**TC:** No, I just went to high school there. My dad was a railway engineer in the logging camps. We moved quite a bit. We ended up there. I went the last three years of high school there.

**T:** Where were you born?

**TC:** Snoqualamie.

**T:** So you just went from lumber camp to lumber camp... that type of thing?

**TC:** First we were at Redmond at the Silar [SP?] Logging Company which was a pretty good sized camp. But then the Depression came along and they closed the camp and then... we lived there until about 1936 I guess. But we were pretty lucky. We had a place for a garden and we got by all right. They didn't charge any rent because the camp was shut down and the water was free. All you had to pay was the light bill. But anyhow, then my dad got a job as an assistant engineer on a yacht. And that was okay but it didn't pay great. And it was only in the summertime. About six months out of the year. And then he got a job at Mineral, Washington and we moved, first from Redmond to Seattle, and from Seattle to Elbe, and from Elbe to Mineral, and from Mineral to Morton. And then ultimately he finally got a job running a switch engine for the city of Tacoma down on the tide flats and that's where he was for several years until he retired. But I never lived in Tacoma. I had enlisted in the Navy.

**T:** Where did you serve in the Navy?

**TC:** In the South Pacific.

**T:** Were you like a medic?

**TC:** Yes. I was a pharmacist's mate.

**T:** Were you actually out in action?

**TC:** No. We were advanced base personnel. We landed after the Marines when they more or less had the island secured. So I didn't see any big action or anything. A few air raids but outside of that....

**T:** And were you there throughout the duration of the war?

**TC:** Yes.

**T:** Overseas?

**TC:** Well, no, I came back and when I came back to Officer's Candidate School and thought I was going to be in the medical but instead of that they put me into engineering. And I had absolutely no aptitude in engineering so I got out of that and went back to the fleet and I was in Pearl Harbor then.

**T:** And then you went back to school?

**TC:** I went back to school after I got out of there.

**T:** Did you know **Herman Wanamaker**? Was he still here?

**TC:** Real well.

**T:** Because he went to the U. W. to pharmacy school.

**TC:** Yes, him and Margaret I knew real well.

**T:** I've always wondered why he never became a pharmacist after getting his degree.

**TC:** He didn't like inside. He wanted to be outside. He was a neat little guy. I think they had a seventy-fifth wedding anniversary. I don't know... was it 75? I don't

<sup>5</sup> Herman Wanamaker, 1875-1976; Margaret Wanamaker, 1885-1979.



know, long time, I know that. He was a really neat guy.<sup>5</sup>

I hunted ducks with him a couple of times. Down at Crockett Lake. Stand out here in the rain and the wind blowing and he had his pipe going. I was freezing to death and he just .... [laughs.]

**T:** “This is great!” Yes, him and then **Puget Race**.

**TC:** I didn’t know Puget but I worked for **Harry**, his son.

**T:** You did! Where?

**TC:** In Mount Vernon.

**T:** Did Harry have a pharmacy up there?

**TC:** For a while.

**T:** Was that after he came down from Alaska?

**TC:** Yes.

**T:** I didn’t know that.

**TC:** I went to Mount Vernon first when I graduated and I worked for Paul Wells. And it was a good job and a good store but then I got a chance to go back to my home town, go back to Morton, for fifty dollars a month more. And I decided, “Geez, this will be the greatest thing since penicillin to go back to your home town!” But it didn’t work out that way. Never does I guess. And so then I went back to Mount Vernon. I got a call from the guy across the street from Wells Drug, it was Murray Drug. And I got a call and he said “I’ll pay you a little more. I’ll pay your moving and all that.” So I went back to Mount Vernon. And I worked for Hal and I liked that. He was a really neat guy. Had a good job. And then all of a sudden, what was it... two days before Christmas, he disappeared. Nobody knew where he was at. So I ran the store until they finally... let’s see, how did that work? They sold it to Harry Race and then I worked for him.<sup>6</sup> But they found Hal, this was in December and they found him in August. He’d fallen in the river. He had a boat he kept on the Skagit. If the river would rise or come up he’d go up there and he had a pole and he’d push his boat out into the stream. And evidently either the pole slipped off or it broke or something and he fell in the river. He was a neat

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<sup>5</sup> Harry Race, 1891-1962. Harry was the son of Puget and Hattie Race. Puget Race [1864-1936] was Coupeville’s longest, and most renowned pharmacist.

guy. I liked him real well.

