

## Don Skinner Interview on the Gay Nineties and Barbershop Ballad Contest

Recorded June 19, 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. We recommend checking this text against the audio recording before quoting the speakers, as it may contain errors.

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Elle Griego 0:00

Greetings. I'm Elle Griego behind the camera, and I'm here with Don Skinner. We are at the Friends of Historic Forest Grove Old Train Station Museum in Forest Grove, Oregon, on June 19, 2025. I will be asking Don about his memories and thoughts surrounding the Gay Nineties festival and the barbershop ballad contest. Thank you so much for being here with me, Don. And I would first like to start at the very beginning of your life, outside of the context of the Gay Nineties. Where and when were you born? I know you grew up in Forest Grove.

Don Skinner 0:31

I was born in Jones Hospital in Hillsboro, which is now Tuality [i.e. Tuality Community Hospital and later Tuality Healthcare]. Originally, it was a wood hospital, and they tore that down and built Tuality. I was born in 1948, so I am going to be 76 years old in November.

Elle Griego 0:56

Oh, wow, a proper, baby boomer. So you were here during, really, the golden age of the Gay Nineties, I would say.

Don Skinner 1:07

Yes, '50s and '60s.

Elle Griego 1:08

And I don't know if you said already, when did you move to Forest Grove?

Don Skinner 1:16

Always lived in Forest Grove. My parents lived here, and so they carted my mom off to Jones Hospital.

Elle Griego 1:26

I see, that makes sense. [Skinner: Yeah.] And have you lived in Forest Grove your whole life?

Don Skinner 1:32

Well, no, after I got out of the service... Let me start over. [Griego: Go ahead.] So I enlisted in the Army because I knew I would get drafted, and I didn't want to get drafted. So after serving in Vietnam, six days later, Cheryl and I got married. She chased me in high school, which would be called stalking now, but was chasing back then, and June 27 will be our 55th anniversary.

Elle Griego 2:17  
Wow. Congratulations!

Don Skinner 2:20

Thank you. So six days later, after I got home from Vietnam, we got married, spent the rest of my 30 day leave here, and then packed everything up and drove to Colorado Springs, where I reported in Fort Carson, Colorado, and I spent my last 14 months there. We wanted to come back to Forest Grove and live because that's where our families were, and we really couldn't justify that, because if you're going to live in Forest Grove, you need to be a farmer or a logger, and I was neither one. So we discussed it and decided Hillsboro would be the place to live, six miles away from our home here in Forest Grove. And so we ended up living there for 51 years. And two and a half years ago, we moved back to Forest Grove, and we love it here. It is the perfect place to live.

Elle Griego 3:34

Yeah. Oh, I agree. And is your family...? I know your family was living here at the time, but were your parents from the area as well?

Don Skinner 3:46

My dad came from Scotland when he was nine years old with his family, and they took up residence out at Gales Creek. And my mom, she grew up in North Central Oregon, around Tygh Valley, Maupin, those areas, and when she married her first husband, they moved to Forest Grove and had Mayhew Jewelry, which was on the corner of where Pizza Schmizza is today. And Louis Mayhew passed away in, I think 50... no, '48 I think it was... no, earlier than that. '46 I think it was. And my dad, he went in the jewelry store to buy this ring, and met my mom, before I was born. And so they started going out together and got married, and here I am.

Elle Griego 5:03

That's so special. And was Cheryl, did she grow up here, and was she born in the area as well?

Don Skinner 5:11

She was born in Portland, but her parents lived here in Forest Grove, and she grew up here also. She graduated in 1970 and I graduated in '68.

Elle Griego 5:25

I see. And I'd like to go and kind of move into the Gay Nineties. Now, when you think back to the Gay Nineties festival or the barbershop contest, what do you remember most clearly or fondly? It sounds like it's something that would have been part of your life from an early age.

