

Bill Curtin

SR 3992, Oral History, by Greta K. Smith

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CURTIN: William "Bill" Craib Curtin

GS: Greta K. Smith

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Session 1, Part 1 *2018 September 24*

GS: Alright, today is September 24th, 2018. I'm here with Bill Curtin at his home in Portland, Oregon and this is our first interview. My name is Greta Smith, oral historian for the Oregon Historical Society. Good afternoon

CURTIN: Good afternoon.

GS: If you would just start by giving your full name and date of birth.

CURTIN: Well, William (I prefer to go by Bill) William Curtin. C-U-R-T-I-N. April 24th, 1942.

GS: Great, and your middle name?

CURTIN: Craib.

GS: C-R-

CURTIN: C-R-A-I-B. It's a family surname on my mother's side.

GS: Great, thank you. And you were born here in Portland, Oregon?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Where did you grow up?

CURTIN: I grew up in the Laurelhurst neighborhood. In Northeast Portland, on the northeast side of that community. 3342 NE Flanders. Flanders and Floral.

GS: Is that house still there?

CURTIN: Yes, it is.

GS: So, let's talk a bit about your family history. Who all lived in the house you grew up in?

CURTIN: I had my father, Victor Aloysius Curtin, who was a Portland Police Officer; and my mother who was a stay at home mom (as all women were in those days), and I had a younger sister who was five years younger than I, Sarah Curtin.

GS: And did you have other family in town as well?

CURTIN: Yes. I had many cousins, some who lived in the neighborhood where I grew up. And there were family out in Vancouver on my father's side where the Curtin family had homesteaded in 1860, actually, and ran a dairy farm there for many generations, and there were people out there. So, most of us were concentrated in the Portland Metropolitan area.

GS: And you had grandparents?

CURTIN: I had two grandmothers who were still alive. My father's mother, Honora Curtin, and mother's mother, who was Ethel Brown.

GS: What is your family heritage?

CURTIN: Irish mostly. And about a quarter Scotch on my mother's side. My father was all Irish.

GS: So, you mentioned that your mother was a stay at home mom. And tell me about what your father did for work?

CURTIN: He was a police officer with Portland Police Bureau. He went in in 1936. He wasn't looking for a job in police work, but he had been a football player at Oregon State College and was a very good football player. And the Portland Police chief (and it was right after the Depression, he graduated in 1933 and couldn't get a job) wanted to start a football team and was recruiting ex-football players from Oregon — Oregon State and the University of Portland. And that's how he got his job and he stayed there for 29 years.

GS: He got his job through football? With the Portland Police Department? That is really interesting.

CURTIN: Yes. A different era. And they never played a game. But there's a picture in the *Oregonian*, I have it somewhere, of these guys who were all football players who later became kind of the first college-educated police bureau. They were all — they all went up in the lieutenants and captains, etc., in the police bureau in the 1950s and part of the 1960s.

GS: So, tell me about the role of religion in your family. Where did you go to church?

CURTIN: We went to All Saints Catholic Church at the 39th and Glisan. And I came from Irish Catholic heritage. The church was very significant and important to the Irish people. They were all immigrants and the church kind of insulated them from a lot of the anti-Irish sort of stuff that went on in the 1920s, and earlier than that. So, the church was not only kind of, it was just a community where they got a lot of – the priests were very good at keeping that solidarity with their Irish heritage. So, it was always promoted to us that way.

GS: And I remember you talking about one of your Grandmothers, I think it was Honora. She remembered this Irish...

CURTIN: Yes. And my father actually suffered from it some too, when he was a young man. But yes, she was born in, I think, in 1884 and she actually married (this is a weird thing) she actually married her first cousin, you know. That was my (I never met him) my grandfather.

And she raised her family in South East Portland and she often talked about the anti-Catholic sentiment in a general, vague way. She mentioned the 1928 election when Al Smith, a Catholic Democratic candidate for president lost to Herbert Hoover because of his Catholicism. And then she was weeping the day John Kennedy was elected President of the United States. And she said, "We've finally arrived."

I remember those discussions with her, and I didn't pay – I would like to have her back to talk more about that.

And then my father (who I said was a great athlete) went to Franklin High School. And he got cut from the baseball team (which I'm sure he could have made) because he was a Papist. The coach was a member of the Masons or Ku Klux Klan or something.

GS: Really?

CURTIN: Yes. In the late 1920s.

GS: Here in Portland?

CURTIN: Yes. My father then went on to the Police Bureau where there was a Klan element and a fascist, or a Masonic, element. And a Catholic had never been promoted to sergeant, and he was the first Catholic promoted to sergeant in 1942. So, he would talk about these things.

GS: So, what he did have to say that you remember about the Klan activity in the Portland Police Bureau?

CURTIN: Well, he never talked about the Klan, he talked about the Masons. But I read the book, that history of Portland by E. Kimbark MacColl and he has pictures of 1924 of the Klan element in the police bureau all dressed up with Christmas packages to deliver to people and they were all members of the Ku Klux Klan. And then there was so much anti-Catholic sentiment (you can look this up too) in 1923 the governor was a member of the Masons and the Masons were in control of the Oregon Supreme Court. And there was a bill in the Legislature to require all young people to attend a government-run school. And they closed down the – what essentially it did, is close down the Catholic school system in 1923. And the archdiocese had to close all its schools. The U.S. Supreme Court (it's a pretty famous decision) overruled the Oregon Supreme Court a couple years later, so the archdiocese got to have their schools back.

GS: So, they were closed for a couple years then?

CURTIN: Yeah, pending the outcome of this Supreme Court ruling.

GS: Was your family very political and, if so, what were their political leanings?

CURTIN: Yeah. Roosevelt Democrats.

GS: Do you remember them talking about politics much and what kind of things?

CURTIN: Yes, particularly my dad. He was a Democrat through and through. My mother was too but she didn't talk about it as much. My father was one of the founding members of the Portland Police Association, the union, and it started in 1942. So, he was involved in all that.

GS: Well, this goes into my next question. So, All Saints was Father Tobin's parish, and I know he was really involved in unions. And you had mentioned before about your father, with the Portland Police Association, and that he was quite fond of Father Tobin. So, what's the story there?

CURTIN: Yes, well I think Father Tobin helped them, helped those police officers get their union established. I'm just guessing. Because he was very fond of Father Tobin, thought he was brilliant and so I think he had some connections to him through that. He never talked to me about it personally. He grew weary of being in the police bureau after a while [*chuckles*], so he didn't go on and on about it. Although he loved being out in the neighborhoods and working with people, but he was not a big macho [*laughingly*] kind of guy. He wasn't catching bad guys. He was trying to help people get through the night.

GS: I would like to hear if you have memories of Father Tobin, in particular.

CURTIN: Yes, I do. And he encouraged me to — you said you wanted to talk about the seminary. He was always kind of encouraging me to go to the high school seminary. I think he saw something in me that would be a good priest. And he was always very hard to approach. So, I just would...

But I was attracted to the priesthood. I was an altar boy and the parish had – Father Tobin was very radical in his worship practices and, you know, moved the altar to face the people in 1957, which was a real radical move in the Catholic Church.

GS: Because they used to face...

CURTIN: Yeah, the wall. And he'd been trying to get that for years. And there was dialogue during the services between the congregation and the priest, which was radical then too. You know, it was always these devout quiet – and he had music at all of his services. And the church, that All Saints Church, was a real important part of our life as a family. Although my dad, I told you later he had a drinking problem? Yeah. He kind of bowed out for a few years and then he came back finally. But you know, he got distracted from all that.

GS: You mentioned this about Father Tobin as well.

CURTIN: Yes, yes. And yeah, I don't know if I should...

GS: That's fine.

CURTIN: Well, no, I mean here's what I – here's an Irish Catholic guy, very devoted to the church and to the priesthood. Tobin would get picked up once in a while driving drunk and end up in jail. And my father (who by then had been sober for a number of years) the phone would ring at our house at night and the jail would be calling, because dad had an arrangement with the jail that if Tobin ever came in there he was going to go down and get him and take him home [*chuckles*]. So, that's the kind of cop he was. Anyway, that was how Irish people treated the church and that's why now the church is having a lot of trouble, I think. Because they covered everything up, you know.

GS: Right. And did you work with Father Tobin when you became a priest yourself?

CURTIN: No, I didn't. Tobin was at the end of his career when I was ordained and he lasted a couple years more, and then he was getting sick. Tobin would always vacation in Rome because he was a big hob nob with all the Vatican and all that stuff. So, he would go back and – in fact, he missed my ordination because he was in Rome. And then he came home, and he retired certainly after I was ordained. Although, I heard that he wanted me to come to his church and work. He wanted me to come back to All Saints and work, which probably isn't a good idea if you grew up there as a little kid. And some other, one of the more elderly priests told me that. I thought that was maybe a rumor something. But I didn't, I went to St. Charles, you know.

GS: Right. An interesting and important side note, I think, is something you told me during your pre-interview. So, your father was involved in some of the cleanup and mitigation efforts after the Vanport flood?

CURTIN: Well I think the whole police bureau was. That was, you know, just a real emergency. I don't know if he was involved in – I think he was around that a lot. He was a sergeant in the Police Bureau, and he probably supervised officers. And then there were all of these people streaming into North Portland, up Interstate Ave, so there had to be...

GS: And that's where he worked, right?

CURTIN: Yeah. He was in the Northeast, North Portland, area most of his career in the uniform part of the Police Bureau.

GS: I guess I remember, mostly from your pre-interview, you talking about how the Vanport Flood affected the population in Albina.

CURTIN: Yeah. And I really didn't learn that till later. But my father told me. My father drove me around there to see it, you know, when he wasn't working. And there were some relatives, Curtin relatives, that were involved too who came out of Vanport.

GS: Who lived there?

CURTIN: And I think my uncle was housing some of them in his home, my father's uncle. So, I remember hearing that. But, anyway, I never met them or anything.

GS: So, tell me more about your father's work, especially as it relates to Albina?

CURTIN: Well, he got promoted in 1942 to sergeant, as I told you, and there was a huge migration — and this is already (I read this thing on Black Panthers this morning) mentioned in the Oregon Historical Society stuff [*Editor's note: the Oregon Historical Quarterly Fall 2018*] of African Americans to Portland during World War II to work on shipbuilding in Swan Island.

So, my father during World War II was the sergeant down in the Albina community, which, in those days, was down where the Memorial Coliseum is now and it was south of what we would now call the Albina community. And he would tell stories about, you know, how half the police department was gone to the war. And he tried to go, but he ruined his knee in football and they wouldn't take him. So, he stayed home, and he supervised the night shift down in that Albina community. And he said, you know, people had a lot of money and they had a lot of time when they weren't [*laughingly*] building ships. There was a lot of partying and he enjoyed — I could tell he enjoyed being kind of around that stuff. But there would be problems for the police in the midst of all that.

And then he talked about deputizing some responsible African American guys and giving them guns to kind of help the police. And then he told the story of two of them getting into an argument one night in some parking lot somewhere and having kind of a shoot-out with the guns, and one of them died. And so, I mean, he questioned that, you

know, “Maybe we shouldn’t give them guns.” I don’t know how he resolved that, but he said you could never tell what was going to happen. And then he said there was prostitution all over the place.

I said, “Well, what’d you do about that?”

He said, “Well, I’d go into the police station, get my overcoat and go down there and start talking, and then I’d have about three or four of them just like that.” [*chuckles*]

And, so there were funny – I used to just laugh at these stories because he would, he loved the Black community, and he liked working there. So, that’s how I kind of got interested in – when I was studying in the seminary, you know, “I’d like to work in the Black community someday and be a priest.” And so, as soon as I got out of the seminary, I was at St. Charles for a few years and Immaculate Heart opened up. I petitioned to go, and they sent me there.

GS: I’m going to pause for just one second here.

CURTIN: Okay.

[End of Session 1, Part1]

Session 1, Part 2
24 September 2018

GS: This is part two of interview one. We were talking about your father's work in Albina and how it helped form your interest for when you ended up going into the priesthood. And one thing I was interested in asking you about, as far as your father's work, is that I remember you saying something about how there was kind of a different way of policing after World War II that looked differently than later years. Kind of a more interactive form of policing.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Could you speak to that a little bit?

CURTIN: Well, my father, he wanted neighborhoods and communities to thrive and he saw it as his job to be the guardian of that. And it didn't mean that you were always going to enforce some law and arrest somebody. It meant that you would counsel people, and, in fact, you would use measures that would inhibit the need to arrest people. You would get them on their way or move them out of a situation and try and use the right to enforce the law as a tool, along with many other tools, to enhance the life the community.

Actually, the new chief of police talks that way now. They're trying to get back to that and it's called community policing. The old guys never understood it that way, they just always policed that way.

And so, my father for example, he was – he later became a lieutenant and for many years he was in charge of that North. He was in charge of each precinct, which included that Albina community. And I remember him telling me one time that he – and he worked graveyard shift. He worked 11 at night to 8 in the morning. He would put on his uniform about twice a month, with all of its gold piping and lieutenant stuff and go to all these club owners (nightclub owners) and talk to them, because they all had illegal activities going on inside, after hours drinking, and some of them were selling drugs, some of them had

gambling going on after business hours, or illegal gambling going on, card games, pinball machines; all the stuff the state of Oregon does now. And he would tell them, "I'm going to look the other way when we go by. But if there starts being shootings and cuttings and we start having to put people in ambulances and things, we're going to come down and start enforcing these things and clean that out." So, I remember hearing that.

And then one time at Immaculate Heart I was up saying mass in front of the altar, and my father was in the back hugging this Black guy who was in our parish, Bill Denton. And afterwards, at coffee, I said "So, I see you know my father."

And he said "Yeah, your father and I had an arrangement." [*laughs*]

So, he was one of those guys. He said he had poker games going on at night at some club that he ran. So, dad would come by every so often and visit with them and talk about those things.

GS: And that would've been during...

CURTIN: That would have been the late 1950s, early 1960s. My father retired in 1965.

GS: Okay. And he worked in – did he work in Albina for most of his career as a police man?

CURTIN: He started out in South East Portland, in the Italian community, before World War II. But after World War II started he went up there. He would often get calls at home from other detectives because he knew everybody in the black community. He had a nick name of "Sergeant Vic." They all called him that. And I would hear that too when I went down there "Oh, you're Sergeant Vic's son!"

I would say "Yeah."

"Oh, you're all right then."

And there were some people that the cops would, you know, get involved with and they'd say, "I'll talk to Sergeant Vic, but I'm not talking to you." And so, they'd call dad and —.

I had an early morning *Oregonian* route and the papers would be late sometimes, so dad would pick me up and drive me around with him.

GS: How old were you?

CURTIN: Well, paper route — I was probably in grade school, late grade school sometime you know—kind of the middle school years. But not very often. And he'd drive me around in his police car and show me around. And I enjoyed it.

I remember him driving showing me Lloyd Center when they were building it. He said, "This is going to be something! They're going to have 106 stores here," and all this stuff. He thought it was, you know, that was just a big change that was going to happen in Portland.

And on Easter morning we'd go to church at All Saints. My cousins lived out on Cleveland and Ainsworth, so we would drive through the Albina community because my dad (my mother would always get mad about this) wanted to see all the men, all the Blacks, coming out of church in their Easter outfits because "They really know how to dress." [chuckles] That's what he said. And they do.

So, he had that appreciation of them. And I wish more — I think today we're getting maybe to that point with some of the police bureaus. I don't know, maybe you're closer to them than I am.

GS: Yeah, not really [chuckles].

CURTIN: You don't think they are?

GS: Oh, I thought you said I was closer to the police bureau than you are. I got confused.

CURTIN: Well, I'm not anymore. My son's a deputy sheriff of Multnomah County, my step-son. But I'm not around anything. I like the new police chief.

GS: Yeah, Outlaw, right?

CURTIN: Yeah.

GS: And, I remember you mentioned also before a man named Tom Johnson, who was a friend of your father's, and that he was taking lessons to become Catholic from Father Tobin.

CURTIN: With Tobin, that's what dad said. Dad told me that. And Tom Johnson ran all the rackets in Albina. He's in the book Bill Stanford wrote, *Portland Confidential*. Tom Johnson was. Yeah, he made a lot of money. And there's some guys I know, Black guys, and they remember Tom Johnson and they're always in awe, you know. He ran the whole shebang and had the police all paid off. I don't know what went on between my father and him. I mean, we didn't enjoy some windfall of money in our family [*chuckles*] ever. So, I'm sure there wasn't much, but my father liked, he respected Tom Johnson.

GS: Did he own businesses?

CURTIN: You know, I'm not sure what he owned, and I'm sure there's not much of a record about him. But he ran, I think, prostitutes, he ran people who pimped, and he ran card rooms, and probably narcotics — although the narcotics aren't like they are today, but, he was around all that underworld kind of stuff and ran it. And a lot of Black, respectable Black guys, had that going on and, you know, like Bill Denton did. They were smart and they stayed out of the police's way, but they did dabble in the sort of stuff to make money.

GS: Yeah, I remember you saying before that it was a way for them to supplement their income.

CURTIN: Right, yeah.

GS: So, back to All Saints. Kind of going chronologically, and kind of going wherever the memory leads us. So, you attended grade school at All Saints in your neighborhood and then just after eighth grade you went to Saint Edwards in Kenmore, Washington.

CURTIN: Yes, yes. They had high school seminaries in those days and Tobin was chomping at the bit to get me to go.

GS: What kinds of things — like, how was he working to encourage you to do that?

CURTIN: Well I, you know, I don't remember how that all happened. But the church was in a very different position than it is now. It was very respected, and it was very — if you came from an Irish family, and you had a priest in your family, that was just a big check mark.

And so, I mean, I was — I don't think my parents necessarily wanted me to go that far away, but they let it happen, and so I went. And it was a struggle for a while, and I didn't do very well academically for the first few years up there. But I survived. I think barely.

I was really into athletics and I was pretty good at athletics, I kind of inherited some of my father's prowess in that. So, that was a way to kind of give me entree and a name around the seminary—and I got a lot of friends. I became friends with a lot of those guys.

It was all male, and then some very odd people in that mix too, but some very good and genuine people. And I stayed there for—on that campus, there was another seminary there for graduate school and the last two years of college—for twelve years.

GS: So, you were there for twelve years in total on the same campus?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And there were two buildings there?

CURTIN: There was a six-year program for high school and the first two years of college, and then there was another six-year program for two years of college and four years of graduate work in theology.

GS: Okay.

I was going to ask you what you remember about your teachers at Saint Edwards?

CURTIN: Well, you know, I look back on most of them, and I think they were nuts, you know [*chuckles*]. And I think they were pretty limited—now I would look at them as pretty limited and inadequate people, you know. There were some that I did kind of bond with, and it was usually through athletics. They were in the athletics, and so they would talk to me. But most, I didn't have – I wouldn't say that I had any significant teachers in that whole system until I went into graduate school, then I had some very significant professors.

GS: Well, let's go ahead and move on to graduate school then.

CURTIN: [*Chuckles*] Okay.

GS: Unless there's anything else you want to talk about with St. Edwards. I was curious about how that transition was for you because you were so young.

CURTIN: Yeah.

GS: I mean fourteen is pretty young to leave home for what could be...

CURTIN: Well, you have to keep in mind too that my home was pretty chaotic. My father was by then in recovery for about four or five years, but before that there was a lot of arguing. My mother never really recovered from those years and died very bitter about them.

GS: Did they stay married?

CURTIN: Yeah. They're Irish. They're Irish Catholic [*laughingly*].

GS: Right [*chuckles*].

CURTIN: And I'm sure there was infidelity when my dad was drinking too. But my mother — I think that's what she was really angry about. And so, I kind of wanted to get out of the house. But I was always glad to get home too, on vacations, and be in my neighborhood. I had a lot of friends in that Northeast Portland Laurelhurst community. They're friends today even on Facebook and all this.

And so, you know, people always ask about girls and that thing. And I —that was a struggle for me. But I had next door neighbors that were beautiful [*chuckles*] young women going to Holy Child's Academy, and girls up the street that always came over to see me when I was home and would include me in parties and all that kind of stuff.

GS: So, when you were in the seminary, even at that young age, you were still expected not to date girls?

CURTIN: Yeah. And I didn't. I came close a lot of times, but I didn't. I fraternized — not fraternized, or whatever you want to call it. I mean, I socialized with young women a lot, yeah.

GS: Sure.

CURTIN: And I knew that there were problems ahead.

GS: [*Chuckles*] There often are.

CURTIN: Yes. Whether you are a priest or not [*laughingly*].

GS: Yeah, absolutely [*laughingly*].

Alright, if you're ready, we can move on to your time in the seminary. So, was the transition from high school to college pretty simple because it's all on the same campus?

CURTIN: It was. Yeah, it was. And the four years of college between the two places was, academically, very confusing to me. We got a B.A. in Philosophy, and our main philosophy professor, a priest, Joe Gustafson, was an alcoholic, practicing alcoholic, and confusing as hell. So, I just didn't do very well.

And I didn't know, after my senior year in college, if I was going to come back. But I was at the point where I wasn't sure it was going to work. And then, the second Vatican council in Rome had taken place, and the church was attempting to reinvent itself after World War II because it had abandoned the Jews during the Holocaust, Pius the Twelfth had. So, there was a lot of emphasis in the leadership to refashion Christianity and to refashion the Catholic Church. I was all in favor of what was going on, and that was a big plus for me. And the Vatican Council ended in 1965 and Paul the Sixth was Pope, and so the seminary began to make changes because of the Council. It was beginning to open up more, so you could go into Seattle, you could get out and do those kinds of things. So, you can live a little more of a normal life. I mean we couldn't talk above the first floor to anybody, and everybody broke the rule and then if you got caught there was this demerit system.

But everybody, it was just – so many rules you, they couldn't even keep track of what they were. So, all that kind of loosened up.

And then, we had some young doctoral professors from Rome and Europe that came to the seminary and were very influential in me becoming a priest. And they also convinced me, however, that celibacy was going to change.

