

Mary Alice Kopf (A) & Betts Zerby (A2), Prospect Park residents

Interviewed by Laurie Stern in Prospect Park, June 3, 2011

Q What can you tell me about this neighborhood?

A Not much. I've only been here 44 years. I'm a slow learner.

A2 (Betts?): She was the force behind the creation of the book. She's the one with the ideas all the time. She says let's do a book. And then somebody has to do it.

A You know, you would think that you could gather for a meeting at a committee site and do the book. But this neighborhood we had to go and take a class, at Macalester.

Q Not at the U?

A He is a geographer.

A So we started right. We probably might have had a more controversial book, but Betts said, no we will be sued for slander. So the really good stuff never got in.

Q Tell us.

A Oh, you're too young. Way, way too young.

Q Well he's not.

A He's also too young. But it's been good. No, we've gone through all the social changes that have gone on everywhere else in the country.

Q What do you mean?

A You know, things in the 70s – people started getting divorced, drinking a lot. I'm talking about myself. It was not a social revolution, was it? Or was it? I don't know.

A2 Well it was. It was.

A Anyway, so we were here. I tell you what it does – it means that you are part of the community in that you care what happens and I think it has an affect on our children, you know? My son, who's 44, lives in Seattle – he does what our neighbor across the street did for 50 years – he walks around the neighborhood at night, taking the dog out with a little plastic bag which he picks up debris. And you know, you just kind of take care and consideration.

Q Do you have a favorite memory from the neighborhood?

A Oh, well Betts. Betts is a favorite memory. Working on stuff. You know, it's not easy.

A2 We all...most of the people that have worked during their working years time, then retire, then start doing volunteer work in the neighborhood.

A Working outside the home.

Q Do you have a least favorite memory?

A A least favorite...there are a lot of funny things. Like we've got these big garbage containers now. Have you seen them? They're about this high, about that square. And we spent – I was just thinking of this yesterday – we spent two meetings of our monthly meeting of the neighborhood group, learning how to handle and relate to these big garbage baskets. You know, we wanted to do it right.

Q And what did you learn? How do you relate to them?

A Just that they're not that big and they won't hurt you. That kind of thing. That's one. But we've had a lot of very wonderful things with the Neighborhood Revitalization Program. You know, there are 82 neighborhoods in Minneapolis and each neighborhood got some money depending on how stable the neighborhood was considered. And ours was considered stable and then there's less stable and then unstable. So we got 3-1/2 Million dollars to spend according to the way we wanted to spend it, by voting and you had to have a certain number of days ahead of the meeting to post it so everybody knew and everybody who came had a vote. If they didn't come....

Q What did you spend it on?

A Well, we spend it...

A2 Mostly we spend it right there.

A Yeah, on the school.

A2 On the school.

A We spent about 2-1/2 million on the school – new windows, new doors, uni-sex bathrooms, kitchen, elevator, and improvements...also a stairway from East River Road to the Mississippi River. And we voted and that's how the money was spent. And we did not hire anybody, you know, to boss us around and tell us what to do. Although we did hire a secretary whose contract was specifically secretary. When that was over she, you know, so we didn't have to fire somebody or do that kind of thing.

Q Do you feel connected to the rest of University Avenue or sort of apart?

A Well, no, we use University Avenue. I mean we have the world's greatest druggist, you know? Tom. Do you know him? See? Yeah, we feel connected.

A2 You should talk to some young people.

Q We will. But I'd better get your name.

A My name is Mary Alice Kopf.

Q So are you saying you drank a lot and got divorced in the 70s?

A Yeah.

Q Yeah? OK. Just checking.

A Everybody was doing it.

Q Did you do crack in the 80s then?

A No, nor did I do LSD. I did not feel stable enough that I would come out of it. You know we've got a couple of folks around here who did LSD and really did not benefit.

Q What are you doing now that it's...what do we call this decade anyway?

A Well, we have to embrace change, so you could call it that. Anyway, I sell real estate and restore old houses right now. Anyway, I'm very grateful that I landed here.

Q Why is that?

A Because it's so close to a treatment center, you know? Fairview-St. Mary's. I mean that's my personal reason. Just a mile away. I always figured I could walk there and throw myself in the office or something.

A2 Mary Alice is still working. She is a realtor and she sells houses here.

A And restores them. Cleans them out. I like it. I'm grateful.

Q What impact do you think light rail will have on the real estate business?

A They keep saying it's going to raise the prices of the houses, which could happen. But what we really need is for everybody to earn more money, because a lot of jobs they are reducing your salary. So until that changes, the houses will not be selling at the same price that they used to. People can't afford it.