

Mary Easton Interview on the Gay Nineties and Barbershop Ballad Contest

Recorded July 2, 2025 at the Friends of Historic Forest Grove Old Train Station Museum

Interviewer: Elle Griego, History and French undergraduate student at Pacific University

Note on the text: This transcript was made through AI in 2025 with manual corrections by both the interviewer and interviewee. We recommend checking this text against the audio recording before quoting the speakers, as it may contain errors.

Elle Griego 0:00

Greetings. I'm Elle Griego behind the camera, and I am here with Mary Easton. We are at the Friends of Historic Forest Grove Old Train Station Museum here in Forest Grove, Oregon, on July 2, 2025. I will primarily be asking Mary about her memories and thoughts surrounding the Gay Nineties Festival and the barbershop ballad contest. Thank you so much for being here with me this afternoon, Mary. First, I'd like to start at the very beginning of your life outside of the context of the Gay Nineties. Where and when were you born?

Mary Easton 0:35

I was born in Scappoose, Oregon, August the 12th, 1934. [Griego: Wow]. I'm going to be turning 91 in a few weeks.

Elle Griego 0:49

Oh, wow. Really? Well, congratulations, happy early birthday. And so how long did you live over in Scappoose?

Mary Easton 0:59

I was just a baby when they left, and what I remember was when we moved out to the Roe farm outside of Gaston. And the reason we did that is during, it was the end of the Depression, and my dad was a dairy farmer, and he lost his farm, and so we had to then rent. We were rent farmers instead of owning, and so we were out at the Roe place, and I was three when we moved there. I can remember, it must have been spring, because I remember the wild roses and just... it was warm. I can remember in the house somebody who had been there before, had left a box of kittens. And, of course, I loved kitties. But anyway, we lived there until I was starting third grade, and that's when we moved to, well, it's outside of Forest Grove, part of the Dilley School District, and it was Judge Hughes's farm. They moved into town and rented the farm. I am the youngest of seven, and about that time, it was the start of the war, and my two older brothers could have been deferred because, you know, vital interest staying on the farm, but they decided they needed to go. So they joined. One went into the Navy and one went into the Marines. And so that left the rest of us. There were three boys and four girls. My brother, just older than me, is four years older, but he wasn't all that old to be working on the farm. But my sister, Marge O'Rear, who is now 97, she drove a tractor and all kinds of things. She worked on the farm and helped dad. Then at one point, they were in a terrible accident. A gravel truck was coming, loaded with gravel, too fast, around the curve, went into the ditch, back out again at the same time as my sister Margie was driving the tractor with dad on the hay rack to go down to the field, and they had to get out onto the highway to do that. Well, at that point, the trucks hit them broadside, and my dad ended up in the ditch. He fortunately survived, but he had... he ended up with a blood clot on the brain. But anyway, he knew that he couldn't farm anymore, so he moved us into Forest Grove, and that was when I was in the fifth grade. I can remember that time, they had the fifth grade divided between Central School and Lincoln School. And because we lived -- at that time, it was called 226

South Seventh Street, which is now Hawthorne, that I would go to Central School, but I got to Central School and they looked at my report cards and they said, "No, you need to go over to Lincoln." So a friend of mine, who I knew from Dilley, walked me across town to Lincoln, and that's where I ended up going to school. Then I went to the high school on the corner of Elm St. and 17th St., which later burned down. I went to the University of Oregon one year, but I didn't know what I really wanted to do, so I came back and I started working for Lloyd Marshall, superintendent of the elementary school district. At that time, Forest Grove had two districts. It was district five, which was the high school, and district 15, which was the elementary district. The office was actually in Lincoln School, up on the third floor. So I worked there. I got married in 1954, and I worked there until... I must have worked there five years total. Then I stayed home and raised five kids until they went off to school. Then I went back to school, to Pacific University and got my teaching degree, and eventually got my masters. [Griego: Oh, wow.] I taught at the Old Central School before they made it into an administrative office. Then I went to Joseph Gale, in the old one, which since has been replaced, and then to Harvey Clark, where I finished up.

Elle Griego 7:21

Wow, you've been all over. Could I ask, going back a bit, what was the name of your father, and then your mother as well, and your siblings?