GS: Like it wasn't going to keep being...

CURTIN: Yes, that the church was going to loosen up on the requirements for celibacy. So, I thought, "Oh, okay, well maybe it'll work for me."

Some of those priests, many of those priests, left the priesthood and got married [*chuckles*] like I did. But, some of them didn't and some of them are – one of them is dying right now, I just heard. Very close friend of mine. He intervened on my drinking career, actually, and told me to go to treatment, kind of forced me into it, and I'm very indebted to him. And He just got diagnosed with pancreatic cancer and he's back in Michigan.

GS: So sorry. Is he someone you were working with at Immaculate Heart?

CURTIN: No, at the seminary. He was a professor of mine at the seminary that I really bonded with, Richard Basso. He was a priest from Michigan and joined the Sulpician Order who taught in seminaries and he taught at Saint Thomas when I was there and he was my confessor, or my counselor type person, during those years.

And then Pete Sheriko (who died just last year) helped us all get through the birth control issue that blew up in our face when we were in the seminary. People were madder than hell about that.

And then Jack Shae, who kind of changed my whole idea of how Jesus works in the world and all that kind of stuff.

And Charles Augustine Karen, our canon law professor [*chuckles*], who watered down all the laws of the church and said, "If you're an ordained priest you can overrule

them, and do it liberally.” [*chuckles*] He was elderly at the time, but he was right. He was a wonderful, very funny man.

So those priests, now, at that level, in my early to mid-20s, were very influential in my going forward into the priesthood.

GS: I’m going to pause again.

[End of Session 1, Part 2]

Session 1, Part 3
24 September 2018

GS: And we're back. This is part three of our first interview. We're with Bill Curtin here, in Portland, in his home. And I'm Greta Smith again — experiencing a few technical difficulties, but we're getting it worked out. And again, thank you so much for your patience Bill.

So, you were talking about your time in the seminary and I wanted to know if there were teachers that talked about Catholic social justice ethics, and what kinds of things they were teaching. What lessons or texts you studied that were particularly inspiring in your burgeoning interest in social justice and ethics?

CURTIN: Well, you know, the social justice thing goes way back if you come from an Irish Catholic family. My grandmother understood, you know, love the church because the church insulated them from a lot of the anti-Catholic and anti-Irish sentiment that was around. And, so that's when I — and, you know, Father Tobin at All Saints was another one who had inroads into the Black community. I bought that picture book of Albina and he's in there a couple of times in pictures with people back in the 1940s, late 1940s.

GS: What kinds of things was he involved in?

CURTIN: Well you know, I'm not sure. I know he met with a bunch of young, Catholic, black leaders at All Saints. He had a meeting with them, and that's maybe where Tom Johnson went. I think Allen Batiste was there, and Bill McCoy (who was later a state senator), and maybe Gladys McCoy too. I remember hearing about that stuff.

And then at All Saints, when we were in grade school, we had a janitor in the school whose name was Ira, who we all loved, and he was a Black guy. He made sure Black guys were around. And then the diocese, the archdiocese, ordained a young priest named Jim Mosley who was African American, and he was at All Saints for a little while. So, Tobin, he later became very scared of the Black Panthers. I was just reading the Black Panther thing,

and I really agree with the Oregon Historical Society's [*Oregon Historical Quarterly, Fall 2018 issue*] assessment of them. And I know Kent Ford, and he was not a big violent radical kind of guy.

GS: Yeah. But Father Tobin was wary?

CURTIN: Yeah. Well, he was very wary of all that stuff when the Civil Rights Movement finally rolled around, you know?

GS: But you said he made sure Black people were around, meaning he would hire them for things?

CURTIN: Yeah. Right—so that they were a presence and that we were running up against them. I mean he saw the importance of that.

Tobin was also very involved in union activity. He was ordained, I think, in the late 1920s and Leo the Thirteenth, the Pope—I think it was 1932, 1933—wrote an encyclical and endorsed the formation of the unions for workers. And Tobin was, In fact, he pestered the hell out of the archdiocese. He wanted Central Catholic to unionize its nonteaching employees and he wanted the chancery office to unionize their work, and I don't think they ever did. But he was always heckling them about that and being in compliance with Catholic doctrine. He'd pull all those things on them. And I would hear these stories about them. And then the seminary. I remember I was in the seminary during Selma, the Selma March. I remember going in and asking the rector (and that was very closed environment in those days) if I could get a leave to go to Selma and march.

GS: What did he say?

CURTIN: [*Laughs*] He wasn't going to. They didn't let anybody out in those days, you know? I was there when Martin Luther King was assassinated, and the seminary took a

couple of days off to memorialize that. And so that was part of – and then the Vietnam War was going on, and we all in our young years in the priesthood marched in the marches against Vietnam in Portland and all the other cities these guys went to as priests. So, we were just kind of – I don't know if anybody emphasized it, it was just kind of an assumption. If you read the gospel properly, that that's what priest do, you know? I always thought it was just a given and many priests did, although they might not be as active as others.

GS: So, you also mentioned you did some work in the central area of Seattle, which was the African American part of town during the 1960s, and you met with some members of that community who were Catholic civil rights organizers?

CURTIN: Walter Hubberd. His son was behind me in the seminary. He never became a priest, he quit. But Walter Hubberd was – and I'm not sure. I googled him a few years ago, and he's dead now of course. But his son would come up because his son is still very active in social – in Black issues in Seattle, and he's my age. He's younger than I am but not much. Probably trying to retire. But anyway, we didn't do much, but I wanted to. I was one of the few there then that wanted to go down in the central area and get involved in something, and I talked to people.

And then I talked to a Catholic guy that was on the Seattle Police Department. He was Japanese and he had been interned as a kid at the Puyallup fairgrounds during the Second World War, so he was very into trying to reform the – he worked in the Criminalistics Division. He was kind of a scientist rather than a police officer; crime lab stuff. So, he would take me around and introduce me to police officers that were in Seattle. But I didn't do – you know, I was in school. I didn't do a lot of stuff with them.

GS: But it sounds like you were kind of putting your feelers out where you could, like you were trying...

CURTIN: Yes. Yeah.

GS: How did you figure out places that you maybe wanted to be involved? Like with the people in central Seattle, with their organizing. How did you hear about that?

CURTIN: Well, there were two churches, Catholic churches, in the central area of Seattle: Saint Joseph's and Saint Therese. And Joe Buck was a very active priest, and Mike Holland, at Saint Joseph's in Seattle. And they would kind of point us in different directions. We would spend a lot of time – there wasn't many we, it was mostly me spending time with them.

And then at Saint Therese, I forget who the other priest was. But they were pretty involved in a lot of the social issues. They all ended up leaving the priesthood too and marrying. Mike Holland did, and Joe did too. And Joe's nephew was a classmate of mine in the seminary too, Gene Chapman, who is now dead.

GS: It seems like you were really interested in getting out in the world, even when you were in the seminary.

CURTIN: Yeah. Well sure, that's where the working the gospel thing is all about.

GS: So that was pretty a typical thing for people in seminary to go...

CURTIN: Yes. And people would go to other places like hospitals and prisons and jails and some would work in other parishes and get involved in youth groups and those kinds of things.

GS: And speaking of which, you mentioned that you visited inmates in the reformatory outside Seattle? Tell me about that.

CURTIN: Washington State Reformatory in Monroe. In our four years of graduate school preparation, we had to pick a place to go and spend a consistent amount of time once a week, and I chose to go to the Washington State Reformatory. I was naive and it was – it was, I mean, I don't know. I'm not sure I knew even what was happening to me at that place, I mean it was very – but it was a good experience. And I felt sorry for all those guys, which maybe some of them I shouldn't of, but I did. And most of them were there because of drugs and alcohol, just like today.

GS: What kind of work were you doing with those inmates?

CURTIN: Well I'm not sure. I think just kind of visiting with them, and talking with them, and supporting them, but it was vague. I think the seminary just wanted us to rub up against different kinds of people. So, I would go to Monroe and I did that for a couple years, and then I forget. But then I did go down, maybe I went down to Saint Josephs with Joe Buck. I really liked Joe Buck.

GS: Was that the guy you were in seminary with?

CURTIN: No, he had been a Seattle priest for a number of years and he was at Saint Joseph's in the central area.

GS: I know that you were involved in protesting the Vietnam War in Portland, but were you involved in any protests when you were in the seminary or anything like that?

CURTIN: No. Sympathetic to it. I'm never one – the University of Washington students shut down I-5 in that area when I was in the seminary.

GS: What do you remember about that?

CURTIN: Well, the city was in an uproar that they would do that, but during the rush hour they just went out and sat down on I-5 going northbound. Everybody's trying to get home and, you know, protesting the war.

GS: And I'm interested – I'm not quite sure how to ask this question but, when you were in your classes in the seminary, I mean, it was 1960s, there was all this stuff going on. So, do you remember if your professors tied what was going on in the world with their teachings, or was it pretty isolated? Does that make sense?

CURTIN: Well some of them did. Some of them were smart enough to do that, and others, the ones I mentioned, yeah, they would make the connections between if, you know, they were teaching some doctrinal point or something, some action you could take or you were involved in.

But there were others that were still kind of old school that just didn't get what was going on. They were very confused by it. And then the church was changing so fast for some of the older guys, they were very frustrated with that. And they thought we were, all of us, were going to ruin the church [*chuckles*]. So, there was all this, the church was in a lot of turmoil. The international church was in a lot of confusion. I mean, I wasn't confused about what I was going to do, but it really did coalesce all my thinking and put in a good place for me to be a priest.

So, anyway, the professors, like Pete Sheriko, and Jake Shae, Dick Baso, and Art Hamulka, who was our scripture professor, would talk about these themes in the scriptures and then relate them to stuff going on politically in our life. And, you know, that this is history repeating itself. And that Jesus often addressed that we would have to interpret the gospels to let people know that Jesus had things to say about all this stuff. So, I mean he would talk about the Civil Rights movement and war, and then Pete Sheriko (the doctrinal guy) would talk about – he knew the birth control thing was going to send the church into a tizzy. He tried to get us ready to answer people's questions and solve problems for them, not create problems for them.

GS: So, that was a big issue when you were in seminary was the birth control?

CURTIN: It was one of the issues that the pope reserved for himself and not let the Vatican Council deal with. It was birth control and celibacy. The Council probably would have overturned the celibacy requirement if it could have voted.

GS: Ah, that would have made things very different.

CURTIN: There's a lot – half of my class that was ordained in 1969 are married. Some with families. And actually, we've all been faithful to our marriages. Good people.

GS: Yeah.

And just for people who maybe aren't so familiar with this part of Catholic history, can you kind of elaborate a little bit on what you mean when you're talking about the birth control issue during this time?

CURTIN: Well, the church's moral underpinning for its morality decisions was always based on the natural law, which means if you bring – that's why the church was against homosexuality, because that isn't natural. The church was against any kind of artificial birth control, because then you're inserting medium into a natural process, and so that's immoral.

But there was a lot of people rethinking that at that time. And there was a commission started after the council with doctors and theologians and philosophers and all this kind of stuff who actually supported the fact that the church could overturn the birth control requirement if it so needed to. But the pope decided independently, because all his political baggage in the Vatican bureaucracy, to still require it in 1968.

GS: I see. Thank you for that.

Well, I think that might actually be a good place to stop for today because that's about where I thought we would get to. Next time, we can pick up with your transition from the seminary into your time in the priesthood. Does that sound good?

CURTIN: Okay, sure.

GS: Alright. Thanks so much, Bill.

CURTIN: You bet. Thank you. It was fun.

[End of Session 1, Part 3]

Session 2
2018 October 12

GS: So today is October 12th, 2018. I'm here with Bill Curtin in his home in Portland, Oregon. My name's Greta Smith, oral historian for the Oregon Historical Society.

Good afternoon, Bill.

CURTIN: Good afternoon, Greta. Nice to see you again.

GS: Yeah, you too.

So, last time we covered basically your childhood through your time in seminary and I just had a couple follow up questions before we move on if you don't mind.

Okay, so the first is that I remember you talking about how your father was really fond of the on-the-ground part of working with people when he was a police officer, but he really grew weary of working in the police department. I was curious about what it was about his work with the Portland Police Department that he kind of grew weary of?

CURTIN: I think that happens to most police officers. I think it's a hard job. You see, you really, see the bad side of life and he had done it for 29 years. And I think he was tired of having that in his life, you know. Another piece of all that was the Civil Rights Movement was starting...

GS: He retired in 1965, right?

CURTIN: Yeah, that's when he retired. And, although he was very supportive of the Black community, it was getting harder and harder for police to work in the community and do all that kind of stuff. I think he was ready to move on. He had another job in retirement totally unrelated to police work. But yeah, that's how I would characterize it. When somebody would ask him why he was retiring he would say because of the Supreme Court

had just approved the Miranda Bill, which required police to tell suspects they needed an attorney [*chuckles*].

GS: The Miranda Rights.

CURTIN: And the county would provide them one if they didn't have one. And he thought, "Aww." So, he was tired of the jumble mumble.

GS: Well he had been working there for thirty years. Just out of curiosity what was his job after retirement?

CURTIN: He worked as a warehouse manager out a textbook depository out in Tualatin.

GS: Alright, so then the second follow up question I had is – I realized again as I was listening back, and we were talking about, you know, your decision to enter into the priesthood, and it sounded like there was a lot of encouragement from Father Tobin and your family, it was a prestigious thing—it meant a lot for someone from an Irish Catholic family to become a priest, it means a lot to your family too. But besides those factors, is there—was there—something that attracted you to the priesthood as an individual?

CURTIN: Well, as I grew older and got into graduate school and college, the Roman Catholic Church in the United States had a real social justice focus throughout its time and a history of supporting labor unions. They have a history of supporting minorities and all that kind of stuff, and I saw it as a platform for societal change and to use the church as a way of – and then it had this, you know, historic support of immigrants who were coming into the country, from the Western European immigrants from which my family was Irish and all that.

I remember my father would often talk about the church as so important, although he wasn't pious or all that kind of stuff, he just knew the church was very important. And then he was one of the founders of the Portland Police Association, which goes on until today and he said Father Tobin and the archdiocese helped them get the Portland Police Association.

GS: Did he talk about in what ways they helped?

CURTIN: Well, I think expertise and just – I think a lot of the Irish immigrants that we came from looked to the priest to kind of transition them into, you know, to assimilate them into American society.

The Catholic school system was started by the National Conference of Catholic Bishops to help the Western European immigrants become Americanized, that was their goal. Of course, it's changed now. It's kind of finishing schools. But in those days, the education wasn't as expensive, but the Catholic nuns and Catholic priests were the center point of that immigration of Roman Catholics that came in from Germany, Italy, Ireland, and all the other European – there was this massive immigration from Europe.

GS: So, entering into the priesthood was sort of something that you saw as a way to enact change, enact positive change in the world.

CURTIN: Right. And you know, I was in the graduate school, I remember sitting in my room reading *Time Magazine* and had the radio on and Martin Luther King had been assassinated. And the Vietnam War was just going on and on and on. And we, as young priests, we were all involved in actions over those issues during the 1970s. Bob [*Father Robert Krueger*] was too,

GS: Yeah, Father Bob. I remember we talked about that quite a bit. On that note, I think we touched on this a little bit, I know you participated in protests a bit when you were a

priest here against the Vietnam War. Can you tell me a bit what you remember about those?

CURTIN: They were interesting. I mean, there's a list in the *Oregonian* of all the priests and ministers from all the denominations who marched. There were regularly scheduled marches against the Vietnam mobilization. I don't know how they – you could probably find out what the title was, but we would all show up for those all the time. It made the law enforcement – because I was also close to them, trying to reform the police in the Black community. They were always very nervous about all this stuff. And J. Edgar Hoover thought it was all communist inspired, so there were – we were getting our pictures taken by I'm sure they were cops and F.B.I.

I was talking to an Episcopal priest at church a couple weeks ago who introduced me to someone he had marched with in the anti-Vietnam war thing, he's retired, and I said, "Yeah, and we probably both have F.B.I. files." And I'm sure we did. And then there were these Portland cops too that I knew – I'd wave to them! And they were taking our pictures. So, there was all this weirdness and craziness about the war and we were – it finally ended. And then I had a cousin who was shot down in North Vietnam in 1970 right in the middle of when I was doing all this stuff. He was an Air Force pilot. So, it was very hard times. And, you know, there was really a lot of spirit in the country for social change and I saw the church as an avenue, an historical avenue, to bring that about.

GS: Thank you. I'm glad I asked those questions. Those were, I think, important to follow up on.

So, going back to where we left off. After the seminary, you moved back to Portland and began your career as a priest at St. Charles on 42nd and Emerson. I was just curious what was that transition like for you? From seminary to working priest?

CURTIN: Well, I you know, was very anxious to get out of the seminary and they let me out early actually, because they needed – I was a deacon when I left the seminary,

which is one rung below the priesthood, the title of priest. I could do certain worship functions in the church, but I couldn't preside at the eucharist and some other things.

But they let me out early to fill an assistant pastors' position at St. Charles and I glommed on to it. And I was to be ordained in May to the priesthood and I could skip the last semester of my academic thing, which wasn't that interesting anymore. So, I came down and I was told I was to work with the youth group [*chuckles*] and be in charge of the altar boys. All typical functions of the new, young priests. And it was a parish that was – it was a church that was in transition. If you noticed, we used to have seven masses on Sunday morning, now there's one. So, the whole, you know, that whole neighborhood is just kind of depleted now from what it was. It was a real working-class parish, probably a blue-collar area of people that lived there. It was a typical eighth grade Catholic school, so I was around there a lot doing things. And people kind of adjusted to me. They liked me, but they thought I was a little crazy because of some of the issues I was trying to talk about.

GS: Social justice type issues?

CURTIN: Yeah, social justice. And I had this abiding kind of gnawing thing to get into Albina. So, I'd go down there and drive around once in a while. And then my friend who later became my very closest friend in the priesthood, Burt Griffin, who became a famous priest in our archdiocese and nationally, actually (later was at St. Andrews at 9th and Alberta). And I'd go down and see Burt. He was kind of a big shot in the diocese, and he kind of took two and half years, but kind of maneuvered me down to Immaculate Heart. But I had a good time at St. Charles. Lot of our kids went to Central Catholic, so I'd go to their basketball games and I liked sports, football games and I got to know the kids well. The weekend schedules were just—these seven masses we all had to do, and when it was your turn to preach you preached at all of them. Just exhausting.

GS: Was this just on Sunday?

CURTIN: Sunday.

GS: Seven masses all on Sunday.

CURTIN: And there were two other priests in residence at St. Charles who helped out, so there were four priests. But the oldest priest, Father Jack Laidlaw, who was my boss, he was in his 80s and he had a hard time. Harder and harder time. But the other – so three of us actually did most of that weekend work, but it was exhausting.

And then, the arch-bishop, they needed a priest up in Vernonia on Sunday night to say a mass. Since there were four of us, he commissioned one of us to do that [*chuckles*]. So, Tim Murphy and I would rotate that after all that work on Sunday during the day, go up there. So that was the busy part.

And then I did all the weddings. Jack Laidlaw didn't want to do weddings. He said, "I'll do the funerals, you do the weddings." So, I did the weddings. This was when Catholics were still kind of serious about the church. So, I did three weddings on a Saturday sometimes. So, it was a lot of that kind of ecclesial work, which I enjoyed and I liked to preach and I would do all that kind of stuff. But I was – I wanted more. I wanted to be where the action was more, you know, the social justice stuff.

GS: And did you have – you mentioned they thought you were a weirdo or something because of your social justice kind of leanings. What kinds of pushback or resistance did you encounter there?

CURTIN: Well...

GS: Or if there's any specific instances you can remember?

CURTIN: Well, there's always this pushback whenever you're into that social justice stuff. That you're a priest and you really just need to go over in the corner and pray and be

quiet and mediate and live an isolated life. Very unlike Jesus, by the way. But [*chuckles*] – so there was that kind of, and the old ladies would get all upset, some of them. But people were nice to me there and things went well. I wouldn't say the pushback was significant. They just thought I needed to grow up a little, you know, and they were going to be patient with me.

GS: Sure.

And what year – You were there from 1968 to 1971, right?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: So, I'm curious to know how you met Burt Griffin, and you said you worked with him to get over into Immaculate Heart. Tell me about that.

CURTIN: Well Burt was at 9th and Alberta at St. Andrews. And he drank a lot, and I drank a lot. So, we would meet late at night after all of our meetings.

GS: Where did you meet?

CURTIN: At his rectory, St. Andrews.

GS: And, sorry to interrupt, but that was a social justice kind of parish as well?

CURTIN: Yes. And it's still a very active church just right down there. And that was before gentrification on Alberta street. And then Burt was kind of a big shot in the diocese; he could make things happen for you. And I became friends with him. And then all of sudden it started – a priest left and got married from Immaculate Heart. The associate, Jim Conroy. I don't know where he is now, but he married some woman in the parish. So, then

there was an opening, so I asked to go there, and they allowed me to go there. And then Carl Flak was my boss for a while.

GS: At Immaculate Heart?

CURTIN: For a couple of years, and then I took over from him. So, I went there in 1971. So, I was like two years and nine months at St. Charles.

GS: And one more thing about St. Charles. When we were talking before, you were saying something about how all the priests lived together and that there were four of you and that it was kind of a hectic situation. Is there anything from that time that you want to talk about?

CURTIN: I mean, I think we all, the priests were all pretty compatible. The old pastor had this housekeeper who was always driving us crazy. And we had kind of a rebellion about her. And Jack actually let her go. I look back on it and think, you know, that was kind of mean to do, but I mean she was way – she could hardly move around anymore. And then she'd always tattle on us to him, but he wouldn't do anything about it. He was always nice about it. But she was always kind of snooping around. So anyway, that was interesting. You can go talk to Tim Murphy at Central Catholic about that [*laughs*], he was part of that too.

GS: Was he one of the other priests over there?

CURTIN: Yeah.

GS: And he's still a priest?