Don Skinner 5:46

Yeah. Well, the earliest I remember is at Harvey Clark grade school, and we would go into the gymnasium and stand on the bleachers and learn Gay Nineties songs. And then, when it was probably the Friday before the big celebration, they had an assembly, and moms and dads would come and we would try to sing these songs. So that was my first experience. Of course, we got dressed up. We had bowler hats and mustaches, and the girls had fancy dresses and that sort of thing. So that was my earliest remembrance. I don't remember the parade. Being with my mom, I'm sure that she brought us up, brought me uptown here so we could see the parade. I don't remember that. Most of my recollection is once I got old enough that I could explore Forest Grove myself and come down and watch the parade and visit the attractions and such.

Elle Griego 7:13

Yeah, going back a bit to what you said, do you remember by chance what songs you learned in school? Do any of those stick with you still?

Don Skinner 7:22

There was the Merry Oldsmobile... [i.e. "In My Merry Oldmobile"] I can't remember them right off hand,

Elle Griego 7:35

Yeah, no, I think that's fair. But the Merry Oldsmobile, that's certainly a classic.

Don Skinner 7:42

Well, I'm a car guy, so yeah. [Both laugh.]

Elle Griego 7:46

And with assembly, something I've seen in photos that I've found here at the Old Train Station Museum -- it looked like there was a camera crew recording. Do you ever recall was, were these assemblies ever recorded by local television stations or anything like that?

Don Skinner 8:08

I don't believe so. I don't remember watching the news myself, but there was a photographer named LeMay, and he took a lot of pictures in schools and other events, and we have quite a collection of his here at the train station.

Elle Griego 8:35

Yeah. Allan J. de Lay? [Skinner: Yeah.] And did you know him personally by chance?

Don Skinner 8:39

No, but he dressed up also. [Griego: Really?] Yes, he had a, I think it was a green and white checked suit that he wore.

Elle Griego 8:54

I asked about the recording of the assembly, because I'm also curious. In the '50s, we know that the barbershop contest, at least, was recorded, or was broadcast live on national television and the radio. Do you recall that at all? Was that a big deal? Or was it something that perhaps you don't remember?

Don Skinner 9:21

I was not into the barbershop quartet contest at all. I knew it was going on, but I was not interested. Yeah, I wish I was now, because I would have liked to have experienced that. But at the time, that was not something that I looked forward to.

Elle Griego 9:49

I see. It almost sounds like there were two separate entities. Or was it something that you could avoid, you could only, totally participate in the Gay Nineties?

Don Skinner 9:59

Yeah, they were kind of two separate entities. The barbershop ballad contest started first, and with that, somebody came up with the idea of, let's broaden that and celebrate the Gay Nineties. And so that's when

the parade started, and the other things around the town here. We did have... when the contestants were here in town, they'd come out on the sidewalk and sing a ballad or two. Yeah, it was fun.

Elle Griego 10:51

Do you remember any of the contestants who were notable here? [Skinner: No.] No worries. I'm also curious. You mentioned that there was attractions you would go and visit when you got a little bit older. What attractions were those?

Don Skinner 11:11

Well, there was the rock and jump show, which I was interested in. I like rocks, and most of the storefronts did displays. And in fact, we have here at the train station, the Montgomery Ward sewing machine that they put in the display window of Montgomery Ward for Gay Nineties. And I was really excited that we got that sewing machine. It meant a lot to me because I remember walking by Montgomery Ward and seeing that sewing machine.

Elle Griego 12:04

So some of the amusements, or attractions?

Don Skinner 12:12

Well, there was an amusement park of sorts, traveling, rides, I guess you'd call it. And they would set up either down at the trade wall parking lot or right up here by the where the Copeland Lumber Yard is now. And so that was exciting, because we got to do that. Just a lot of people. It was really interesting to see all these people, and many of them were dressed up. Even if they came from out of town, they'd still dress up and play the part. So it was a lot of fun.

Elle Griego 13:11

Yeah, did most people dress? Was there anyone who didn't dress up? And did they stand out?

Don Skinner 13:20

Well, yeah, it was... a lot of people dressed up, but you took notice of them rather than the people that didn't dress up, because they were just common folk that you saw every day, and they didn't look any different. So, yeah, it was interesting.