Mary Easton 7:32

My father was Alfred Cedergreen. Swedish name, C, E, D, E R, G, R, E, E, N, and there are lots of Cedergreens in Sweden. My dad was one of 14. His father, who came from Sweden, was one of 11. [Griego: Wow.] So big family, and they have -- every five years in Sweden, they have a Cedergreen reunion, and it happens to be this year. I always thought it would be fun to go, but I've had cousins who've gone, but I haven't. Anyway, but in Swedish, it's Cedergren, and it means cedar branch. A gren is a branch in Swedish. Then my mother was Chloe Ellen Buffington, and her father -- it sounds funny, because it should be four generations down to me, it's only two. He fought in the Civil War. [Griego: Really?] When he was 19, he was in Sherman's March to the Sea through Atlanta, Georgia, and he was a Nebraska farm boy. It wasn't a state at that time, it was called Iowa territory. We have some letters that he wrote to his dad, and they had to ask for food from farmers as they crossed their farms. They were walking to meet up with Sherman. It's a long way to go. Anyway, interesting background. When I say that to friends, they say, "You can't possibly have a grandfather that was in the Civil War." Yes, I do.

Elle Griego 9:45

That's fascinating.

Mary Easton 9:46

But he died when my mother was four, so of course, I didn't know anything about him. So what else did you want...? Oh, you want to know my siblings. Virgil was the oldest, then Eldon. Then Mildred, and then Margie, and then Velma, and Dale, and then me.

Elle Griego 10:28

And you said you got married in, was it '54? [Easton: Uh huh.] What's your husband's name?

Mary Easton 10:35

David. David W. Easton, E, A, S, T O, N, and he was born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa.

Elle Griego 10:48

Oh wow. And how did you two meet?

Mary Easton 10:55

His father died when he was only a year old, and he had a brother who was five years older than he, their mother and the two boys came to Oregon to live with her sister and brother-in-law. The mother remarried, she married Miles Austin, who was the manager of the First National Bank of Oregon, which used to sit up on the corner. [Griego: Oh, yeah.] They were married the summer Dave turned 14, and then they moved here when he was a freshman in high school, and I spotted him the first day of high school, new kid on the block, you know. We started dating when we were seniors in high school. He went off to Willamette University, and I went to the University of Oregon. I came back after one year and he continued. We were married in 1954, and he worked for Tektronix for a little over 18 years, he got into the hardware business with Ray Miller, and eventually took over the business, and now our daughter and son in law run it. [Griego: Ace Hardware?] Ace Hardware. And the hardware, it's over 120 years, different owners, but we can trace it back here in Forest Grove all that way.

Elle Griego 12:54

So was it a different company, originally?

Mary Easton 12:59

Yeah, it was just a hardware store. I can't remember when Ray joined up with Ace, but it's been in different places. It started out right up there on the corner that is the insurance office now. And then it was where BMO Bank is, that's where it was when I was in high school, and then it went down to the shopping center, about where the gym is down there. Then we went out, bought out a building, Carlton Nursery, and remodeled that building. We had about five acres out there, and then it was purchased -- I'm blanking the name of it, but a grocery outlet up in Bellingham, Washington, I believe that's where it started. And they were going to build a grocery store there. We thought, "Wonderful!" Well, that didn't happen. So it's now apartments out there, but in the process, they bought us out and built our building for us. Norabel Miller, who was the widow of Ray, got her half. We have had this building a lot longer than I can... seems like yesterday, but we've had it for quite a while now. My daughter and son-in-law now run it. I still go and help her in the office every day. [Griego: Oh, wow. Oh, good.] Yeah, I climb those 19 stairs up to the office. [Easton laughs.] Get my exercise that way.

Elle Griego 15:10

Yeah, and it sounds like you had a passion for teaching as well.

Mary Easton 15:14

Yes, I taught first, second and third grade, mostly third, and mostly at Harvey Clark. It was when teaching was fun. I wouldn't want to be a teacher right now. I really wouldn't. We had a good time, and I still see so many of my students. Dr. T.J. Gray, who is really, really tall. He was in second grade, and I tease him every time I see him. Everything he needed for med school, he learned in second grade. [Easton laughs.]

Elle Griego 15:57

Wow. And you said that you wouldn't want to be a teacher now. Could you expand on that? What do you think has changed?