CURTIN: He's the president, or president emeritus over at Central Catholic.

Well, Laidlaw kind of called me in when I left and thanked me for all I had done, and he liked everything – this is kind of a funny story, and I’ve told some other priests this too, but he said, “You know, one of the things you really didn’t do very well was the altar boys.” Well, now in this day and age [*laughingly*], you know, that’s kind of an endorsement of being good behavior. So, anyway, there were other priests that were around in those days – I told Burt about that and he laughed. Well, he laughed later when we found out some of these priests were just terrible.

GS: Yeah. Well, that is an endorsement then, isn’t it.

CURTIN: Yeah [*Both laugh*]. Yeah, it’s a low bar but, I mean it’s...

GS: Okay, so one more thing I wanted to ask about with St. Charles. During the time you were there you would also go spend time with the students at Adams High School and Fern Hill Park — and that’s no longer there, that school. And it was kind of a new model of school. I’d just – I’d like to hear more about that.

CURTIN: Well, what I remember about it is that I was this young priest with all this energy, and during the week I didn’t have a lot to do, so I just took off and – Adams was just opening, its first year.

GS: Where was that exactly?

CURTIN: Well it’s – as you go down 42nd street and get past that little commercial area where that Mexican restaurant is and all that kind of stuff, and go towards Columbia Boulevard you can look to the left and it’s just an open field. It was right on, now it would be right on the southern end of Farragut Park.

GS: Okay, thanks. So, you would do work. What kind of work?

CURTIN: Well I just showed up and talked to Bob Schwartz, who was the principal and I said, "Bob is there anything?"

He said, "Yeah, why don't you teach a class on something?" I didn't really want to teach a class, but he said, "Just hang around."

And then you know they had riots there at the opening of the school year. They called them riots, they really weren't. You know, they were just kids trying to take advantage of the disorganization and all that. I remember the school police showing up and trying to calm them all down. It was kind of crazy for a while.

GS: Now what were the demographics of that school?

CURTIN: Well they were pretty African American, and that's what appealed to me too. But, there were a lot of kids from our neighborhood too; white kids that were going there too. So, it was kind of a mixture of different things.

Julianne Johnson, do you know who she is?

GS: I don't.

CURTIN: She's a noted Black female vocalist in town; very good singer. And she went to Adams High School. She went to Immaculate Heart grade school too, and then she went to Adams high school.

There're some people down at the Miracles Club that went to Adam's high school that are in recovery now, Michael Booker – in fact, he's the executive director of the Miracles Club. And so those – There were a number of people. He was the quarterback on the football team.

And so, Adams didn't last for very long and I don't know all the difficulties. There was the vice-principal, an African American guy named Edgar Mitchell, who was very good to me. He's dead now. His son later became a Portland Police officer, and I think he still is

a Portland Police officer. And he played, he was very – he went to Central Catholic and [became] a very successful football player at Colorado State. So, that was just a place to kind of meet people and – but, I was really pulled back all the time to go St. Charles.

And then I invited all these Black athlete kids to play basketball. We had a gym at St. Charles, so I invited them on Sunday afternoons. I would open the gym and they could come up. And poor Jack Laidlaw got all these complaints from school parents—who were the fussiest Catholic people there is and wanted their kids to be perfect and all this stuff. And he called and said, “You have to go to this meeting with me and help, they’re all pissed off about the Blacks.” So.

But I’ll never forget, this one woman was worried her son was going to get gonorrhea from going into the restroom because Black kids had been in there using the restroom during basketball.

GS: Oh my gosh.

CURTIN: Yeah, so.

And then Jack just looked at me and I said, “That’s not how you get gonorrhea.” [both laugh] I said, “You know, maybe we need to do a course or something. But no, that’s not –.” But that’s kind of the – that was kind of characteristic of the way people were adjusting to Black people making their presence known more than they had before, finding silliness like that. And they still do.

GS: Yeah.

So then, when you say it was a new model of school, what is...

CURTIN: Yeah. I’m not a sophisticated educator, but, you know, kids could kind of pick their own curriculum, they had a lot of power about that kind of stuff. And actually it just fell apart because, you know, teenage kids got a – now we think it’s a frontal lobe problem

[*chuckles*]. They just can't process things properly, they really needed more direction. They needed more, kind of, guard rails and parameters on things.

GS: Right. So, did you not end up teaching a class there?

CURTIN: Well, I don't think I did. Now, my memory is that maybe I sat in on classes where kids might have had questions about the Catholic Church.

GS: Okay, that's interesting. So, then you left St. Charles in [1971], you moved over to Immaculate Heart on Williams and Stanton, and that's where most of your career as a priest took place. Let's go ahead and move...

CURTIN: Well, let me tell you one more thing. While I was at St. Charles, I met a Portland police officer who coached the baseball team and worked the graveyard shift in our neighborhood. And his name was Dave Koch, and he let me go on – we worked out a deal where I could go on ride-alongs with him in police cars and that kind of stuff and see how the police operated. And he was kind of my *entré* (plus my father, who many people remembered) my *entré* into Portland police before I went down to Immaculate Heart. And that's where I did a lot of work in police-community relations.

So anyway, that's it then. We can move on from...

GS: Oh, okay. So, he was kind of one of your connections that sort of got you thinking about – so then, that sort of clarifies maybe you weren't exactly thinking about going to Immaculate Heart when you were at St. Charles except for that, sort of, exposure through Officer Koch.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: So, you'd go on ride-alongs with him. What kind of stuff did you see when you were going on ride-alongs with him?

CURTIN: Well, I saw police officers being problem solvers in communities and neighborhoods, in domestic issues, and then kind of mostly trying to tone people down rather than, you know, getting all wrapped up in craziness. I saw that. I became very impressed with the potential that police officers had to be an agent in the community and bring normalcy to – my father used to call it “getting people through the night,” you know. And I think that's what most cops were like in those days.

GS: Okay. Can you think of any particular – I'm just trying to envision what this would look like in practical application. Can you think of any specific examples that could kind of illustrate what you're talking about?

CURTIN: Well, you know, the community-policing model is what these guys were just kind of naturally doing. And there weren't any women yet, which I think had a huge positive impact on policing. And there were a couple of women showing up at the North Precinct in those days and, you know. And then, Penny Harrington, first female Portland police chief in the country and in Portland, she showed up at North Precinct as a sergeant during that time. So, I mean, but anything specific – you know the stories that were always talked about were, of course, the sexy, glamorous stories with guns and all that other kind of stuff, and confronting people and doing those things. But I remember most of the time – and 90% of what I saw had to do with problem solving and getting people through the night, rather than arresting and doing all this fighting and stuff that you see. And I hope police are still focused on that rather than...

GS: Yeah. So, you mean having a conversation with somebody, figuring out what it is that they need or what the problem is...

CURTIN: Yeah or getting health care for people. Getting help for people, you know, rather than putting people in jail. I mean, there's no room in the jails.

And I was always impressed when Dave Koch went on to the police academy to teach officers how to talk to people in a less aggressive form and work from the bottom up in terms of how you talk to people, start out nice. And then, like Michelle Obama says, "Speak softly but have a big stick ready." And that's what I think good police officers do. You know, solve it at the very minimum level and then, if you have to do awful things, then you have to do them. So anyway, that's how Dave Koch, that's how I remember him.

Well, we got in a couple high-speed chases, I remember, and I didn't – out on Lombard, used to be a street where people would burglarize or rob someplace then they'd head to Lombard so they could get the hell out of the neighborhood. So, the cops would all go down to Lombard when they got a report on the radio and once in a while – I think one night we saw one and pretty soon we were out at the airport chasing him. So, there were things like that too. I was impressed at how fast they drove all the time, you know, police. They still do, down this way a lot [*both chuckle*].

GS: They sure do.

So, did you go over to Immaculate Heart much before you started working there?

CURTIN: No.

GS: No. Okay. And then, so Burt Griffin was somebody that you worked with to get over there. So, I guess just tell me about the transition for you. What was that like?

CURTIN: Well you know I was – my dad actually helped me move down there, you know. And I was kind of glad he was there because the Dawson's Park across the street was full of criminals, and drugs, and drug dealers, and all kinds of people that were all Black, and loud, and I was just kind of, "Oh, man. What'd I do to myself?"

I remember my dad leaving me there and I was all alone in the house. And then all of the sudden there's a knocking on the door, and I look out the peephole. This huge Black guy who is drunk and has these hands that are just huge, and I thought, "Oh, man. I don't know if I'm going to answer the door or not." So, then I called the police to assist me and a cop named Joe Murrillo showed up, who I had known. And then I went out the door and he said, "This is Bull Halsey." [*laughs*] He was a street guy and the cops all knew him. And he was really a good guy, I mean, but he was always drunk. Had a real alcohol problem. I'm sure he's dead.

GS: His name was Bull Halsey?

CURTIN: William Admiral Halsey. He was named after William Halsey who was an admiral in World War II, and he would always make that big announcement. And he had been ex prize fighter. He was actually a pretty good prize fighter. And he was big and, oh he was a strong guy. So, he became my kind of caretaker in the middle of all that. He liked me, and if anybody started anything with me around the church you know, he would be over there, "You stay away from the father, get away from him," and people were scared of him. And he'd move on.

You know, I got to know a lot of those street people in those days because I'd go out and work in the garden, and mow the lawn, and do these things. And prostitutes were on our streets all the time.

GS: Yeah, when I spoke to Ida Shepherd, she said that she remembered you going across the street and kind of shooing them away from the church property.

CURTIN: She told me she told you that, yeah. And I did, yeah. I told them I just thought, maybe – I didn't want prostitutes sitting on the steps of our church on Williams Avenue. They were always very respectful of that, they understood.

GS: Did you ever get to know any of them personally?

CURTIN: Yes, some of them. Mary Bailey was one I knew. I think they're all dead now. You know, I remember it was very dangerous to be a prostitute on the street, and I remember three or four of them, their bodies would be discovered up in Clark County or in the Gorge; unsolved homicides. Cops would try and come down, but nobody would talk to them about what happened. There were pimps or somebody, but you know.

Sherman Jackson who is still alive (I get my haircut from him once in a while) he was the big pimp of the neighborhood and the big drug guy. He'd be a guy to do an oral history on. He's kind of a guy in recovery and did a lot of time in the penitentiary and then got shot real bad one time and decided to give it up. He had a barber shop at M.L.K. and Fremont, back in the day. But I don't think he's going to talk to you, he doesn't want to – he's – but I knew him. He had gone to Immaculate Heart grade school when he was a kid. So, he would show up on the playground during recess in his big Continental all tricked, out, and I would [*gestures to leave with his finger*], "Go." I mean, I could just see our parents [*chuckles*].

GS: You'd tell him to go?

CURTIN: Yeah! I said I could just see our parents driving by and, you know, spending money on the education of their Black children and we got Sherman Jackson on the – [*chuckles*] I mean everybody knew who he was. So, I explained that to him, "Can you understand? You know, we want to – our parents don't want, I mean, you're all – I like you, but they don't want their kids associating with you."

GS: Would he actually drive on to the playground?

CURTIN: Yeah! Because these kids all liked these cars. He was showing his car off. And then they kind of knew who he was too. You know, but that was part of – that’s why – did Laverne ever call you back?

GS: I called her twice again this week and left messages and I still haven’t been able to get in touch with her. I’m going to keep trying. I was hoping to talk to her before this interview, since we’re at that point, but you know – I’ll talk to her and if she tells me things that we haven’t covered then we’ll go back, and I’ll ask you follow-up questions.

CURTIN: Okay. I’ll call her again. Of course, she calls me right back when she sees my number on the phone.

GS: I was able to leave her a message this time, and I left my phone number and name and...

CURTIN: She’s all excited about Beto O’Rourke [*chuckles*] in Texas, so I call her about – I don’t know if he’s going to get elected or not, she doesn’t think so, but she goes to his rallies and stuff.

GS: Well, she seems like a busy person, but I’m sure we’ll be able to connect at some point.

Before we get too much into this part we’re talking about, I want to hear more about what it was like when you moved over there [Immaculate Heart]. Were you with just one other priest there?

CURTIN: Yes, one other priest. Carl Flak who was scared out of his wits in that neighborhood.

GS: How long had he been there?

CURTIN: A couple years before me. He was very conservative. I mean, all Catholic priests understood the importance of social justice and he understood that. He grew up in Chicago in a Polish neighborhood. Very insular, very Catholic and he wasn't open to – and he was scared. The church house would get burglarized and he finally got a burglar alarm to put in there and then I would just, as soon as there was a big crowd in the park, I would just have a malfunction of our burglar alarm just so everybody over there would know we had a burglar alarm. And I said, "That's what a burglar alarm is good for." Not that really – but they won't come over here know, they don't want any part of it. And they didn't, they stopped. And so, Carl was there probably two, two and half years and then they transferred him out to a bigger church in Gresham. And they told me I could stay there.

GS: And you were the only priest?

CURTIN: I was the only priest there, yes.

GS: And so, when you started, it sounds like you were a little intimidated or maybe even a little scared yourself.

CURTIN: Sure. But, you know, it quickly kind of dissipated. The school was a place I would hang out a lot. We were probably the only – Kim Brown, who was going to our school in those days...

[REDACTED]

But, you know, it was in the middle of all that racial stuff, cops are always being called pigs whenever they drive by. So, I kind of worked my way into the community and then the Model – we'll go into the Model Cities next time, but I mean I started getting on some boards. You always had to have a board if you were in government money, although

that didn't solve any problems. So, I was on those. But I spent a lot of time with the kids and the school. We had a lot of discipline problems. Tried to work with the staff on some of those, and that's when Laverne – she can come in on those.

GS: So, you worked with Laverne because she was a teacher and I remember you talking about how the kids really respected her, right?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Was she an eighth-grade teacher?

CURTIN: Yes. Seventh and eighth grade. She had seventh and eighth grade classes.

GS: So, the school at Immaculate Heart, was that K through 12?

CURTIN: K through eighth.

GS: K through eighth, so she was the senior – and where would they typically go for high school?

CURTIN: Jeff [*Jefferson*] or Grant—some went to Grant. Kim Brown went to Grant. Or Central Catholic, St. Mary's Academy, some of them if they were really good students. But most of them went to public high school. Their parents couldn't afford the tuition. And Burt and I were trying to get Catholic schools to start accepting some of our kids, and it never did work out. Now, Central Catholic has got all kind of Black kids.

GS: They didn't want to accept them because they were African American or?

CURTIN: No, I don't think that. I think it was – well, I shouldn't ever presume that. I'm not sure. People don't tell you. But they saw them as problematic, I think, because of that. And then, you know, at a white, like Central Catholic, all-white Catholic high school, the parents would start fussing about things like gonorrhea and all this other kind of stuff, then pretty soon, you know. So, I think that that – but most of our kids went to Jeff. Some went to Adams. Julianne Johnson went to Adams. Kim went to Grant. And I think the parents thought that Grant was probably the better school of all of them, so they would try to get their kids in Grant high school.

GS: Was Immaculate Heart an all-Black school at that time?

CURTIN: Mm-hmm. That's what Kim tells me. We were the only all-Black Catholic school in the state. I was talking to her some months ago and she said that, yeah.

GS: So, tell me about some of the responsibilities of being a priest during your time at Immaculate Heart. Because you mentioned at St. Charles it was more ecclesiastical and I know that it was different at Immaculate Heart.

CURTIN: Well, there were weekend masses that we had and then we had a pretty Black congregation. And they were mostly from Louisiana, in the south, because the Jesuits came with the French and evangelized southern Louisiana; Shreveport and New Orleans and all that. That's where most Black Catholics come from.

So, they had migrated up here during World War II to work in the shipyards and so they were here for that reason. And they liked Portland and they stayed. Unlike Ida. Ida's kind of unusual for a black Catholic, and she told me that her family converted to Catholicism when she was a young girl. I think her sister wanted to be a Catholic, and so that's why they did it. So, she started going to Immaculate Heart grade school and, I think, she went to Immaculata Academy, which was right next door to Immaculate Heart grade school. And now it's the Kids for Portland or something? You know, it's a mentoring agent

that works in the community. They sold the buildings years ago. It was sold when I was there. So, there was that weekend stuff and...

GS: How many masses did you guys have?

CURTIN: Just two. So, I always took all of them after Carl left.

GS: And you also provided pastoral care for Catholic patients at Emmanuel.

CURTIN: Emmanuel, yes.

GS: And counseling and guidance to your parishioners as well.

CURTIN: Yes. Although, you know, nobody came in for counseling and guidance. I mean, Black Catholics, they don't...

GS: No?

CURTIN: Blacks take care of themselves, you know. They didn't want some priest telling them what to do. So, it was kind of a relief. I never knew what to tell people in counseling. They'd come in for marriage counseling. A bunch of celibate priests giving [*laughingly*] marriage counseling? I mean, you're married, you know how impractical that is and it's all kind of religious and...

GS: Did you do that at St. Charles?

CURTIN: Well, people would come in, and I always was ineffectual I'm sure. I didn't know what to – I remember asking other priests, "What do you do?"

And then when I got to Immaculate Heart, I found some counselors at Lloyd Center that were professional marriage counselors, and personal counselors, and I'd refer people to them

GS: When people would come to you at Immaculate Heart?

CURTIN: Yeah, so I stayed out of counseling.

GS: I see. And then the pastoral care to the Catholic patients at Legacy Emanuel, how did that work?

CURTIN: Well, I would take them communion from the eucharist we would have every week. And then some of them would be dying, and the Roman Church has this Sacrament of the Sick, so I would give them the Sacrament of the Sick. There would be fifty, sixty people there at a time and I would kind of run through it all, and so – but I did get to know a lot of people at Emmanuel too, the staff and that kind of stuff.

And then I'd get calls in the middle of the night, you know, car accidents and that kind of stuff. Usually when they were dying, they wanted – Catholics believed if they, if a priest gave them a Sacrament of the Sick they'd go immediately to Heaven in those days. Kind of magic stuff, rather than any substantial kind of benefit.

GS: And what was your role at the school?

CURTIN: Well, I was kind of the — it kind of just happened automatically. I became the problem solver for kids that were out of control and, you know, and what we were going to do with them. So, I would sit in, they would call me, and I'd be over at the house, and I'd go over there and sit in the principal's office and we'd try to get this kid on the right track, you know? And then their parents would get mad, at times, because we would send them home. Laverne talks about how she would send kids home and she was always afraid I

wasn't going to support her, and I go "What? [*laughingly*] Who else am I going to support? No, I would support you today." And she laughed.

There were some kids that were really rooted in street life going to our school. And we decided to take on some of them as part of what we were doing there. And I'm not sure we were that well equipped to do it, as I look back. But, you know, the public schools weren't doing a good job either.

GS: So, when you say, "take that on," you mean, kind of, help get them through – like as your father would say, "get them through the night," you were thinking, "Let's get them through their education."

CURTIN: Yes. Right.

GS: So what kinds of tools did you use?

CURTIN: You know, I kind of left that up to the principal and the teachers to figure out methodologies that might activate these kids a little better, you know, and focus them. I was just kind of in there as the heavy, you know, "If things keep going this way, duh duh duh duh duh duh." Then sometimes we'd have to tell a kid, "This isn't going to work. You know, the rest of the school has to survive."

There were some really – in fact, one of those kids I still have some contact with and he's mad at me right now, but that's fine. He needs to be mad at somebody. He's now an adult and gets arrested all the time. Wants me to take care of him. Still goes to jail and then [*plaintively*], "I want Father Curtin to call me!" And his wife calls me. And I said, "I'm not Father Curtin anymore." And, you know, it didn't work forty years ago and it's probably not going to work now. And then I tried to call him at the jail, and they charge you. They charge you!

GS: Collect? Yeah.

CURTIN: Yeah!

So, I told his wife, "I'm not going to pay money to talk to him. He doesn't respond!" So anyway, I'm really tired of him anyway. But there were kids like that that were exhausting.

GS: Yeah.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: So, when you say you were the heavy, that they would bring you in as the heavy, how did that work?

CURTIN: Well it was just ratcheting up. The principal would take a stab at them, the teacher would take a stab at them, you know, and then I'd come into the meeting as kind of – and I don't know how it worked, but I think I was there more to reassure the staff than, you know – I mean, I loved our staff and I wasn't going to – I felt sorry for them, what they were going through, and wanted to support them more than anything else. I think they hoped the kids saw me as a – because I was a male presence, rather than female presence and all that. We didn't have any male staff in the school in those days.

GS: Oh, so then it sounds like you were in more of a supportive, administrative position.

CURTIN: Yeah. Heavy might not have been the – I think that was their view of me. But I was kind of the final decision maker around that place, so. But I wasn't going to – like Laverne, why did she think I was going to not support her? Good Lord. Anyway, that's just the way people are [*laughs*].

GS: Yeah, sure.

I recall you saying that Paul Waldschmidt loved Immaculate Heart and would sometimes attend. Could you tell us more about him? Who he was and...

CURTIN: Well, he had been the President at the University of Portland. And he was a Holy Cross priest from Notre Dame community in Indiana. He had been at University of Portland for many years. The archdiocese was seeking some helper bishops to support the archbishop. And Paul mysteriously (everybody was surprised) – Rome would make these decisions, or the Apostolic Delegate In Washington, DC., because our archbishop wasn't very organized and wasn't very bureaucratic and wasn't very smart, really. Nice guy though, he was really a nice guy. So, they picked Paul to be the auxiliary bishop, I think, to get an organizational model and structure going with the church headquarters in Oregon. And so, he became an auxiliary bishop.

And then he called me after he'd been in the job for a couple of years and said he wanted to come down and spend a weekend with us. And I thought, "Oh man, he's going to be a problem." You know, he's going to find something wrong. But, it was the opposite [*laughs*].

We had, by this time, we had a Black gospel choir of women and men. And we had all the robes, you know, like a Black church and all that stuff. And we hired a choir director for them, and it was very good. I mean it was – they were wonderful. And so, Paul was coming and all his regalia, and he loved it. And he heard the choir and I don't think he'd ever seen anything like that in a Catholic church. They were really spirited and all that. And then he would just – he didn't show up a lot, he was a very busy man, but he would show up, maybe once a year just to participate in Sunday liturgy at the church and meet people. And I put some pictures, I think...