Elle Griego 13:46

Yeah. And when you think back on the Gay Nineties festival, what emotions or feelings do those memories evoke?

Don Skinner 13:55

Well, I loved the Gay Nineties. I really did. It was, I think, because basically the whole town celebrated Gay Nineties, and it was just a really fun time. You didn't have to worry about anything other than getting to the parade on time or something, you know, it was just wonderful.

Elle Griego 14:40

Yeah. So you say, like the Gay Nineties... something that's interesting is the idea, I guess, just the fact that this whole festival was surrounded around the 1890s decade. I'm curious, what does the 1890s decade mean to you?

Don Skinner 15:01

Oh, I never thought of that. Well, Forest Grove had become Forest Grove. I mean, it was a thriving city. We had two railroads coming into town for passenger service, and that was just good, economically, economic growth time for Forest Grove.

Elle Griego 15:41

In the real 1890s? [Skinner: Yeah.] Do you think then this sort of celebration, or fondly looking back on turn of the century America was something kind of unique to Forest Grove? Or do you remember growing up and this era kind of being celebrated or remembered in popular culture, American popular culture at all, or was it very tied to Forest Grove?

Don Skinner 16:07

I think it was just Forest Grove. There were no other celebrations that I ever heard of that were similar.

Elle Griego 16:20

Yeah, perhaps not festivals. Do you remember any, perhaps movies or anything, or TV shows that also focused on that era, perhaps, or literature? [Skinner: No.] I see, and I asked you what the 1890s decade meant to you. What do you think it meant to other people? Was the festival about -- what I mean by that, was it about accurate, educational, kind of historical reenactment, or was it really just about fun? Something that's interesting, why I bring that up is there's definitely this idea of going back to the 1890s but then you see, in some years, cavemen coming. [Both laugh.] And I think we both know cavemen didn't exist back then.

Don Skinner 17:12

We did have some cavemen in the parade, and we also had some devils. [Griego: Really?] Yes. Was the Lincoln City... I don't remember the organization. It was like Kiwanis or Elks or some organization, and they would come over here for the parade, and they dressed as devils, and they had a wooden stock where you put your hands and your head through, and they'd put a red "A" on your forehead. Of course, the ladies, they would snatch them out of the spectators of the parade, and they'd let them off maybe a block down the street. [Skinner laughs.] Yeah, because you didn't stop the parade and they were always a hit, because they were just so much fun.

Elle Griego 18:22

Yeah, and before we started recording, you told me a bit about the Boot Hill gang.

Don Skinner 18:28

Yeah, the Boot Hill Gang, I want to say they were from Portland. I don't know where they were from, but they showed up and they had cartridge type weapons, handguns and rifles and shotguns, and they would shoot blanks. Of course, here in town, we had a train come in from Portland that would bring passengers for the Saturday parade and the Barbershop Ballad Contest and any of the other things that was going on here in town. And they'd park out here. The train would stop out here on 19th and let people out. And as people were let off the cars, then the Boot Hill Gang would usually hold up the train, and with much shooting and shouting and going on and and people dying on the street. And then, usually during the parade, the Boot Hill Gang would rob the bank, and they would come out of the front doors, shooting and yelling, and throwing play money up in the air. So that was always fun. I loved the Boot Hill Gang. They were a tough bunch of characters.

Elle Griego 20:10

Yeah. Do you remember when they stopped coming to Forest Grove, out of curiosity?

Don Skinner 20:15

No, I don't. Well, they were here when I was in the parade, and we had a shootout, and the group I was with had muzzle loaders and they had repeaters, so we all died. [Both laugh.]

Elle Griego 20:40

How funny. Yeah. I know you mentioned they cut they came in from Portland. Do you remember anyone else coming from farther away than that?

Don Skinner 20:54

I'm sure that people did. The Rainmakers would come occasionally. Probably as far as Hood River, I would assume, and Salem, so, yeah.