Mary Easton 16:13

I think right now, it is all focused on... I'm not sure what it is focused on. It doesn't seem to me that they're teaching some of the things that to me were essential. They've given up on cursive writing. They've given up... you don't really have to learn to spell, you know, just that's not important. Of course, in high school, I don't think they teach civics, government. Nobody seems to understand who runs the government and why. When we were in third grade, I taught with Pat Truax and Margaret Nousen, and we took field trips all over town, walking. We would walk to the library, walk to the police station, to the fire station, at that time, to the veterinarian station, to the prune factory over here. I mean, the kids were absorbing all kinds of things,

and having fun and learning. I don't think it's fun anymore. And of course, you know, with discipline, you dare not touch a child. You know little kids, particularly in the young ages, they need hugs. There are times when that's all they need is a hug. You can't do that anymore. No, you've got to keep your hands off. Parents used to be very supportive. Now, from what I understand, a teacher that teaches in the district, if a child is in trouble, you'd call the parents, "Well, we'll wait until they get home and hear their side of the story." Didn't used to be that way.

Elle Griego 18:35

And what year did you retire from teaching specifically, or, I guess I could say what years...?

Mary Easton 18:42

I took early retirement from teaching. At that time, we started traveling more, and we took some wonderful trips before my husband died, and I just, I was ready to quit, and also, we had all five of our kids through college by that time, and they were all married. We paid a lot of money for those five kids, getting them all through college, helping them get their first homes. I had decided it was time for me to relax and travel some, which is what we did.

Elle Griego 19:29

Yeah, oh, that's wonderful. The reason why I asked, I guess, when did you retire, is I am curious. You know, I'm so curious. With the Gay Nineties, I hear a lot about school children and how they participated, and I'm curious, if you remember, as a teacher...

Mary Easton 19:47

The little kids would dress up, you know, yeah.

Elle Griego 19:50

Yeah. Can you tell me a bit more about that? What were you teaching...?

Mary Easton 19:56

Some parents, of course, you know, would really get into it. Not that other other kids wouldn't, so we wouldn't make that big a deal that not everybody was in costume. I don't remember that I wore a costume in those days, but I do remember going to the parades. Of course, that was great fun. George Horner would have his, I think he had percheron horses, and they would take rides and...Spiesschaert. Is it George Spiesschaert? He also was a farmer who had beautiful horses, and they always participated, and the old cars. I know there was one picture of my sister Margie in Bill McCready's car. Like I say, the Burlinghams got trophies for being the best dressed business in town. Other than that, I don't really remember that -- but of course, it was tied in with the Ballad Town, and going to the programs and listening to the quartets.

Elle Griego 21:35

Yeah, did you do that? Listen to the quartets?

Mary Easton 21:37

Oh, yeah. Very much. It was fun. And they had the Ballad Town Belles. They dressed up as can-can ladies, and had their dances and whatnot. It just was a fun time. Forest Grove, of course, at that time, was much smaller than what it is now, and people knew each other. Now you go downtown, and of course, at my age, most of my contemporaries have already died, but you don't know as many people as you once did. But interestingly, Pat and Pete Truax, both teachers, Pete was the mayor for years, and then he was on city council, and now he's on the school board. The only male on the school board, which I find interesting, but he'll hold his own.

Elle Griego 22:58

Yeah. Well, I have two questions I want to ask. First was, was the hardware store ever involved in the Gay Nineties parade? Because I know the businesses were, in general, involved. Did your business ever participate?

Mary Easton 23:13

I don't remember that they did. I don't remember if Ray or not... he was very involved in Rotary so, you know, it's possible, but I don't recall that they ever had a float or anything like that.

Elle Griego 23:32

Yeah. My other question is, you know, you mentioned kind of a decline in civics education in high school and this idea that people today are less involved with each other. Do you think I'm kind of just curious if you could expand on more that, like for the Gay Nineties, was this almost a way for the students to engage with their community more?

Mary Easton 23:56

Yes, yeah, definitely. And I'm trying to think, what else they have. Well, I do remember it was such fun at Lincoln, when I was going to school there, we had a carnival every fall, and the townspeople turned out... I mean, it was a big deal and such fun. And I think that's one of the things about the people in Forest Grove. They really supported their schools. They attended assemblies. They attended theater productions that were put on in the schools. When I was a junior, I had the lead in "Don't Take My Penny," and I was Penny, and the auditorium was full, and it wasn't just the students, it was the townspeople. And the same thing when they started Theater in the Grove, it was mainly townspeople that were the actors and actresses. You'd go and it was just fun seeing all these people that you knew that were in the theater.

Elle Griego 23:56

Yeah, the Theater in the Grove is a real gem. I went to my first show there, "Arsenic and Old Lace." It was a lot of fun. I can't believe I hadn't gone there before. It's real special to have that. But you had mentioned that it's not so much actors from Forest Grove [Easton: Not anymore.] Do you remember when that change happened? Was it, you know, last decade or so? Was it a few decades ago? Was it just kind of a gradual thing?