GS: Yeah, I think that there's some pictures in this file.

CURTIN: And Paul was not well, I mean, he had – he was diabetic and overweight, and he never really took care of himself very well. And – so he – but I just loved him, and

I think he liked me a lot. Although I just stayed away from all those church leaders. I just – I let Burt deal with them. They were kind of scared of Burt. But I think they liked me. I heard later that they liked me. When I left, they were very disappointed. But Paul, I remember him telling me one time, you know, “We’ve got to get your guys out of the inner city and out in Washington County where all the money is.” And I thought, “Oh, I don’t want to go out there.” Did I tell you that?

GS: No, you didn’t.

CURTIN: Well, he just mentioned it. And I said, “I don’t think I can survive out there,” you know. And he never responded. He never said anything back. But he was good.

And then, he came down one time for Palm Sunday (when we bless palms) and we would go across to Dawson Park for the blessing of the Palms. And the people from St. Philip’s Episcopal Church, which is down on Rodney and Knott, I think, they would come and join us, and we have a joint blessing. Bill Wetzel was the Episcopal priest at St. Phillips. Saint Phillip the Deacon it’s now called, it’s still there. And then we would bless the palms and then go to our respective churches and start the Holy Week. And Paul was there for that and so, he was just a good – he was a voice of reason in the leadership of the church. And, you know, I’m surprised they made him a bishop. He made too much sense [*both chuckle*].

GS: By the way, we are at about an hour. How are you feeling? Do you want to keep going?

CURTIN: I’m fine.

GS: Okay. We can keep going for a little while. Let me know if you’ve had enough, say “Uncle.”

So, I know Immaculate Heart received a subsidy cut from the Archdiocese of Portland in 1978 or 1979. This is later but since you're talking about all of the stuff right now, I thought I'd go ahead and ask about that. Did that have anything to do with Paul Waldschmidt, or...?

CURTIN: No. How did you know about the subsidy cut?

GS: This letter that I wanted to ask you about in here. This Immaculate Heart Church dated December 1978...

CURTIN: Oh, that's the money raising...

GS: Yeah, and I wanted to ask you about after this subsidy cut happened. And it says the archdiocese of Portland — the letter reads in part, "The Archdiocese of Portland, which subsidizes a great deal of our work for necessary reasons, has had to cut our subsidy for the fiscal year of 1978-79." And this is a letter that you wrote, as the parish priest of Immaculate Heart. And so, I was just curious after this happened — and this is a letter asking people in the larger community to help support the church for financial support. And I'm curious, you know, obviously you reached out to the larger community but, what are some of the means that you employed to fundraise, to support your church programming after that happened? I know you guys had a summer program.

CURTIN: Well, you know, we, on our own, had very limited resources. Just because of the neighborhood we were in. And then, that subsidy stuff actually started in the early 1970s under a former Archbishop, Robert Dwyer, who, the three — and Carl Flack was the pastor then, but they went into the chancery office, St. Andrews, Immaculate Heart, and St. Francis, in an effort to keep our schools open. We weren't going to be self-sustainable, and we were getting a subsidy for all those years. As long as I was at Immaculate Heart there was a subsidy from the archdiocese. And it later became an archdiocesan-wide

fundraiser for social justice programs in the total archdiocese of Portland. So, they would raise money for inner city churches, which we were. And then there were other sort of Catholic charities and other things that the diocese was trying to support but they weren't self-sustaining any longer because of limited finances.

At one point we—the three churches—tried to form a board to raise money.

GS: And when you say the three churches, do you mean?

CURTIN: St. Francis, Immaculate Heart, St. Andrews. And Don Duran was the pastor at St. Francis. And that was kind of an all-white, kind of a hippie church in those days. And then I was more of the Black church and then Burt [at St. Andrews] was the white liberals. I always kid him about that. They were all down there with some Blacks. But so that never got off the ground.

But we were always trying to scheme and figure out ways to raise money. And we all had some kind of personal affiliations with donors that would give us money. Linus Needamayer would give me few thousand dollars every once in a while. And Bill Keyes, who owned Wilf's, his family owns Wilf's down by the railroad station. He gave me money, but then he got mad during the public utilities campaign because he had didn't like what we were doing and pulled his money. So, that kind of stuff was starting to happen too.

So, we were always scheming about money. And I remember going to my family for money and they would give a hundred dollars — my family wasn't rich but, I mean, just a hundred dollars every once in a while. Then I had uncles who were like, "What are you doing with this hundred dollars?" "Well, don't give me the money then. We're just trying to keep the heat on. How's that?" You know.

So, anyway, that was always a struggle. And finally, the schools had to — we had to give up the school after I left. Chuck Linerd took my place there and they had to let the school go because — St. Andrews did to. And St. Francis. So, there was no inner city schools.

And we would run this guilt trip on the about the Catholic school system. You know the American bishops in the early part of the 20th century started the Catholic school system to support the poor immigrant populations of Western Europe to Americanize them, and our schools are in the inner city trying to Americanize African Americans, and poor whites, and various groups. And that worked for a while.

Robert Dwyer, who later died. He was from that Irish immigrant history. He had been the bishop of Reno and he'd been a priest in Salt Lake City — very white places. But he understood from his Irish family that the church would do — and he was a historian too. So, he understood all that kind of stuff and he was easily talked into — and then the other bishops were kind of stuck with it.

Then Central Catholic high school got mad at us because we were taking money from their subsidy and there were some priests that — one priest, in particular, Thomas Laughlin, who became the most celebrated pedophile in the history of our diocese was the one leading that charge against us.

GS: At Central Catholic?

CURTIN: Yeah and he was almost made an auxiliary bishop. And Paul was the one they picked, thank God.

GS: Instead?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Whatever happened to him?

CURTIN: He was later arrested. There were thirty — he went to All Saints Parish on 39th and Glisan. I had been out of the priesthood a couple of years but he — there were all these people that went to the archdiocese about Tom and his abusing children, and they

kind of ignored it. So, they went to the police and there were like 30 complainants against Tom Laughlin. And so, the police were trying to arrest him. In fact, one of the first woman police officers — God, what was her name? In fact, we dated once after I left. But she called me — I worked the night shift at Emmanuel hospital. She called me and woke me up in the middle of the afternoon because they were trying to arrest Tom Laughlin. And she said “What should we do? We’re trying to — we don’t want to make a big scene. The D.A. doesn’t want to have a bunch of cop cars, and knocking doors down, and doing all that.”

And I said, “Well, what would you do? You used to work in Albina, what would you do down there?”

She said, “Well, we’d knock the doors down.”

I said “Please do that. And then call me, because I want to come out and see it. I’ll call the press so they’re there.” I hated Tom.

Anyway, she called me back in half an hour and said he just surrendered with an attorney down at the police station. So, they weren’t going to have to do all that. But she said, “Thank God you got out of that place.” The archdiocese.

So that was Tom. And Tom was really in good stead with the Archbishop at that time, Cornelius Power. But then a lot of priests went in and complained because we were all hearing rumors about his treating children so badly. And actually, some of them went to the Apostolic Delegate in Washington, D.C., and said, “Hey don’t do that to us.” And then Paul surfaced, which was just the opposite; full of integrity, full of good things.

GS: Yeah. Thank you.

Well, I guess just keeping on that vein talking about the fundraising...

CURTIN: Well later — I’ll tell you about — Tom later got fired from the archdiocese.

GS: After he was arrested and all those charges and everything?

CURTIN: Yes, they later fired him. Then he died last year in Omaha, Nebraska, where his family is from.

GS: So, he was maybe living back with his family?

CURTIN: Yeah. Well, I guess so, but I heard there were other complaints about him. In New Mexico, getting in street kids and all this. Police were on his tail down there too. He was an evil guy.

GS: Yeah. And it sounds like when he got arrested, he was actually at the parish that you went as you were growing up.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Did your family continue to go to All Saints after you were at Immaculate Heart or did they start going to Immaculate Heart?

CURTIN: Dad, my father went to – my dad never went back in All Saints except at his funeral. But he had a sense that Laughlin wasn't right, but he didn't know what it was. You know, he had that instinct like police officers get sometimes, that things aren't on the level. I said, "Well you're right."

Then when I told him what happened he didn't believe it for a while. You know, he had this inherent respect for the priesthood. And then I told him who the investigators were, and he said, "Oh, yep."

GS: So, he had gone to Immaculate Heart when...

CURTIN: He was actually was going there a little earlier. You know my dad – Tom Laughlin had been the priest in Corvallis and was always cozying up to the football team,

and my father was kind of a famous athletic alumnus from Oregon State. My dad finally told me – I said, “Well, why’d you quit going?”

He said, “Because every time I walked in the church he was ‘There’s Vic Curtin! One of the 1933 Oregon State Iron Men!’ and blah blah.” And he said, “That was part of my life but, you know, I’m just – I’m done. And everybody would look at me.” And, you know, he said it was just embarrassing [*both chuckle*].

GS: I could see that.

And speaking of your dad and the financial part of Immaculate Heart, I remember in your pre-interview you told me something that I thought was really interesting, that your dad kind of gave you this clue to reach out to people in the community like Mr. Brown who owns Cleo’s, and Po, who owned the Burger Barn, and Jerry Robinson who ran the gambling joint up at Amvets. And I’d really be interested to hear more about all of that — kind of who they were and what your relationship with them was like and how they supported the church in your neighborhood.

CURTIN: Well, you know, they didn’t go to church, those guys, they were kind of—they had a criminal enterprise on the side of a legitimate business. There was a bar kitty-cornered from the church in those days called Cleo and Lillian’s Social Club. Actually, I would go over there at night once and awhile and have a drink, and I got to know Mr. Brown. And so, then I met Jerry Robinson up at that Amvets — and he had a gambling deal going on there too. Supposed to be an American Veterans kind of organization for socializing and all that.

And then Mr. Po ran the Burger Barn and he sold all kinds of heroin. He made more money on heroin than he ever made off of any food. But those guys, they were good, respectable – They were, you know, that’s – I remember the Irish, you know, when the Irish emigrated and we’re transitioning into assimilating into the United States. They always had little criminal – every immigrant group has little criminal enterprises going before they really get mainstreamed into American life.

That's the way I look at it now. But in those days – and my dad who was in charge (he was a lieutenant in charge in the middle of the night of this whole area) would go around and had arrangements with these people. You know, that the police would kind of stay away from their – not protect their criminal enterprise, but you know, we weren't going to get distracted by it either. Unless we had shootings or there was all kinds of people getting hurt, or there were thefts going on. They needed to manage it properly, and we wouldn't bother them.

And there was a guy named Bill Denton who went to our church and he was retired, but I was saying mass one morning. And my father's in the back hugging Bill Denton. And so we're at coffee afterward and Bill Denton – I said, "I see you know my father."

He said, "Your father and I had an arrangement."

And that was a kind of a policing strategy in those days. To tap that stuff down, and control it so that it wasn't disruptive to people's safety and security and all that kind of stuff.

So, he told me to go talk to those guys. And we had a summer school every year because the city was trying to keep the kids organized instead of burning buildings and all that kind of stuff – like the abandoned housing and all that. So, I tried it out on Mr. Brown. I said, "Why don't you give me two hundred dollars for our summer program?"

He said, "Yeah let me get it."

So, I kept trying it. And then Jerry Robinson – Poor Jerry. You know, when the Black gang kids came they didn't like these old guys because they wanted the drug business and they wanted it all and this other kind of stuff. And they just, they killed Jerry Robinson.

So, Jerry at the Amvets thing I got money from him, and I got money from Po, and then there was a one other guy at Fremont and Vancouver – I forget the name of that place. So, I could raise about a thousand dollars from – a thousand dollars went pretty far in the 1970s.

So then, while I was at Immaculate Heart, Amvets got busted for something. I don't know what it was. And it was in the paper and Jerry called me and said, "I'm going to tell them you're my chaplain. You're our chaplain."

And I thought, “Oh God, I’m not going to go to some trial and testify and –” you know. So later, an attorney called me and I said “Now listen, I have no chaplaincy kind of thing with those guys.”

GS: Well he didn’t go to your church.

CURTIN: No.

“They donate to our summer program and, you know. And he’s a very nice guy and, I’m sorry he’s in this situation but, you know, he needs to work it out with the police somehow where he gets to do his thing and dah dah dah.”

And Mr. Brown at Cleo’s, they would stay open all night, after hours, you know. And he would have card games going on there. You know, the house would take the kitty and that’s how they’d make a little extra money.

When the police did raid an afterhours place or something, my father always said, “We made sure the back door was open. So, we’d go through the front just real loud and aggressive and everybody’d run out the back. And that’s what we wanted.”

GS: So is that because they maybe had to show that they were doing active work to kind of combat the...

CURTIN: Yeah, and they’d arrest two or three. Somebody’d start mouthing off to them, they’d arrest them, find some charge and take them to jail and then everybody would think, “Oh yeah there’s Portland Police again, doing their thing.”

Now, some people would call that corruption. But no, I don’t think it is. Neighborhood management.

GS: Yeah.

And so, you mentioned the summer program at Immaculate Heart. What other kinds of programming did you guys have?

CURTIN: With kids or the school or?

GS: Well anything of note, I guess, that you can think of.

CURTIN: Well until [Albina] Fair Share came along, we were pretty school focused. And then, you know, the burglar alarm. I remember talking to Carl Flak, "I mean okay we've got a burglar alarm, and that's fine. But I want Immaculate Heart," (you know now they've got a big gate around the place) I said, "I want Immaculate Heart to be part of the community too." So, we opened up a clothes closet and a food bank. And you know, we had some resources there and we hired some staff.

GS: That's right. On the back of this letter there's this great photo collage and it says it's got the clothes closet, talks about Albina Fair Share, the gospel choir, and there's a picture of you and it says, "Father Curtin is totally involved with the community." This is a great...

CURTIN: And I'm talking with the cops?

GS: Yeah [*Curtin chuckles*].

Well, you know, maybe this maybe a good place to stop for today. I'm just thinking that this is a good place to stop because what I want to ask you about next goes into Model Cities and then Albina Fair Share. And since we're sort of at the end of our time then, I think it'd be better to do that at the beginning. You know what I mean? When we're fresh.

CURTIN: Okay. Yeah, that'll be – and then I do want to get to Harry Watson. One of the things we did do at Immaculate Heart was start the first Narcotics Anonymous meeting in Portland

GS: Do you want to talk about that, because I do have on here to talk about Harry Watson?

CURTIN: Whenever you want to do that. We don't have to do it today.

GS: Maybe let's go into this tomorrow, because we're at about an hour and a half and I'm feeling like...

CURTIN: And I'd like to spend some time on him because that's become a perennial theme. Immaculate Heart, in the Black community, is still seen as kind of a center of this recovery thing entering in — and my dad was part of that, and Harry. And Harry just died. And then the Miracles Club, Central City Concern. All these things kind of shoot off from that. The detox center down — that was started just in these same days.

GS: So, was Immaculate Heart — and not getting too much into it again because we're at the end of our time, but just so I know for next time when I'm making my follow up questions—didn't you say something about that being where the first recovery, like AA place, in the Albina area was? Is that that correct?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Well great. We'll pick up there too next time.
Thanks so much, Bill.

CURTIN: We did quite a bit, didn't we?

GS: We sure did.

[End of Session 2]

Session 3
2018 October 29

GS: Okay, so today is October 29th, 2018. I'm here with Bill Curtin at his home in Portland and this is our third interview. My name is Greta Smith, oral historian for the Oregon Historical Society, good afternoon.

CURTIN: Good afternoon.

GS: So, I'd like to start with some follow-up questions that I had after I got a hold of Laverne Hernandez.

CURTIN: Yeah [*chuckles*], she said she talked to you.

GS: Yeah, we had a nice a talk. So, she taught at Immaculate Heart, if I'm not mistaken and she taught primarily eighth grade which was the highest grade there, right?

CURTIN: Mm-hmm.

GS: So, one of the things she talked about was how embedded in the community you really were and that one thing that you tried to do was make Immaculate Heart a part of the larger community in Albina. I'd just like to hear you talk about your thinking behind that and how you went about trying to connect the church to the people in the neighborhood?

CURTIN: Well, when I went to the church in 1971, and I was with another priest (who was actually my boss) at the time. Very good priest, Carl Flak, but he was just overwhelmed by the criminality in the street and just by the whole Black community — civil rights stuff that was going on. And what appeared to be maybe just a lot of anger. And every time we would leave the house, to go out for the evening—we didn't go together, but separately we'd go out and we'd get burglarized, you know, the house would get burglarized. There

was all this drug addiction in the park and prostitution on the church steps and just all this stuff. And we were reclusive in our church and praying and doing all this church stuff, and not really addressing legitimate gospel and social justice kind of issues that were all around us, as the way I saw it.

So, Carl's response was (this other priest) his response was "We need to get a burglar alarm."

And I was not opposed to getting a burglar alarm, but I said, "I think we need to also do other stuff too. We need to —" and I told him, you know, "I'm going to be outside a lot, I'm not terribly scared of all this stuff. I mean they are really more scared of us than we're scared of them."

And then, St. Andrews up at 9th and Alberta, they had gotten a clothes closet. They got people bringing old clothes to church, and so they opened it up and a food bank — people were bringing canned goods to church on Sunday and they would give out food to people. And then at Thanksgiving and Christmas we got a bunch of turkeys donated. So, we began to change the image as being someone who was a helper.

And then, along came Fair Share and other things, where we were engaging the problems of the neighborhood rather than just kind of locking the church all up and saying prayers and you know, blah blah blah blah blah blah. And then, the school was trying to do the same. We were trying to — Laverne could probably tell you more about that. But that spirit also went over to the school and they began to engage problematic kids in the neighborhood that were failing in the public school system. And we were kind of in over our heads with some of that. I don't know how much you talked to Laverne, but we did. And I've talked to some of those kids later. Some of them are in their 50s. And some of them have appreciated coming to Immaculate Heart school, but we challenged their behavior too. We just didn't let them get away with stuff. And Laverne was one of those very — she was an African-American woman, who was tall, and strong looking, and had a black belt in karate and she could — they didn't want to mess with her. So, she was — and people still ask about her from that era.

And so, those were some of the things that we need.

In terms of worship, we got a Black gospel choir going in our church. I got a guy (and he's now dead) to donate all the robes and all that stuff — kind of mimic the Southern Baptist church. Especially the women in the parish were all excited and ready to do that, and we hired a choir director. We had some wonderful worship things with the Black gospel choir. And then kind of using the Roman Catholic liturgy together with that. We began to draw people and we began to draw white liberals too, because they [*chuckles*] wanted to come and see this kind of stuff. So, we got a little revenue. We began to get a little revenue bump from that kind of stuff in the church. Not the clothes closet.

But then some of the women in the parish — Rita Benjamin (she's now dead), she was involved in the clothes closet and the food bank long after I left, still keeping it going. And then we had — then Harry Watson came along, and we started the Narcotics Anonymous, so that was another thing that we were kind of addressing. And then we developed a close relationship with the Portland Police, to be a bridge between those.

GS: Yeah. That brings me to another thing that Laverne said and that was that you worked really hard to build bridges between the police and the community. You had the policemen come by the school and kind of mingle with the kids. And that you also took the teaching staff to the police club, which was a little tavern on Burnside and had the...

CURTIN: I hope I didn't do that [*laughs*].

GS: She said you did! And that you guys used to go there sometimes. Tell me about that?

CURTIN: Yeah. Well, the Portland Police Association — they probably shouldn't have had — they had kind of a bar, and it wasn't on Burnside, it was between 6th and 7th and Alder, next to the old East Precinct. But I naturally had connections through my father; they knew the name Curtin. And then my dad was going to church there so they — and then we had some Portland Police officers that were worshipping there, too. Catholic guys that

would come to church there and work in the neighborhood. So, we were trying to just, you know, like today, they talk about all this division in our society, and there was in those days too with the Civil Rights movement, and the war in Vietnam, and all that. And we were trying to cross those boundaries and bring people together. And, like you always find when you do that, people like each other and most people are not crazy and they want to get along and, you know. So that's the kind of – that was our strategy in all that kind of stuff. And then pretty soon we weren't getting burglarized when we were going out at night.

GS: Wow. Because you were more connected to the community.

CURTIN: Yeah. And then some of the winos in the park didn't want those people messing with our church. There were some remarkable people there that are long dead now that I'm sure died of addiction diseases and all that. Bull Halsey was one guy who – he would not let anybody cross me.

GS: He's the one that you mentioned...

CURTIN: He was an ex-fighter. Ex-prizefighter, you know, heavyweight boxer. Nationally recognized and he died of alcoholism, I'm sure. But he was kind of a famous guy down there.

GS: Just out of curiosity, did you – I'm just thinking because you're talking about boxing. Did you ever have any interaction with the Knott Street Boxing Club?

CURTIN: Not the club, no, but certainly I knew – it was Matt Dishman. When I was there it was changed to the Matt Dishman center. And certainly, there were children who participated in events there from the neighborhood, yeah, swimming and boxing. But that boxing thing was starting to fade in the Knott Street. I was there a little after when that

began to, kind of, fade. But Knott Street Community Center was the center of the prize fighting community in the city of Portland, yeah.

GS: You know, the Knott Street Boxing Club still actually exists inside the Matt Dishman Community Center?

CURTIN: Oh, it does?

GS: It does, yeah. It's, like you said, not as active as it was, but it's still there. So, kind of a cool history there.

CURTIN: My grandsons, who are from Dubai and spend the summer here a lot, are swimmers. I mean, competitive swimmers. And they go down to Knott Street and practice and stay in shape and do all that.

GS: That's cool.

Well, okay, so I guess that's it for my follow up questions.

