

*Investigating Place
with Portland's
Longtime Residents*



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People's Homes is a collaborative project that honors Portland's longtime residents and investigates expanded notions of home. The project explores the often-overlooked experiences of Portland's oldest homeowners and the local histories they carry. We have paired local artists with longtime residents to share their life stories and draw attention to the city's quickly changing landscape. The artists and homeowners have worked together to create small-scale billboards that represent the elders' experiences of home. The signs signify the artists' interpretations and homeowners' perspectives, the relationships they formed with one another through this project, and the ways in which their lives intersect. The signs are installed in the residents' front lawns—asking passersby to reflect on their communities, interact more intimately with their neighbors, and acknowledge the past while recognizing the urban changes taking place around us.

As artists, we are interested in using creative practices to humanize, visualize, and reflect on complex, socially charged issues and explore the implications often associated with issues of gentrification, economics, and urban growth. As residents and neighbors, these concerns are present in our daily lives. While Portland is experiencing accelerated growth and rising housing costs, lack of affordable living continues to grow across the United States. Through this project, we consider the dynamic ways that artistic research, intergenerational exchange, and storytelling can illuminate the subtleties of a lived experience.

—Emily Fitzgerald and Molly Sherman



Sharon Helgerson *with Nolan Calisch and Nina Montenegro*



I was born in 1937 in St. Johns. My folks were married here. At that time my grandparents lived down on Willamette Blvd, close to the bridge. When I was growing up, everyone on this side of the railroad cut was from St. Johns. In fact, they used to have a road sign up on Lombard there that said “Entering St. Johns.” It you were from Portsmouth, or a little further up, you were better off. Nicer houses, nicer community. In school those were the kids that were dressed the nicest. Us over here, our folks were working in the mills, you know.

...

Unions have meant everything to my family. My dad was a staunch union man. He walked out—down at the Plylock—and lost a car because of it. We ate a lot of canned green beans. My dad never wanted to talk about it, but it was over trying to form a union. They were trying to join the CIO union and they got locked out and had to go back and work with scabs. He was a staunch union person. He was real fair-minded and I think that’s what unions are about. They are about being fair. That’s how we were raised. I’m a fair person. When my kids were little, they grew up without grapes and iceberg lettuce because the union supporter Cesar Chavez. I believe in fair wages. It’s from my family.

...

My dad had a fishing boat. He tied it up at Westerlin Moorage where there was a big brown jug right at the end of the Interstate Bridge. We would drive down there. Once we were driving by the Expo Center and we went by the internment. There was a little Japanese girl behind the barbed wire on a tricycle. It was identical to my

tricycle. I couldn’t imagine why that little girl was behind barbed wire, that little girl my age. Why would people do that? I don’t think I ever got a satisfactory answer and so it stuck with me—the memory of that little girl and the tricycle. It wasn’t fair to any of them, but she got my attention. I was probably six.

...

I tell you, that one year, I remember those shooting stars out in the yard. I could hear the tugs blowing for the Steel Bridge to open. And the mills, and the trains. It was so clear at night because you didn’t have all the traffic. I remember you could hear them at night when the windows were open. It was call and response. Now, I hear road traffic. I also hear some little birds out in the bush in the morning, but I don’t hear very well anymore. My daughter can hear hummingbirds’ wings but I can’t hear them. It just kills me to sit and watch them and not hear them.

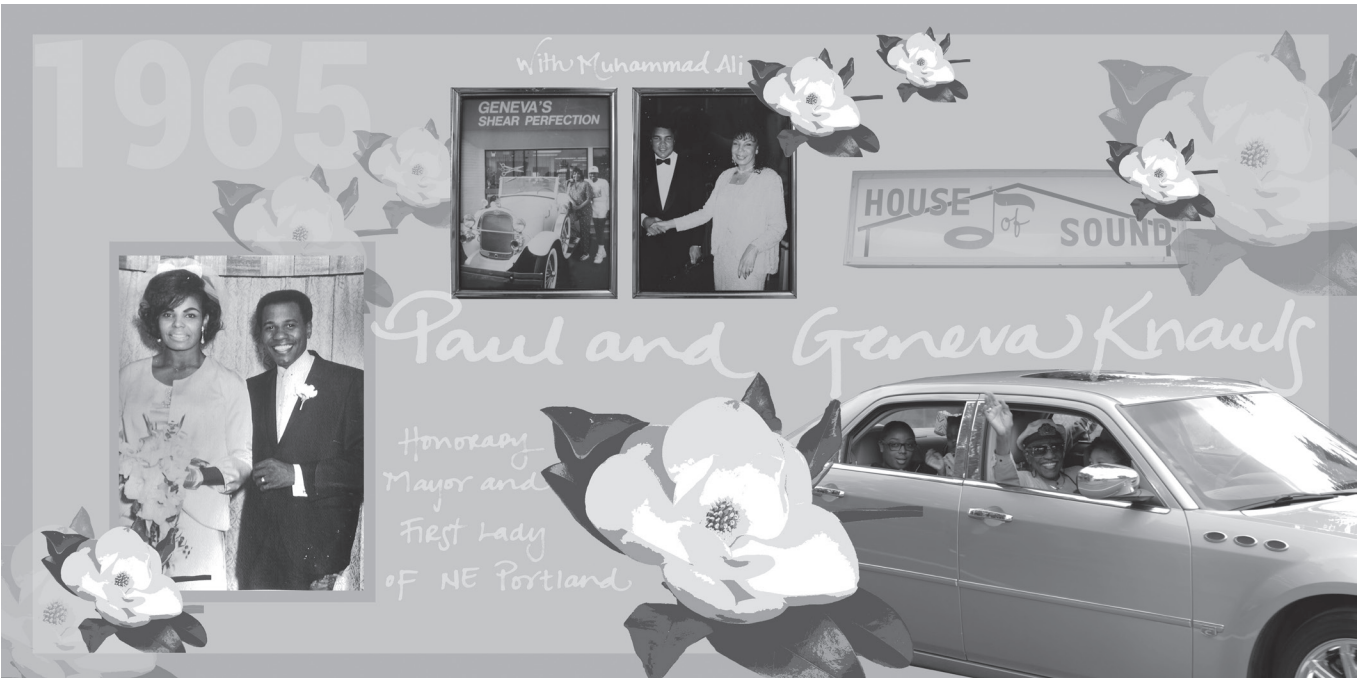
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St. Johns has lost its small sense of community. When I walk down the street, I still say “hello” to people. It’s something you always did in St. Johns. My mother always did it. You’d say “Hello, how are you today.” Sometimes I embarrass my grandkids because I talk to people. St. Johns was a nice little working town. There were always kids out playing and you could always find something to do. There were empty lots with trees to climb. I used to spend a lot of time up at the James John Elementary School playing handball off the wall. All you need for that is a tennis ball. I would spend summers at the Pier Park pool. I’d spend almost every day