Mary Easton 25:56

It probably stopped about... maybe 1990? Probably in the '90s. And the very first production, which was "South Pacific," was actually held in Central School. And Central School had a big auditorium and a stage.

Elle Griego 26:26

So, what was the Theater in the Grove building before it was Theater in the Grove? Do you remember?

Mary Easton 26:34

It was Grove Theater. [Griego: Was it like a...?] A movie theater. That's where I went to the movies and we paid, I think it was 15 cents to go to the movies, and next door was Tip Top, which was the ice cream place. Don Watrous owned both of them, the theater and Tip Top.

Elle Griego 27:06

Yeah. So going into... this is a question I like to ask everyone is, why do you think it was the 1890s decade that was celebrated by Forest Grove presidents like, why have this festival centered around the 1890s?

Mary Easton 27:20

I don't know who came up with that idea. I truly do not.

Elle Griego 27:24

Yeah. Well, I can tell you, it wasn't Forest Grove that invented the Gay Nineties term. That came in the 1920s with a Life magazine artist. From my understanding, the barbershop contest came first, and then it was kind of, this they had fun with it, and were a little wacky and dressed up, I think, you know, the very first -- before it was even a contest, when they were just having fun, and they associated the 1890s with barbershop. And I think, it was more of a general nostalgia term, but perhaps I could rephrase... I guess, what did the 1890s mean to you, or what did it mean to the people of Forest Grove?

Mary Easton 28:09

I don't know that it meant all that much to me. I guess it was, you know, a time where people just seemed to be happier. Then after that, of course, was the Depression. Yeah. Things crashed, but it's the ebb and flow of life, you know, ups and downs. That's the thing, you know, coming out of the Depression, people were much more careful of things. We weren't a toss away society, which is where we are now. Just like my cell phone keeps buzzing in on me... after every few years you get rid of that one and get another one. Same thing with a refrigerator, with just about anything. It's not working quite right, just throw it out, get a new one. It didn't used to be that way. That's one of the things that I really appreciate about Friends of Historic Forest Grove, that they are working hard to preserve some of our old houses and buildings. And when I see Pacific, I love seeing Old College Hall and Carnegie Hall. Carnegie Hall was where the education building was at the time I went to school there.

Elle Griego 30:14

So when the town was celebrating the Gay Nineties, was it ever in the context of Forest Grove history, specifically, like looking back and teaching Forest Groves like turn of the century, or, you know, end of the end of the 19th century, turn of the 20th century history? Or was it more of just a general kind of nostalgia for this era?

Mary Easton 30:41

More nostalgia, I think. Yeah. Well, I was thinking about when we took those field trips. It really was showing the children about Forest Grove and how these different companies or whatever, how they started, and it gave them a real sense of belonging to town when they knew where different things were. I can remember at that time, we even went out to the Masonic Lodge, at the time that the elderly people lived there. I always found it interesting, because some of my little guys that weren't always the best behaved when they were out there around those older people, they hugged the older people. I mean, they just lapped it up, and they were so good. It was just amazing. And of course, the elderly people loved seeing these little kids coming in, and we would perform for them. We would sing a song or two, and it was wonderful.

Elle Griego 32:21

Yeah. And what do you think of it now? Have you been to it, where it's McMenamins? It's wonderful.

Mary Easton 32:28

Of course, yes. I love it. I mean, I love what they've done, but it's important for the kids of today to know what it had been and to know about the children's cottage, and those were orphan children. It's important for children to understand history.

Elle Griego 33:08

Yeah, absolutely. And do you recall how the festival and the contest changed over the years? Of course, the festival itself ended 1990s or so. The contest, I would say it still kind of exists today on a much smaller scale [Easton: Much smaller scale.] Yeah, but I'm interested in how it kind of went from the festival being something where everyone came to town, everyone was involved in it, and then the contest was something where I'm sure you've heard how it was -- I would actually like to ask you, do you recall it ever being broadcast on national television or radio? I think it was '55 or '56 that it was broadcast on the Wide Wide World show.

Mary Easton 33:52

Was it on TV?

Elle Griego 33:53

Yeah, national television. [Easton: Oh, okay.] And then from the 50s or 60s, the contest was on national radio. Separate thing.

Mary Easton 34:02

See, and I probably wasn't even aware of it, probably focused on other things. But no, the barbershop portion of it really drew a lot of out of towners coming. You know, with the different barbershop groups, and people from their town quite often would come. So it really became more outside town people, rather than locals, attending. So I guess that's just the natural changes. Changes are not always fun.