I wanted to ask you, by the time you became a priest at Immaculate Heart in 1971, many of the homes had been demolished and the people displaced to make way for the I-5 and in preparation for the Emmanuel expansion. I'd really like to hear what you remember about what Albina was like then, what it looked like, what was kind of the – you mentioned something about people being angry a second ago. But yeah, I just wanted to hear about what you thought about it when you got there.

CURTIN: I showed up and there were homes that hadn't been torn down yet — no people in them, you know. And then it had an impact on our church community too, because we lost membership. I mean — I forget. I can't remember. I remember going to Elliott neighborhood association meetings and there was the anger, because people

weren't getting value out of the deals the government was giving them for their homes. You know, it was a typical shakedown thing. And so, there was that kind of anger.

And then, it kind of got just stalemated because Emmanuel then got scared of – you know, the city you had experienced some massive civil disturbances where most of Union Avenue (which is now Martin Luther King Boulevard) was burned down. I mean you've probably heard of that. And so there was – so everybody was – in fact, I remember going to meetings around the community trying to get a grocery store back on Union Avenue, and we didn't get one until sometime in the late 1980s. Safeway went up Ainsworth. So, you've heard these things?

GS: Yeah, but I want to hear what you think about it.

CURTIN: Well, I mean that was just – there were just problems.

So, Emanuel just shut down. They were scared. Everybody got very timid about this development stuff. There were all these empty blocks of stuff. Still now, there's a couple. You drive down there, you can see there's a couple still. There are empty blocks. And then, they just didn't do anything with all the property. And then they tore down –.

The big social life of the community was at Williams Avenue and Russell—Paul's Paradise, the Gay Paris (which is now Sloan's Tavern across the street on Vancouver and Russell). I still go there for lunch—my wife and I do—from time to time. And then Paul Knowles had a place called Paul's Paradise. And that shut down. There was a Rexall drugstore at the corner of Williams and Knott. The Texas Playhouse was kitty corner. There was a lot of drugs and prostitution out of there. Mrs. T owned the Texas Playhouse. I never met her, but I heard about her.

GS: What did you hear about her?

CURTIN: Oh, just that she – everybody knew her, and you don't mess with her, and she had women there, and drugs there, and all that stuff. And so that closed down. That went down in the Emmanuel thing too.

And then Paul bought Geneva's, which was – you've probably heard of Geneva's, it was up further up on Williams Avenue by Skidmore. And that was kind of a nice – that was a famous nightspot for many years.

GS: There's a barbershop named Geneva's too on M.L.K.

CURTIN: Well that's his wife, who is named Geneva. Paul's wife is named Geneva.

GS: There was also a nightclub...

CURTIN: Named Geneva's, yeah, which hasn't been around a lot of years.

Cleo & Lillian's was across the street, which was a bar. And I do remember taking Laverne there one night, just her and I. We had a wonderful evening, but that – and then Mr. Brown owned that. He would contribute to our summer program. I think I told you about those guys. He had a gambling deal going in the back room, and that was always kind of the life down there. And so –

But the Emanuel thing, I remember going to the Eliot neighborhood association meeting and there were people very upset about it. The city could sustain all that yelling and screaming, you know, they – the houses were already down. Neighbors were already bought off. They made a deal with them, and it wasn't equitable. It never was equitable.

I mean, the same thing happened at the Memorial Coliseum. The same thing happened at the freeway on the north end. I mean so, the Black community was used to this reshuffling. It was in that thing on housing in the last quarterly that came out from the Oregon Historical Society. Describes it much better than I can describe it. But I know it was a big upset.

GS: And I'm just going to note because this is going in the archive, that the article in *The Quarterly* that you're talking about is the Fall 2018 issue on residential segregation in housing, in case people want to look that up later.

So yeah, that kind of brings me to my next question, which was just that you were talking about the Elliott neighborhood association and people being up in arms. I'm just wondering if you remember the kinds of things that people were saying?

CURTIN: [Thoughtful pause]

They were the obvious things. I can't remember anything specific, but I know it was about this relocation program, and the inequity of it, and just the disruption again to the African-American community.

GS: Because as you mentioned this had happened before. This wasn't the first time so, yeah.

CURTIN: Yes. Yes.

And Ida [Shepherd], you know, I don't think Ida went to those meetings, but she was certainly there. She still lives right in the middle of it.

GS: And she was in the gospel choir too, wasn't she?

CURTIN: Yes, she was. Yes.

GS: So, what do you make of all of this at the time? I remember – I'm asking this because I thought it was interesting when we had talked before, during your pre-interview, you said that you kind of didn't know what to make of it at the time.

CURTIN: Well, I was. I mean, I was kind of overwhelmed. I eventually got on board with – you know, and then you talked about Model Cities. There was a lot of money, federal

money, in the neighborhood. So, there were all these people trying to take advantage of it, as I look back on it now. They would start organizations like, the Albina Women's League was one. And then there was another – what was the other one? The Office was it – but they had to – they were renting these buildings and creating boards and here I was this naive new young priest. They would often ask me to be on the board, and I'd go, and nothing would happen.

And then I was doing some stuff with North Precinct, police precinct. And Captain Bill Taylor was the captain out there, and he was really willing to – he was tired of the riots. And the Police Community Relations Unit had just started on Williams Avenue. It was housed in what is now the Fourth Dimension recovery building down there. Phil Smith, another captain, was in charge of that. The police bureau was trying to figure out what to do and they created this special police unit.

And then the Albina Women's League. Betty Overton, who would jump on everything she could find and (now that I look back on it) start taking credit for it, and then getting her money from Model Cities somehow. And then, she created a big Albina Women's League Police-Community Relations Award and gave it to Bill Taylor and I and had a big dinner that nobody showed up at. And so there were these kinds of things going on too.

GS: And this is with Model Cities money?

CURTIN: Well, it was – I'm sure was Model Cities money. They all got different – they would start an organization, they would write something up and get money to start. And then there was one for our neighborhood and the office was at Seventh and Knott. Marcus Glen was kind of running that and I was on his board. Maybe it was called the Albina Action Center or something. And then they would give out awards and plaques and all that kind of stuff to people, but nothing was happening. They finally had a big meeting down at Gearhart, and they had rented this big resort hotel that was just full of people. And they invited me to go down, and I went down, and everybody was just partying and drunk and

just doing all – so, I left early and I said “I’m done with this kind of craziness. I mean I don’t know what’s going to go on.”

And then within a year, these community organizers that were going to start Fair Share came to St. Andrews and us, and so that’s where I devoted my energies. They were real goal specific, and had action messages, and wanted results, and were kind of hardcore. They were Saul Alinsky techniques. I don’t know if you’re familiar with Alinsky and his techniques, mostly used in Chicago. In fact, Barack Obama was involved in some of that later on. This was way before Barack Obama’s time, when he was a young – just after college he went to Chicago. But he talks about Alinsky methods. And, in fact, the Republicans tried to make him out to be a communist or something because of Alinsky’s thing. But it has nothing to do with that.

But anyway, so that’s where I – and then, all of a sudden – Cleveland Gilchrist was the head of the Metropolitan Human – no, what was it called? But he was kind of the head of this Model Cities thing.

GS: Cleveland Gilchrist?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: In Portland?

CURTIN: Yes. And you’ll – I’m sure I’m sure there’s stuff about him down there [at OHS].

GS: Did you know him?

CURTIN: I had met him. But he was the big – his offices were down on Knott and between Union Avenue and Williams Avenue. Right by that New Song Community Church. That wasn’t built in those days, but it’d be right in that area.

GS: So, was he an African-American man?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And what was his – where did he come from?

CURTIN: Well, you know, I'm sure I looked it up at one point because I couldn't quite – he later got into all kinds of, I think, criminal trouble over the misuse of these funds and all that other kind of stuff. But, I mean, that was the – I just was done with this. I didn't have any faith any longer. You know, you talked about this Model Cities program. I lost faith in that process. And I saw it as a big rip off.

GS: What was the process as you understood it, or you saw it?

CURTIN: Well, they were supposed to kind of rebuild black communities and African-American communities. After the – you know, the race riots of the late 1960s and early 1970s in this country, I mean you're too young to remember, but it was terrifying. The Watts Riot, and Detroit, and you know, every city in the country was having this terrible unrest after Martin Luther King was killed, after Robert Kennedy was killed. There's just all this – and the government was scared. They wanted to figure out how to – and then people in need were trying to [*laughingly*] rip off money, you know. It makes sense, you know? So that's what happened. But they weren't getting much done.

And then the government, local governments, were all trying to appease them and say the right things, but not getting anything done. Like on abandoned housing. Right, so those kinds of things. And like lower utility rates. "Oh yeah, well we're doing a study and we're doing this." And nobody was asking, "When's the study going to get done? You know we've also done a study, that's how Alinsky – okay, we'll give you our study and then

you can respond to our study.” You know, those kinds of things. And we had staff that was beginning to do that after we got organized.

So anyway, that was how I saw things at that point. And then Bert Griffin at St. Andrews, we both agreed that – then he’s the one that got contacted by these community organizers, some from the Bay Area, one from Chicago. They wanted to move to Portland and they wanted to do community action kinds of things. And Bert sent them down to visit with me. I thought they were – I was still so mad at Model Cities that I said, “I really don’t even want to talk to you if you’re going to just play games.” So, they finally convinced me (and Bert helped convince me) that the two parishes there could get some – get our people together. But we wanted to be broader than just the two Catholic churches. And then in the middle of that Bert invited Angela Davis to come and speak at St. Andrews. And that was a big deal for the black community, but it also got him in trouble with the diocese [*chuckles*].

GS: When did that happen, about what year?

CURTIN: Well, it’s in the 1970s – I forget when it is.

GS: So, she did come and speak?

CURTIN: Yes. She spoke at St. Andrews Church.

GS: And Bert Griffin got in trouble for that?

CURTIN: Well I don’t know – It was hard to get him in trouble. He was a real big shot in the diocese. But he called me to tell me, “She’s coming and get ready.” [*chuckles*]

GS: Did you go?

CURTIN: I didn't go. No. I kind of stayed away from it, just you know. But I'm glad she came. You know, it was really good. People were – see, that's another thing where we kind of came in, and then – you know, like helping the Black Panthers with our vans and all that stuff for their breakfast programs and sickle cell anemia. That's getting out of the out of the sanctuary of the church and working with people.

GS: Yeah, I wanted to ask you about – because you mentioned that you did work with Kent Ford and the Black Panthers. I'm curious how you came to meet Mr. Ford and be involved with the Black Panthers.

CURTIN: I think Bert sent him down to me. Bert was kind of the major domo, great head guy. Yeah. We both had our – he was just really a good bureaucrat about getting people involved. And I want to get together with Kent too. I mean, his place was actually right down by our church. So, anyway, I still see Kent from time to time. I told you that.

GS: Yeah. And you mentioned that Mr. Ford's wife, Sandra – I just remember you talking about her. What do you remember about Sandra?

CURTIN: Well, I think Sandra was – I just met her a few times but I heard people say that Sandra was the brains behind the operation. You know, really, what I heard – actually, I think Bert knew Sandra better too, and said that to me.

Too bad Bert isn't around.

GS: Yeah.

Okay, so we were talking about the Model Cities program. And so, you're saying that Albina Fair Share came out of the Model Cities program?

CURTIN: No.

GS: No? But it was sort of this thing where you were really *over*, kind of, the way that the organizing with the Model Cities was going, and so when these outside organizers came from Chicago and wanted to work...

CURTIN: And the Bay Area.

GS: And the Bay Area.

CURTIN: One of them had been studying for the priesthood with me. And so, he knew me and then they knew Bert too.

GS: What was his name?

CURTIN: Mike Barnes.

GS: Mike Barnes. Okay.

CURTIN: And I don't know where he is.

GS: So those are the two – so they are who, kind of, started Albina Fair Share or got the idea going?

CURTIN: Well they came – they met with us and they would say things to you like “You guys are going to be the founders of Fair Share,” Bert and I, because they wanted to stay in the background. So that kind of made me feel like “Okay, maybe this is for real.”

“We'll do all the scut work and the dirt work for you. We're going to have a canvassing program to raise money in the broader community and we're going to – ” you know. They were just very organized.

All of them had been in big major campaigns. They had done a utility rate campaign in the state of California that changed all – and we adopted that utility reach structure in Oregon later. But they, you know, they could organize. And they had staff that they would bring with them that they'd have to pay. So, they would raise – and this was not going to be a cost to us. They just wanted to use our church structure. In fact, we opened up a room in our rectory, at Immaculate Heart, for them to have an office.

In fact, Dick Springer, who was the state senator, said that he was going to start taxing our church [*laughingly*] because we were using it for governmental purposes. He never did. But that was one of the threats that was out there.

GS: Yeah, I remember you saying that that the church had offices in the rectory or – sorry, that Albina Fair Share had offices in the church rectory. So, I really want to hear everything about this that you can remember. Tell me the names of the two guys again, the community organizers?

CURTIN: Well, Kim Claire was the head of these organizers. He came from California, the Bay Area. Mike Barnes came with him. Some women who were, like, staff people. Kevin Jeans-Gale came from Chicago.

Kevin is, unfortunately – he married one of the women that came from California, and their poor family has been through hell. Kevin's a paraplegic now and I don't know if he's going to be very useful to get a hold of, but he's the only one that's still alive. His wife and older daughter were killed in a head-on collision, oh, about ten years ago, right after Christmas, going over to Bend to a family party. And so, he lost his wife and oldest daughter. He and two sons were the survivors and then he had a terrible accident swimming in the Atlantic Ocean with some riptide and ended up paralyzed totally. And so, I don't know his status. I can find it out if you want. I don't think he can – he's on a ventilator all the time. I don't even know if he can talk for very long, but he would be very valuable. He later worked in city government and was a chief of staff for Jim Francesconi, who was a city commissioner and all that.

GS: Yeah, maybe that's something we can talk about later, the possibility of getting a hold of him. I remember you saying that he was also involved, and he was kind of – was he running the office at the rectory?

CURTIN: Well, he was kind of a lead organizer. So, I think he did training. They started training some of these younger people in Alinsky tactics and how they're going to operate, but they always took members like me, and Bert, and Ida, and other people and put us up front. They were never on the news, but they were always in the background. Alinsky – there's a book called *Rules for Radicals* if you want – are you familiar with it?

GS: No.

CURTIN: Yeah, I think I have it in there. I'll give it to you. It's all about how to do things.

And then we would have community meetings with people, and they would write out agendas – we had to follow the agenda. Weren't going to let people go wandering off into – and there was always a goal for every meeting, something you were trying to achieve, and city government officials were going to be asked specific, direct questions about solving the problem as the neighbors saw it. Like the housing thing.

GS: Yeah and let's just – I know that we've talked a lot about this and kind of touched on it throughout your oral history, but just to be really clear, what was the goal of Albina Fair Share? Why did it exist?

CURTIN: To win issues that were important to the neighborhood and to bring resolution to them. So, it could be a number – now housing is the one we got into the most, but we also discussed prostitution, and we also discussed police community relations and those kind of things. But we could never get enough traction.

And then Fair Share was expanding, and so there were chapters in Medford, chapters in Eugene, chapters in Salem, and there was a chapter actually out in Lents. And then we decided to do a statewide utility rate reduction campaign for poor people so that rates were based on consumption rather than just flat rates for everybody.

GS: And that was called Oregon Fair Share, right?

CURTIN: That was called Oregon Fair Share.

GS: And, with the other chapters in other cities like Medford and whatnot, were the same people who were doing the behind the scenes organizing in Portland also doing it in those places?

CURTIN: Well, I think they were involved somehow. I don't quite know how they managed all that structure. I know that we went to the State Capitol when the State Legislature was in session. Vera Katz was speaker of the house and we had five hundred people and we flooded every representative. We brought the Legislature to a standstill that day we were there. Vera Katz was very angry at us. They did not like Fair Share, the politicians, because we made them – they couldn't BS. They couldn't wander off and talk. We didn't want to talk, we just wanted stuff done. "When, where, when will it get done? Dah dah dah dah dah dah dah."

GS: Tell me about some of the tactics and methods that you all used to get the attention of the people in government?

CURTIN: Well, we – okay, the one I was closest to, the small issue – I was close to the Oregon utility rate campaign. I was kind of chairman of that, but that doesn't mean I was close to it. But the housing campaign in Albina, we had a meeting of people. We canvassed those neighborhoods around abandoned houses and invited them to a meeting. They

were upset. They were angry. We kind of fueled and weaponized that anger. Weaponized is a word we didn't use then, but that's a good word today.

GS: How did you do that, would you say?

CURTIN: Well, we would just get them to talk about it and tell us more stories and, you know, about rats running around, and their kids, and all this kind of stuff. And nobody was taking care of these houses and dah dah dah dah dah dah.

Some of the stuff you saw in the video where they were challenging. So, we had a meeting. Then we asked (I forget his name) the head of the Bureau of Buildings with the city government to come and told them that – and then, not only did we do that, then we got a city ordinance that we wanted implemented, that these houses had to be cared for by the landlords.

GS: Because the issue was that people who lived in the West Hills were buying up properties because they were looking to make an investment on it due to the Emanuel expansion. Is that correct?

CURTIN: Yes, so the neighborhood zoning had changed because of the Emanuel expansion. Or it was going to change. So, the city, I think, expected all kinds of medical office buildings to go in around the hospital. But it never happened because the project was brought to kind of a standstill. But the people who were investors thought they could buy this cheap, ghetto housing and then turn it over later into a – so they just boarded it up, they didn't want to be renters, and then these houses were just there.

So, we met with the Bureau of Buildings and told them about the city ordinance that we wanted. And I forget the specifics of the ordinance, but it was always very specific that landowners in the city of Portland had to do such – if they were renters. They couldn't just board a house up. If there weren't renters in there, then they had to mow the lawn so there

wasn't fire problems or, you know, keep it as a safe environment so people couldn't get into their structures and do all that kind of stuff.

So, then we then we went down to the – Fair Share staff would go down to City Hall and find out who owned these houses, and that's when we found out that there was all these West Hills people up in the West Hills who were –.

So, we invited them to a meeting down in Albina with our group of people, and nobody showed up.

GS: Surprise, surprise.

CURTIN: No, we weren't surprised.

So then, we decided that on a Saturday morning we were going to go to their residences in the West Hills and get the press to join us. And the press were always at these meetings too. We always invited the press. So then I remember a woman coming up to me from the press (you know, these kind of cute, articulate, young women) and wanting to know what gave me the right to do what I'm doing. And I said, "The Constitution of the United States. The right to assemble, the right to speak freely about problems with our government, and to try and bring resolution. We're being good citizens. We're the good citizens in this thing."

So, I became kind of a – Fair Share liked that, so they kind of made me the front person for a lot of this kind of stuff. That's why I got out of the utility rate campaign. They told me I was good on my feet. I didn't know that, but I was, I think. So, then we then we went up to the houses, you know, up to the homes. And then the city of Portland...

GS: In the West Hills?

CURTIN: Yes, on a Saturday morning. And I think there was video of that too that you have, and the press was there, and it got a lot of coverage, and it was all good. I mean it was just – see, that's the kind of – Model Cities would never do that, would never challenge

the establishment of Portland. You know, that's where the moneyed people are up there. And then we got the ordinance passed.

So, these renters, these people that own these properties had different requirements and there was leverage to get those places cleaned up. I mean we had — in the summertime when it was a hot summer night, you know, the kids would burn these houses down just to have kind of a ghetto festival. "Let's go burn a house down." [*chuckles*] And they'd never get caught. But I mean, why do that? It was just a hazard.

GS: So was it — I'm just thinking about what it must have been like in the neighborhood at the time. Would it have been like every few houses there was an abandoned house, or would there be an entire block of abandoned...

CURTIN: No, they were never...

GS: And I say "abandoned" but what I should...

CURTIN: I don't think there was ever an entire block. There were just sporadic — Ida would be able to tell you more about that when you talk to her. I think she had one next to her house.

But I mean, they would be sporadic, these houses. When people would poll the — it was an issue that came up right away. When Fair Share was polling people in the neighborhood, going around to talk about problems, it was one of the issues and it was winnable. There was no way you could lose that issue. It wasn't a bunch of Blacks being militant, it was families trying to protect their own property, their investments, and their kids, and everything else. It was so winnable.

GS: And you guys did win it, it sounds like.

My head is just swimming here there's so many things I want to ask, so I'm going to try really hard to keep on track. I'm wondering, how did changes start to happen once you guys got that city ordinance passed?

CURTIN: Well, you know I can't – well, I remember telling people about it at church after. I'd wait out in the back and they'd talk about some house and I'd say "Well, you know, now there's a city ordinance. Call the city."

GS: Did people see it? Did you see it? Change? Did landlords start coming and taking care of the properties? Did it improve?

CURTIN: Well, I'm not sure. I don't remember anything specifically, but I think it was there to be used if you wanted to. So, there was some kind of a tool to give people power to address some of that.

GS: Hmm. I'm just curious how much it was enforced...

CURTIN: Oh, effective?

GS: Yeah. If people had to call, and they had to know who to call – I'm just curious.

CURTIN: You know I can't remember how that all transpired. I just know we won. And then the city tried to take credit for it, of course, but, you know, it didn't.

Fair Share was a mixed blessing for politicians, because we would make them look bad if something didn't happen.

GS: I remember you saying that when you called Neil Goldschmidt or Frank Ivancie they would answer.

CURTIN: In fact, we got Neil to come down to our church school sometimes and play basketball with the kids. And there's a great picture on – there's a Facebook page called The Immaculate Heart School Get Together that kids put together and there's a picture of Mark James who was just a kid then...

[REDACTED]

But he was taking a hook shot over Goldschmidt out in the parking lot.

GS: That's on the Facebook page?

CURTIN: I could get Neil to come down, and, you know, we weren't mean to him then. It was just trying to get – you know, the city needed to show, and it was anxious to because of all the disruption of the civil rights movement, you know they needed – they finally knew the police, everybody, finally knew that – in fact, Neil brought in probably one of the best police chiefs we've ever had in this city, Bruce Baker, who really did a lot of – he was way ahead of the community policing. He didn't call it community policing. He was a wonderful man and he's dead now. But that was one good thing Neil did. Poor Neil. You know, people just get sideways sometimes.