there. Swimming was free. I would go down there when it opened and stay all day. I would just be starved when I got home. I would eat those pie cherries with worms in them on the way home. We knew they had worms in them but we didn’t care. We just didn’t look. I remember how good they tasted. It was a whole different way of living then. More simple. I think a lot of people are trying to get back to it.

Paul Knauls

with Patricia Vázquez Gomez



PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GOMEZ: What is the story of this house where you live?

PAUL KNAULS: I got married in 1965 and my wife was already living here. It was her house and when we got married it became our house. She moved here in 1964.

PVG: Do you know why she picked this house?

PK: Very nice neighborhood, the price was right, \$28,000 for the house in those days. \$100 a month payment so she said, “Honey, you get \$50 and I get the other \$50.” [Laughter] And that is how we paid for the house.

PVG: You talked the other day about the tree in front, tell me that story.

PK: Oh my God! We were down South some place and she saw those beautiful flowers on a magnolia tree and she wanted it. I said, “Honey, you don’t want a tree, you gotta rake leaves all the time!” But she wanted it, so we bought the tree and planted it, and now we gotta rake leaves almost eight months out of the year, every day! [Laughter]

PVG: Do you remember when that tree was planted?

PK: No, but it’s at least 30 years old.

PVG: That tree has seen a lot then. You told me that there are very few businesses owned by African Americans around here now.

PK: Yes, when I came here in 1963 there were over a hundred black businesses in the area. Only five of those remain in the community. The rest have moved or closed. It is unbelievable that you could get rid of that number of businesses. A lot of it was that the kids saw their parents working so hard and they didn’t want to take over the business, but as gentrification comes in, your clientele actually moves to another location. The whites are not going to come into your business because it’s still a black and white world. If you think it’s getting better, it’s really not. They are not going to participate in your business like they do in a white business so that leaves you with a very limited clientele and eventually you have to move also.

PVG: How has your business survived this for so long?

PK: Because of our brand: “Geneva’s. Give them what they want.” Some of my clients’ parents came here, and people say “I remember my mom used to bring me when I was a little kid.” The Internet helps a lot, too. People, who come from out of town, looking for a salon, know that MLK Blvd must be in a black area.

PVG: Your business is, then, bringing together a community that is now dispersed.

PK: That’s the way it is.

PVG: Do people know each other in this neighborhood?

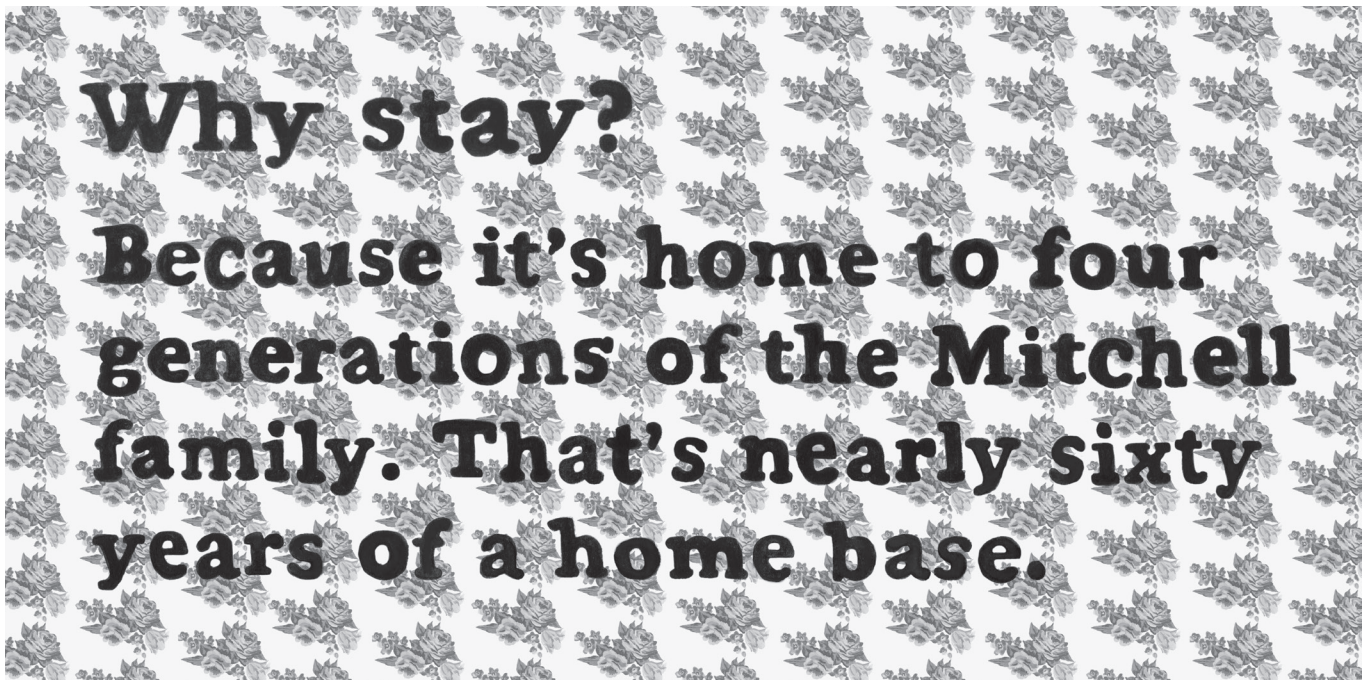
PK: No, I am probably the only one who speaks to everybody. “Hi, how you doing? Good morning!” The guy next door, he just moved in. He is from West Virginia. I was out raking my leaves this morning, and it’s the first time I have seen him. I asked, “What’s your name?” “Jordan” “Jordan, I was waiting for you to rake these leaves but you didn’t do it so I had to come out and do it!” [Laughter] He said “Oh yeah! What’s your name?” “Paul Knauls,” and so on. The lady across the street said “I read about you on Google, I am so proud to live next to you!” [Laughter] I don’t know where she got my name; I think somebody at work told her.