Elle Griego 34:59

Yeah. Would you say there was, I guess, when, in your opinion, was the height of the festival and contest, for me, it seems to be the '60s or '50s or so, and then it started to decline from there. Would you say that's that's right? [Easton: Yes.] And do you remember when perhaps was the year you stopped going, or were you there until the very end? Were less and less people coming to town?

Mary Easton 35:30

Well, see, at that time was when I was off at college and then back, and I'm sure that I went there through the '50s. I don't honestly remember in the '60s. Of course, that's when I had little kids. I don't know that we went to that much at that time. But again, there are pictures that aren't in any of these that recently have been posted, and one of them showed, actually my sister-in-law. They were dressed up as, you know, part of the Ballad Town Belle group, and I recognized a lot of those people.

Elle Griego 36:27

What's your sister-in-law's name?

Mary Easton 36:29

Well, it was Maxine Cedergreen, and she died several years ago. My brother Elden just died a year and a half ago, and he was 99, and that was his wife. He had been in the Marines in World War Two, in the Battle of Okinawa. [Griego: Oh, wow.] And he was a tank driver.

Elle Griego 37:14

Wow. So it does, it really does seem World War Two is relevant in terms of this festival kind of starting up. I mean, it makes sense with the year '46 I've always also been interested in the context of perhaps the Cold War, sort of the Atomic Age. Would you say that's a fair way to look at it? Would you say it's perhaps irrelevant? Or is there, I guess, a general fear in the '50s and '60s,

Mary Easton 37:42

I can remember when the war ended, the bells rang all over town.

Elle Griego 37:49

Where were you? Were you here in Forest Grove when that happened?

Mary Easton 37:53

Yeah, I was in junior high at that time.

Elle Griego 38:01

Were you in school when it happened? Or could you remember...?

Mary Easton 38:04

No, it was summertime.

Elle Griego 38:05

Summertime. Yeah, that's right.

Mary Easton 38:07

Yeah. Interesting that you said something about the Cold War. My husband and I were traveling. There was a program where you could pick up a Volvo. You bought it here, you'd pick it up in Sweden, and you could drive it, you know, up to several months, all over, if you wanted to. Then they would ship it home to you, and they paid for your ticket to fly to Gothenburg, Sweden, where the factory is. So we were going to go on this Baltic cruise, and my husband and I decided we would go early, pick up a car. I wanted to visit where my grandparents had come from. We did that, and we drove across Sweden to the east side and saw his birthplace and a lot of that. Then we decided we wanted to go down to see Normandy. So we traveled quite a bit driving that car. On the way back, we took it back to the dealer, and then we met up with -- no, we went back across to Copenhagen, and then we met up with the group from Forest Grove that was, well, not Forest Grove, but actually the church we went to, Sunset Presbyterian, and the pastor was the one who was leading this Baltic cruise. We met up with them. My husband was not feeling very well, and we thought, well, we'll just get him on the ship and let him rest up. Which we did, but during the night, he was running a high, high fever, and so the doctor checked him out, and they said, "He needs to go to the hospital. He has pneumonia." So we ended up in Rostock, Germany, which had been behind the Iron Curtain. So it was in Germany, but the adults did not speak English. The younger ones in school were now being taught English, but the adult group had grown up when it was Russian, so they spoke Russian and German. Well, I didn't know German, and my husband had one year of German in college. But anyway, in Rostov, Germany, it was a university hospital. Wonderful. They had state of the art everything. But once we got there, like I say, I didn't speak German, but there was a young man, young cardiologist, who had been an exchange student to Twin Falls, Idaho. Of course, he spoke English. Thank heavens. So anyway, my husband went into the hospital there, and I stayed in a little hotel. And of course, the cruise had to go on. So they left and I was there, really by myself, trying to figure out how to get back and forth to the hospital, not speaking German. It was an interesting time. My husband was desperately ill, and they put him into a medically induced coma, and they hooked him up to all these machines, which I said, you know, were the state of the art because it was a teaching hospital. But the hospitals over there are not like our hospitals. You know, we have cafeterias, vending machines, wonderful places to sit. There, they had long hallways with folding metal chairs, and that's where you sat. No vending machines. The doctor really was wonderful. Normally, they did not allow you there unless it was visiting hours, but he told the nurses she could stay here as much as she wants. Well, he died. [Griego: I'm terribly sorry.] My son, my youngest son, he flies for Alaska Airlines. Anyway, he came over and met me and stayed with me those eight days, and then we flew home. It was quite an experience, and quite a challenge when you don't know the language. I've often thought if the

United States, if every state had a different language, we would be learning all those languages too, because over there, you know, those countries are so close together, speaking different languages, they all speak six or seven languages. It would be nice to speak some of those languages.