GS: And speaking of these, you were, talking earlier about the riots that were happening in the late 1960s. Do you remember, they call it the Albina riots?

CURTIN: They never used the word riots, I remember that. They called them civil disturbances. They burned a lot of buildings down on Union Avenue. I think it was 1968 and 1970 when we had big – in 1970 I was up at St. Charles, so I remember them. And then, we had a police officer in the parish at St. Charles that later went to Immaculate Heart who was in the middle of it all. You know, in the middle of trying to respond. And I remember going over to his house after it was kind of settled and listening to him, just all the craziness.

It was a big – and the police didn't know how to deal with that mass demonstration kind of stuff in those days. So, they did stupid things. Got caught doing – always like this, you know. Now the police are a little more [*chuckles*] discreet on how they grab people and hold on to them – those kinds of things, which is good. And then Bruce Baker was brought in to introduce some kind of new policing.

And then Penny Harrington came along, she was a good friend of mine. She didn't last long, but she would've been a wonderful police chief. She's Facebook friend today.

GS: I wanted to ask you about this earlier. Let's talk about Harry Watson. I know that he was, you mentioned he was the first Black person who really embraced the 12 Step program in Albina and he has this wonderful legacy. And you told me a beautiful story about him during the pre-interview that I'd love to get on the record here if you...

CURTIN: Well I think – you know, my father was a recovered alcoholic, and a Portland police officer too, but a recovered alcoholic. And so I knew that this thing in the park across the street was – you know, there was no response to addiction issues at all in the early 1970s. I mean, the detox center was just starting, so people could go to detox, and then they had a dry out place down in Wilsonville at what is now Coffee Creek Correctional Facility. But then it was called – it was mental hospital before, but I took a few guys down there to just dry out.

But unbeknownst to me (you know this is how life happens) there is a woman named Peggy who had started a rehab recovery house for black drug addicts up by Lloyd Center in a house. And Harry Watson was 29 years old and had just graduated after two years in that recovery. He had sold drugs across the street from Immaculate Heart church. His parents went to our church.

And his mother came down to my office (and I was just there a few months) and said, "Baptize him." [*chuckles*] Louise. She was a wonderful woman. Sainly woman.

I said – and I wasn't going to mess with her – I said "Okay, let's go over and do it." And I baptized Harry and then he kept coming. He was living with his parents and he kept

coming to church with them. So about three weeks later I pulled him aside after church and I said, "Well, how are you doing? Are having any struggling trying to – you can't go back out there and drink and use with these people."

And he says, "I know that. I see my friends all the time and I don't know what to do. And I'm with my parents. I'm bored."

And I said "Well, my father is a recovered alcoholic. He's been in AA for over 20 years. I'll talk to him. I think maybe you guys should have lunch and talk." And I said, "Now, let me warn you. He's a retired Portland police officer."

And he said "Oh, that white-haired guy at church?" [*chuckles*] I said "Yeah." He said "I knew I knew him from somewhere. And yeah, he was at the jail and he was a nice guy. We all liked him."

They had lunch and they started a meeting right away at Immaculate Heart. It was all these guys from Freedom House, Peggy's place who were these ex-addicts. And then my dad would bring down his old Irish alcoholic friends from his home group and they would meet every Thursday night at Immaculate Heart church, over in the hall at the place next door. And that meeting still goes, and I go to it now. It's called – my dad's name was Victor Aloysius Curtin and after he died all those guys, those Black guys, called it the Victory Group in his honor, and he loved those guys. I mean he just, he'd been with them when he was in the police. You know, he knew them, and he knew it was the same bucket that all these problems came from.

And so, Harry stayed sober. My dad died in 1987. Harry just died last year. He had 45 years of clean time from drugs and he began – if you ever go to the Miracles Club and look around and you'll meet people that talk about Harry saving their life. And he did. He spent – he later got a certificate in alcohol and drug counseling and worked in that kind of industry for years. Then they would use him in the criminal justice system too to talk to – I mean, he really wasn't a bad criminal, but he did do county jail time. But now there's guys that spent years in the penitentiary that have been clean and sober for 20 years, and they're all –.

There's a vibrant, muscular recovery community in the Black community because of Harry Watson and my dad. And I think that's a remarkable thing. The Miracles Club is one of the things that has come out of that over the years. They were always looking for a place to have their meetings, their twelve step meetings, and they would have trouble and then they started – you know, Sam Brown (who would like to talk to you about the Miracles Club sometime) he was very close to Harry. I think they started in some abandoned house, and then they called it the Miracles Club, and now...

GS: They started in an abandoned house?

CURTIN: I think it was. Now, Sam can tell you more about that history. Sam was one of the founders of the Miracles Club. He's known as one of the founders. And he now kind of – there's a building now down on M.L.K. just off in Skidmore called the Miracles Club and it has housing for addicts up above. And [Dan] Saltzman, you know, the council (the guy going off the city council) was very instrumental in getting the federal funding so they could have that in the community. And it's kind of a social place for drug addicts to go and alcoholics in the African American community, but they accept anyone. I go to meetings down there and I just love the people they're just wonderful. Men and women – a lot of women too. A lot of women who have been prostitutes and are no longer in that life and are grateful as hell. And they're grandmothers and they love their grandbabies. And they do all this stuff.

So, I mean it's just this – I think it's a remarkable story. And they have a story too in the middle of the Black community. I mean the Black Panthers get kind of this notoriety and – but people respond to things and things happen kind of by accident. I go to the jail, I told you, and I tell them about this meeting down on Williams Avenue across from Dawson Park and it was started by a police officer and a dope dealer. And they'll go "Really? I'm not going to that meeting."

I said "Well, that's how the Twelve Step God works. You know, [*chuckles*] with people like that."

So, that's how that meeting got started. You know, the drug addiction thing started again this summer in Dawson Park. The city redesigned that park to make it more child-friendly and get that element out of there. They had a shooting down there, the week before last or something. So, it's still going on. I mean, We walked into our meeting on Thursday night and people in the park are all waving at us "Have a good meeting."
[chuckles]

GS: So, it's still going?

CURTIN: Yeah. This meeting is still going. Called the Victory Group.

GS: Started by Harry Watson and your father.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And Harry Watson also started the Miracles Club.

CURTIN: Well, now Harry, Sam Brown, and two guys, two brothers whose last name is Gage, I think. You know, you've got to be careful about last names.

GS: Sure.

CURTIN: But they – Sam would be able to get you together with them.

GS: I'm curious if you know Peggy's last name.

CURTIN: You know, I don't. I can I can find out real quick.

GS: Yeah, if you find out I'd be interested to know. You don't have to find out right this second.

CURTIN: Jackie Johnson is still alive, who was in that Freedom House thing, and he's got 43 years of clean time. He's a wonderful guy.

GS: So, shifting gears a little bit. You had talked about, in Albina Fair Share, going to the West Hills and demonstrating, because you couldn't get those people to come into Albina for the meetings. Tell me about that. Did you guys carry signs, did you...

CURTIN: Yeah, I mean it's been it's been a long time ago. We did carry signs. And the T.V. cameras went with us and we tried to – well, that one woman who came on the video, you know, and said "Those people came up here and disrupted our – and my husband had some surgery. They just had no respect," and all that stuff. I mean that's the kind of...

GS: Mm-hmm.

CURTIN: But, a lot of people didn't want to even talk to us, but we always made sure they knew we came.

GS: Did you go knock on doors?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And did people come to the door and talk to you?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Do you remember what kinds of things they talked about?

CURTIN: No, I don't. I just remember that what I saw that video was typical of – But she was a little more – people were scared of Blacks up there, you know? Scared of Ida Shepherd, if you can imagine. So, I mean that that was –. *[laughs]*

You know, but yeah, these Black mothers, they were what were the backbone of that Albina Fair Share. They were strong people and, you know, they're going to take care of their kids, and that's understandable. I just put something on my Facebook page that there's been 257 mass shootings in the United States last year, and not one by a Black or an illegal alien. So, I put it on my Facebook, and I said, "All by angry, overheated, white males."

GS: It's awful.

CURTIN: Anyway, we don't want to get off on that.

GS: And, just keeping on with the Albina Fair Share, I'd love to hear some more about some of the other people involved. You talked a little bit about Kevin Jeans-Gale, a little bit about Ida Shepherd, and generally about the kinds of people who were really the driving force. Any other people of note?

CURTIN: Well, I'm trying to think maybe Arna Dean Bean, and some of our staff. Well, there was one woman that was – what is her name? Ida would give you her name. She was a real fireball too; a Black woman. I can't think of her name right now. But Ida and I have talked about her since we've been getting together about this, and I think she's still alive. She'd be a good one to talk with and I can get that to you sometime.

GS: Okay.

CURTIN: Yeah. I don't remember a lot of the people anymore.

GS: Mm-hmm. Okay.

CURTIN: I kind of left that world and never went back. You know, now I've got back in recent years, but I haven't...

GS: And about what year was this all happening? This would have been the late 1970s?

CURTIN: Yes, late 1970s, like 1975-1976 on. And then it was kind of losing some of its steam by the time I left in 1981, I think.

GS: Yeah, were you – so after Albina Fair Share – or I guess I'm not really clear. Was Albina Fair Share still going when Oregon Fair Share took shape?

CURTIN: Yes, but you know, I think we just had, we just diminished our resources, you know, when we took on a state campaign. So, the local chapters began to – we really depended on staff to do the heavy lifting and they got into the statewide campaign which really mimicked the California utility rate campaign.

GS: Tell me how that got started, the Oregon Fair Share?

CURTIN: Well, I think those guys from California, that was their intention, to get a statewide organization to take on issues in Oregon. They thought they had that great experience in California and it wouldn't be that hard to do. I think that's Kim Clare and Mike Barnes. Well, Mike Barnes kind of took off. He exited the thing in the middle of things.

And then they started having staff leadership – I think if Kevin could talk, he could tell you that. They started fracturing a little bit. You know, there was relationship stuff going on between them all and a lot of heavy drinking. Those guys were all kind of that way. And so, I think it kind of petered out.

But I think the [Saul] Alinsky model of action really works. And it really gives you techniques too. I'll give you the book before you leave, *Rules for Radicals*.

GS: Yeah, and I'd also love to hear just for the record here, what your interpretation of the Alinsky model is.

CURTIN: You don't have – you have an agenda when you go in and talk to politicians. And the more specific the agenda gets, the better. And then after any meeting with them, you regroup and get more specific. So that you kind of create stepping stones to a resolution that's going to satisfy the people, not the politicians. Now, you can read Alinsky's book, but I think that's basically how it is.

And you're respectful. I mean, one of the things we had to do in the beginning was, people didn't want to get arrested, for good reason, and we assured everybody we wouldn't get them arrested. So, then they would get on board. You know, Blacks especially didn't want to get arrested, so civil disobedience was not going to be one of our strategies. I think Alinsky, I think that's one of his principals too. So that's the best way I can describe it. And then, always ask: What can you do to make this happen? And make them report back to you about what government is doing to make this happen. And then they'll try and say, "Well, we've got a better idea." We're not interested in your better idea. We're the people that live in the neighborhood. We think this is the best idea, and this is the idea we want. You don't play the game. But you've got to have staff to help you do that research too, so you're not going in there with any kind of ridiculous – you've got to be realistic too.

GS: So, you were mostly involved on the frontlines, it sounds like. And then people like Kevin Jeans-Gale would have been doing that sort of behind-the-scenes staff work, the research...

CURTIN: Right. So, we would rehearse before we would go in. Our people would help us. They would program questions for us that they thought we would get, "How would you

respond?” That’s how they would train and school us in doing these things. So, it was very result oriented, and it wasn’t just gabbing, communicating so that you were...

GS: Did you enjoy that work?

CURTIN: Yes, I did. I did. And it and it helped me immensely the rest of my life in other occupations I had after the priesthood. It helped me organize the church community too, when I did meetings relating to the church and all those kinds of things.

GS: So, it helped you largely in your own organizational skills?

CURTIN: Administrative, yeah, management type skills, yes. Talking to difficult employees about goals that I had for them and how I thought they were going to be achieved.

GS: What was it about it that you think helped you? Like in what way?

CURTIN: Well, I think when you’re — particularly when you’re a priest, you want to be loved by everybody, you know. And you want to be charitable, and good, and understanding and all that. There is a way to be that way and yet achieve goals and get results from people. That’s what I learned from that. So that I just, I didn’t get tripped up in the feel-good, do-good kind of game, but I always kept my vision on the goal.

Later when I got real jobs out in the community in higher education I would — because higher-ed is full of that “yap yap yap” stuff too, you know. So, you’ve got to break people down and help them talk about — so, does that help?

GS: It really does, yeah. That’s very interesting. I can see how that would definitely help and I know what you’re talking about with getting, kind of, tripped up and wanting to just please and make people feel good. But then there’s another side of it where you do need

to get things done. And there is a way to do that without — where you can kind of merge the two. And I can see how that would be very valuable in being a priest and in a lot of other things.

Let me just check the time right now. How are you feeling?

CURTIN: Yeah, I'm talking a lot. I hope I'm not talking too much.

GS: No, you're great. You're great. Do you need to take a break or do you — how are you feeling about keeping going?

CURTIN: Well, I might go get something to drink.

GS: Okay. You want to get some — we can pause it.

[Recording stops]

Okay, and we're back. You were talking about the woman who was big in Albina Fair Share. You remembered her name.

CURTIN: Gypsy Hopkins.

GS: Gypsy Hopkins. Okay, great. Thank you for that.

CURTIN: And if you find her, give her my best.

GS: Sure. What was her — what kinds of things did she do that you remember?

CURTIN: Well, I think she was good at confronting people respectfully. You know, you always wanted to be respectful and maintain dignity in the middle of these things and

articulate and grounded in the community. And, you know, grounded in the things that the community needed. She was an African American woman that was – had family and all that. And she wasn't into any of either of our churches. She was somebody we got attracted by – and then I think she worked in utility rate campaign too, so.

GS: Maybe you encountered her through doing the community outreach; the canvassing or something like that?

CURTIN: Yeah, maybe. Yeah.

GS: And so, you were talking about Albina Fair Share kind of petering out. I'd like to hear more about that.

CURTIN: Well, that's my impression of what happened [*clears throat*]. That's pretty – I think it really had a lot of momentum when it started, and then it kind of got jumbled up, you know. Organizations do – they have a hard time surviving. And then we didn't – Kevin Jeans-Gale, of course, married somebody and stayed in Portland. He married Victoria Jeans (that's the hyphenated name) who had come up from San Francisco. And he started an organization to try and – he left Fair Share and started an organization that actually [Father Robert Krueger] Bob Krueger probably talked to you about, Portland Progress or Portland – POP or something...

GS: That sounds familiar. Yeah.

CURTIN: Yeah and he just worked with churches trying to organize them on social justice issues. And I think he had some success doing that for a while to the point where he got a job with a city commissioner. But they got into more electoral stuff too, later on. And then Jim Francesconi didn't get reelected. And Kevin worked for the school district

trying to find jobs for kids that weren't going to graduate. And then he had his accident, his unfortunate accident.

GS: Yeah.

So, tell me about kind of – I'd like to hear about how you came to the decision to leave the priesthood. You left in 1981, so if you want to talk about that...

CURTIN: Well, sure it's fine. I mean, I loved being a priest—especially in the Albina community. I really did. And I'm so glad in my senior years now to be back there, at least in some capacity, and to be back with those old street people that have survived and recovered and all that from addiction.

I always had struggles with the celibacy requirement for Catholic priests. And I had political problems with the church administration over a number of things. And then Pope John Paul the Second came in and was turning the church – [*metal banging sound of mail flap*] that's the mail man — around from the Vatican Two mandates that it worked on. I was ordained in 1969. I thought celibacy was going to change (we were told, you know) and it didn't. And John Paul the Second said it's not going to change.

But, I was never very good at keeping that vow of celibacy and I met my – who is now my wife, I met her. She worked at Emmanuel hospital, and she had three middle school sons. And then, at that same time, I was losing the hearing in my left ear and I was diagnosed with a malignant tumor in my left ear. I had a very small, almost benign kind of tumor, if you can talk like that — low-grade malignancy. But I was going to have a surgery.

I became – I was using alcohol as kind of a toxin to deal with my guilt about the celibacy thing, and so I just went through kind of a personal crisis. I had surgery and I went up to – I resigned from Immaculate Heart, and the Archbishop gave me six months leave from the priesthood. And I went up and lived with a priest friend of mine (whose funeral I went to this week actually) in Longview Washington, and in two months he confronted me about my drinking.

GS: While you were living there?

CURTIN: Yeah and got me into alcohol treatment.

And during that time, I decided to resign from the priesthood and come home. I was going to get together with Liddy (my girlfriend) [*laughs*] and her family. And I was not going to be celibate. I was so relieved. And, you know, I could have a normal kind of family life.

So, I remember driving home. I was at a treatment center up in Seattle, driving home to have lunch with my dad who probably had about 30 years of sobriety. I had no job, I had no place to live, I had a girlfriend who had three middle school children and was taking care of her mother. And I had to stay sober. And he met me for lunch, and he gave me \$200 and said, "Figure it out." And he thought it was good that I was leaving. He could tell that it was not working well.

I got a job at Emmanuel Hospital in the security department and worked in the emergency room from 10:00 at night until 8:00 in the morning, four days a week, and watched all the wreckage of addiction come through the emergency room. And dated my wife. We lived separately, she had children, of course. And got an apartment and started another – was able to build up enough – I had some friends in the police bureau who helped me get a job as a public safety director at Reed College. And then I went from there to Lewis and Clark College and had a 20-year career in higher education public safety. Did a lot of consulting after I retired, and now I'm enjoying life.

So that's what happened. Whether you want all that – you can use any of that. Everybody kind of knows my story.

GS: Well, I just think it's remarkable that you made this huge life change where you left the priesthood and, at the same time, quit drinking — which is how you were coping it sounds like...

CURTIN: Yep.

GS: With, kind of, some of the inner turmoil you were having. And also, that you had cancer at this at this time.

CURTIN: The cancer was abated by the surgery, I didn't need any – so it was kind of a simple, thank God.

GS: Mm-hmm, yeah.

And, what was the reaction of the parish and the larger community at you leaving?

CURTIN: Well, the parish had a big celebration, a goodbye for me, and that was nice. Had it over in Dawson Park, you know, because I thought we had to compromise Dawson Park and its drug addiction and criminality. So, I was always having stuff over at Dawson Park.

And then I left. And I had kind of hand-picked the guy that was going to replace me, Chuck Linerd (he came up from Grants Pass) who was a very good priest. He later went after Immaculate Heart to St. Andrew's. He worked in the chancery office for a while and did a lot of the heavy lifting on the sex abuse crisis; getting rid of priests and all that for the archbishop.

So, I kind of just left the diocese. I just – but they did have — they saw a lot of value in me, and I didn't realize it at the time. So, they called me after the six-month thing. They found me somehow. And I was working, you know, I was kind of off doing my life. And they wanted me to come back, and I said, "I'm not. I'm going to resign." And they were disappointed. The archbishop was disappointed.

But, I remember Paul Waldschmidt telling me, "We have to get you and Bert and these guys out in Washington County where all the money is."

And I said, "That's not going to be what I'm going to do." You know, [*chuckles*] go out there and listen to all that stuff. So, Bert did, Bert went out to Saint Pius the Tenth and then ended up in alcohol treatment. And then we got back together again and became very close before he died.

GS: And he remained in the priesthood?

CURTIN: He remained in the priesthood.

GS: Well, I think that this is maybe a good stopping point for today if you feel all right about that.

CURTIN: Sure.

GS: Thank you so much.

GS: Well, I hope that, you know, you'll want to pursue Sam Brown and the Miracles Club. Do you think that...?

GS: Well, I'd have to talk to, you know, O.H.S. I'm certainly interested, but it depends on, you know...

CURTIN: Resources?

GS: Yeah.

CURTIN: I talked to [O.H.S. Library Director] Shawna [Gandy] about it, she thought it was...

GS: Oh great, maybe we can...

CURTIN: I'll talk to her about it again.

[End of Session 3]

Session 4, Part 1
2018 November 16

GS: Today is November 16th, 2018. I'm here with Bill Curtin at his home in Portland. This is our fourth and final interview. My name is Greta Smith, oral historian for the Oregon Historical Society.

Good afternoon Bill.

CURTIN: Good afternoon.

GS: So, I just wanted to start by – when I was listening back to the last interview, I realized we referenced a video several times when we were talking about Albina Fair Share. So, I just wanted to take a second to clarify for the record that the video we're talking about is called "Albina Fair Share," by Peter Handel. It's from the late 1970s and can be found online or at the Oregon Historical Society.¹ I believe they hold it in their collections.

And moving into the interview, you mentioned before that Albina Fair Share was trying to address other issues beyond abandoned housing and the absentee landlords, or homeowners. Such as the prevalence of sex work in Albina and police community relations. I was hoping you could talk a bit more about that—what some of the other issues were, and how they were working to confront them.

CURTIN: Well, after the housing campaign a lot of our leadership also got diverted into the state campaign for utility rate for Oregon Fair Share. But we did have discussions (we never took any actions) based on the street prostitution problem on Williams Avenue and what was then Union Avenue and is now M.L.K. And also, police-community relations. And we never took any direct action. I was working, kind of, in both areas as a priest, because a lot of the prostitution was right in my neighborhood; right across the street and all that.

GS: In Dawson Park?

¹ The video is available at the following link (as of 2021): <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YY-nKgnilR4>

CURTIN: In Dawson Park and along our street and then, I think we were just kind of – we didn't quite know what to do about these issues. They were gargantuan-big issues that had been there for years.