Elle Griego 21:14

Yeah. And how do you think the festival contributed to Forest Grove's identity, both internally among residents and externally to visitors. Did it create a specific image for the town?

Don Skinner 21:15

Well, it definitely put Forest Grove on the map. The things that were happening here in Forest Grove during the Gay Nineties celebration was not happening anyplace else that we knew of anyway, and, you know, so we'd get lots of visitors in from outside of town, but the whole town would just turn out for Gay Nineties. It was just amazing.

Elle Griego 22:09

Yeah. And do you feel it was ever more appealing to older residents who remembered the real 1890s, or was it really just an intergenerational event? It sounded like there was something for everyone.

Don Skinner 22:27

Yeah, there was room for everyone. We had floats with kids. Mr. McCready, who owned the lumber yard, had a collection of early automobiles in the 1910s and 20s, and so, of course, the mayor would ride in one of those and some of the other important people here in town, and pretty much anybody else that, if there was room, you know, they'd take them for a ride through the parade.

Elle Griego 23:08

Yeah. Was the festival something you look forward to year round, kind of like the holiday of Christmas?

Don Skinner 23:15

Yeah, exactly. The only thing bad about Gay Nineties was it was always at the end of February or the first of March, so you could expect rain or maybe snow. [Skinner laughs.] But you know, if it was a nice weekend and the sun was out, there was nothing better.

Elle Griego 23:51

And were there any -- besides the bad weather -- any sort of criticisms, challenges, or perhaps controversies associated with the festival over its lifespan that you can recall?

Don Skinner 24:06

No, I don't know.

Elle Griego 24:10

Yeah. And do you remember what the last year of the parade was, or at least the last parade that you went to, what, what year or decade that was?

Don Skinner 24:23

I want to say, the last parade I was in was 1990 or 1991. And it was a bit different than when I was going to high school, which would be in the '60s, 30 years earlier. Of course, things change over time, anyway. So, I didn't feel there was anything bad or detrimental to the changes. It was just a little bit different.

Elle Griego 25:12

In what ways was it different?

Don Skinner 25:15

Well, the parade route was different, and well, it didn't seem like as many people were in the parade and viewing the parade. Not that it was a few here and a few there, but just the crowds were not quite as large as they had been.

Elle Griego 25:52

Yeah, it sounds like it wasn't as big of a deal towards the end of the festival itself. Would you say at that point, not everyone in town was involved, but there's some people who didn't dress up or even attend the event in the same way?

Don Skinner 26:12

Yeah, I would say that. Of course, I didn't go in any of the establishments, so I don't know if they were dressed up or not. I don't believe the disc window displays were in any kind of Gay Nineties, and they used to have the high school art department, I think it was, they would come out and paint the display windows, and there was a contest for that, and I don't remember seeing those. But then I wasn't focused on that. I was looking for the Boot Hill Gang, because they could be sneaky. [Skinner laughs.]

Elle Griego 27:03

Yeah. Do you remember them being there in that last parade?

Don Skinner 27:09

They were the last time, because that's when we had the shootout. [Griego: Yeah, I see.] And we all died, and the Boot Hill gang was notorious, yes.

Elle Griego 27:26

Was this the very last parade, from what you can recall? I'm curious if it was like, "Oh, this is the last festival. Enjoy it everyone," or if it just abruptly stopped. From my understanding, the woman who was in charge of running the festival moved out of town, and no one else wanted to take up her responsibility, and that's kind of how it ended. But I was wondering if there's any sort of warning or idea that, "Oh, this is the last one."

Don Skinner 27:55

If there was, I didn't know anything about it. Like I said, it had changed a little bit, not a lot, but just over time it had changed a little bit. So I guess I would assume that it would keep going to today. [Skinner

laughs]. In fact, there's a lot of people that would like to see it return, but that would be a big job.

Elle Griego 28:32

Yeah. Do you think it could, or should return? Do you think it would still be the way it used to be? Do you think it could have a revival?

