



SHOW NOTES & TRANSCRIPT

EPISODE SHOW NOTES

Episode Title: A Stroll Down Memory Lane

Episode # & Date: Episode #34 – June 18, 2020

About this Episode: Judy discovers a husband and wife team who have chronicled the changes to San Mateo’s downtown over 30 years. Do you know the oldest downtown business still in operation?

Episode Web Page: <https://sanmateofocus.com/memory-lane/>

EPISODE TRANSCRIPT

I’m Judy Gordon, and *this* is San Mateo Focus. As long-term residents who have raised six kids here, we thought it was high time someone shined a light on the good things in San Mateo to enrich the lives of those living here and the businesses that serve them. If you want to know the best places to eat and play, the events not to miss, *and* want to know how San Mateo became the crown jewel of the peninsula, tune in every Thursday and please be sure to click the “subscribe” button on your favorite podcast app. Now, onto this week’s episode.

Vince Siminitus, a San Mateo resident who lives with his wife Jackie in some condominiums close to the Main Library completed an interesting project in 2019. His condo’s first residents moved in 30 years ago. Vince writes a history article for the condo quarterly newspaper and he was trying to figure out how to tie the 30 years of the buildings back to the few original owners who still live there. He came across a 10-year old Downtown Association restaurant brochure and got an idea. Maybe he could figure out what storefronts were downtown 30 years ago, and discover which ones are still there today. With the help of the Main Library reference librarian Eric Groth’s great research skills, he found a book called the Haines Directory. The directory comes out every year and is a cross-listing directory where you can look up a street address and find the business at that address. Jackie and Vince went down 3rd and 4th Avenue from El Camino to the train tracks and checked out the storefronts that were still there 10, 20, and 30 years ago. It was a nostalgic exercise for them, as they walked up and down 3rd and 4th, they remembered some old favorites like Central Park Bookstore and Strouds Linens. They’ve updated the spreadsheet twice. Here’s what they learned: there are five storefronts that remain the same from 1989. They are Miss Bess’s Hair and Nails, Wells Fargo, Baskin Robbins, Amici’s Pizza, and the Christian Science Reading Room. Thanks to Eric at the library, they found out which of the five has been there the longest. Hang on ’til the end of this episode and I’ll let you know. I can tell you that Miss Bess’s Hair and Nails was listed as Miss Bess Coiffures 30 years ago, but Vince thought that it was close enough to include it in the count. Vince and Jackie might not stop at 3rd and 4th. They think that it would be really interesting to do the same thing with B Street in the future. So stay tuned!

Besides reminiscing, Vince says that there is a cultural lesson that you learn when you go through an exercise like this. For instance, compare the number of coffee shops on the streets 30 years ago. There was just one and it was not gourmet. There is a time period where you can pinpoint when the gourmet coffee revolution started happening. When did cell phone stores arrive? When did book



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stores leave? When did the mix of restaurants change to reflect so many different cultures? And when did the travel agencies and airline ticketing offices close?

Talking to Vince reminded me of two Facebook groups that each have thousands of members. One, called “You Know You Grew Up in San Mateo When...” has 4,500 members and the other, started in 2011, has 8,300 members and is named “You Know You’re from San Mateo If...”. The phrase ‘gone but not forgotten’ can best describe the conversations in the groups. It’s obvious that the small businesses that have always been a part of San Mateo made a big impact on a lot of lives.

I took my own walk down that virtual path and here are some of the memories being shared in the groups: Being born in Mills Hospital and having your tonsils out there, The Manor Movie Theater, The old St. Matthew’s Church at 3rd and Ellsworth, Diamond Lil’s restaurant next to the A&W, the College of San Mateo when it was at Coyote Point, Santini’s Pizza, Vince’s Italian and Seafood restaurant, The slide down to the children’s department at Joseph Magnin’s, Vera’s Sandwich shop, Johannsen’s shoes, Tex the Barber on 25th Street, The early Hillsdale Mall and the giant Christmas decorations, The early Fashion Island Mall, Entertainers from Circle Star Theater who would stay at the Hillsdale Inn Honeymoon Suite, The Villa Hotel and the drinks menu at the Lanai, Imogene Woodruff’s dancing school, Farrell’s Ice Cream Parlour, The slide down to the basement at Melart’s Toy Store in Hillsdale Mall, The tunnels under Hillsdale Mall in case of nuclear attack, The Ninth Avenue Market at 9th and Humboldt, Merv Griffin eating at Capp’s Creamery as a kid, The butcher at Humphrey’s Market, The names of the drivers on the old San Mateo Transit route, Pre-Walgreens and CVS independent pharmacies and pharmacists like Ralph on 25th, Blum’s Bakery and Cafe, Levy Brothers Department Store downtown, Schneider’s, Roos/Atkins, The old train station downtown, The smell of popcorn and chocolate at the old Sears at Hillsdale, Sullivan’s Club at 2nd and Claremont, Buckey’s Bar and Torese Health Studio above it, and the Trampoline Park near Sears.

We enjoy a city with a downtown and several different shopping districts and distinct neighborhoods. People come from other places to work here, and residents leave daily to go to jobs in other cities. In the meantime, the small businesses that wash our cars, sell our groceries, clean our clothes, and serve us food carry on. It’s nice to be remembered and appreciated. Now, *Here’s the Deal*: of the five storefronts on 3rd and 4th streets still here for 30 years, the Christian Science Reading Room, opened in 1953, is the oldest.

Okay, that’s all the time we have for this episode. Have a great week. Don’t forget to subscribe to San Mateo Focus on your favorite Podcast app. As always, if you’d like more information about the topics in today’s episode or any of our sponsors, visit sanmateofocus.com.

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[PDF: Downtown San Mateo Guide](#)

[Webpage: San Mateo Public Library Foundation](#)

[Website: San Mateo Public Library](#)

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PODCAST SHOW NOTES

Podcast Name: San Mateo Focus

Logo:



Description: Whether you're new to San Mateo, California, or a long time resident, the San Mateo Focus Podcast is the place to learn about local history, good eats, and things to do.

Website: <http://www.sanmateofocus.com>

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Host & Founder: Judy Gordon

Producer/Co-host: Peter Radsliff

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