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This interview was conducted with Brian Griffin on April 6, 2006, at this home in Bellingham, Washington. The interviewer is Tamara Belts.

TB: Today is Thursday April 6th, 2006, and I am here with Mr. Brian Griffin who is an alumnus of Western's Campus School and also a Bellingham leader involved in many activities. He did sign our Informed Consent Agreement. My first question is how did your parents end up in Bellingham?

BG: My parents came to Bellingham in 1929. My father was an employee of Northwestern Mutual Fire Insurance Company in Seattle, now the Unigard Insurance Company (it has evolved to that). He was sent to Bellingham as the district manager, meaning he managed two or three other agents. They sold property and casualty insurance, auto liability and fire insurance; personal and commercial. Interestingly enough, one of the agents that he recruited was Helge Johanson whose son comes into the story quite a few years later. At any rate, my parents lived on Garden Street right where 16th comes down to Garden. The house is of course still there. That's where they lived when I was born in 1932. My sister Marilyn had been born in Everett. She was three when I was born. Marilyn is now Marilyn Griffin Gunning, a resident of Bellingham and a graduate of the Campus School.

TB: Excellent. Any comments about how your father got into insurance?

BG: As I recall, it was during the Depression and he had enrolled at the University of Washington in engineering. I think he concluded that engineering was not in his future and he got a job. While he was in school he was driving motor cars, trolleys, in Seattle. At any rate, I don't really know how he came to interview for the job. He was a tall, good-looking guy and well-spoken and he fit in the insurance business pretty well; conscientious. He got a job working in Seattle at first. He worked there for several years with Northwestern Mutual and then they sent him to Everett as the district manager there. He was there for three or four years and then he was sent up here.

TB: You have been very involved in community activities. Was your father before you and if so, what were some of the issues that he worked on?

BG: Yes, he was. I think that's something that maybe you learn [from] your parents' footsteps. My father was the president of the Chamber of Commerce the year when the Mobile Refinery came to Ferndale. He was the president

of the Samish Council of Campfire Girls at one point. He was involved with the Chamber when the Mount Baker Recreation Company, to become a factor in the skiing industry in the Northwest, decided that they needed to have a chairlift. They sold a lot of stock in the community to be able to raise the money to afford that chairlift, the first chairlift. It's still there. My father and Helge Johanson sold that stock. That was kind of their mission. He was always very proud of that. In those days, buying stock in a chairlift at Mount Baker was really a gift to the community; it wasn't an investment for anybody. Everybody who bought stock figured this would be good for the community and we'll just never see that money again. The good side of the story is that I have inherited my father's stock (he bought a little, too). Every year I get a nice little check from the Mount Baker Recreation Company. That must have been fifty, forty five years ago.

TB: What did your mother do? Did she work outside the home, volunteer, [or] what kind of community activities was she involved in?

BG: In those days, very few women worked outside the home. She did not but she was in PEO (I never did know what that meant), a women's organization. She was active with the museum. She was one of the first formers of the docents' group. They raised money and helped the museum a lot. She was an active person and plenty active at home, I can assure you; a wonderful gal.

Let me tell you a little bit about her background. Her father, Arthur Clemens Miller, was the first cigar maker in the Territory of Washington. He passed away about 1956 at 100. He had a pioneer cigar shop. In those days, cigars were all handmade. The tobacco came around on a sailing ship around the Horn. He had a shop with four, five, six men who rolled the tobacco, licking it to keep it moist and get it to stick together. Then they put them in cigar molds and put them in a press overnight. The next morning, the finished cigars were ready to go into the box. He was a capable business man and during the Alaska Gold Rush he did pretty well by selling cigars to the taverns and saloons on First Avenue.

My grandmother was a German immigrant. Her maiden name was Bielenburg and she came to Seattle with her father and mother and five sisters and one brother. The brother went to San Francisco and I never met him. The Belinburg girls melded into the large German community in Seattle down around Pioneer Square. In fact, when they first came they lived on the second floor of the Merchant's Café building, which is still there. It is reputed to be the oldest ongoing restaurant on the West Coast. It's right on Pioneer Square. They lived upstairs there for I don't know how long. One by one the daughters married Seattle people. All of the sisters but my grandmother, whose name was Sophia married Germans. My grandmother married Arthur Miller. At any rate, there are lots of old German yarns and it is kind of interesting because one of the sisters married a part-owner of the Merchant's Café. He was a prize fighter; a man with a notable athletic history. He was kind of a celebrity apparently in early-day Seattle.

I do have to tell you this story though; it's really kind of fun. My grandfather, as you might imagine, had a million great stories. I think one of the best: He had just received a shipment of tobacco from a sailing ship. It was in one of the warehouses in the Port of Seattle on the dock when the Seattle fire started. In order to protect his merchandise, he hired a horse and wagon and two men and bought a tent before the hardware store burned down. They went to the docks, one man driving the wagon, the other man with a shotgun, protecting the goods. They loaded up the tobacco and they took it up into Pioneer Square to Prefontaine Square, which is a little triangular park in front of the old courthouse. It's just uphill from Pioneer Square. There he set up the tent and one guy stood guard and the other guy

threw buckets of water on the tent. Seattle burned down around it, but he saved his tobacco leaves! It's kind of a fun story.

TB: That's a great story! Any other comments about your family's involvement in the community or any other family legends that you might wish to share?

BG: I just assumed as I grew up that if you lived in a community, you worked in it, you gave back to it. I've always tried to do that. In our business we tried to develop that expectation among partners and people who came into the business. That was kind of what you did. It has just kind of happened. It's just what you do. There aren't any local legends. Most legends are way back in time.

TB: You grew up during the Depression. Do you have any particular thoughts or memories of that experience?

BG: You know, other than my father and mother reminding us to always turn off the lights and once in a while giving us a little economic lecture, we lived pretty well. I don't recall any economic impoverishment. My father always had a job. He was self-employed. I guess people still had to buy insurance in those days although perhaps a connection there is that people of that generation didn't want to borrow money. They weren't comfortable with mortgages. My parents rented until they could afford to buy a house. The house they bought cost them \$6,000, which I suppose was a lot of money. It might be as much as two years' wages or something like that. That's an interesting sign of the times. I've had many people tell me that was a common experience. You didn't borrow money unless you really had to and that came out of problems with the Depression and maybe a tradition that began long before.