**T:** What was his last name?

**TC:** Murray. Hal Murray.

**T:** What part of Mount Vernon was that in? Was it up by the hospital there?

**TC:** No. It was downtown Mount Vernon. I think the Hugo Helmer store is where Wells used to be and then we were kitty-corner across the street. It used to be the Palace Café was over there and the hotel.

**T:** So you worked for Harry. Harry sounds like he was a character.

**TC:** [Nods.]

**T:** I've talked to his niece.

**TC:** Yeah, Harry was a character all right. But he was a good guy. He was good to me. I have no complaints about working for Harry. Except ultimately he sold the store back to Mrs. Murray, Lillian Murray, Hal's wife. And a guy I went to school with, Dave Palmer, they bought it as partners. And I could see there was no future there. So I quit. And I got a call from a man up.... This has nothing to do with the hospital...

**T:** That's okay!

**TC:** Up at Sedro-Woolley. And he offered me a job that was so good that I thought there must be something wrong so I turned it down. Turned out, it wasn't but anyhow... then I went to work back at Mount Vernon at Thriftway Drug which was down the street by the theater. The Lido I think.

**T:** That's gone now.

**TC:** And stayed there until we bought the store in Coupeville.

**T:** Did you know a pharmacist named Powers in Burlington?

**TC:** I knew who he was. That was kind of in downtown Burlington. And then Hannafords had a store in Burlington too.

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**T:** So when you first came to Coupeville, I guess people then went to Oak Harbor for medical care?

**TC:** Yes. Bailey and Goetz and then John Teays came. And he worked with Doctor Bailey and Doctor Goetz for a while, then he went out on his own. Then he ultimately built a clinic and Rudy Knatt [SP?] came and Warren Howe [SP?] And they had three doctors in that clinic.

**T:** That was in Oak Harbor?

**TC:** Yes.

**T:** Was **Polly Harpole** still around when you came?

**TC:** Yes. I had two kids born at her [maternity home.]

**T:** Did you really? What was that like?

**TC:** It was just a house where they had a couple of rooms and they had a delivery room. My two boys were both born there. Matter of fact, Tim was the last one born there. When Doctor Bishop died, Polly closed that.

**T:** Did she close it because he had died?

**TC:** Well, she was getting old but then I think she thought, she decided that since there was no doctor there and there was a maternity home already in Oak Harbor that the doctors there sent their [patients to].... I can't remember her name....

**T:** Was that Bultmans?

**TC:** Bultmans, that's right. So Polly closed hers.

**T:** What year was your son born?

**TC:** 62, my last one was born in 62. The first one was born in 58. Ted was born in 58, Tim was born in 62.

**T:** And so he was the last one?

**TC:** He was the last one. He was ten days old when **Doctor Bishop** died. That was a

real traumatic thing for us because number 1, he was a good friend, and number 2 he was taking care of our family.

**T:** Did Polly stay in the community then after that happened?

**TC:** She died not too long after that.<sup>7</sup> I think she still lived in the same house but she just closed the nursing.

**T:** So she lived there too?

**TC:** She lived there too.

**T:** Did she cook the meals for the women that came or did she have somebody come in and do that?

**TC:** She had a helper. When Tim was born... what was her name... I think she's still alive. Her husband was the manager of the Game Farm at that time. Her son still lives in Oak Harbor. Hedstrom. Al Hedstrom is his name. Al of course is dead, but his wife is still alive. And she's been remarried.

**T:** I heard that if, God forbid, you didn't eat all the food on the tray that Polly brought in, she read you the riot act!

**TC:** And she was a *big* lady! And she had a *big* appetite. And I know Gloria [my wife] had trouble too [eating all the food.] I mean they had lamb chops or something, I remember that as an example, and there was three of these lamb chops plus all the other stuff! But she treated her patients like queens. They got all kinds of attention, all kinds of service.

**T:** How long did your wife stay there after the baby?

**TC:** About three days I think. Maxine is Mrs. Hedstrom's name. The lady that worked there was Maxine Hedstrom. She remarried and she lives in Oak Harbor.

**T:** So would you deliver drugs for Polly? If she needed drugs, did you serve that need for her?

**TC:** Yes, from the store. Drugs and toilet paper, and boy, if you didn't get it up there on time you heard about it too! We delivered to her, yeah. She didn't pull any punches! Polly. She let you know what was going on!