PVG: It’s interesting that she found out about you on Google rather than talking with you, since you are neighbors. That seems to be changing in a lot of places. We are losing the connection with our neighbors. I see it in the neighborhood where I grew up in Mexico City.

PK: Nobody wants to speak to anybody, you know. I make them speak to me, they will be walking the dog down the street and I am “Hi, how are you? Who is that?” I am asking about their dog, “Oh, that’s so and so”. And next time they pass, they will speak because you spoke to their dog. Otherwise if they had been by themselves they wouldn’t even have spoken! [Laughter]

PVG: So talking to dogs is a good strategy to make friends with the neighbors!

PK: That’s right! [Laughter]



Jean Mitchell *with Michelle Swinehart*

I've been thinking about how rare it is for you and I to both live next door to our parents. I wanted to ask you, "Why do you think that you didn't want to live next door to your mom at first?"

I don't know why, I loved her and we got along okay. I just don't know why especially. She wasn't trying to run my life. As it turned out later, I just thank God that we were next door to my folks because we were able to help them. They helped us some too. They helped us get the house because we didn't have any money. In 1967 they had a big car accident. I don't really know why I didn't want to. It turned out fine.

I do a lot of looking back but I guess that's a sign of being old. Isn't it interesting how things work out? I tell my kids but I don't know if they really believe me or not. Sometimes when you wish and wish and wish or pray and pray for something—you don't get an answer but when you finally get it, it's much better than you ever expected.

59 years later, why do you think you stayed here this whole time?

Because it's home.

Now when you think of that word, home. What does it mean to you?

It means where I am comfortable, where I am in a place where anyone who cares to can come see me, which doesn't happen if you go live in a retirement place or move to Florida. I guess

they don't care to be around people back home. I know people cross the country to be near a child and I can understand that. What does home mean? I can do whatever I want, which you should be able to do at home; I am my own boss.

I wanted to ask you about the thing you said about wanting your grandkids to remember you for being a loving and kind person but an interesting person as well. Can you tell me why?

Yes to me that's very important. Well because now that they're grown up I can enjoy them all the more because we can talk as adults about things.

Out of the pieces you've written, do you have a favorite?

I'm probably the most proud of the one about going back to school.

That's the piece you showed me the first day we met. What do you think it is about this piece in particular?

I just wanted to have that degree. I was the only college dropout in my family. The rest of them went straight through. When I got married, I thought I can't have it both ways, so I dropped out of school.

I keep thinking about this sign that is going to go in your front yard. What would you like to see on it? It could be a photograph, a drawing, a quote or anything really.

I think of flowers but that's not a message. I don't especially want a picture of me, I was better looking forty years ago. Hard to believe, I know.

Something that I've thought about is a quote by you, especially considering your love of writing. How does that strike you?

What did I say that is worth quoting? I don't want to sound like Ms. Prissy like I am soooo good I have to share it with you. I heard Hillary mention in one of her talks, she quoted a Methodist belief to do all the good you can for the people you can. I thought now that is lovely. That isn't my quote but isn't that a nice thing to do? Of course I grew up in the Catholic Church but so many things are the same for everybody. I say sometimes, "I have been so blessed." Is that worth something or is that too skinny? or "I'm a humble person but I'm really wonderful." Now that's what I don't want.

I am so glad I asked you. You've said so many things that are both serious and funny.

I may be funny but a quote needs to have a really good message too.

Thelma M. Sylvester

with Lisa Jarrett



Thelma Marzette Sylvester is ninety-three and has owned her Portland home in the Irvington neighborhood since 1960. Thelma and her three children—Dorris, Verlean, and John Jr.—migrated North from Louisiana to Vanport, Oregon in 1944 to reunite with her husband, John Sylvester, who was employed by the Kaiser Shipyards. Thelma’s first household in the Vanport housing projects was destroyed in the 1948 flood along with the city of Vanport. Her story is defined by resilience and perseverance. She watched the lilies blooming in her garden during our first conversation and, as we later talked about that first meeting, Verlean reminisced about the lily flower, “Even after a heavy rain, it stood up—it was there. To me that is powerful.”

LISA: What do you remember about the flood?