TB: What were some of the significant events that happened during your growing up years? I'm thinking of Pearl Harbor, World War II. What do you remember about those events? Where were you when you first heard about Pearl Harbor and any other thing that you remember about how the community responded to those events?

BG: I have strong memories of Pearl Harbor. Immediately after Pearl Harbor the Army, expecting an invasion at Bellingham (if you can imagine) set up machine gun nests all around Edgemoor, all along the waterfront. Of course in Edgemoor there weren't any houses in those days except way up on the high ridge on what's now Briar Road I think. There was even a machine gun nest in the hillside uphill from Garden Street just below Morey Avenue. That was a great thrill for us kids because we would ride our bikes two or three blocks up to the machine gun nest and bring comic books to the soldiers who were terribly bored. They weren't getting any action, I can assure you. That was a big event.

My father was a little too old to be drafted. He was in that perfect sandwich age when he was too young for the First World War and too old for the Second World War. Many of my contemporaries' fathers were air raid wardens. I thought it was pretty neat that he had a tin helmet and a badge or an armband that designated him as an air raid warden. And he was even issued (thrill of thrills!) a gas mask.

Part of his job was to go out every evening at dark and walk the neighborhood, whatever his area was, and make sure no lights were showing. Everybody had to put up air raid blinds to keep any light from shining out the

windows. I remember we put up tar paper on our basement windows. We tacked it all around. That was there for years in the window wells.

I guess the only other memory of the early part of the war was that aircraft watching was a big thing. In several areas around Bellingham towers were built so that people could get up (I guess above the light) and sit in the towers with binoculars and watch for those Japanese airplanes. We children had little playing cards that identified all the Japanese and German planes. I can remember looking at the rising sun on the zeros.

I guess another memory is that there were scrap campaigns. I would wander the neighborhood with my little red wagon knocking on doors seeing if people had any scrap metal to be turned in to the war effort. The results of my gathering were all thrown into the garage in the alley behind. My folks had a double garage and one car, so I had one garage pretty well filled with scrap at one point. Kind of crazy! I remember the big steam whistle, 'Big Oly,' on the mill down on the waterfront blowing at the end of the war. It blew and blew and blew and we knew the war was over.

TB: That's pretty cool. Growing up in Bellingham, what were some of the special or fun things to do as a family? What were some of the special or fun things the neighborhood children did (games that you played, places that you visited)?

BG: I think in junior high school and high school we went to the movies a lot when we were old enough to get out by ourselves. In 1941 my folks went to San Juan Island and for not very much money (with another family) bought twelve acres over there. It was just brush but there was a lot of beach, a lot of waterfront. My folks spent the rest of their life going there on weekends and I spent most of my childhood going to San Juan Island on Friday night on the ferry and doing what you do over there – fish for salmon and hack back the brush. That was a wonderful family event.

Like all kids of that era, we obviously didn't have television to watch. Well maybe that isn't so obvious to a lot of people that might be hearing this. I didn't watch television until I was a college student. We did other things. In the evenings, all of the children in the neighborhood would gather out on the street and we would play kick-the-can and run-and-chase kind of games. We used to make rubber-guns. You would take a piece of wood and make a gun-like object and then take rubber inner tubes from tires and stretch them back over the barrel of this gun and hold the end with a clothespin that was taped down and maybe also wrapped with rubber to make it resistant to opening. They were lots of fun because you would shoot at people. Kids' games. We had a lot of fun. It was great growing up. I see the parents [today] leaving their kids at grade schools and picking them up again and being so cautious of all the perils that await little kids these days it seems. I don't know if it's as real as it is imagined, but we were expected home for lunch and then home for dinner and I don't think my mother knew where we were the rest of the time! Once in a while she would say, "*Never take candy from a stranger, Brian.*" And that's the only sex-predator education I ever got! I didn't even know why I wasn't supposed to take candy from a stranger! Those were innocent days I guess.

TB: Anything else about growing up in Bellingham that was special or something that was not pleasant? Did you feel any limitations in growing up here?

BG: Bellingham was a smelly old mill town, but it was a town filled with good people and it always had community spirit. You couldn't get to the waterfront; it was all industrial. It simply wasn't a part. There was no public access to the waterfront when I was a kid. The mill smelled terribly. It got better over the years but even the last year I was here it smelled pretty bad at times. It used to be quite a bit worse. That's what we grew up with. We used to complain, but nobody ever thought it shouldn't be I guess. There were always the islands and the mountains. I skied as a kid in high school and took the school bus as they do now. They took to the mountain on the bus. It was a good place to grow up.

TB: Excellent. Now we are going to talk about your Campus School experience. How did you happen to attend the Campus School?

BG: I have no idea. My folks just sent me there. I would guess that they thought I was going to get a superior education there. It may have been partly a social thing because most of the kids that went to the Campus School in that era were the children of business people and doctors and lawyers and a few college professors. There weren't very many college professors. I don't think I had a college professor's child in any of my classes but there were in other classes, other years.

At any rate, it was also fairly close to where we lived. It was walkable. My parents lived on Garden Street and then up on 17th and finally they bought a house on 15th and Garden, which I suppose is about a mile and a half from the campus. I always walked to school.

TB: Did anyone else in your family attend the Campus School?

BG: My sister Marilyn who was three years ahead of me.

TB: What were the years and grades of your attendance?

BG: I started there in Kindergarten with Synva Nicol. I finished the ninth grade there. I must have started in 1937 or 1938.

TB: 1938 is what you said before.

BG: I must have taken the time to figure that out!

TB: You did start when the primary grades were in what we call Old Main now. Do you have any special memories of that place?

BG: You know, I have hardly any memory of that. I have a strong memory of moving into the new building and I have a strong memory of going to the seventh, eighth and ninth grades in Old Main. Moving into the new building was a great thrill and it's funny what sticks in your mind about those things. I remember being really fascinated by the rubber padding on the... they weren't stairs...

TB: They were ramps.