Don Skinner 28:46

I don't think it would be the way it used to be. Because, well I'm a car guy -- cars aren't like they used to be. So yeah, there would be changes, I'm sure. Maybe it wouldn't be as big of a draw. It's hard to say.

Elle Griego 29:13

Do you think people today would be interested in celebrating the 1890s, or I guess what I mean by that is, do you think perhaps today there's people who'd be like, "Oh, but what about the 1950s," or "Oh, what about the 1970s, let's do a festival around that."

Don Skinner 29:32

Yeah, all of those would be interesting. Well, as I'm a car guy, you know, '50s and '60s cars, and you get people out with those and and line them up, and you can have a dance, a sock hop, or whatever, you know, it would be fun.

Elle Griego 30:13

Yeah, there's a sentiment that I hear a lot, not that you necessarily brought this up, but that, you know, the 1890s was a simpler time compared to, well, when the festival was put on in its hey day in the '50s and '60s. Is that a sentiment that you share? Do you have a sentiment that, oh, '50s and '60s, they were tough for whatever reason compared to the 1890s, or was it...? if that makes sense.

Don Skinner 30:53

Yeah, it was a simpler time, but the problems that you had were totally different than the problems you have today. It's totally different. Yeah, there's no way to compare it, even people that are living in houses that were built in the 1890s, they have inside, they have modern appliances, and live just like you and I do, except the outside of their house looks old. [Skinner laughs.]

Elle Griego 31:44

Yeah. You've mentioned, you know, different problems. I'd be interested if you could expand on that. Were there any, was there any sense of, I guess, what were the sense of problems when you were here in the '50s and '60s? It doesn't have to be just limited to Forest Grove.

Don Skinner 32:10

Well, there was the time when my dad came home with a brochure on how to build a fallout shelter. That was quite disturbing. Of course, the Cuban Missile Crisis was... in fact, you can take this off if you want. The battalion that I served with in Vietnam, I started the reunion, and I was cold calling people to see if they were part of that battalion. And I got a hold of the then commanding officer of first military intelligence, and he said, "Oh, by the way, we worked on the Cuban Missile Crisis." [Griego: Oh wow.] And I about fell out of my chair. And then in calling later, I came across a guy who said, "Oh, by the way, I worked on the Cuban Missile Crisis. About six of us piled in an unmarked car, and we drove down to Miami, Florida, and checked into a hotel, and we were wearing civilian clothes, and we worked on the U-2 spy plane pictures and pointed out there's a missile base. There's another one."



Elle Griego 34:09

Oh wow. And could you share with me, do you recall the actual Cuban Missile Crisis? What was that like when you were a kid?

Don Skinner 34:23

Well, it was scary, and it was duck and cover in school, you know, just all of a sudden... not the fire alarm, but an alarm would go off. And we were trained to get under our desks and cover our heads. Of course, with the nuclear explosion, that wouldn't help a lot, but just what we could do, you know. So, yeah, it was scary times.

Elle Griego 35:05

I think it's really interesting to note the way that the Gay Nineties festival started, I think it was 1947 or so, at least the barbershop contest... [Skinner: A year before I was born.] Yeah, oh wow. And during, like, the early years of the Cold War, right? And it notably ended around the time of the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. I mean, perhaps that could just be a coincidence, but it sounds like... do you think there was anything about that era that might have influenced why people wanted to look back fondly at the 1890s?

Don Skinner 35:50

I don't... maybe a few people thought about that, but they would have had to been older than me to think about something like that, I think. I was just a kid growing up and enjoying life as it was. I didn't worry about that. Although, you know, I'd hear on the news that somebody tried to escape Berlin and was killed or whatever.

Elle Griego 36:29

Yeah. I'm curious, did you ever feel that the festival's version of history was more about what people wanted the past to be rather than what it really was? Do you think that kind of historical storytelling, especially during, you know, in the context of the Cold War, shaped how Forest Grove saw itself, or how it wanted to be seen?