VERLEAN: This happened in 1948 on a Sunday afternoon and we had wanted to go to the movies. I’ll never forget that afternoon because Mom said, “No, just wait.” I’m happy about that now because a lot of people got stuck in the movie house and I don’t know how many were injured.

LISA: How did you know to be worried? Did you hear the weather?

VERLEAN: I don’t know. Mamma just said, “No, we’ll wait until your dad and sister get home from church.” By the time he got home the water was in the street and they grabbed what they could. A friend, Mr. Ganter, had

the car. We were a family of five and with his son and his wife we got in this car and I don’t know how we all got in. Before that, we got up on Denver Ave., and my dad had to go back for something.

THELMA: Something to eat. I had made a cake. And he went back.

VERLEAN: For years we didn’t eat coconut cake. The water was up to his chest and he was holding this cake as he was wading through the water.

THELMA: He just loved sweets. And I cooked him sweets. We were settin’ up in that car waiting for him.

VERLEAN: He didn’t go back for pictures; he went for that coconut cake. [Laughter]

LISA: What makes a neighborhood a good place to live?

THELMA: We are a beautiful neighborhood because we don’t all see eye-to-eye but we get along. People check in to see how I feel about it. Because really and truly I was the only black person that was in this neighborhood and they all got along with me.

VERLEAN: I love this neighborhood. The neighbors, the people, we look after each other. My mamma had a lot to do with that because she’s outgoing and nosy and knows who belongs where. Also, it’s a safe neighborhood.

LISA: What makes a place a good home?

VERLEAN: Everywhere we lived it was always a home, whether it was the project type in Vanport, the apartment, the house on Hancock, or here on 14th. That’s why it’s so sad for a family to think about selling a home. This is why it’s important for Mamma to be able to stay in her home. It has a lot of memories. I married out of this home.

THELMA: Yes, she came down those steps to get married.

VERLEAN: I don’t care how much you might love a place. If someone asks you what’s important growing up it’s that feeling of safety and being loved and protected. So, home is wherever Mamma and Daddy were. I hope someday my kids can say that about me.

THELMA: A lot of people have the beautiful house but they don’t have the love. So I prayed for the Lord to make the Sylvester’s house a place of love and peace.

The still point of the turning world



Paulina and Connie Thorne *with Travis Souza*

Isn't that terrible what happened? I can't believe these people committing suicide. This happened today?
Not too long ago.
I've been at work—where did it happen?
At an airport.
In Istanbul.

He can start.
You start, honey.

After I graduated, I volunteered for the draft. It took me to Fort Ord. Camp Gordon. Then Korea.
I wanted to go to Alaska so that I could put a ring on a girl's finger.
So you had a girlfriend here?
Yeah, but I don't like to write. My aunt who is a schoolteacher in Kentucky said I had Epistemophobia. It's a dread of writing. I was engaged, but I didn't write my fiancé letters like I should have. I started to respond, then I just couldn't—I panicked.
When I got back after being discharged, she gave me my ring back.

I was an apprentice at the St. Johns Substation. A trenchant was picking mushrooms off the lawn. I went out to see what he was doing. Next week there was a mushroom show at OMSI. My wife and I decided to go, and it got us hooked. I taught mushroom identification at PCC and Clark College.
He identified for hospitals and veterinary, and led mushroom forays. People would come by the house for him to identify.

I joined the Oregon Mycological Society. He was President of that twice. I knew none of this when I married him.

That's about it.
That's not really it.

I married J. She provided two children—a boy and a girl. She died of breast cancer. Then I was married to another lady who was a member of the mushroom club, and she could only take me for about a year and a half. And I can tell you why.
[Laughs]

Then my son and her second youngest son were classmates. They got Paulina and I together. We were different religions and different everything, but I liked her.
It was 1981, and I think we got married in this house about three months after we met. We knew each other 113 days. We had been dating for 81 days.

I got married when I was 18 or 19 to my first husband. He was in the Coast Guard. We went to Alaska right after the big earthquake. They had Armed Forces TV there. I did a sort of Good Morning America-like show. I was not on it, but I did everything—got all the information for the host to say—he just read everything that I told him. It was on Kodiak Island. One of the priests told me that the Natives were ashamed of their history. The ones who survived were descendants of the people who had given into the invading people. So they

didn't want to talk about it, and I didn't get to do anything about that.

I stayed single for 11 years waiting for just the right Jewish man who had no children, who had never had a family member with cancer, and all of these things.
I was Presbyterian. My wife died of cancer. He had children.
You can't choose these things, I guess.
I wanted nothing to do with this man. But D borrowed hiking boots from Connie and forgot to return them. He came over to the house to get them back, and that's all she wrote. What went through my head when I saw him was, "Welcome to my web, said the spider to the fly." He looked so sweet, and so bashful.

When did you get cancer?
2008
That's the year that my wife got cancer.
What kind?
Breast Cancer.
I had Colon Cancer.

He fell down the basement stairs. They kept telling us that he was going to die and not to make him hold on. They figured he'd never walk again, and here he is.

A couple of days ago we were the same age.

Art Is What Makes Life More Interesting Than Art

by Lucy Lippard

Lucy Lippard’s books including The Lure of the Local, On the Beaten Track, and Undermining greatly influenced and reinforced our thinking while we conceptualized and worked on this project. Her examination of art, place, and social engagement—often in non-traditional art contexts—has been an important touchstone for us along the way. Through our practice, we take the ‘personal’ into the ‘public’ by creating a shared platform to investigate place through the lived experiences and individual perspectives of longtime residents. This project has inspired us to ask more and more questions that help us understand our roles as artists, neighbors, and citizens, and deepen into the places we live. As we worked, we formed a series of questions for Lucy that we hoped would offer some insight into her 50+ years of experience investigating, integrating, and reflecting upon issues that we are just beginning to explore. Our questions included:

You shift scale in your work by seamlessly integrating personal experience into a larger political context. How do you extend and translate the personal into a public realm while maintaining integrity to the work, place, and people involved?