BG: Yes! That was a very modern, new thing then. Ramps! Oh, look at this. No steps! Then they had those don't-hurt-yourself rubber pads. Somehow that struck me as a very cool thing. I also have a great memory of the spine of the sandstone ridge. When they built the science building, they had to blast down a big sandstone ridge that probably went right to the library. I can remember with fascination how we would watch them. They would drill the holes in the ridge and then they would cover where the dynamite was with big mounds of fir branches to deaden the explosion. When they set them off, of course all the kids thought that was wonderful. The branches would jump in the air. That was pretty dramatic.

I also have a fun memory much later of being in Old Main. I must have been in the eighth or ninth grade; we had caught a baby crow on San Juan Island. My sister and I raised that crow and she became wonderfully tame. We called her Beulah, which isn't socially or politically correct I suppose, but in those days it was alright. Beulah would sit on your wrist and walk up your arm and sit on your shoulder. Every morning at home she would peck on the window until I would get up at the crack of dawn and open the window and go back to bed and Beulah would fly in and sit on the end of my bed. Crows are fascinating pets. When we went back to school, we had to leave Beulah. She wasn't getting the attention she was used to so she began to stray. One day when I was in junior high school we were playing football on what was then a field. It was just beside the old gym with a swimming pool in it. We were playing touch football down there and I heard Beulah. Crows have distinctive voices and I recognized that was Beulah. She was way up in the trees at the top of the hill. I said to my companions, "*There's Beulah! I hear my crow!*" They said, "*Oh, sure.*" I hollered, "*Beulah! Beulah!*" This crow launched itself from the top of the tree and came down. I put my wrist up. I was in the middle of a football huddle and Beulah landed on my wrist. She had found me. That was of course a big hit and a big thrill for me! When we went back to class there came a *tap tap tap* on the window. Believe it or not, Beulah saw that I had gone into that building and she was flying around tapping on the windows to find me. We opened the window and Beulah came in the classroom. That was a fun story. I wonder if any of my classmates remember that story.

TB: They do! I was going to ask you about that because that was told back to us.

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TB: Anything else about when the new school was being built? Some people have talked about the landscaping or going out and picking up rocks or something to help.

BG: I don't remember that. I do remember that what is now Red Square was rocks and mud. My memory is telling me that there was a wooden duck walk sidewalk in the early years across that mud. There must have been a road out there somewhere. We had to walk across a wooden walk and then eventually it was grass and then eventually we used to play baseball out there in what is now Red Square.

TB: Any thoughts about going back to Old Main for your junior high years?

BG: No, nothing jumps at me.

TB: Where did you live when you attended the Campus School? How did you get to and from school? Please share any favorite memories of this experience.

BG: I initially lived on 17th Street just across from the Welsh twins, one of which you will [probably interview].

TB: I interviewed her.

BG: Alright. We used to walk the trail that is now Highland Drive. That was a wooded trail that, as Highland Drive does, goes right into the campus. Then when my parents moved to 15th and Garden, I used to walk up Garden Street. I have a couple memories of each of those walks. From 17th Street, I'm sure I was walking with someone else. I don't remember who it might have been. We came across a mountain beaver in the trail. I haven't seen one in years and years. I don't know what their scientific name is. I think they might be getting a little hard to find. They are a little rodent that digs in the ground and nests in the ground. That was kind of an exciting thing. We captured a mountain beaver and I think took it to school.

Then I have kind of an amusing memory of walking Garden Street. Once you got down to Garden Street from the campus, Garden Street gently slopes all the way to my home at 15th and Garden. In those days everybody smoked; the men smoked anyway. Many of them lit their pipes and cigarettes with stick matches. You could always find a stick match in the gutter. Since most of the school year was rainy weather, the water would run nicely down the gutters. I would find a stick match, put it in the gutter, and watch it all the way down and help it around the obstacles. Sometimes it would take me hours to get home, so my mother had people stationed along the way! She would call one of her friends midway and say, "*Has Brian passed by yet?*" And there I was, floating those stick matches. Kids! It was fun.

TB: That's wonderful. Do you remember your lunch? What did you do for lunch?

BG: It seems to me we had lunch in the lunchroom in Miller Hall. I think there was a lunchroom there. I don't have a very strong memory of that. Was there a lunchroom there?

TB: I think so. I think the older kids may have gone to a lunchroom and the younger kids ate in their room. I've heard that and then I also heard that maybe one day a week you went to a lunch room. We have pictures of them in a classroom obviously with lunch being brought in to them; there's a soup bowl or something. I haven't completely caught it.

BG: I'm sorry; I just don't remember that very well. But I surely remember the naps that we had to take in the early classes. Each classroom had little boxes that contained your rug. Everybody had to bring a little scatter rug to sleep on. I think that might have been not the practice in the public schools because I kind of recall being kidded about that or thinking that I didn't think that was very smooth because my acquaintances in public schools didn't do that.

TB: Did you have desks all the way through or did that come later?

BG: I don't remember desks. We had desks in junior high school in Old Main. I think we just sat around big tables in grade school in the Campus School.

TB: Do you remember any favorite classmates (particularly any special stories or relationships about them)?

BG: I think we were all quite close and all quite friendly, so I remember a lot of favorite classmates. Of course, the way that goes, for a couple of years you would be a great buddy with somebody and then you might have a falling-out. Relationships would change. Did you mention that you talked to Donald Turcotte?

TB: He responded to the electronic version, yes.

BG: Did he tell you what his real name is? He was famous because he had lots of names. His name is (and I don't know why I've always remembered this but I bet everyone has) Donald Lawson Phillip Alec Turcotte. That was pretty impressive. Nobody else had more than three names!

TB: He just put 'Donald L. Turcotte' on his response.

BG: Donald Lawson Phillip Alec. I haven't known anyone since who has had that many names!

TB: That's great. Who were or most influential teachers and then can you flush that out a little bit more, like why they were your favorite teacher?

BG: Teachers are such an important part of a child's life. Actually, some of those teachers had a second go at the Griffin family because both of our daughters went to the Campus School much, much later. Synva Nicol taught all of us! That's got to be some sort of a record! I remember Miss Nicol; in later years I heard that she had a reputation for being a disciplinarian and a task master but I remember her with great warmth, being supportive emotionally and a very pleasant person. I think everyone's favorite teacher might have been Priscilla Kinsman. She just had a wonderful personality and she was a handsome, impressive woman in every respect. She also was very friendly and outgoing. Irene Elliot; and Katharine Casanova, a wonderful lady.