Don Skinner 37:05

Well, the Gay Nineties would not be how Forest Grove would like to be seen currently. [Skinner laughs.] Yeah, they're just two entirely different subjects. I think we were focused on one, and then the other one happened, like Gay Nineties. And so we focused on that, and then we got back to focusing on what we had focused on before.

Elle Griego 37:46

Yeah, that makes sense.

Don Skinner 37:51

Maybe the Gay Nineties was a way to escape.

Elle Griego 37:56

Yeah. Do you feel like people did for a little while during the festival?

Don Skinner 38:02

Yeah, just be somebody else and do things that you wouldn't normally do because of the celebration.

Elle Griego 38:13

Yeah. And I know that you had graduated high school by this point, of course, and had been moving around a bit. But were you here in Forest Grove in the '70s and '80s, for the festival? We've kind of talked about the heyday of the festival and the end, what was it like in those decades?

Don Skinner 38:38

Well, I'm sorry to say I wasn't around. Beings I was only living six miles away, I didn't come for Gay Nineties, raising a family and so forth. And just never thought about, "Well, let's go watch the parade." Hillsboro has the Fourth of July parade, and I think we'd gone to it twice.

Elle Griego 39:31

In those decades when you weren't visiting Forest Grove for the festival, do you feel like others perhaps weren't doing the same thing as in, others from Portland not coming in that time? Do you think it was kind of just a gradual decline of the Gay Nineties itself, or perhaps parades and these kinds of community celebrations as a whole?

Don Skinner 40:00

So I think it was a gradual decline. I don't know when the train from Portland stopped coming, but I think it was kind of early. Maybe, well, probably into the early-'70s. I don't think it came after '75. I don't know, but I'm just guessing.

Elle Griego 40:38

Yeah, of course. You mentioned how you didn't care so much for the barbershop aspect of it back in the day, have you since gone to any of the barbershop events with the Tualatin Valley Harmony Masters? Is that something you've attended or looked into more as you've gotten older?

Don Skinner 41:03

Well, now that we're back in Forest Grove, it's a lot harder to say, "No, we don't want to go." [Skinner laughs.] But we haven't visited the contest yet, but one of these days we'll make it.

Elle Griego 41:27

Yeah. I know that you were a key volunteer and member of Friends of Historic Forest Grove, and it sounds like you have a lot to do with the Old Train Station Museum and why it exists. Could you tell me when you first got involved with Friends?

Don Skinner 41:45

It was fall of 2011, and I was tasked with finding pictures of storefronts from the 1960s, when we were growing up, that we could display at our high school reunion. And so I heard that I should go to the OTS and see if they have any pictures. Well, where's the OTS? It's down on the corner of or down on 19th and Main. And so I came down here, and I had no idea of what I was looking for. I didn't know what OTS was, so I went to the pet store next door and asked them, "Where's the OTS?" And they said, "Well, it's that brick building right next to us." So I came in here, and Mary Jo Morelli was here, and I asked her if they had any pictures. And she said, "Well, we've got pictures of the Gay Nineties parade, but there's people standing in front of the storefronts." So that's the only pictures that she knew of that we had. And so nothing was displayed, absolutely nothing. There was a display case in what we call the display room now, and it had some paper material in it -- I don't even remember what it was now -- no signage and the fluorescent light did not work inside the case. And in what we call the ticket office, there was a steel desk and a floor lamp, and that was all. The lobby had an old, crusty refrigerator that was unplugged, and you did not want to open the door because strange things could fall out. And a fax machine. And the fax machine was sitting on a

makeshift two by four stand, and that was it. So I went home, and I said to Cheryl, "You need to come see this place." I don't know what it was that attracted me, but we came down, and Mary Jo was here again, and we said "We'd like to help out." And she said, "Well, there's a work room down at the end of the hall. You can go down there and do whatever you want." Well, Cheryl and I have never done anything with museums [Skinner laughs] or any other type of close knit work. And so we went down there and messed around a little bit, and so we started going through the file cabinet, and it was in disarray. And so it took us a long time to go through the file cabinet, because you had to read everything to see what it was. And, "Oh, look at this." And we'd have to share what we found. And so that took a long time, and there were artifacts here, but they weren't displayed. And the room we're in currently, this was a junk room. Just stuff piled up in here. I think there were five metal desks and carpet remnants and just all kinds of junk. And so I asked if I could clean this out. And well, the fax machine finally moved into what would be the ticket office to get it out of the lobby, and the refrigerator came into the junk room, and got permission to clean up the junk room, so I did that. And we started putting artifacts up. In this room, there was a lot of empty wall space, so we hung up posters that had been collected, and pretty much what you see is what Cheryl and I did.