What motivates you to work on multiple scales—from editing your community newsletter to writing books on an international level—and how do these differing scales support one another?

As a dedicated writer, curator, and activist for more than fifty years, what propels your interest in socially engaged practices now, and how has that changed for you over time?

We are interested in work that exists in the in-between spaces—the intersection of art and life, reality and imagination, inside and outside, old and new, content and form. What considerations are important when engaged locally in one’s neighborhood to create work that is also shared in a broader art context?

We consider the work we are doing on this project to include: storytelling, documentary, activism, and relationship building, along with other “social energies not yet recognized as art.”¹ What value do you find in this way of working and situating these actions as art?

As you’ve deepened into the community and the landscape where you live, how has your relationship to place changed?

—EF/MS

I came into the art world thinking art meant freedom and realized within a few years that nothing is free within a capitalist cage, no matter how airy it may seem. After some formalist beginnings, I was involved in conceptual art in the mid-1960s and was swept along with the artists I hung out with into the anti-Vietnam war movement, then feminism—all of which changed my life. Since then, I’ve been fascinated (if not always convinced) by the various “escape attempts” that I’ve so often written about. They range from dematerialized artworks, street performance and actions, community arts, demonstration art, and a range of forms under the aegis of “cultural democracy.” In other words, the “in-between spaces,” or “social energies not yet recognized as art.” It’s just an extension of the longtime idea that anything is art if the artist says it is. My first art historical interest was in Dada, and collage. I see collaboration as the social form of collage and learned to love it in a feminist context.

Like all activists, yourselves included, I’m propelled by looking out the window at a world of injustices, by outrage, and anger, by hearing people’s stories...the same tinder that ignited the Occupy Movement. I don’t make distinctions between wheat pasting, demonstrating, community planning, watershed restoration, cleaning toilets at the fire department, and so forth. Or between writing the monthly community newsletter for 20 years and writing about the history of the land where I live, and writing about artists who share my concerns. My context has become increasingly local over the 23 years I’ve lived in New Mexico, and there’s plenty to do in one of the poorest states of the Union. The issues in Santa Fe County include water, protection of cultural resources, immigration, upscale development, the extraction industries, an energy monopoly...and always, everywhere, climate change.

Though I’ve always hated the term art critic (artists are not my adversaries), words are my medium. I don’t make art (although in the past I’ve occasionally made, for fun, woodcuts, comic strips, and demo art) from my community activism but it fuels my writing, which is always informed by lived experience. Living in the rural west has turned my longstanding interest in land art and landscape into a direct involvement in land use. Knowing the people and history of this once Hispanic farming/ranching village (now a gentrified bedroom community with traces of its past in the landscape and social interactions) has illuminated the ways in which people create place—cultural geography. (I’m working on a history of the village, 1800 to the present, having already published a tome on the history and archaeology of the whole Galisteo Basin, 1250–1782.) Art is rarely a factor, though I still write short essays about artists who share my values, particularly women, Natives, and critical landscape photographers. (My favorite quote is from Fluxus artist Robert Filliou: “Art is what makes life more interesting than art.”) Working on a broad variety of topics as well as art keeps me from getting bored. But I’m decidedly out

of the global art loop, which is just fine when you’re pushing 80. I don’t miss the New York artworld, except for my friends and collaborators. At a time when everything seems to be going to hell, when long-term thinking is in short supply, I cling to Antonio Gramsci’s advice, my other favorite quote: “Pessimism of the intellect, optimism of the will.”

Lucy Lippard is an art writer, curator, and activist. Since 1966, Lippard has published 24 books—including an experimental novel—on feminism, art, politics, and place. She is a cofounder of Printed Matter along with many artist groups including the Ad Hoc Women’s Art Committee, the Art Worker’s Coalition, the Heresies Collective, Political Art Documentation/Distribution, and Artists Call Against U.S. Intervention in Central America. Lippard has curated more than 50 exhibitions, made comics starring Polly Tickle, and organized guerrilla theater and demonstration art. She has been a visiting professor at the School of Visual Arts, New York; Williams College, Williamstown, Massachusetts; The University of Queensland, Australia; the University of Wyoming, and the University of Colorado Boulder. Lippard has lived in Galisteo, New Mexico for over 20 years, edits her community newsletter, and is active in various local issues. She is currently working on her 25th book.

1. Lucy Lippard, *Six Years: The Dematerialization of the Art Object from 1966 to 1972*. (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1997), xxii.

Stop, Look, and Listen to the World Around You

A Conversation with Norman Sylvester

We interviewed Norman Sylvester in his North Portland home in October 2016. We wanted to include his voice in this publication because of his strong commitment to building community relationships and honoring the history of North and Northeast Portland. His generosity and connection to place helped us throughout this project.

—EF/MS

How long have you lived in North Portland?

We came to Portland in the fall of 1957 from Bonita, Louisiana. I’ve been in this house and a resident of Kenton for twenty-three years. This house is 131 years old. It was one of the original farmhouses here when this area was an apple orchard. This house and a house down the street were the first two-story houses in this area. Before that, I lived over on 15th and Saratoga. I still own that house. It’s a rental. The house I grew up in is on 9th and Going. My parents bought that house in 1959. It was a duplex with an extra lot on the side for \$9,000. Back in those days, that was a lot of money. That house is probably my longest history of residence because my sister lives there now and we all still gather there like we did when my mom was alive.