Elle Griego 45:05

Yeah, I know absolutely. I was just abroad over in France, living there earlier this year, and it was just kind of normal for some people to know five languages just casually. I can't even -- I've been studying French for several years, and I'm not even fluent in it. And there are people who are fluent in five languages. Just fascinating.

Mary Easton 45:28

Yeah. So you've been to France?

Elle Griego 45:28

Oh, yes. I was studying abroad there, over in Grenoble, over the house this past winter, just this beautiful area. And I traveled to Italy twice, because -- I always like to say I got the Italy bug, because I just... [Easton: Oh, Italy... I love Italy.] Florence, Rome and Bologna. And I also spent time in Turin. I had a French friend who spoke Italian and had family over in the mountains, over by Turin. And so it was just a wonderful time.

Mary Easton 46:00

I'm a member of Old Scotch Church, which is out on Glencoe Road.

Elle Griego 46:11

Oh, yes. Yeah, I was baptized there.

Mary Easton 46:16

At Old Scotch Church? [Griego: Mhm.] Were you really? [Griego: Yeah.] Oh, of course! I recognize your name now. Well, do you know Bruce Waller, who sings in the choir? And he teaches French in the Beaverton schools. Every year he goes to France, and he's there now. He posts all these pictures, and he's eating his way across France. Well, that's great. Yeah, wonderful.

Elle Griego 46:48

Yeah. Going back -- I would love to talk to you more about that -- but going back to the Gay Nineties. Do you remember, I guess, how it...

Mary Easton 47:03

How it ended? [Griego: Yes.] I honestly don't remember.

Elle Griego 47:06

That's interesting, because it seems like it was a bigger part of everyone's lives, and then all of a sudden, it just kind of completely faded. You know, I was talking, do you know Tim Schauermann? [Easton: Oh, yes.] I was talking to him about it, and he brought up the Concours d'Elegance, the car show, and how that came around, [Easton: Exactly.] and kind of almost replaced it.

Mary Easton 47:31

Yeah. My husband was very involved in Rotary, and from the very beginning, Concours d'Elegance. Yes,

yeah.

Elle Griego 47:41

And do you think, well, could you, can you tell me a bit more about, then, how he was involved. Do you go to it every year?

Mary Easton 47:51

Oh absolutely, when he was involved in it, I mean, he would be up, he would spend the whole weekend working on it. You know, they'd put a fence up, and they used to have different stations all over campuses. It's very different now than what it used to be. And they had food stations at different places, and he also spotted cars to get them where they're supposed to be. Our oldest son, Dwight, he was 14 when the Concours first started, and he was up at five in the morning, spotting cars, helping get them settled. Every year, Dave was involved.

Elle Griego 48:40

Let me see, I have... just looking at my questions real quick.

Mary Easton 48:49

Well, I know I've wandered all over the place. [Easton laughs.]

Elle Griego 48:51

Oh no, this is wonderful. This is just perfect, I think. Exactly what I want, I like when it wanders. I think that it's perfect to preserve these little things like that, especially. I would say, well, let me just ask more of a general question. I think you know, the Gay Nineties, it changed because Forest Grove changed in a lot of ways. How has Forest Grove changed since you were growing up? It's a big question.