TB: So Irene Elliot wasn't a little bit stern?

BG: I don't remember that. I just remember them all as being very nice people that I enjoyed and liked. There was a teacher in the seventh or eighth grade whose name I don't recall.

TB: Leslie Hunt, I bet.

BG: Yes! She was kind of tough. But maybe if you are teaching kids in the seventh or eighth grade you have to be tough! She was alright too. Eventually I thought she was fine.

TB: Good.

BG: Leslie Hunt, I didn't remember.

TB: I think that is right, isn't it? I've heard that.

BG: You must have heard stories about Miss Gragg.

TB: Yes! And actually tell me about that. I forgot to put that note down. I wanted to ask you about learning to type and handwriting.

BG: I don't remember that she was teaching us to type. She was the handwriting teacher.

TB: Right.

BG: Oh my, she had a tough job. She was quite a bit older I think. Kids weren't very excited about learning handwriting, I don't think. I think she had discipline problems with us and she didn't quite know how to deal with it. I can remember those repetitive circular motions that she had us do; we all hated it I think.

TB: Did you learn cursive writing or just to print?

BG: The agonies were with cursive writing. I just couldn't do it. I, to this day, print in a kind of illegible long scrawl. I just never could coordinate despite that I have pretty good hand coordination in lots of things. I just can't get my brain to do cursive writing continually. I somehow, somewhere along the way started printing.

TB: Did you learn typing when you were there?

BG: I learned typing. It was in Old Main and it must have been in junior high school. That was really valuable. I wasn't a very good typist, but I got my brain programmed to the finger board and I was able to type and when I went into the Army I was in the counterintelligence corps and I had to write reports all the time. My typing got pretty good then. Now I type rather well, so thanks to the Campus School.

I'm not sure that they were that great in all areas, however. If you interview Ann Hanson, I predict she will talk about her math problems. Ann ended up being a German teacher, you know. She and I had a similar issue I think. I did not naturally come to math, apparently, not having one of those minds. I didn't learn math very well at all and I bluffed my way through Campus School avoiding math. I essentially bluffed my way through high school avoiding math and I was an English major in college and I avoided math. I graduated from college and believe it or not, I didn't know the multiplication tables. I've since learned them.

I have a theory about the Campus School, and that is that they encouraged creativity and they encouraged people to do what they were good at and get quite good at it, but they didn't discipline you to do what you didn't want to do. I think that was maybe a failing. Maybe that was modern experimental education in the day.

On the other hand, (well, how do you know what to credit what you are to?) I somewhere developed a major chunk of creativity. It's been a wonderful part of my life and it remains that way. I think that the Campus School fostered creativity. If you had any in the beginning, they built it for you and increased it. I can remember some of the rewards for creative thinking in writing and that sort of thing. I remember Leslie Hunt, about that year, when I dreamt up

some crazy imaginative story and whoever it was heaped praise on me and made me feel like that was really wonderful and encouraged that kind of activity.

Maybe to support what I just said, Donald Turcotte, who was always brighter than most of us, had a significant career in science. I'm sure that he was always great in math. Peter Onkels, who was a brilliant kid and unfortunately died in the Navy landing a jet plane on a carrier, was a gifted mathematician. There were lots of kids who were excellent in math. I was not one of them.

TB: What were your favorite subjects or classroom activities and what were your least favorite subjects or classroom activities?

BG: Math was surely my least favorite. I always enjoyed reading and speaking and that sort of thing. Those kinds of things were of particular interest. And here we are sitting in my woodworking shop. I remember with clarity (it must have been in junior high, I don't remember what years) we had quite a few introductions to Kasper Aagaard and the college workshop. Kasper Aagaard, has that name come up?

TB: Just I think from you, you mentioned him.

BG: Kasper Aagaard must have been the college woodworking teacher. They had a wonderful shop just to the north of Miller Hall. I remember being fascinated by everything I saw in there. He was kind of a rough old Scandinavian carpenter I'm sure, but a nice guy. He taught us rudimentary things. We learned to saw things and make sawdust and glue things. That no doubt had an influence because I didn't have any of the influence at home. I've been a woodworker all my life.

TB: Did the girls do that same woodworking or did they go to home economics and learn cooking and sewing or something?

BG: I don't remember.

TB: When you talk about the creativity, did they in any way try to shape what the end project was supposed to be or did they just kind of turn you loose and let you work on whatever you imagined?

BG: I think the latter. Like all children and all grade schools, you fuss around with clay and bring home squished-up ducks and pots that you paint and your mother keeps until you are old and gray! I just don't recall.

One other memory I have is I was in a school play and that made a big impression on me; I really enjoyed that, I'm not sure why. They had lots of creative things going on.

TB: Any other comments about the learning materials that you might have used? Did you use regular school textbooks, materials created by your teachers?

BG: I have no idea.

TB: What kind of grading system was in use during your attendance (letter grades or narrative reports)?

BG: They were written reports. I don't think there were letter grades. Were there ever?

TB: I think early in the beginning they had letter grades and it sounds like it evolved to narrative reports.

BG: My mother kept a few of those. Most of them weren't very good. They were always written comments. I just don't think there was a letter involved.

TB: It fits with your era. I don't know that anybody else has said that. Do you remember any creative activities such as weaving and making things? We've already sort of talked about that.

BG: I remember weaving now that you mention it. I don't remember much about it but there were looms and we did weave. I think maybe we tried to make baskets. That was a long time ago!

TB: What was it like for you to be observed so often by student teachers? Did you take advantage of them or play tricks?

BG: I'm sure we must have, but it seemed so natural to us. We always enjoyed our student teachers and we always were interested in who we were going to get. How often do you get them, quarterly? We were always worried about getting a good one or a bad one! I think we ended up loving most of them. No doubt we initiated some tricks, but I have a memory generally of affection for student teachers. Maybe they were a little more lenient than the classroom teacher.

TB: Do you have any recollection of what was a good student teacher versus what was a bad one? Is it just good humor?