A lot of the issues in both police-community relations and the sex trafficking issue had to do with drug addiction. And the problems were fueled by the addiction crisis that wasn't being addressed by anybody. And then the fact that we had started kind of a narcotics anonymous meeting, that was – and then, I think we abandoned those things too because there wasn't any specific kinds of things that were going to be winnable for us by doing community action. So, I think it would be fair to say that we discussed that but didn't get any further with that kind of stuff, and that a lot of the leadership went into the state campaign for utility rate reform, which we thought it was winnable, and it was.

GS: And that's Oregon Fair Share?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And tell me about what that was and why there was a need for it.

CURTIN: Well, the Fair Share program was to – we had chapters in Portland, in North Portland and Albina. We had chapter in Lents. We also had chapters in Salem and Medford. And I think that was about it. Usually led by ministerial people, priests and ministers. Mark Mohler Gunderson was the one out in Lents who got that organized. I can't remember the names of the others. But anyway, these organizers we had had done the same utility rate campaign in California and so wanted to get moving on that. So that's where we decided to do the whole utility rate campaign.

GS: And what was the deal with the utility rates where you needed to have that?

CURTIN: The utility rates were all based on a flat rate, so consumer rates now—not business rates. The consumer rates were the same for people in the West Hills as they were for people in Albina. So, they were the same rates. There wasn't any consumption—the amount of consumption of utilities that you used that was fact factored into your payment. It was just flat rates.

GS: So, like how we have the meters today and people come read the meters, they didn't have that before?

CURTIN: Well I don't know how -- I'm not sure. I'm sure they had some -- but if you got electricity from the city, you paid the same kind of rate. The consumption of how much you used wasn't factored into that rate.

GS: So, it was just the same across the board.

CURTIN: Yes. So, we argued that if you don't use as much, then you shouldn't have to pay as much.

And then, we tried to meet with utility commission because the utility companies are regulated. And then there were some public utility companies in the state, but very few. There was just P.G.E. [Portland General Electric] and Pacific Power and Light. And they were corporate entities that we had to take on. And they were controlling the public utility board or commission.

GS: So was it sort of structured, or were you using a lot of the same tactics that you used with Albina Fair Share, where you would be the figurehead and maybe there were other public figures that were in the forefront and then you had the activists kind of in the background?

CURTIN: Right. The same kind of format that the Alinsky kind of methodology that is outlined in the book *Rules for Radicals*. And yes, we would. In fact, I was one of the leaders of that utility rate campaign.

And then we wanted to get a ballot measure to make Portland and Multnomah County go to a public utility form so there'd be more government – people would have more oversight of the utility company than the corporate. Of course, that was a big battle. But that would kick P.G.E. and Pacific Power and Light out of the utility business. And then we went to the commissioner. We finally got to meet with the commissioners. And, you know, it was a struggle to get these kinds of things moving in this area.

Then we went down to the legislature. The Oregon Legislature was in session and we got five hundred people statewide to go to Salem, and just flooded the House of Representatives and the Senate with those memberships. To have meetings and get commitments from all the politicians to get lower utility rates for the poor. That was the thing.

And then, Vera Katz was the speaker of the house and got very, very angry at us that day. She was – we really shut down the government that day until they were going to get, you know, they couldn't do any other business for the whole day.

GS: So, you brought, or Oregon Fair Share organized and brought 500 people into the actual Legislature?

CURTIN: Yes. The House. Yes, The House of Representatives and the Senate.

GS: So, what did Vera Katz do when she got mad?

CURTIN: Well, she just ranted and raved. I think she said some things in the press, you know. But she was always a very polished politician. She later became the mayor of the city of Portland. You've probably heard of her.

GS: Yes.

CURTIN: But she had – she was a state representative from Northwest Portland or maybe Northeast Portland. I’m not sure, but she was in Portland. She lived here in the Portland community. You know, I don’t remember exactly. I bet if you went back to – I don’t remember what years these things exactly were, but there might be some news clip of her kind of been exercised about this.

GS: I’m sure.

CURTIN: If you look up you rate reform and those kind of things. They were around that day, I know the media was.

GS: And this would have been in the late 1970s, right?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And so was the campaign successful?

CURTIN: Well, you know, eventually. I know that the politicians quickly got together and did a rate based – and we called them, “We want fair share rates.”

They did a rate structure on consumption, and started charging people – people that use less electricity got less of a price for their usage than those who used a lot of electricity.

GS: Okay, so they did kind of start doing it based on consumption.

CURTIN: Yes, they got a rate through the utility commission. In the end, P.G.E. and P.P.L. must have worked it out with the utility commission. It turned into kind of a back room win, you know. And so we did get fair share rates.

Maybe Ida – Ida was involved, maybe she can tell you more about it, but I don't remember. If you ever run into Gypsy Hopkins, she was involved too. So, I mean they were from the Portland community. They were involved in this thing.

GS: So people from the Albina Fair Share we're definitely working on this Oregon Fair Share.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Did you also work with Father Bob Krueger in the Oregon Fair Share?

CURTIN: You know, I don't remember Bob. I think Bob – Bob and I were recently at a party. When I was in Albina and he was in Medford.

GS: Right.

CURTIN: But I don't remember if he ever got involved. You'd have to ask him that.

GS: I know he was involved in Oregon Fair Share, which is why I asked, because you mentioned the Medford chapter and that just reminded me.

CURTIN: Oh, he was? Yeah, I don't remember. I don't remember Bob at the Legislature, but maybe he was there. I'm not sure.

GS: Sounds like a lot of people were there [*chuckles*].

CURTIN: Yes. A lot of people were there.

GS: Okay. So, you mentioned before that Albina Fair Share diminished their resources when they took on the statewide campaign of Oregon Fair Share...

CURTIN: Yeah. Right.

GS: And they were happening concurrently? Albina Fair Share was still going on when Oregon Fair Share was happening.

CURTIN: Yes. Yeah.

GS: Can you tell me some more about that time and what sort of ultimately happened with Albina Fair Share and Oregon Fair Share as you remember it?

CURTIN: Fair Share began to, like a lot of these kinds of organizations, lose some of its energy. The leadership, and the organizers, got kind of fractured and started – there was a lot of internal bickering about what to do next. Then there was personal problems and all these kind of things and it began to – it just kind of died of its own weight and energy and never got back the original energy.

The two things I remember about my involvement was the housing campaign in Albina and the utility rate reform campaign in the state of Oregon. Then I was, at about that time, I was thinking of moving on, you know, in my life and so I didn't hear about it.

And then I know that one guy who I talked about last time, Kevin Jeans-Gale, was going to peel off and start working on organizing churches in the city to get organized around social justice issues. And I think he started what was called the Portland Organizing Project, that kind of came out of that. And I think Bob was involved later in that. Pretty active on that.

GS: So you didn't ever work with Portland Organizing Project?

CURTIN: No.

GS: So, did you leave the priesthood before Albina Fair Share and Oregon Fair Share went away?

CURTIN: No.

GS: They were still – they had already, kind of...

CURTIN: Yeah. I think I was in the process of leaving when they were in the process of kind of fracturing and losing their energy, which was too bad.

GS: I guess I'm trying to get a sense of sort of what that looked like...

CURTIN: Yeah, I don't remember.

GS: Because I'm thinking back about how Kevin Jeans-Gale and the Albina Fair Share had their offices at Immaculate Heart, right?

CURTIN: Mm-hmm.

GS: And so just as a side...

CURTIN: Well, they actually moved into the Dekum Building, eventually. You know they canvassed—they had a canvassing staff that raised money in all the neighborhoods. That's how they would get revenue. And so, they finally had some resources and they had

offices and the Dekum Building, now I remember. So, Kevin kind of moved out of our office. Yeah.

GS: Okay, so they had moved. Where's the Dekum Building?

CURTIN: Well I don't know if it's downtown anymore, but it was it was kind of an old office building and the rent was cheap and so that's why they went there. It was probably on Third Avenue or Fourth Avenue in downtown Portland between Washington Street. Was probably close to that. Yeah.

GS: Okay, I see.

And then you had talked about the police community relations unit on Williams Avenue. In your last interview.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: I think you said Phil Smith was in charge of that.

CURTIN: Phil Smith was the Captain, yeah.

GS: And I just wondered, because we didn't go much into it, but I was intrigued. I wondered, what was the purpose of the police community relations unit and, you know, did you work with them? What do you remember about that?

CURTIN: Yeah. Well, I mean the civil rights movement and, you know, the groups like the Black Panthers and some of the – but they weren't really very militant. But the police were very confused about how to respond to the Black community, and I think there was a lot of goodwill, but just a lot of misunderstanding of what was really going on.

And then there was a lot of national stuff that was being fueled by, like, J Edgar Hoover, communist inspired kinds of stuff, and all that. But I think the police legitimately recognized that they didn't do very well in Black neighborhoods and that there was kind of a natural enmity towards them and they wanted to figure out how to do that. So, they created what they called a police community relations unit. And there were probably seven or eight officers, and a sergeant, and then [Phil] Smith, who kind of ran the office.

They were on M.L.K. where the Fourth Dimension Recovery Unit is now, that was their building. They went to neighborhood meetings, they met with groups, and they would go to calls once in a while just to observe how their officers were responding. They didn't have any kind of oversight responsibilities of them, and they didn't wear uniforms, and they had cars with no lights on top or sirens or any of that kind of stuff, but markings of the police. And they would go to the neighborhood association meetings and try to relate to the community and understand. A lot of cities tried to do that too, and it just didn't — it seemed, kind of, real fake to people. They wanted real police officers to start behaving better. So, they didn't want to have some special kind of unit for the Black neighborhood that was supposed to be a softer, touchy-feely kind of thing. So that also kind of fell apart on its own.

And then there were officers there that were always, you know, they had their own personal agendas in the middle of all that. Some of them are tired and want to get off the street and so they thought they would do that.

And then one time there was an incident there with one of the officers and some woman that worked in the office. That got in the press. And then somebody tried to bomb one of their police cars in the back. Yeah, and it was kind of a — it wasn't any kind of a big deal but it was — so, there was just a struggle with — there always was a struggle with the police, and there still is today, you know, with the police-community relations piece in our society.

So, Phil Smith, who was a captain and a bright, bright guy and a long-time police official, was very good. He worked for my dad and so I would go up there. And then they would have big crowds of kids showing up, drinking all summer and, you know, there'd be

two or three hundred kids in the middle of the street and the cops would show up and then there'd be a big – they'd start throwing beer bottles at the police and doing all this stuff. And they just didn't know how to – nobody quite knew how to handle it. And the neighbors were all mad because, you know, they didn't want that going on. So, it was just a hard time for the police.

There had been civil disturbances in Portland in 1968, I think, and 1971 or so. Burned a lot of buildings down. So, the police were very confused about how to deal with it. And so, I met with them a lot to try and talk to people on their behalf and try to help them understand as much as I could, and I didn't understand. It was just too big for all of us, you know? So anyway, it was – I rode around a lot with the police to kind of see what they were doing. I thought a lot of them were very good people. You know they weren't out there trying to shoot people and do those things. They were trying to maintain the community. So, I became friends with many of the officers. Some of them started going to our church. I still see one who still is a good friend of mine and retired. But it was just a hard time. They were in all those riots, and they were scared.

GS: Yeah. So, it sounds like they were in the area – that the police-community relations unit was there all during the time that you were in Albina?

CURTIN: Well, no. They finally shut it down just because it was kind of, you know, government agencies are always having to be pretty careful about their resources and they just couldn't – it just wasn't creating the kind of thing they wanted. It wasn't – you know, it was a lot of money and so they – people wanted more officers on the street and all that kind of stuff. So yeah, they finally shut it down.

Phil Smith went on to become Deputy Chief in the Police Bureau. And then Bill Taylor was the captain at North Precinct. He was very good too about being with people. And, you know, the leadership of the Police Bureau was really trying to – and then Neil Goldschmidt was mayor and Bruce Baker was police chief. They were very – they wanted things changed. They wanted the policing style changed in the city.

GS: From the community style to a different style?

CURTIN: No, to the community style from kind of an old knock them down and, you know, a macho kind of thing to a softer kind of policing, community policing. They didn't use "community policing" that term in those years, but they would call it "neighborhood management" or terms like that to change the focus from crime fighting and all this other kinds of stuff with guns and batons and all that to a more passive, positive resource instead of the other.

GS: It sounds like – I'm just thinking back to when you were telling me about your father's time policing in Albina. It sounds like it's almost like a pendulum. Like, that sort of was their style...

CURTIN: Yes. It was.

GS: The community-style policing back when your father was working there. And then it sounds like it got harsher.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: And then there was a push to have it go back to that community style.

CURTIN: Right. And there still is. It's a yin-yang. And then sometimes the police have to be kind of severe to keep the peace [*chuckles*].

GS: What did your father think about what was going on at that time?

CURTIN: I'm not sure. You know, there was the – right when I was leaving Immaculate Heart, you know, they threw the possums out in front of the Burger Barn Restaurant. And George Powe was the owner of the Burger Barn, and these two cops (who actually I knew) decided to – they killed these possums. Possums were running around all over North Portland in the middle of the night, and the cops would run over them by accident and they'd clean them up and they'd put them in their truck so they wouldn't be a nuisance. And so, these two guys decided to throw them in front of the Burger Barn, because the Burger Barn was also a place where a lot of heroin was sold out of. And the police could never get – and Powe I know knew my dad. He told me he knew my dad. I was down there the night the possums were in front of his building. And that just caused – my father was very upset that those cops did that and that the police union supported them. And he was a founder of the Portland Police Association so he said, "That is not what the union was designed for and those cops should have been –."

I remember asking him what he would have done, and he said, "Well, I would have taken their guns or badges and their car keys and said 'Go, you're done, go home. And I'll call you when you come back. To come back, if you come back.'"

And I thought boy, that wouldn't work anymore, the union would be all over you. But that's, he did not – he thought that was – well, it was. It was a terrible thing for the police to do and it ruined all the good work that people had been trying to do.

GS: Yeah, it's a pretty famous incident.

CURTIN: It is.

GS: And you said you were down there that night. What do you remember about it?

CURTIN: Well I talked to Powe, and he just he was just laughing about it. I mean he knew he was going to make – he was going to sue the city. You know, he was telling everybody, you know, "I'm just a family restaurant." But he did. There was all this heroin

that was coming out of there. I mean, I hear about it now when I go to Narcotics Anonymous meetings. You know, people were buying their heroin there.

[REDACTED]

But yeah, they – he was going to sue, and he was going to get a big cash settlement from the city of Portland, and that’s what those cops, you know, they just weren’t thinking. They didn’t have, I don’t know, they just didn’t have a very holistic view of their job and what it was about sometimes, a lot of policemen.

GS: Did you talk to the two police officers that did that?

CURTIN: No. I’ve seen one of them since a number of times but I don’t – he knows, he got – I think those guys got about 30 days off without pay and one finally left and actually became the sheriff over Morrow County where (it’s over in eastern Oregon) they have about two deputies there.

But they – no, I didn’t talk to them.

GS: Where you already down there?

CURTIN: No, I was driving. It was just coincidental. I was driving down M.L.K. and saw it and saw the press out in front of – taking pictures of the possums and doing all that. So I stopped and Powe was out there, so I got out and said, “What is this?” You know, and just talked to them [*chuckles*]. Yep.

And then I left. And I was tired, worn out with all – taking on all these issues that, I mean we’re still dealing with. You know, you look at downtown Portland and the mayor is trying to get some rules for demonstrations so that and the police, you know. The politics is very different today, it’s not racial stuff but it’s alt-right and Patriot Prayer — hiding behind prayer to do their stuff and then other people, some of them. I mean you shouldn’t

demonstrate right now in the city of Portland, you're going to get – you could get hurt. And a lot of cops are getting hurt too, from what I hear. They get hurt in those things too. And so, it's just not – the police in a free society are going to be at odds with the principles of a free society. And they have to repress when it's necessary to repress, and limit, and do the kinds of things Americans don't like. And so, they take the brunt of that energy and it's a tough job. I don't know why they want to do it. I have a stepson that's a police officer.

GS: In Portland?

CURTIN: He's a Multnomah County Sheriff, yeah. Sergeant.

GS: And you mentioned that you also knew or were friends with Penny Harrington?

CURTIN: I am. I actually just – I got to call Penny talk to her about some – I haven't talked to her in years. But there's a new book out on women in policing and the author is going to meet at our church and a former Episcopal priest told me about it, because he knows I worked with the police in the 1970s. And I said "Well, have they –" they haven't talked to Penny! And I said, "Well, she was the first woman police chief in the United States and she's a good friend of mine." So I put them in touch, through email, I put them in touch with Penny, so they're going to talk to her.

GS: Oh, that's great.

CURTIN: So, she's living in Morrow Beach, California. Her son died – very sad – a couple years ago of cancer, and she's got a granddaughter, and she's single and alone, but she's enjoying life and doing well.

GS: Oh, good. Can you tell me a bit about your experience of knowing or working with her?

CURTIN: Well, Penny, I knew Penny when she was in the Women's Protective Division, which was a special division for women in the Portland Police Bureau who were police officers, but they worked with young children and families that were in trouble and those kinds of things.

Penny become an advocate for mainlining women into the ranks of the police, so they were driving around in cars and being more visible and doing actual police work. And she was the first one to kind of crack the barrier and she was a patrol sergeant at north precinct. Driving around, in uniform and supervising, being a street supervisor for police officers in the 1970S.

GS: So, while you were working in Albina?

CURTIN: Yes. And we became friends. Then she rose in the ranks—she's a very bright woman—she rose in the ranks very quickly from Lieutenant to Captain, she was captain at east precinct. And Bud Clark became mayor and so he appointed – I had left the priesthood by then, I was working at Emanuel hospital. But I stayed in touch with her often. And, she married Gary Harrington in the meantime. And so, then she became the police chief and she was going to try to hire me to work in the minority community as a liaison in the chief's office. But it never – she was gone by the time – her career was very sad, and she made some mistakes, I think. I haven't told her that. Well, I did tell her that, years ago. Anyway, it was a very tumultuous time. Gary kind of screwed everything up too (her husband) letting some guy that owned the Chinese restaurants know that the drug unit was kind of looking into his activities and then he told some other officers and then a lot of people were – whoever the police chief is in Portland, there's always a group that's trying to undermine whatever he or she is doing.

And I think if it's a woman, there's kind of a more – now there is a woman who is our police chief who seems very competent and sharp and a good woman. I don't know

what – I'm not privy what her stuff is down there, but I'm sure there's stuff for her that she has to deal with.

And so, Penny then resigned and left Portland and I haven't actually talked to her much over the years. But she asked – we became friends on Facebook about two years ago, but we haven't talked. Then I told her I was going to call her because I want to chat with her, and talk with her, and catch up. So, I am going to call her, probably after my surgery—maybe when I'm recuperating. When I'm sitting around, that'd be a good time to call her.

GS: Yeah, it's a good time to make phone calls.

CURTIN: Yeah, so she's – that's Penny's part of my life.

GS: Okay, well thanks. And I also wanted to hear about your experience with Central City Concern.

CURTIN: Well now, that's an outgrowth. That's why I think it would be pretty good for you, the Oregon Historical Society, to do a thing on The Miracles Club and Harry Watson.

Harry Watson was the embryonic – Harry Watson and my dad starting that Narcotics Anonymous meeting at Immaculate Heart church was kind of the embryonic moment when recovery began to flower in the Black community in particular, but also I think in the city of Portland. It was when the detox center first got established too, in fact Vera Katz, before she was in the Legislature, was one of the people who – and I was on a committee with her to promote that. To promote the detox center.

GS: The one in Albina? That your dad and Harry Watson started?

CURTIN: No, it was a Multnomah County detoxification center.

GS: Okay.

CURTIN: In the early 1970s, there was a change in law. The health people defined alcoholism as a health problem and not a criminal problem. So, the city and the police could no longer arrest people for public drunkenness and put them in a drunk tank in the jail, which they used to give them like 30 days and then they'd be trustees at all the different precincts. They had to put them into a health environment. And so, the detoxification center was established to get them, you know. And they kept people for four or five hours to make sure they detoxed properly, and then they would let them go. And actually, many people said, "Well the jail did a better job." Jail made them stay sober for two or three weeks [*chuckles*]. So, they were healthier and all that.

You know, but that stuff was starting to – society was beginning to define addiction differently. It started with alcohol, but then nowadays there's lower – changing the sentencing guidelines for drug use (some of the drugs) and all that kind of stuff is now taking hold. And Central City Concern kind of grew out of that detox program. And I'm not sure how all that happened. There are probably people down there that could tell you how it – and the guy that just retired who was the chairman of Central City Concern for a lot of years, I met him at fundraising dinner for the Miracles Club. But these Black guys started this Miracles Club after they got real secure in their clean time. And then that was part of this whole change. And you know people get – I just think people today in our city are so, kind of, depressed about the homelessness, and the drug use, and the narcotics use, and drunkenness around the city. And it's alarming. It's much bigger than it used to be. But there are a lot of really good answers that have come out of this community.

There's a book called *Deadline* or something. Central City Concern is acknowledged in there as somebody who has tried to answer it. It's going on in every city in the country, and they have come up with some good solutions. They are quite an organization. I've just kind of gotten involved with them in the last few years since I started going to – Harry Watson got me going to these meetings down here, and a lot of these people work for Central City Concern. You know, they're drug counselors and they're

people that transport, or they work – I have a good friend that I go to meetings with, she works at a detox center. She’s a counselor and she was a heroin addict, you know, and she’s a marvelous woman. And there’s just marvelous people around town that are working hard to bring some sanity to this stuff. And so, I am – I don’t know much about Central City Concern, but I know that there are – I’ve met many people, most of them in meetings because they’re in recovery, so they go to meetings too, that work for Central City Concern, and are just dedicated, and noble, and just have a lot of good wholesome energy on this issue. And I don’t know if they’ll make any progress or not, but you know.

GS: So, it’s something that you’ve more recently gotten involved.

CURTIN: Yes, yeah.

GS: And it’s kind of – so, it was related to Miracles Club and...