Mary Easton 49:22

Yes. Big Question. It used to be, Sundays, all of the stores were closed. Saturdays, all the farmers would be in town. Place was buzzing on Saturdays, and it was always fun to go up, because you'd see all your friends. And now, stores open seven days a week, just like Ace Hardware is. [Easton laughs.] I have to laugh, because we are only closed four days a year. [Griego: Oh, wow.] Thanksgiving, Christmas, New Year's, and Easter. We used to try to convince my husband that we really should close on the Fourth of July. And he says, "Yeah, but people need things on the Fourth of July." And it's true they do. But you know, everybody thinks, "Well, you guys are off on holidays." No, we don't. We really don't. Of course, the library, you know, has changed from that little, tiny library. I have to tell you a story about that library. Mrs. Moore ran the library. She was a stickler. You didn't move out of your section. If you were a child, you stayed in the children's section, and you didn't wander into the teenage section or the adult section. You'd get scolded and sent right back to the -- I was scared to death of her. [Both laugh.] And at the time, one of the reasons why it was formed, is to give a place for the ladies who came to shop on Saturdays, a place to go to the bathroom. They had a restroom there. So that was the place where the women went, and it's just kind of interesting. And if you look back, when they came to town, the farmers, they were dressed in suits and wore hats. They were all dressed up. And that's another thing that, to me, has changed so much. I wonder sometimes with our young people, is there anything that they think is worth dressing up for? [Griego: I know what you mean.] We used to go to symphony. They would come in in torn overalls, and I think you know, isn't this worthy of dressing up a little? So anyway, that's just my observation. And of course, the way teachers, too -- when I started teaching, I taught in high heels and dresses. I can remember when pantsuits came out, we were finally allowed as teachers to wear a pantsuit, but it had to be matching. It had to be a pantsuit, couldn't be just trousers and whatever kind of a top you want. [Griego: That's fascinating.] My poor feet. That was also interesting. When I was teaching first grade, they had loved to get so close to you, my feet -- the little ones would, when we lined up, somebody would always be standing on my feet, [Easton laughs] my poor feet. When I was teaching -- they don't do it anymore, they have nurses or somebody else

do it -- we had lice check on Fridays where the teacher actually did it. [Griego: Every Friday?] Not every Friday, maybe once a month. This one child, I swear... I normally just see the nits, but this child's head was just literally covered with lice. It was hopping all over, not just... oh dear. At that time, of course, we sent him down to the office, and then they called the parents and whatnot. But, so different now. And of course, you know, when they came out, if somebody got a cut or something, you know, normally, a teacher would just wipe it up. No, no, no, you know, you have to have it sterilized and all that sort of thing. Different.

Elle Griego 49:23

And I've already interviewed Carol Drew, who I know is basically family... what would the term be for you, because your children are married, does that make you... actually, I don't know what the term is for family like that.

Mary Easton 49:23

[Easton laughs] We're just extended family.

Elle Griego 49:23

Yeah. She'd mentioned how there was a lot more back in the day than there is now. Would you agree with that sentiment? That surprised me a bit, that it seemed like there was a lot more here in town back in the day, compared to now.

Mary Easton 49:23

Well, there were a lot more stores, because now people go to Washington Square, Streets of Tanasbourne, or even Hillsboro. We used to be self contained. There used to be a gas station on just about every corner, abundance of grocery stores. And now, what do we have? Safeway? We had jewelry stores, I think we had three. We had drug stores. There was probably one on every block. And there were many hardware stores. And in the 1980s, when it was kind of a recession -- or maybe a depression, I don't know what you want to call it, a recession -- they all went out. We were the last one standing, and we had to cut back a lot in order to survive. So it definitely does change. And now, what do we have? I can remember when I was at Harvey Clark and we were having this workshop on health, nutrition, and all that. They made the prediction at that time, within 10 years, more families will be eating out, fast food. We couldn't believe it. And now, here we are. Who cooks from scratch anymore? Not very many people. [Griego: No.] And what do we have an abundance of? Restaurants. [Griego: Yeah.] So times have changed, and not always for the better, unfortunately.

Elle Griego 51:57

Yeah, it sounds, just in general, that people were more connected back in the day than now.

Mary Easton 51:57

Yes, and we knew all of our neighbors. I don't know all my neighbors, and that's probably partly my fault. Carol does a much better job. She just walks around the neighborhood and meets different people, which is very good now, particularly since she lost her husband. But, anyway.

Elle Griego 51:57

Yeah, do you feel like there's a sense of loss with the Gay Nineties festival and barbershop contest being gone now, or is it just kind of, we've moved on? The Concours took its place? Did it perhaps present the way we were more connected, or...?

Mary Easton 51:57

Well, I really think that the farmers market is also taking place.

Elle Griego 51:57

Yeah. Oh, you're right. Totally right.

Mary Easton 51:57

And particularly when they have special, musical, you know... that takes a place.

Elle Griego 52:14

You know, just with my conversation with Tim, I realized how much getting small businesses involved was an important part of the Gay Nineties parade in the first place. It was about a way for people to advertise their businesses, and I hadn't thought about that. And the farmers market is still a way for people to gather, but a way for small businesses to thrive and be involved in their community as well.

Mary Easton 52:18

Of course, I think when we were in town, we were more involved. Where we are now, we aren't as much, but we're filling in out that way. Definitely.

Elle Griego 1:00:29

Another thing I'd like to ask you, to go back a bit. You had mentioned that your sister was really involved more so than you in the festival and everything. Could you tell me just a bit more about that? Or how she was involved?

