

Susan Larson-Fleming, Prospect Park resident

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

Q How do you fit into this neighborhood?

A When my husband and I moved up here, we had been students at Madison and when we were going to move here people told us this was the neighborhood to come to. We got an apartment, which I heard later was very lucky because people tended not to move. So we moved here in '77 and had an apartment for a few years and bought a little house. I'm from Chicago and I'd never lived in a house before – I'd lived in an apartment, so that was the first house I'd ever lived in, was over on Franklin Avenue. And then my oldest daughter was born and we moved to a house over on the other side of the tower. And my youngest was born and we've been there ever since.

Q So you've raised kids in this neighborhood. What was that like?

A Yes, two girls. It was great. It's a very magical neighborhood, very...I don't know. The streets go in and out and out and about and people tend to stay so they recognize you. They recognize your children and I always felt my children were very safe and engaged and were doing wonderful things.

Q Did they go to this school?

A No. This school was closed as an elementary school between 1982 and 2000. During that time it was a community education center, so it was multi-generational, but it didn't operate as a public school. So they were of the generation that couldn't attend Pratt. They were here – they're pictured in the history book and they were participants in various programs here, but no, they went elsewhere in the Minneapolis Public Schools.

Q This project is about University Avenue. Where is that from here?

A It's behind me. This way.

Q What do you do on University Avenue?

A Well, because we're sort of on the border, our orientation tends – or my orientation – tends to be more St. Paul. Because you go left on University, you hit the University and you go right and then you're all the way to the Capitol. But somehow, entering into St. Paul is a lot easier than...you get to the University and things go all which way. Even though we are. But because of this orientation, I took my kids to the library in St. Anthony Park, my husband worked in downtown St. Paul, I was a student on the St. Paul campus for a while, so the orientation was kind of that way.

Q So University Avenue is your corridor.

A Was my corridor. When we first moved here, when you took a bus on University Avenue it would stop at the border and you had to have a transfer to continue, you know because they're two separate cities. So I thought that was extremely unusual. They don't do that any more.

Q Do you remember when it changed?

A I would say probably in the 80s sometime that it changed.

Q That's interesting....

A You know, there were all these old cartoons about the exchange of prisoners on the Lake Street/Marshall bridge, you know? But here it was sort of...you had to have a transfer. So it really was something going on. They weren't quite...both cities were a little suspicious of each other, I guess.

Q After light rail, how will it be 5, 10 years from now?

A I think this neighborhood has a history of struggling because it is sort of on the border, it is sort of encapsulated by the freeway on one side, the industrial area, the University, and then the border. So in a sense it doesn't get any bigger but it can get smaller because the University creeps further and further east. So there's a real history of people watching what's happening and there have been various fights or whatever. I think the light rail is going to make it very exciting, going to make it very accessible – more accessible. We are right by the freeway, we are on the central corridor and the bus service has always been great so people have really been able to get where they needed to go and I think that'll continue. Lots of people are associated with the University, but I think not as many as in the past and this was considered sort of a suburb of Minneapolis when it was first built. And when the streetcar came out, streetcar went on University Avenue, that allowed the development here. But it was pretty much out in the country, in a way. And it has kind of preserved that. When you drive over the Franklin Bridge and you kind of see this huge expanse of green – and that's really the neighborhood, but you see the tower poking up and it's just the expanse of green. I always feel like I'm taking a deep breath when I'm coming back from work.

Q Do you work at the U?

A No, I work at a little museum – the Hennepin History Museum, which is the County Historical Society for Hennepin County.

Q Do you plan to stay in this neighborhood indefinitely?

A Yes, I think so. I think lots of people go and come, but they tend to come back. There are multiple generations of families living here. I don't know if my kids will actually move back here, but they seem to be settled in Minneapolis right now, so we'll see. But I don't anticipate moving. Might move to a smaller house in the neighborhood sometime. People tend to do that. But right now, no, we're not moving.