Elle Griego 47:51

Yeah. What do you think pushed you to, kind of for both of you to volunteer and do that sort of work?

Don Skinner 48:01

The love of Forest Grove. If it was another town and I did not grow up and live in that town, I'd say, "Oh, what a mess," and leave.

Elle Griego 48:19

Yep. Why do you love Forest Grove?

Don Skinner 48:27

You can cut this out too. Hillsboro has never been a place that Cheryl and I have loved or wanted to be in. In living in Hillsboro, we lived out on the corner of Minter Bridge and River Road. And it was a two lane street, and they came in and put curbs and gutters and sidewalks and turning lanes and stop lights and all kinds of stuff in. And now it's a thoroughfare to I-5. And so anybody out west here takes off down river road to get to I-5, rather than going through Beaverton on 217 because that's a mad house. Anyway, neither one of us have ever liked Hillsboro. I did not feel safe standing on the sidewalk in front of my house. Here in Forest Grove, I can be anywhere in town, and I feel safe anywhere.

Elle Griego 50:11

Yeah. And I've asked you how the Gay Nineties festival has changed. Do you feel like Forest Grove has changed in obvious ways or drastic ways since when you were growing up here?

Don Skinner 50:28

Well, I remember when there was no one way traffic in Forest Grove, and there was one traffic light, and it hung at Pacific and Main Street, and it flashed red for Main Street and yellow for Pacific. That was the traffic light. I rode my bicycle down B Street to Gales Creek, and there was a sign down there that said, "Welcome to Forest Grove. 5280." [Skinner laughs.] Now it's, what, 26,000 or something?

Elle Griego 51:14

Probably more now, yeah.

Don Skinner 51:17

So the town has grown, not the business district so much, but the outlying areas, neighborhoods now. Many

apartments.

Elle Griego 51:39

Yep. Something I've observed with some of the newer generations or those families or people who've moved to Forest Grove in the last 30 years or so is they do not recall the Gay Nineties or the barbershop ballad contest, even though it'd been such a big part of Forest Grove's history before. Why do you think it's important for people today, or for future generations, to know about the Gay Nineties festival and the barbershop ballad contest? What exactly about Ballad Town, U.S.A. should be remembered?

Don Skinner 52:26

Well, Ballad Town, U.S.A. is what put us on the map. I don't think people need to be taught about Gay Nineties, although when I take young people around and show them the exhibits that we have and pictures and so forth, and Gay Nineties comes up -- usually I bring it up -- I have to say that's 1890s, because gay has a different definition now. But yeah, I don't think we need to restore people's memories, or even bring up Gay Nineties, per se. It was just a happening here in Forest Grove, and it withered and went away.

Elle Griego 53:42

Yeah, that's an interesting perspective. Do you feel like there's a sense of loss with it being gone now, or is it just, you know, we move on, and that was then?

Don Skinner 54:05

Well beings, I live here in Forest Grove now, and within walking distance of downtown Forest Grove, I would definitely come and watch the parade, and maybe take in some of the other goings on that are going on, and the ballad contest. So yeah, I would like to see it come back. It's sad that it went away in the first place, but things change. People move on, and here we are.

Elle Griego 54:54

Yeah. I think that's about all I have for you. Do you have any further concluding thoughts?

Don Skinner 55:06

No, I guess not.

Elle Griego 55:10

Thank you so much for being here today. It was wonderful speaking with you.

Don Skinner 55:14

Well, thank you very much.