BG: Probably whether they were pleasant and friendly and let you get away with things once in a while. I do have a very strong memory of a student teacher who may have saved my life. After the War, there was a student teacher who was teaching swimming to the entire school. He must have been a PE major. He was powerfully built; he seemed like an old man to me but he wasn't thirty, probably twenty five. I don't remember his name, but he had great broad shoulders. He'd been a Navy Frog Man. Of course, the boys all thought he was very impressive for that reason. He'd tell us Frog Man stories. He taught us the elementary backstroke. He insisted that we learn the elementary backstroke well and told us, *'One day this may save your life. This is the stroke that we used when they dumped us off of PT boats two miles off of a Japanese-held island and we swam to the shore and did our work and swam back to be picked up.'* It's the only stroke that you can sustain for a long period and it's a strong stroke. I learned it very well and one day in fact when I was in the Army we were going to Korea where I was in the counterintelligence corps and we had a half a day layover in Hawaii. A bunch of us rented a car and went to Waikiki Beach and bought swimming suits and went swimming. I got caught in a sideways current sweeping down the beach and out. I was swimming the crawl stroke and I got tired and thought I would put my feet down. I thought I was close enough maybe to touch because I had been a little while previously. I couldn't touch any longer and I remember a moment of panic and I remembered that student teacher teaching me that stroke. I rolled over on my

back and with that powerful stroke, I swam to shore. I've always credited him. Maybe I wouldn't have drowned, but I was in trouble.

TB: What year do you think you learned to swim or learned that?

BG: I think that must have been in the seventh or eighth grade. I don't know when we started going to the pool, but we were very young. I remember the little child experiences of being naked in front of peers for the first time and being embarrassed about that. Isn't that funny how that comes back?

TB: Do you remember anything about the swimsuits? I've actually heard people talk about them.

BG: Oh yes! They were all college-issue and they were black cotton.

TB: When you were a really little boy, didn't you have to wear a girl suit? Some people have said that.

BG: Yes! I think you are right! I had forgotten about that until just this moment. Thank you, that's a fun memory. We were very embarrassed about that! We didn't think that was very good.

TB: I can't imagine that either! What out-of-classroom activities did you engage in? What did you do at recess, lunchtime? What did you do enjoy the most? What games did you play?

BG: In the new Campus School we used to go to the gym and there was some sort of a game where you threw balls at each other.

TB: Bombardment?

BG: Bombardment! There you go. But I don't have much of a memory of that.

TB: Did you visit the college itself, the college library, attend assemblies or sporting events or anything else at the college when you were at the Campus School?

BG: We went to the library. We were taught the Dewey Decimal System at I don't know what age, but I was always impressed with the library. That's still a beautiful building; it has a certain majesty. We did go to Old Main for something.

TB: Assemblies I think would have been there. They had the auditorium.

BG: That could be. I don't remember much about that.

TB: At what grade level did you enter the public school and what was the transition like for you?

BG: The anticipation of the transition was terrible. I remember being very nervous, very frightened of that experience, going to high school. I graduated from the ninth grade and off we went to the high school. And of course

Campus School kids were considered to be “sissies”. There was a social stigma attached. I’ve lived in the South Hill all my life and when I was a kid, everybody below 14th Street was a Yugoslavian fisherman’s kid. They were kind of tough. Most of us were pretty nervous about going below 14th Street for fear that people like Pete Elich would beat us up! You know Pete?

TB: Yes.

BG: Consequently he has become a great friend. At any rate, we used to take a bit of ribbing when we would interact with kids from public schools. I can’t speak for others, but I think it’s fair to say we were all pretty nervous about going to Bellingham High School, but it turned out fine. Most of us did very well. Most of us were leaders in the school and most of us were excellent students. I don’t know whether the Campus School can take the credit or whether their families can take the credit. One of the girls in the class I believe was editor of the paper. I was the student body president my senior year. Campus School didn’t hurt us any at all in that respect.

TB: Did you have any sense that you immediately just naturally gravitated to those positions of leadership?

BG: I think anybody in high school that finds themselves in positions of leadership probably does naturally gravitate to it. I never had any intention of it. Well, my sister was the vice president of the student body in her year, three years earlier. I don’t know how those things happened.

End of tape one, side two

It’s an interesting comment that [Campus School kids] stuck together. I think it’s fair to say that we were all good friends and most of us had been together since Kindergarten. Maybe there was some sort of a mutual support team going there. You also need to remember that with the exception of about two representatives of lower economic units, every kid in the Campus School came from a background of (generally speaking) solid families, middle class or above economic background, and in many cases college-educated parents. Most of us had advantages that the average kid didn’t have. It has often interested me that some of those kids that I got to know in high school who didn’t have advantages prior to coming went off into the world and did great things. They matured and they developed later. It wasn’t that the raw material was any different; they just didn’t have the same boost that we did.

TB: How did your attendance at the Campus School influence your life and/or career?

BG: I think it’s impossible to equate. I don’t know. I have never known whether I got a good education or a poor one up there. I really don’t. How do you judge? I guess maybe by what you brought to the Campus School. The things that have always been of assistance to me in my life have been some degree of sociability and communicative skills. Did I come to the Campus School with those or did they put them in? Who knows? I don’t know how to answer your question.

TB: That’s fine. We talked a little bit about this off the tape, but I know you worked with Larry Johanson who is also a Campus School alumni. Your father worked with Jack Payne’s father and Jack also attended the Campus School. Were there a lot of those kinds of close relationships or is it because they were obviously the business leaders anyway?

BG: No, the Campus School connection had no business relationships as a result of it.

TB: No little fraternity development.

BG: No, just coincidence. You know, how many children were there in a class at the Campus School? Twenty or thirty?

TB: Probably about twenty five or something.

BG: Bellingham had a population of 30,000 forever. I don't know how many business people and professional people there were of a community of 30,000, but a reasonably good percentage of the sons and daughters of doctors, lawyers and business people went to the Campus School. I wouldn't be surprised if it was 25%. It's natural that some of those connections come back together in later years but they didn't have anything to do with Campus School loyalty to my knowledge.