<sup>7</sup> Dr. Paul Bishop died March 3, 1962; Polly Harpole died on September 23, 1962.

**T:** She'd have these teas for raising funds to send to Children's Orthopedic and stuff.

**TC:** She did! That was a big deal for a long time around here. They had **Orthopedic Guilds** too here in Coupeville.

**T:** To support that particular hospital?

**TC:** Yes. Children's Orthopedic.

**T:** And was that because they felt it served their interests? Or was it more of a charity.

**TC:** No... I think it was more of a children's thing. Kids from here, some of the kids went to the Orthopedic. We used to have Orthopedic Calendars. We used to sell those in the store I know.

**T:** So, as you wound down your career at the hospital as a pharmacist, do any issues come to mind that the hospital was having to deal with during that era, after it opened, that were really difficult ones?

**TC:** Yeah. I hate to mention it. I probably shouldn't. I was off the board and Edwin was on and they had a doctor that pulled the plug on a patient and he really shouldn't have I guess. And they had a big toodle about that. Ultimately I think he lost his license. Edwin Sherman used to cuss me, he said, "You must have known something like that was going to happen. You got out!"

**T:** "Yes, I timed it just right didn't I?" I did read about a lawsuit, there was one about a baby that died, or had brain damage or something like that...

**TC:** I remember that one. I don't think that happened when I was on the board.

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**TC:** Doctor Bishop, he had kids born at Harpoles and he lost a child at Pollys.

**T:** Was he there?

**TC:** Yes. Somehow the cord got entangled around the baby's neck or something and strangled. I can't remember when that was. I can't remember how many kids he had, he had a bunch of them.

**T:** Nine or ten.

**TC:** They were all boys except one, and the one that died at birth was a girl. But then they did have another one [girl.] One of them's a doctor in Mount Vernon. Lyle Bishop. He's a pediatrician in Mount Vernon. What's the kid that went to school with my son. They were friends. The kid that's the coroner.

**T:** Robert.

**TC:** Robert. He asked, "What was my Dad like? I never even knew him." He's a lot like his dad. We took our animals over there when he was still practicing as a vet and he treated his animals like his dad used to treat the patients here. Just a real neat guy. I told him his dad was just a great guy. Wild man on the highway though!

**T:** I've heard Polly was the same way.

**TC:** Yeah. She was. I'd ridden with Paul a few times. That was an experience. He hated the deer. I don't know how many he hit.

**T:** How long had he been here before he died?

**TC:** He was here when we came. And I don't know exactly how long he practiced in Coupeville. Before that, there was a **Doctor Chaffee**. He went to Africa or somewhere as a missionary. And then he came back when Bishop was still alive and opened a little office in Coupeville but he didn't stay very long. He went somewhere else. I think he went back to the missionary.

**T:** Financially, could the town support more than one doctor do you think?

**TC:** It would have been difficult. Bishop had a tremendous practice but that was because everybody from here to Langley knew him. Doctor Purdy was in Langley. He left too finally.

**T:** So there was a clinic in Langely?

**TC:** A doctor's office.

**T:** And then there was one in Oak Harbor?

**TC:** No, there was two in Oak Harbor. Well, sort of. You had Bailey and Goetz and then Gabrielson.

**T:** And were they all separate clinics?

**TC:** They were separate clinics. They're all combined now.

**T:** Where was Paul Bishop's office?

**TC:** Do you know where the liquor store is? I think its the next building down.

**T:** So right on Front Street there.

**TC:** Yes. And we had the store right across the street. Then there was a grocery store on the corner where Mariner's Court is. Lindsey's Grocery. And Fred Moore had the building where the attorneys are now. He had a hardware store in there.<sup>8</sup> And then right across the street, where the big lot is now, where they're going to build that motel or whatever they're going to build now, he rented that and used that as a lumber yard.<sup>9</sup> And the tavern was there, and the little restaurant was there next to it.

So everything was down there in those days. And then they had a fire in Fred's place and it burned up. So he decided he wasn't going to be in business anymore so he closed that up. And then Lindseys decided they were getting too old to operate the grocery store. So they closed that up. And Warren Lindsey, their son, turned it into kind of a marina and he repaired outboard motors. He was a real character. If you didn't buy your things from him, he wouldn't work on it. But anyhow, they closed up. Then the Post Office moved. And the Post Office used to be where the liquor store is, or was, and it moved up and left us pretty much high and dry down on Front Street. So that's when they built the buildings where we had the store up across from Whidbey Island Bank.

