

Andy Lee, former Prospect Park resident

Interviewed by Laurie Stern at Tower Hill, Prospect Park, June 3, 2011

Q So where are we and what do you have to do with this place?

A We're in Tower Hill, right by the witch's hat tower and I grew up in this neighborhood and I still live pretty close to it.

Q So were you born here?

A Yes, yes. Just on the other side of Franklin.

Q And how would you describe it?

A It's an interesting neighborhood. It's kind of tweedy, it's kind of interesting – some students, some old folks, some kind of crotchety people that go to neighborhood meetings a lot. Yeah, it's a neat place.

Q What was it like to grow up here?

A I liked it a lot. There was kind of like this whole wave of kids that were all growing up here at the same time. All went to the same school and everything.

Q And what were some of the things that you did on University Avenue?

A Well I would take the 16 to the U of M campus all the time and to high school, and I'd bike up and down it and still do.

Q So is University Avenue like the big city or the corridor or....was it....

A It's just another road with a gas station, you know.

Q How do you think light rail will change it?

A I don't know. I know the neighborhood's worried about development encroaching into the historic area, but I think it'll be positive. And I think it'll mean good development and hopefully less parking lots and vacant car dealerships and all that. At least in St. Paul.

Q So looking ahead a few years – would you want to raise a family in this neighborhood?

A Sure, sure. Yeah, yeah. Not that I could ever afford to buy a house here or anywhere, but yeah, yeah.

Q When you were saying that it was kind of crotchety and tweedy....does that include your parents?

A Yeah, yeah. They're both teachers so it includes them, yeah.

Q OK, so give us the little bio of Andy Lee.

A Well I grew up here in Prospect Park and I went to Marcie School down in Marcie Holmes neighborhood. Then I went to South High School, with Sophia Guinness and a few other folks. And then I went to college at the U and then I'm at Humphrey Institute for Urban Planning.

Q Urban Planning? So what advice would you give this neighborhood to progress?

A I don't know. I'm not qualified. I'm just a student.

Q You don't have an opinion?

A Well you know, I don't know. It has to kind of evolve on its own. I has it's own...definitely it's own kind of nature. Like it's kind of libertarian in that everyone wants to do whatever they want to do with their houses and they don't want to be told what to do. But they also want to tell their neighbors what to do with their houses. So there's angry neighborhood meetings that I've been to a lot. I don't live here anymore, but when I did.

Q I'm so glad we talked to somebody of a different age because we've been talking to all these people of a certain age and they all describe harmony and community. And this is the first we've heard of crotchety and disagreement of any kind.

A Oh sure, but that's kind of what makes it special, you know. You get two people in a neighborhood group in a room and they'll disagree and you know, all that.... I know there's been some big neighborhood fights over the years. Like when I was a little kid my parents would go to neighborhood meetings about the streetlights that are kind of special around here. And I think they charged people that live here a little bit extra to put in these special streetlights and there's like really contentious battles and people that would get banned from neighborhood meetings for spitting on other people and.....so it was interesting.

Q Do you remember which side your parents were on?

A Yeah, they wanted the lights. I think they like them, but I think it kind of shines in their house a little bit too much now so....