TB: Do you at all remember (this is something else that one of your classmates mentioned) starting the college's bonfire? It must have been for Homecoming. Your class managed to sneak-start it the day before the college would have started it?

BG: I plead innocence!

TB: Ok! That's the only other story.

BG: Now I have to ask, who told you that?

TB: I'll have to look in the notes. I got it from someone but I don't remember offhand. This is now getting into the next section: Your college career and your retirement experiences or post-career work. You attended Whitman College, why did you choose to attend there?

BG: My sister was sent to Whitman College and why she was sent there I don't know, but somewhere along the line my parents must have assumed that was a good place to go. It seemed okay to me. It wasn't a great selection process.

TB: What were your years of attendance there? Did you go there right after high school?

BG: Yes; I was there from 1950 to 1954.

TB: What was your first job after leaving Whitman? Do you have any distinctive memories of that experience? Please share any information about your subsequent careers.

BG: Well I was drafted. The Korean War was on while I was in college. My college exemption kept me out of it. I volunteered for the draft just to get it over with and was sent off to Fort Ord. I chose to not go to [OCS]. I had an

opportunity to do that but that meant an extra year and I was engaged so I didn't do that. I just threw myself on the mercies of the Army system and I got very fortunate. I was selected to go to [Army] Counter-Intelligence Corps training and sent to Baltimore, Maryland to the intelligence school. Then I was sent to Korea. I got to Korea about ten days after they quit shooting. The timing could not have been better.

I was assigned to the Inchon Field Office and I had a marvelous experience. There were two officers and a regular Army sergeant and nine or ten college boys who had followed the same path that I had. I inherited five informants, so I had Korean informants to work with and my own interpreter and my own Jeep. And we lived not in military housing. First we lived in an old Methodist missionary's house for the first part of my stay there and then we moved into the harbor area and moved into the lovely villa overlooking Inchon Harbor, formerly occupied by the Japanese governor of Inchon.

Our rank was classified, although I was an E-2, meaning just about at the very bottom. We wore little brass USs, so everyone thought we were officers. We could go to the officers' club. The only problem was we couldn't afford to buy a beer because we weren't getting paid enough! At any rate, I spent eighteen months in Korea and it was an excellent experience.

Then I came back and Marya and I were engaged. I got married and all of a sudden I had to earn a living. My father's business had gotten to the point where he needed some help, so I went into the insurance business with him. Thirty five years later, at age fifty eight, I [decided I had] done that and retired.

TB: But you have only partially retired. You have been involved in community activities. I believe you were involved in Boulevard Park and then most recently the Centennial Stone, the public market and others. What can you tell me about these projects? What motivated you to get involved? What were your favorites and did they turn out as you hoped?

BG: I've really been involved from the beginning in community activities. I guess I told you that I was the student body president of the high school class, and that does something to you. I was involved with the Campfire Girls as my father had been before me; I was the president of the Samish Council for two years. I was on the board at the 'Y' [YMCA] and all of those kinds of things. I was on a Chamber of Commerce committee.

Thirty years ago I was on the Civic Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Commerce. Bellingham's downtown was facing a parking problem. There had been rumblings about needing to do something about parking. I was asked by Nick Lidstone, who was a retired admiral and who was the Executive Director of the Chamber, to take on the chairmanship of the Civic Affairs Committee. I had been unimpressed with the activities of the Civic Affairs Committee, so I told him I was not interested because the committee never did anything. It was just spinning its wheels. He said, *'Alright, kid. What needs to be done?'* I said, *'Well, we need to build a parking garage in this town. I'll take the chairmanship if you'll agree that we don't do any of the rest of that nonsense that it has done for years but we'll only work on the parking garage.'* He said, *'Alright.'* So I literally, with the help of two other businessmen downtown, am responsible for the parkade.

It was an amazing experience because we had a mayor, Reg Williams, who was against it. We had the assistance of Bill McDonald and Jack Mallahan who were on the City Council and Ron Jepson who was the city's Assistant

Public Works Director. He was a big help. I enlisted the help of Al Levin and Joe Hilton of Hilton's Shoe Store. The five or six of us convinced the city to pass a bond issue and knock down the buildings that the parkade is built on. That was dramatic! We established the local improvement district. We were able to convince a majority of the property owners in the area to sign a long term debt to help finance that. I think I raised \$100,000 dollars in cash which, thirty years ago, was a ton of money. We built the parkade.

It was an amazing experience. That was my first adventure in public projects. I learned to work with the city. I learned the power of that position. With the city's legal and financial assets, if you can convince them to do something in the public good, that's a huge opportunity, a huge lever, to make things happen. At any rate, later on because of that, because of my successful stewardship of that thing, one day I got a phone call from a woman who was a member of the YWCA Eco-Action group. It was a small committee of women; Anne Rose was one of them. She was a City Council person later. At any rate, they had heard that some local business people were planning on building condominiums along the boulevard, along the road in that narrow strip between the railroad and the boulevard itself, which would block the view. They wanted to stop that. They asked me to meet with them to give them some advice on how you work with the city. They thought maybe I had some secrets. I met with them and I shared their concern; they sounded the alarm for me as well.

Coincidentally, about that time, the Rotary Club of Bellingham had always had fireside meetings where they would split up the membership and go to the homes of members, fifteen or twenty at a home, and discuss issues. The topic of the fireside that ensued shortly after meeting with those women was what kind of projects the Rotary Club should take on for the future. I proposed in my home to the fifteen or twenty men that were there that the Rotary Club should take on the Boulevard Park issue. Discussion generated the fact that we knew who those business people were, who had options on that land, and who planned to build those few blocking buildings. Some of them were Rotarians. Everyone agreed this was something we ought to do. The report went back to the main club. The entire club took on that as a project. We should save the view and the boulevard. We were in a unique position to do something. Jim Fickel, who was a dentist in town and is now deceased, was the appointed chairman. The Rotary group began to work on that. The idea was to buy an option from those people and present it to the city and then motivate the city to buy the land and preserve it.