And so why does Portland feel like home to you?

Well, you know, home is what you make it. I cried when I left Louisiana. I got on a Union Pacific train and rode across the country. I saw my first canyons. I saw my first mountain peak. I didn’t know where my journey was taking me. Oregon is 3,000 miles away from Louisiana. The happiness was that my family was here. So that’s home. It made me comfortable. My dad and mom were just powerful people. I think I had the best parents in the world because I came up here when I was 12 years old, pre-adolescence, you know, and I was in my first integrated school. I was in a strange place. I had that family bonding that made me feel like anywhere they were I was okay. Yeah, so then Portland became home.

Is that what makes you feel at home here now?

Home to me is just when I pull into my driveway after a gig at night and my headlights hit my house, I relax totally. When I walk in the door and kick off my shoes and look at my easy chair and my surroundings, I’m perfectly at peace at that point. I’ve had a wonderful time doing what I was doing out there, but when I come home, it just embraces me. It holds me because I know my wife is here. I know my children are a phone call away and that they are doing well.

Being a longtime resident of Portland, how have you seen your neighborhood change? What are we losing through the process of gentrification? Who is implicated in this process?

You know when I came to Portland, Oregon in ’57, Williams Avenue was a booming strip. African Americans, open produce markets, barbershops, Chinese restaurants, shoe stores, clothing stores, cool cars, and nicely dressed people were up and down that avenue. When I drive home, in my mind, I can still see that when I go by Unthank Plaza, and I look at the Urban League. I see the cleaners there and behind that was a barbershop where I got my first haircut in Portland. I see those things in my mind. As I walk through my neighborhood at 9th and Going and say I pass old houses where kids would run out when I was going to Jefferson High School, I’m going to hear those families call my name because I remember the mom and dad and the kids’ names of those homes.

...

I had a situation the other day where I cried. I was driving down on Alberta and Coast Janitorial at 7th and Alberta is going through a change. I think the house next to the parking lot has been torn down and the building is going to be a new business. I was going up to the barbershop, and I just couldn’t dig myself out of that emotion because that was history, once again, going away. This with a family business. These are the Scott brothers. I went to school with them. When I started with the trucking company in 1968, I had four kids, and I worked eight hours with the trucking company. I’d come home at 4:30. At 6:00 I’d go down to Coast Janitorial and pick up a truck and go out and do janitorial routes. They only had three trucks. They grew so big that they had a contract with Nassau in Florida. They had downtown high-rises. To see that business go away and that corner changed forever, you know, that’s one thing elders have to face. To see that eraser board of their life as things change over the years. I saw that building go away and it just makes me cry. We can’t stop the corporate wheel from rolling, but we can stop the eraser from erasing.

What role does listening and storytelling play in your life? How have you learned to listen?

When I was a kid, I used to love to hear my grandmothers tell me stories about their childhoods because it was like “Oh my God. Really? Really?” and you learn from those stories. When elders are in our family, and we put off going to see them and hearing those stories, it’s a disservice to them. And it’s a disservice to you for not hearing that story. We have a society now where people are not taking the time with elders and elders are so important to us.

...

Well, I think, I was trained to listen. My grandmother was a healer. She was a midwife. She delivered children all over northern Louisiana in the countryside and the average family in the countryside had ten kids. “Miss Lou, Miss Lou, come now, I think it’s time, I know it’s time.” And boy, she’d run off, and I’d see a guy driving fifty miles an hour down this dusty country

road, my grandmother in the car with her little black bag, and she’d be gone overnight sometimes, sometimes two days, depending on the birth. She always told me, “Listen to your soul. It’s speaking to you all the time.” I’ve listened to that. I think everybody should. The whole thing I was saying today is that we’re so busy we don’t get to stop and be quiet and look around. If you stop and listen to your heartbeat, all of a sudden at that moment, you see how important that heartbeat is to you. We got screens, and we got places to be. We got things to do. But we forget ourselves. So if we sit and just clear our minds, that inner voice talks to you all the time and leads us on our journey because we are powerful individuals.

Your influence and support have been instrumental in the development of this project. Through you, we connected with Paul Knauls, Sharon Helgersen, and of course your Aunt Thelma. How do you maintain so many community connections and why is this important to you?

Say I’m busy, and I’ve got to go from Point A to Point B, but I see this person I know. I was taught don’t take that moment for granted. I’ll turn around, make the block, and I’ll stop and say “Hello” to that person. Momentary, but don’t take that for granted because what if I passed that person and then I find out a day or two later something happened, and they were there, and I didn’t stop.

...

I’ve always worked hard and been around hard working people. My dad worked 16 hours a day for 18 years. He worked two jobs, St. Vincent Hospital in the daytime, a foundry at night. Paul Knauls and the people of the community, like Thelma Sylvester, like Joan Brown’s longshore family. Her husband, Austin, was a longshore guy. Sharon Helgersen, her brother Carly T, who played the harp in my band, went down to the longshore and worked on loading cars out there by the St. Johns Bridge. Hardworking people. We would sweat. We worked hard. Now you guys are mentally working. That’s why it’s so important that you get into your bodies and stop, look, and listen. And get into the history of your surroundings because you need something to get you out of your head. These projects are monumental to your learning process and your journey.

Louisiana-born guitarist/vocalist Norman Sylvester has been gigging around Portland, Oregon since the mid-1980s, and he was inducted into the Oregon Music Hall of Fame in 2011. He has lived in N and NE Portland since 1957. He has seven children and nine grandchildren. Sylvester is a professional musician, storyteller, songwriter and performer. He performs regularly at the Spare Room and Clyde’s. He’s currently an artist-in-residence at Irvington School and has previously worked with youth at Boise-Eliot Elementary School and for the Youth Music Project/Blues in Schools program in West Linn.