**T:** Oh. So did you build that building?

**TC:** No. We rented it for ten years, five years, ten? Then we ultimately bought the building. That was a big headache.

**T:** Was that like the early 60s when that happened?

**TC:** Yeah. 62, 63, somewhere along in there.

**T:** Okay. So in that period, there was a real kind of emptying out of the downtown area.

<sup>8</sup> Moore's Hardware was in the Glenwood Hotel at the corner of Main and Front.

<sup>9</sup> This new structure is going up as of early 2000 on the southeast corner of Grace and Front Streets.

**TC:** Yeah. Really! The building where we were, we could've bought for ten thousand dollars but who the hell wants that? Why would anybody want an old building down there? [Laughs.]

**T:** Yes, before the historic....

**TC:** Yeah, before all that happened.

**T:** When you were working in the hospital, in the pharmacy, is that the way hospitals still do it now? Do they mix their own IV solutions and everything?

**TC:** Yes.

**T:** They don't come pre-packaged from some place?

**TC:** No. Of course they're all different. One might have 20 milligrams of potassium chlorate, and another one only 10... there's no real standard except for the basic IV solutions like your D5W and your sodium chloride and all your different basic solutions. But we add everything to those. And then the Total Parental Nutrition that they use when people can't eat. That comes in two separate things. One protein and then we added vitamins and all kinds of stuff to it.

**T:** Shat did you call it?

**TC:** Total Parental Nutrition. It's all IV solutions.

**T:** So you mix all that up too?

**TC:** Yes. It's all mixed. We used to mix everything at night so they had enough to get them by until morning.

[Tape is momentarily shut off.]

**T:** So you retired in [19]87?

**TC:** 87.

**T:** What are your thoughts on looking back over what you helped create?

**TC:** I'm glad its there! The things that we predicted would happen, did happen. We got a lot more physicians on the island, a lot of specialties that we didn't have. There



was no surgeons on the island or anything like that when we first opened. Dr. Bailey did a lot of surgery but I don't think he was a board-certified surgeon like the guys are now. He did his surgeries in Mount Vernon in those days. And then, when the hospital opened here, he came down here. But then... like, we have four internists now I think and three orthopedic surgeons and we didn't have any pediatrics... they're in Oak Harbor now but they were here for a while. Jane Mays and her partner.

**T:** So pediatrics has gone to Oak Harbor?

**TC:** Yes. I don't blame them because that's where most of the peds are. Navy families. Coupeville has more, or less, an older population.

**T:** Are there general practitioners?

**TC:** Not in Coupeville. We don't have any primary care physicians here. That's one thing I think we really do need. Two in Freeland. Doctor O'Neil and she just got a new partner.

**T:** What do you think about the new direction the hospital talks about going, the **Planetree Model**? Have you read about that or heard about it?

**TC:** I don't think much of it. I can't see how it could be very practical. I guess the people that do it down in Oregon somewhere, I guess they think its okay. But to me it's not really hospital oriented. If I was a patient in the hospital, I wouldn't want my family hanging around there all day long. I just don't think its a very practical thing. I might be all wrong. But that's my opinion. I think it's a crock.

I'm not against the modern trend towards treating the whole picture, that's okay. But I just don't think it has anyplace in a hospital where there's surgery recoveries and all that. Of course, that's changed too. Most of its outpatient now. My daughter is a surgical nurse at the hospital.

**T:** Here?

**TC:** Yes. She's the senior person there now I think.

**T:** It seems like it's changed profoundly in the last decade.

**TC:** Yes. They do a lot more surgeries but they're not hospitalized as long so the hospital census doesn't seem to go up much like when we used to have a whole surgical side and recoveries from surgery. You still have it but now they do so much outpatient stuff.

**T:** Does the hospital census play an important role in terms of how the hospital functions in terms of planning and...?

**TC:** I think so.

**T:** Do they look at the numbers a lot?

**TC:** They look at the numbers because the census determines a lot of their income, how many patients they have. But there again, they do so much outpatient surgery that that's really grown. So you can't really say that the census is lower or not as good as it used to be because so much of that is done on an outpatient basis. They're there for maybe one day. Like hernias and tonsillectomies.

### **END OF SIDE B**

### **END OF INTERVIEW WITH TED CHRISTENSEN**

**@ Theresa L. Trebon, 2-2000; edited August 2001**