Then one day when this was all cooking away in my brain I drove down there and I stopped along the road and looked down over the side and watched the log trucks dumping logs down on what we now call Boulevard Park. It just hit me like a ton of bricks; *'My god! We've got to get that too!'* There's our opportunity to get (finally!) waterfront access! I wrote a formal letter to the Chairman of the Rotary Club committee and to the president I guess, pointing out the opportunity and the need to do this. They all said, *'Hey, that's great. Let's do it.'* So the Rotary Club essentially pieced together the land and got options on it all.

With its influence, they didn't spend much money, but they knew who to talk to and they had friends. In fact, one of the pieces was owned by Foss Tug & Barge (one of the pieces of the waterfront down below). Roy Jorgenson had been a former Rotarian when he was heading the cement plant and now he was the President of Crowley Maritime, which had just bought Foss Tug & Barge. They didn't need it, they didn't want it and they gave it to the city. Those kinds of connections made it all happen. But it took years to put it all together (seven years actually). That's a long story but I feel very good about at least not doing the work but having some of the vision to see how Boulevard Park happened. I feel a little parental about it.

Then when Trillium wanted to build what is now Bellis Fair, I got upset about what was going to happen to the downtown. In league with Ken Hertz, the mayor, we put together a significant effort to build a mall in the downtown. We had land options; we had a developer ready to go. The city bought the railroad property on Railroad Avenue from the Burlington Northern who had abandoned it about that time. I spent two years working on that and as part of that project we put together a local improvement district. The city hired a landscape architect and we put together a local improvement district of property owners to pay for the bollards, street trees, and all new sidewalks; kind of as part of the effort to bring the downtown up to the point where it wouldn't be destroyed.

There was a great political scrap over building a parking garage. The developer that we had lined up wouldn't build a mall (it was going to go from the old Penney's building on Cornwall all the way back up to State and two blocks that way, over Railroad Avenue – it was a big public private partnership kind of thing, very ambitious). But he wouldn't do it unless the city would build a parking garage – a big one. There was a big political scrap led by the typical Bellingham conservative element. It was taken to a vote of the people as an initiative and by a very narrow margin, the people voted no. The initiative was 'the city of Bellingham should not be allowed to build parking garages' – and it passed by a tiny little margin. The moment that passed, I quit. The developer went home. It was over.

They had Trillium build and put together the Bellis Fair and the downtown business district took a real hit. It went downhill. Business went to the mall. That was not a successful effort. Can you imagine what Bellingham would look like without street trees? You can't even think of it without trees anymore! The next time when the trees are in leaf, go down and give that some thought.

More recently I was on the committee of the Rotary Club that was interested in community projects. I had heard that the city had some money to do something for the farmers' market and to improve Railroad Avenue on that block. I was kind of delegated by that committee to find out what they were up to and if there was a part for the Rotary Club in it. I went to visit the mayor and to my amazement he told me that in fact they had a plan and it would soon be presented. They had a Seattle architect putting it together and they had a million and half dollars of state and city money committed to it! I thought, *'My god, that's amazing. That's a huge story!'* He was delighted that the Rotary Club would be interested and welcomed our assistance. Just the next week was the great day when the architect came up from Seattle to present the plan to the stakeholders (the stakeholders being the property owners and business people along the street and the Farmers' Market Association). We kind of invited ourselves to the meeting ('we' meaning Rick Wright, the chairman of the Rotary Committee, and myself).

Rick and I and everyone else were horrified at the plan. It was awful; it didn't do the job for anybody and the farmers' market people were distraught. I thought it was just going to be a street beautification project that wouldn't help anybody and we would just be throwing a million and a half dollars down the drain and I told the mayor that. At any rate, Rick and I walked away from that meeting [and thought] that no one would touch this with a ten foot pole.

Then the wheels began to turn. That awful creativity wheel began to move, as with my friend Wright. We called one another the next day and said, *'You know, I've been thinking about that and here's a possibility.'* He told me a fact that I didn't know. That site that the farmers' market had been on for thirteen years was the site of the old railroad

depot in Bellingham, the first railroad depot; a very historic site. It was a wonderful old Victorian building built in 1892. That kind of excited us.

I remembered visiting a couple years previously the cathedral in Chartres and after we had toured the cathedral, we wandered a block or so away to the market square and it was filled with cars. It was used as a parking lot. There was a market building in the center of it and it was filled with cars too! Cars were everywhere. This was on a Friday. We stayed in Chartres that night and the next morning was Saturday and we went back to that square and there wasn't a car to be seen and here was this marvelous French market. That really struck me as a great use of that public land. All of a sudden I thought, *'Wait a minute, we should do that here in Bellingham! That's the perfect plan.'* So I sketched up some pictures and Rick and I made an appointment with the mayor for two days later and we sat down with the city and pointed out what they could do. The mayor says, *'That's terrific. That's just what we want to do. Let's do it.'* We committed to hire the architect and raise a bunch of money and off we go. Now it's being done. In another six weeks it will be done! Anyway, I always had a terrible enthusiasm problem!

TB: That's great. Is there anything else you want to talk about in terms of your community activities?

BG: No, that's about it.

TB: Okay; how and when did you get involved bee pollination?

BG: Well, I've always been fascinated with natural history. It probably started as a kid poking around in the tide pools. About twenty years ago now, I planted that Belgian fence out along the 16th Street sidewalk – forty fruit trees, apples and pears, planted two and a half feet apart and trained in the espalier method. I wasn't getting very good pollination in those early years and then a friend sent me a WSU bulletin titled *The Orchard Mason Bee*. I read it and I was fascinated. It was just about this time of year in the spring. It said to drill some holes in a block of wood and hang it out in your garden and maybe the bees will come. So I came out here to the shop and did that one morning and hung it out on the dog kennel wall and the garden house wall. That very afternoon I had two little black bees nesting in those holes. I was blown away! I was just fascinated.

Over the next few years I built up a large population and I made a contact with an entomologist with the USDA who had studied this bee for years. Scientists knew about the bee but nobody had ever popularized it. Finally I had more bees than I knew what to do with. They really worked wonderfully. One day I thought I would make some Christmas presents so I made a little wooden block with a dozen holes in it and to the bottom of it I nailed a little slice with three holes filled with hibernating bees. I put a little hang tag on it and gave them away for Christmas. People were fascinated; it's a pretty different thing. The next spring, they all worked. The bees came out of the three holes and filled up the dozen empties and people just loved it.