Mary Easton 1:00:47

She was a very artistic person. She first worked for Bill McCready in the lumber yard, and she was his bookkeeper. At that time, the McCreadys lived at the very end of Main Street, up here. He had made these Christmas displays that he had made for his kids. He had three children, two girls and a boy, and he wanted to expand that. Well, he found out Margie was artistic, so he was having her make these things. And at one point, I also made some of them, and they generally were, oh, like Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs. The three bears, you know, just, you know, nursery rhymes kinds of things. So anyway, then he would display them at Christmas time and open up, because I think he had a gate there, and people would go there at Christmas time, and that was just such fun. All lit up, and they had things that moved, music going on. Well, then he died. And I think... who took it over? Somebody took it over for a while, but then it ended up that Margie, my sister, took it out to Dilley, and now they do display it every couple years. Storyland out at Dilley. For a long time I could go, go through this place, and I'd say, Yeah, that's the one I drew, and that one Margie drew, and we have an older sister that happened to be down here one time. She did some of the things, so we could identify which ones were our drawings of those displays. But, you know, they're all motorized. It takes a lot to keep them up, so they don't do it every year. But anyway, like I say, she's not that well anymore, she's done really well up until probably the last couple of years. Mind is sharp, but her body's giving out. So, anyway.

Elle Griego 1:04:01

I'm very sorry again about your sister right now. That's gotta be very, very tough. The one other question I did want to ask you is -- I like to ask this question to everyone -- is, do you think that the Gay Nineties festival could exist again today? Or do you think it even should exist? There's not a right...

Mary Easton 1:04:29

The problem is, you've got to have somebody really committed to doing it. And it doesn't seem like there are that many people who want to give that kind of time and effort and take the responsibility for it, so whether or not it could be revived, I don't know. But I think about Old Scotch Church, you know, 150 years

celebration. But it had a core committee that were absolutely committed to doing all the things they did, and that's what you need. Same thing with Concours, sometimes you can't get people to want to work. So because of that, it has changed a lot since the original Concours.

Elle Griego 1:05:26

Yeah. Another side of it is, do you think, well, on one hand, do you think people would still want to be nostalgic for the 1890s or would it be, oh, let's be nostalgic for a different decade. There's also, I guess, this idea of celebrating the past might be seen. I don't know, it's just not as common anymore, or even controversial at times.

Mary Easton 1:05:54

Well, it's interesting, because Pacific University used to have a May Pole. And I can remember when I was in junior high over there, we would come over and watch the May Pole. And then they also had a fire, a bonfire, yeah, in the fall. And that's when they would have the Boxer Flash.

Elle Griego 1:06:22

Oh, the Boxer Flash, was that the race to get the statue?

Mary Easton 1:06:31

The statue? Yeah, yeah.

Elle Griego 1:06:34

All these traditions.

Mary Easton 1:06:35

Yeah, but you know, what traditions does Pacific have anymore? They have homecoming. [Griego: Yeah.] What else do they do? Well, do they still do the Hawaiian...?

Elle Griego 1:06:49

They do the LÅ«É»au, yes. Now they're starting up... have you heard about the Powow? They're doing that I think in May. [Griego: No.] I can't remember the name of the organization right now. I think it's the Student Indigenous Alliance or something like that. I forget the acronym, but they have different Native American vendors and dancers come and it's over in is it Stoller or Stroller center? I always forget how to say it? But they have that, that kind of seems like another event or tradition they're introducing there for the long term. They've done it for two years now. [Easton: Interesting.] But you're right. It's kind of interesting, because the Gay Nineties, it used to seem like everyone was involved. Now it's these smaller, like oh, Pacific is doing their thing, or Forest Grove is...

Mary Easton 1:07:53

Well, the McMenamins does a lot of things. [Griego: Yeah.] So... I'm trying to think if... does the high school? Well, their homecoming, they have a parade down through town, but you know, everybody's busy, and the kids are all involved in soccer practice, or Zoom practice, or something. Lots going on.

Elle Griego 1:08:41

Yeah, do you have any more concluding thoughts?

Mary Easton 1:08:46

I'm glad that you're doing that! I'm also glad to tie you in, because I know I've seen you at Old Scotch Church.

Elle Griego 1:08:53

Yeah, and I'm so glad I was able to speak with you. Yeah, no, this was a great pleasure, and I couldn't have done this without you. I mean, it's your voice and the other people who I've interviewed, their voices that allow me to even do this research. [Easton: Yeah.] So thank you.

Mary Easton 1:09:09

You're very welcome.