CURTIN: Well, it was after I had breakfast with Harry. And he said, “I want you at Immaculate Heart to go to the meeting.” You know, on his anniversary, his 40th anniversary. And then I started meeting some of these people and hearing about Central City Concern. But also the Miracles Club, and I belong to the Miracles Club. I go to meetings there.

GS: Well Central City Concern sounds...

CURTIN: That’s all related to this. I bet if you went down there and start talking to people about Harry Watson, people would know who he was.

GS: Oh, yeah. That’s an interesting history, how it’s all related.

CURTIN: And then Harry became a drug and alcohol counselor. Not at Central City Concern, but he later — in his later years when I knew him recently, he worked in the custody unit at the juvenile detention center in charge of custody of these gang kids. And it was just knockdown, drag-out stuff, you know. He was controlling them and getting them to behave. And sometimes it took a little physical stuff, but he was — he couldn't figure out what the gang thing was about. I asked him many times and he said "I don't know. They're so mean and they're so angry and, you know, I don't know. I don't think anybody knows what to do with them."

So that — I think that those people that do that work don't get enough recognition and they don't get as much ink in the press. And everybody you talk to "Oh, it's so awful." It's bad, but it's not — the city's not going to fall apart. I mean, let's [*laughingly*] put the money in some right places and give people some resources to get better. They're sick.

You know you can't police — the police aren't the answer to all these problems. You know, they do their best but they're not — they can't solve these problems. But they are public, they are order maintenance issues on the streets, from time to time. And they have to take care of that because society has to go on. So that's that balance again.

GS: Absolutely. I had one other follow up question. It's kind of out of order here, but I wanted to make sure and ask you about it. It's something that Laverne talked about you doing.

CURTIN: Uh-oh [*chuckles*].

GS: No, it's great. It's good. And I just thought it was really an interesting thing. She talked about how you set up retreats for parishioners and nature excursions, like hiking and camping trips to the beach, also for students, because you believed in hands-on experience with nature for people. And I was wondering just — I'd love to hear you talk about that a little bit.

CURTIN: Well yeah, I did. But you know that what happened was, I remember taking some of these African American kids out to the [*chuckles*] camping, you know, and sleeping outside and they couldn't – they were scared, you know, because they thought that they were going to get eaten up by these animals and stuff out in the woods. And they were out of their element. But God I don't know why Laverne – I guess that would be the kids that I would take, and I did it only a few times because I just, there would have had to have been some kind of orientation. I didn't think – I thought they would just naturally, you know – but they were out of the city, you know, and they were afraid of – they thought the coyotes were going to come and chew them all up in the middle of the night. I remember some kid thought a bear, "Are there going to be any bears?" And these Black kids, their eyes get real big. "Is there going to be some bear come along and get us?" And I said no [*chuckles*].

But yeah, I mean, in the summertime, during the summer program we would take day trips to the coast to get them out of that Albina street scene and let them know that there's, you know, some kind of sacredness to the world and all that kind of stuff. But I quit doing the overnight thing because it just got too complicated.

GS: I can imagine that being a ton of work. About how old were the students that you would take on the overnight trip?

CURTIN: Well those were like seventh and eighth graders that Laverne was – and, you know, they just grew up right down there in the streets, and played basketball, and did all this other kind of stuff. The street lights on all the time and then all of a sudden, they'd be out in Santiam Pass camped out, and it'd be so dark that it would scare them.

GS: Well she talked about it being a really wonderful thing for the students. She really was like, "If not for Bill, we wouldn't have had these experiences and it was a really enriching thing." She felt that it was a very positive, enriching thing for the students.

CURTIN: Well, good. I should call her and ask her about – we maybe we have a little different memory about some of that stuff.

GS: It happens that way a lot for sure.

CURTIN: Oh, it does?

GS: Oh yeah. Memory, I mean.

CURTIN: She's African American herself, so maybe, you know – and I think maybe she grew up to grew up in Memphis, Tennessee. That's a tough place to grow up. But she probably loves to do that now; go out, and probably took her kids. She had her own children later in life, you know. So anyway I – yeah that's good. I think I'm going to – I got to call her about the Texas election stuff anyway [*laughs*].

GS: Yeah, tell her I said hi when you talk.

CURTIN: I will. Yeah.

GS: Okay, so at the point when you left the priesthood in 1981, you'd been in the church since about 1957, when you went to St. Edward's at the age of 14.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: So, I guess a total of about 24 years.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: Long time. And you'd also quit drinking and you were dating your now wife.

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: So, I'd just love to hear you talk a bit about this period of transition. You did talk a little bit about it last time, but I'd love to hear more. How did you cope? What kinds of things did you find different about life outside the priesthood? Anything else?

CURTIN: Well, you know, I was pretty burnt out by that time, and I remember getting out of the treatment center and coming home. And I was going to have – my dad was going to meet me for lunch. And here he was this Alcoholics Anonymous guy with 20 some years, and I was very nervous about meeting him. He was very good to me. But at the end he said – you know, here I was. I had no job, I didn't have a place to live – did I tell you the story already?

GS: You did, but...

CURTIN: And the \$200, you know, he gave me \$200. And a girlfriend with two, three kids in middle school. And so, he gave me \$200 and said, "Figure it out, but there's no more money." Which I think was probably the best thing he could have done. I didn't think I'd ever get two hundred dollars from him.

So, I got an apartment and I got set up. Then I got a job eventually after seven or eight months. And I had sick leave from the archdiocese, so I had a cushion (for about 4 months) of money. My salary was coming in from the archdiocese. But what I remember is that it was so nice and quiet, and the telephone wasn't ringing all the time. And I kind of had my own life. I went to Alcoholics Anonymous a lot, and I worked night shift at the hospital, and then I'd go over to Liddy's for dinner and then go back home, and get ready for work. It was really a good time in my life. And I did that for – we didn't get married until about five years later. And she had – her sons were growing up and I spent time with them.

And then I finally got the job at Reed College which was a real, like a real job. We got married and I moved in and we – her mother lived with us who had Multiple sclerosis.

GS: Were her sons still at home or were they out by then?

CURTIN: They were still at home.

And then next year right after that one of them went to college, and then the other two. And then, in the meantime, I got a tuition remission program from Reed so any dependents I had would get free tuition at certain colleges in the Northwest, so that was a big boon too. So, Liddy decided she really liked me [*both laugh*]. And then the kids grew up, and I went to Lewis and Clark after about five years at Reed. And then I worked 15 years at Lewis and Clark in the same kind of job, director of their public safety program. And I was – it was a good career.

A lot of changes in higher education, public safety. The federal government was requiring us to manage alcohol. Colleges and Universities would lose their federal funding if they didn't provide consequences for underage drinking and all that, so I had to write up all these programs for both Reed – Reed didn't pay any attention to it, they just ignored it, but Lewis Clark did. So, then we were intervening into these alcohol things on college campuses that, you know, the colleges didn't do any oversight of alcohol. A lot of bad things were happening with students—sickness, and alcohol poisonings, and overdoses (especially at fraternity houses), and deaths, and terrible things. So, I was in charge of introducing these kind of programs at Reed and Lewis and Clark.

And then in the middle of 1989, the San Francisco earthquake happened. I was actually there in San Francisco trying to go to the World Series when the earthquake happened. And I had become good friends with – oh my god, I forget his name now, but the chief of police at Stanford, who just died this last year. Stanford really got hit hard with the earthquake. And so, he became kind of the – he created emergency management programs for these kinds of incidents. So, I became kind of the Emergency Management

Director at Lewis and Clark, and we started doing tabletop exercises with our executives and all these kind of things.

So, it was kind of an exciting career. But I was glad when that was over too. Students always hated me because of the intrusion into their drinking and then I was in charge of parking and that got people upset all the time. So, I was always dealing with – kind of like the police, I’m always dealing with this kind of, you know, always with that balance of being compassionate, yet orderly, yet maintaining. You know, “The college has to function. And, you know, your behavior is kind of getting in the way of that. And blah blah blah blah.”

And there were consequences sometimes that had to be imposed, I worked with the Dean of Students at both places. And then I managed these security officers, who were wannabe cops sometimes and didn’t know how to behave, you know, and weren’t very well educated, and would just do bizarre things sometimes. So, I had to visit with them and chat and do all those kinds of things. It was a complicated job.

And, you know, my marriage worked out. My three stepsons all graduated from college and now have families. The oldest one now is fifty-one and is in Dubai. He’s head of the *Wall Street Journal* in the Middle East. And the middle one has a company in China – here’s my wife coming in, I think.

GS: We can pause it for a minute when she comes in. Hi.

LIDDY CURTIN: He does have a wife.

GS: Alright, it’s so good to meet you. I’m just going to pause this.

[End of Session 4, Part 1]

Session 4, Part 2
2018 November 16

GS: That will be in two files. Okay, now we're back on again.

CURTIN: Well, I think I was talking about Liddy's kids. Evan's in China with a business and commutes from Spain. He doesn't want to live here in the U.S. right now. And he's got a young family.

And then Tim is a Multnomah County Deputy Sheriff. He's a sergeant. He's in charge of their drug unit. And so, they're doing fine. And we have six grandchildren, and a couple of them, the girl — the older ones are kind of getting into high school. One is going to graduate this year from Central Catholic. And so, they're answering back now. I mean, they're adults. They're kind of young adults. They're fun.

And I've been retired since 2006. I did a lot of consulting in higher-ed things. The Virginia Tech shooting happened shortly after my retirement. And Steve Rittereiser, who's a very wonderful long-term friend colleague of mine, who is the Assistant Chief of Police at the University of Washington, he and I had a consulting thing. We would go to various colleges and universities and do audits of their public safety department and kind of foist them in the direction of community policing methodologies on their campus instead of the old police techniques. You know, softer interviewing styles and et cetera et cetera et cetera. Did that at many — we probably had 20 different universities and colleges that we went to. Mostly in the Northwest but one in Montana, one in Omaha, Nebraska, we went there. And so that was fun, but I got tired of that too.

And we made some good money doing that, but then I became kind of out of date too with a lot of — there were a lot of changes in public safety brought about by the government and then just the Department of Education oversight of colleges and universities. Sexual incidents of date rape and et cetera and assault were becoming more and more important. And so, Steve now kind of is still in the business. He's getting ready to retire from the University of Washington at some point. But he does investigations of sexual assaults nationally and around — in fact, last time I talked to him he was leaving for

Coastal Carolina University for some big problem, and then the hurricane came in and so he didn't go.

GS: What's his last name again?

CURTIN: Rittereiser.

GS: Steve Rittereiser. Okay.

CURTIN: Yeah. I think his title is Major Steve Rittereiser or something at the University of Washington. But yeah, we did a lot of work together in our years together. We were officers in the professional association in Western Association of Campus Law Enforcement Administrators together. And were Seattle Mariner baseball fans so we'd [*laughingly*] go to games at what is now going to be T-Mobile park instead of Safeco Field.

GS: These names.

CURTIN: Yeah, I don't like those names. I like the old names.

GS: Sorry I got sidetracked because I was thinking about Wrigley Field.

CURTIN: Yeah.

GS: Was that named after Wrigley's gum?

CURTIN: Yes.

GS: So it's been happening for a long time.

CURTIN: But the Wrigley family owned the Chicago Cubs and owned the stadium. You know, back when baseball started it was these families. They were rich families, but they were, you know.

GS: Yeah. Okay, so it sounds like you had a really rich second career and very successful.

CURTIN: Yeah, it turned out to be.

GS: How do you think your experience as a priest, working in the community in Albina and your knowledge of policing and your exposure to...

CURTIN: Well, it absolutely – that combination made me attractive to higher education who doesn't want to hire former police officers because they're too — because they have this view of police officers that is harsh. You know, there were terrible things in the 1960s when the police had to go on to the campuses to deal with demonstrations. They'd be these – the president at Lewis and Clark, Michael Mooney, told me that he was at Columbia University when the students took over the president's office. And they called the New York Police Department in, and to the police department just beat the hell out of the students. They were these cops who'd worked in downtown (and New York wasn't a very safe city in those days) and so then they just came in and treated them like the people they were dealing with on the street. And that's when campuses and universities out of that 1960s, early 1970s – and then Kent State. You know, they killed those kids at Kent State, the National Guard did. Began to form their own police departments and design their policing to be a more softer, gentler approach and more of a talking – what we would call community policing today.

And so that was what I brought to Reed College and Lewis and Clark College. I had the priest background, I had family background in real policing, so they knew I could do both. And then I always was going to emphasize that you don't just go with the first thing.

You just don't be impulsive when you're trying to deal with volatile situations. You think it over and design a strategy, and if you can't then you have the equipment to go in and deal with it. But before you do that, you need to open your mouth and talk and say hi and you know, "Settle down. Let's talk and work things out."

And that was attractive to higher-ed and that's why I got that job, I think. Because I [was a] priest, and I'd been in a rough neighborhood, and I'd been there, and I'd survived.

GS: Yeah, that makes sense.

So, moving on to some more reflective questions because we're kind of getting to the end here. I wanted to – I thought a lot about how to word this question. And so, we often hear about bad things happening to people. The inequality of everything that happened in Albina back when you were a priest there, for example, with the houses, and the drug problem, and poverty, stuff like that. So, we hear a lot about that in our narratives, but I also think it's important to talk about how people resisted and worked to effect positive change. And we've done a lot of that with talking about Albina Fair Share and Oregon Fair Share and also I think we have touched quite a bit upon just different kinds of community things happening with the church and whatnot. But I wondered if there were other forms of resistance or community resilience that you remember from your time in Albina that we haven't touched upon.

CURTIN: Well, you know one of the things I was amazed at was the way blacks are portrayed in our society. You know, how they don't have good families and how they're shiftless and lazy and they're all dope addicts and they're all this – I found out really pretty quickly that there was a depth in many people that was very deep, and there was a respect for noble things in these people, and there was endurance that they had come from a struggle. People that shouldn't ever be underestimated. I mean, I'm amazed at some of the – especially with Black women, you know. How they take on their grandkids and they just create this cohesion and healing and all this kind of stuff. I always marveled at that. People like Ida who's had – she had some struggles with her husband, who is dead now. And

she's got struggles now with her adult children. But she goes to church every Sunday and she just prays to God, you know, and she's just got a depth to her that is just – and I think that we've got to just – you know, here we listen to all these rap singers and Blacks are always portrayed as kind of not being serious about life, but they're very serious about life. So, I mean, if I was going to talk about something that is subtle – you know, I'm reading a book about Frederick Douglass right now and boy what a human being he was. I mean he is equal if not better than all these damn saints we have in the Catholic Church. I mean he was just a holy, holy man, and just got the crap kicked out of him all the time. There's people like that in the black community that are just – and they never kind of get the – Martin Luther King was like that, you know. He certainly got the recognition, but boy, he went through hell. And then he got, he was assassinated. And so, I don't know what it is about our society that is so afraid.

In all these jobs I had, I was always trying to bring people together, Blacks, whites, all these people that had all these divisions. And now we live with a guy as president who seeks to divide all of us and send us off splintered and angry with each other. My wife and I we both – we talk often about a few friends of ours that are tired of us now because of our politics. And, actually, we're equally tired of their politics. I don't know how it's ever going to get resolved, but we've got to figure out how to be – you know, that's what priests do. That's what always attracted me to the priesthood too, to try and bring communities together, to bring diversity. Divisive issues, you know, to walk away from those and come together. We have much more in common, most of us, than we think. And certainly, Blacks and whites have a lot more in common than they are led to believe they have. All the Blacks I know want good things for their kids. They don't want them to be criminals. They don't want them getting in trouble with the police. They want good thing and they work hard, sometimes two, three jobs, to try and make all that happen. And it's tough. So that's the thing [I was] so impressed with everywhere I went.

Higher education was confusing because there wasn't as much of that there. It's a strange animal, but there was a lot of liberalism there but it's not grounded in the kind of stuff that Blacks were grounded in. That deep history of grievance that they suffered and

smiled through, and nodded, and acted, and treated others with respect despite that. That doesn't go on in higher education.

GS: That's true [*both laugh*]. I'll agree with you there.

Something that you said, I wanted to ask a follow up on. And that was great. Thank you for your answer to my question.

You talked about the narrative that we have about Blacks being shiftless, lazy, drug addicts, whatever. And then just thinking about with the police and our prison system and how there are so many more Black men in jail, I just wonder what you think about that. Do you think that sort of narrative that we have contributes to that at all, or have you seen anything?

CURTIN: Well I think the police – well, look at the different sentencing guidelines for crack-cocaine and white powder cocaine, okay? So that – you know, and the sentencing guidelines are being reformed now. Even Trump is, you know, there's been a recent – last couple of days he is trying to get something done, some partisan bill through Congress. But, you know why they are doing it is because the prison system's costing them so much money and there's no effect out of it. There's no...

GS: Mm-hmm.

CURTIN: So, I think that there's kind of an inherent fear that Blacks are scary and mean and going to hurt you. But if you talk to Blacks, you know, [*chuckles*] they're scared they're going to get their butt kicked. And they don't want any part of it.

I know, I have these — Liddy talks about my friends. They talk to their kids about how to act when the police pull them over. They don't want them getting shot. "And don't smart off, don't be acting the fool," you know?

And so, I mean there is this kind of a thing. But now we're more intermingled and all that other kind of stuff. And then, when I was around the police they were starting to get

more Blacks on the police bureau. And I remember Phil Smith telling me, you know, “It will start happening when a Black officer and a white officer work together in a car and spend 40 hours a week together, and talk about their families, and talk about their kids, and how they’re trying to get along with their wife, and do all this other kind of stuff,” you know, like human beings. And that was true. And there’s lifelong friends that way. Now those guys are all retired, and their families all get together [*chuckles*] and socialize together. So, stuff is starting to happen but it’s real slow. But we’ve got to have more of that and we need to get somebody in the White House who is some kind of national leader who’s going to promote that. I think we need a woman to be the – you know, I don’t just say that because – but I do. I’m tired of – not the former Democratic presidential candidate, but a real part of these younger – maybe Amy Klobucher or Kirsten Gillibrand. Some of these young senators that are dynamic, and have the legal education, and know how to behave. It’s a big job. It’s a terrible job. And there are people there that can do it and I hope that – I’d look forward to voting for a woman in 2020. I hope I live that long.

GS: I hope so too.

So, how do you think the work you were involved in – sorry. My levels feel really loud here on my voice. It’s weird. How do you think the work you were involved in during your time at Immaculate Heart sort of reverberates into the present?

CURTIN: Oh, I don’t know – well certainly into the present, Harry Watson’s probably the best example, and that’s why I try to motivate you guys to do something with all that. But I think that’s – now there is — in Albina and in the Black community of Portland — a robust, muscular, recovery group of addicts who are talking a different talk than was being talked in the 1970s. And there’s a recovery response in the greater Portland area. There was no recovery response in the Portland area in the 1970s. There was the detox center. The only thing was the Portland police would throw you in jail, and that would interrupt your drinking or using. And you’d get your health back if you stayed in jail long enough. But there wasn’t any other kind of medicinal kind of therapy or treatment to get you into a

recovery setting. So that's one of the things that I think is still going on and I think Immaculate Heart kind of unwittingly—because of Harry—got in the ground level of that change. If you talk to Blacks in recovery, they all know about Immaculate Heart because of that.

And the Catholic Church has been a real disappointment, because of its sex abuse crisis and because most of the priests that are of my generation left and got married. And now we're being replaced by Nigerian or Tanzanian priests from another world, because they are getting more priests ordained over there because it's conservative. Church got real conservative and real inward looking and needs to have a big transformation of some kind. And that's a disappointment. That's not answering your question.

GS: No, no I mean...

CURTIN: I think there's a lot of kids that went to our grade school that Laverne worked with and that are real — they're in their 50s now, and they've been real community leaders in Albina. They work at S.E.I. [Self Enhancement, Inc.], some of them, Richard Fortson and others. And so that's been good. Some of them just kind of quietly raising their families and they've done pretty well. And that makes us feel good. Laverne and I call each other often to tell good stories to each other about our kids, because they grew up in a difficult time for young black people.

GS: Yeah.

What about with Albina Fair Share and Oregon Fair Share and the work with that — what are some legacies as you see them, if you do?

CURTIN: Well, I think local government is more willing to listen to organized groups when they come in. But, you know, I don't know quite how. I think we helped the black community learn how to address the government and when. I hope that. And that you had to be kind of unapologetic and not pander to — the politicians always tried to get you in a,

you know, “Be friendly,” and all this other kind of stuff. Like they’re your buddy, but they don’t want to do anything [*chuckles*]. And so, you’ve got to be kind of rude sometimes. You don’t want to do anything that’s criminal or disrespect – well, you do want to be just disrespectful a little bit. Yeah.

GS: It sounds like to me — what you were talking about, I think it was during our last interview, with some of the tactics with Albina Fair Share of going into a meeting with government officials with an agenda and holding them to...

CURTIN: Yes. Right.

GS: Not letting them just feed you some P.R. line but asking questions and holding them accountable to giving you answers.

CURTIN: Right. And giving them a task instead of letting them figure it out.

GS: Well, is there anything else you’d like to add as we close your oral history? Anything I haven’t asked you about it?

CURTIN: No, I mean, I think it’s been very thorough. It has been enjoyable for me to kind of go over the – we really did a lot, you know. And I’ve had a very – I’ve had a wonderful life that I’m very grateful for. I mean, I’m glad I did the things I did. I have no regrets about any of this. I’m glad I got into alcohol recovery when I did and I’m glad I’m still in it. And I’m glad I’m kind of back down there, in a much lower profile, but with these people — getting to be an old man and just hanging out.

GS: That must be nice.

CURTIN: Oh, it’s wonderful, it’s wonderful. Yeah.

GS: Yeah. Just going to be there. That's great.

CURTIN: Yes. And I thank Oregon Historical Society for giving me the honor of doing this.

GS: Well I think it's been great, and I really appreciate the opportunity to get to talk with you and record your oral history. So, thank you Bill.

CURTIN: Okay. Thank you, Greta. Good luck.

GS: Thanks.

[End of Session 4, Part 2]
[End of Interview]