I thought boy, what am I going to do with all these bees? They multiply like rabbits! I got a bright idea that I would take that cutesy little house that I had given away and I sublet about four square feet from a friend who had a booth at the Seattle Garden Show. I went down for five days, stood there and talked to people constantly, showing my wares. I met only one person who had ever heard of a mason bee. I sold all of them. I came back with \$3000 in my pocket. I sold them for \$15.

End of tape 2, side 1

I had a hoarse voice; I was exhausted, but exhilarated! I realized that I had found an economic opportunity in a strange little niche. Driving home I thought to myself, ‘*Griffin, you just stood there for five days giving away your information! You told everything you knew about these bees to hundreds and hundreds of people.*’ Ah! I was an old lit major at Whitman. Here was my chance to write a book! That spring I wrote a little book and I self-published it and I’ve since sold 30,000 of them, which I understand is a pretty good number for a self-published, self-sold book.

I developed over time a wonderful little business selling bees and bee nesting holes and I wrote a book about bumble bees later. There are books and video tapes and all kinds of stuff. Essentially I popularized this wonderful little native bee that is native to almost every state in the union. We have thirty four products. It was a pretty good little business. I did it for fourteen years. Then eventually all the fun and the creativity was gone. It began to seem like work. My youngest daughter Lisa had been helping me. I had made her a partner. A year and a half ago I gave her the rest of the business. Now I’m retired again! It was lots of fun over the years, you know? It was such a strange little niche. I got my picture in *Smithsonian* magazine and *Better Homes and Gardens* and *Sunset* a couple of times. The last one, Lisa and I were featured in a full page of *People Magazine*! It was really a kick. I have to be very happy about the role I played in educating people about pollination and bees. I think it has been important and probably the most important thing that I will achieve. It feels very good.

I didn’t mention, I guess maybe, I’m as proud of anything as of Fairhaven Village Green. We skipped over that. One day Chuck Robinson and another merchant down there called me and said, “*We really need public restrooms in Fairhaven and we need somebody to run a campaign to build a public restroom down here in this city-owned lot behind us.*” They wanted to build a bandstand on the corner down there and put a restroom under it. I turned it down. I said I had no interest in building restrooms for merchants. The more I thought about it (it’s that damned enthusiasm again!), I began to envision what we could do and how important that could be. A couple weeks later I called them back and said, “*Okay, let’s take a run at it. Chuck, if you’ll help, I’ll take it on.*”

That land was owned by the city. The city had bought it with the Greenways funds a couple of years before. I put together a small task force of six or seven people who had particular skills they could contribute. I don’t like committees but I like task forces! We got John Stewart, the architect, to do a free design. We got a contractor to give us a free bid. And we got to the park board before they set their budget and got to the city council before they got their budget going. In pretty rapid order, we got that thing put together and built and raised almost \$400,000 to contribute to the city’s \$400,000. We raised about half the money to do that and got a lot of volunteer activity. It has really been successful. It feels very good. I’m very proud of that.

I’m hopeful I’m going to be very proud of Depot Market Square. I think that is going to do for the downtown what the Village Green has done for Fairhaven. I really have a strong belief that communities need gathering places. We all buzz around in our automobiles and we meet occasionally at a social event but there are very few places where people are just kind of forced to come together and do something in common. That kind of place does that.

TB: That’s very nice. What are the things that you most look forward to yet doing?

BG: I've always been kind of a half-baked artist. I've always enjoyed working with my hands. For the last ten or eleven years, right here in this building we've had a little group that comes together to do watercolor painting. Because of the Village Green, I got involved with carving patterns and casting them in bronze, so I made the manhole covers down there and the bollards (I made those patterns). I'm kind of interested in that. I think maybe I'm going to concentrate on artsy things for the foreseeable future. In fact, I'm headed off to Venice for two weeks in May to do nothing but sketch and paint.

TB: Are you totally self-taught in art or did you take some classes?

BG: I've taken a few classes. We got this group together here ten or eleven years ago and pooled our money and hired Steve Mayo to teach us the rudiments of watercolor. We've had a couple of other teachers and I've gone to a couple La Conner classes. It's just fun to do. I don't make any pretenses [about] being any good at it; it's just that I enjoy it.

TB: That's excellent. Actually, one other quick question, you have also gotten real interested in local history and have been doing some oral histories. Can you tell a little bit more about what got you started doing that?

BG: Most recently (I mentioned that I did one of my uncle fifteen or twenty years ago) Bob Moles, who was a wonderful man and an amazing community leader, was dying of cancer and I went out to visit him. I asked him in our conversation whether he had written his history. His great grandfather came to Whatcom County as a circuit-riding preacher only he wasn't a rider, he was a walker; he couldn't afford a horse so he walked to preach up around Custer and Blaine. He's got a long history and nobody in his family had ever written it down. I so respected Bob and he had such a personal story that I asked him if he would allow me to do an oral history interview with a video camera. He welcomed that.

I came home and bought a video camera. Two days later I was sitting in his living room. Fortunately, I got an hour and a half of Bob telling his and his family's story. Three days later his health took a dip and he wouldn't have been able to do it. That felt very good and I think it's an important thing to do.

Somebody said to me once, "*When an old man dies, it's like a library burning.*" That really is so true. I wanted to record that and I've done some very interesting people. Do you know Pat Fleeson? Pat almost single-handedly saved the museum. When the tower burned up, the city was just going to just bulldoze it into [Whatcom] Creek. They were going to just knock it down. Pat put her foot down and said, "*No way.*" She worked at it for years and years and raised most of the money and made it happen. Recently I did Ken Imus who owns so much of Fairhaven. I thought that story had to be trapped, caught. I've done David Morse. I've done about thirteen of them, maybe this is fourteen. Then I give a copy to the museum and a copy to the archives (to Western [Center for Pacific Northwest Studies]), one to the family and I keep one.

TB: Excellent. It's a treasure what you are doing. One last question: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you would like to comment on?

BG: Not that I can think of.

TB: Thank you very, very much. It was a great treasure to meet you. You have a great story and are obviously a great Bellingham-builder of our community and have done a lot for it. Thank you very much.

BG: Thank you; my pleasure.