Contributors

SHARON HELGERSON

Sharon Helgerson was born and raised in St. Johns. She attended James John Elementary School and Roosevelt High School from 1942–1954. She retired from the International Longshore and Warehouse Union Local 8 in 1999 after 20 years. Unions have provided a solid background for her family and still contribute with a decent pension and healthcare. She is still active in the union and has written stories of her work on the waterfront in the memoir class she attends through the Portland Parks system. She enjoys researching local history and belongs to the St. Johns Heritage Association. She has always tended a vegetable garden and takes pride in her bounty which she shares with family and friends.

NOLAN CALISCH AND NINA MONTENEGRO

Nolan was born and raised on Sugar Creek in rural Indiana. He spent much of his childhood outdoors, and then as a teenager developed a strong interest in photography and documentary filmmaking. His love and concern for the natural world led him to apprentice on an organic CSA farm on Sauvie Island in 2007 and, the following year, cofound Wealth Underground Farm. Currently he shares his time between the farm and working as a freelance photographer and artist. Nina was born in Evanston, Illinois. Her work as a visual artist, illustrator, and designer began in 2007 after graduating from the University of Michigan. Every member of her family is an artist as well, each specializing in a different medium. When Nina moved to Portland in 2011 she became involved with Signal Fire, an organization that provides opportunities for artists and activists to engage in the natural world. She is now a wilderness guide for Signal Fire. Nina and Nolan met in 2011. They immediately kindled an artistic collaboration. Their artwork creates room for dialogue and participation around important social and environmental concerns. Together, they manage a small, organic farm not far from Sharon’s house in St. Johns.

PAUL KNAULS

Paul and Geneva Knauls married in 1965 in Portland, Oregon, blending families successfully. Geneva was originally from Minden, Louisiana, and Paul is from Huntington, Arkansas. Together they owned some of the most renowned businesses in Northeast Portland including The Cotton Club, Paul’s Lounge, Geneva’s Restaurant, and Geneva’s Shear Perfection. Their shared passions included skiing and traveling, and visiting faraway places like Brazil, Greece, Ivory Coast, and Thailand. Their support for many grassroots efforts and organizations won Paul the title of “Unofficial Mayor of NE Portland” which, in the words of a local newspaper, made Geneva, “The First Lady.” Geneva died in 2010 and Paul still runs Geneva’s Shear Perfection, working every day. Paul stays healthy by exercising every other day, walking his house’s stairs up and down.

PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GOMEZ

Patricia Vázquez Gomez was raised in a working class, densely populated Mexico City borough, and for the last six years has lived in Northeast and Southeast Portland. While living in Mexico City, she enjoys the liveliness of the streets and public spaces, the openness and spontaneity of human encounters, and the abundance of public transportation. In Portland, she enjoys the clean air, the endless rows of trees, the cultural, social, and political resilience of communities of color, and the ability to commute by bike. She has made a few attempts to settle in only one of those two places without success.

JEAN MITCHELL

Jean Flynn Mitchell has lived in her home for nearly 59 years. Her parents lived next door when she moved in. Her dad, a real estate broker, approached her with the possibility of buying the property. At first she said “No thanks,” because she did not want to live so close to her parents. Two months later, when the house was still for sale, Jean and her husband, Bob, reconsidered and decided to buy it. Over the years they raised eight children, sheltered two foster daughters as well as two teen Cuban refugees and their families in its walls. At the age of 50 she enrolled at the University of Portland to finish her Bachelor’s Degree with a major in Gerontology. Jean has published several articles in The Oregonian on personal subjects from returning to school to receiving help during difficult times to accidentally being trapped in her bedroom. Jean would like to be remembered as a good and loving person.

MICHELLE SWINEHART

Michelle Lee Swinehart currently shares ten acres with her parents in Ridgefield, Washington. In 2008, she and her husband proposed starting a small vegetable farm on the same land where Michelle grew up. Her parents generously agreed and a small forest separates their two homes. Michelle is in the beginning stages of raising three kids and feels mighty appreciative to be near grandparents. She has acquired several degrees at local institutions including Whitman College, Lewis and Clark College, and Portland State University. She currently teaches at Portland State University. Despite all these degrees, there are few things she enjoys more than listening to people’s stories and learning through lived experience. For her, it reaffirms pretty much everything about our lives that is worth remembering but often forgotten.

THELMA M. SYLVESTER

Thelma Marzette Sylvester was born on March 28, 1923 in Louisiana. She lives with her daughter, Verlean, in Northeast Portland where she enjoys sitting and quietly watching her neighborhood from the porch or window. She has three children, thirteen grandchildren, six great grandchildren, and one great-great grandchild. Thelma says something when she feels like it and believes that if you have respect and mind your life you will be here for a long time.

LISA JARRETT

Lisa Jarrett was born on September 30, 1977 in New Jersey. She lives with her dog, Muay Thai, in Northeast Portland. As an artist and black American woman she is drawn to stories and people who live in diaspora—histories of displacement and home, how we come to call a place home, how we remember home, and how we—as black Americans—construct home amid the violent sea changes of American history. She is learning to say what’s on her mind and to have respect and to mind her life.

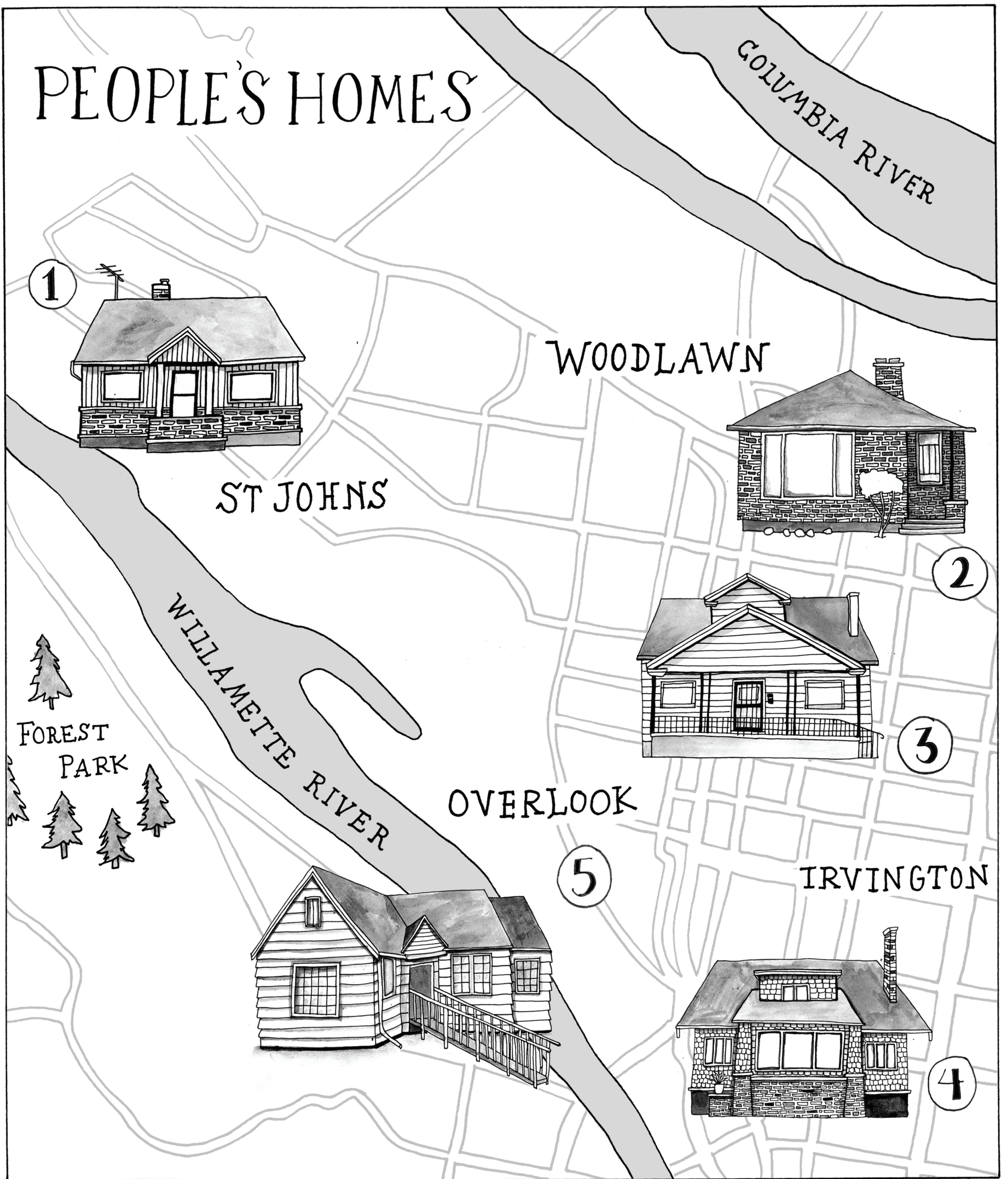
PAULINA AND CONNIE THORNE

Paulina, 82, and Connie, 83, live in the Overlook neighborhood of Northeast Portland. Their sons were school friends and initiated them meeting each other. Connie has lived in this neighborhood his whole life apart from time served overseas during the Korean War. He nearly became a CIA Agent. Instead, he worked for Bonneville Power for almost 35 years, and became a local leading mushroom expert in his spare time. He now enjoys Tai Chi and watching sports. Paulina once produced a Good Morning America-style TV show on Kodiak Island in Alaska. She was a hospital OBGYN secretary, and an amateur Sauvie Island historian. She now enjoys researching her ancestral Ukrainian history and drinking tea. On Thursday evenings, one of their sons takes them out on the town.

TRAVIS SOUZA

Travis is 37 and lives in Southeast Portland. He is one of five brothers from California. He lived 13 years between London and Glasgow where he met his spouse and had two children together. Travis walked from Los Angeles to San Francisco with two of his brothers along the proposed high-speed rail route. Apart from walking and being outside, Travis enjoys sharing meals with friends and playing music.

PEOPLE'S HOMES



1 SHARON
HELGERSON'S
HOME
1937*

ARTISTS: NOLAN CALISCH
AND NINA MONTENEGRO

2 PAUL
KNAVL'S
HOME
1965*

ARTIST: PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GOMEZ

3 THELMA M.
SYLVESTER'S
HOME
1960*

ARTIST: LISA JARRETT

4 JEAN
MITCHELL'S
HOME
1957*

ARTIST: MICHELLE SWINEHART

5 CONNIE
AND PAULINA
THORNE'S
HOME
1967*

ARTIST: TRAVIS SOUZA

* YEAR RESIDENT MOVED
INTO NEIGHBORHOOD

PORTLAND, OREGON
NOVEMBER 2016

SHARON HELGERSON
PAUL KNAULS
JEAN MITCHELL
THELMA M. SYLVESTER
PAULINA AND
CONNIE THORNE

NOLAN CALISCH AND
NINA MONTENEGRO
PATRICIA VÁZQUEZ GOMEZ
MICHELLE SWINEHART
LISA JARRETT
TRAVIS SOUZA

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