



Paul Turner Oral History Interview, June 24, 2015

Title

“A Visit to The Darkside”

Date

June 24, 2015

Location

Darkside Cinema, Corvallis, Oregon.

Summary

In the interview, Turner provides an uncensored view of his career as a theater operator and of his perspectives as an independent businessman.

The session begins with an overview of Turner's upbringing and family background, an exploration of the importance that film played to him as a child, and a discussion of his first job in movies, working as an assistant at the Woodburn (Oregon) Drive-In and as a projectionist at an indoor theater also located in Woodburn. From there he describes his decade-long management of the Kuhn Cinema in Lebanon, Oregon, and his decision to return to school during this time period. In this, he notes important professors who made an impact on him during his stints as a student at Chemeketa Community College and at Linn-Benton Community College, and also details his work as a student newspaper journalist at the LBCC *Commuter*.

Turner next recounts the story behind his transfer to Oregon State University, which arose primarily out of his writing and editing at *The Commuter*. Reflecting on his OSU experience, Turner focuses on his pursuits as a member of the *Daily Barometer* staff and on the development of his friendship with Film Studies professor Jon Lewis. Turner also shares his memories of film culture in Corvallis in the mid-1990s, and speaks particularly of the fates that befell The State Theatre, The Whiteside Theatre, and OSU's International Film Series.

The session then turns its attention to its primary focus, the founding and evolution of The Avalon Cinema and the Darkside Cinema. Turner describes the germ of the idea for The Avalon, the renovations that were required prior to its opening, and the role that Jon Lewis played as a film booker during the theater's first years. He then outlines the economic forces that compelled him to open the Darkside Cinema and details that work that went into making the Darkside a reality. He likewise shares his thoughts on the craft of film projection - noting several humorous moments that have occurred in the projectionist's booth - as well as his perspective on the impact made by the film industry's shift to digital content, and the Kickstarter campaign that helped keep the Darkside afloat amidst this sea change in content delivery.

As the interview nears its end, Turner provides his characterization of the downtown business community in Corvallis. The session concludes with Turner's thoughts on the future of the Darkside.

Interviewee

Paul Turner

Interviewer

Chris Petersen

Website

<http://scarc.library.oregonstate.edu/oh150/turner/>

Transcript

Chris Petersen: Okay, today is June 24th, 2015 and we are interviewing Paul Turner, who is the founder, owner, operator of the Darkside Cinema in downtown Corvallis, and we'll be talking to him principally about his connections with OSU and the stories of his two theaters here in Corvallis, the Avalon Cinema and the Darkside Cinema. Before that we'll gather a bit of a biographical sketch, but I want to mention for the record that this is our 150th interview for this project, so a nice little milestone.

So, as I mentioned, Paul, we'll talk a lot about your connections in the Corvallis business community and your history here, but I'd like to get a sense of your life sort of from the get-go.

Paul Turner: [in voice of Steve Martin] "I was born a poor black child." Apologies to Steve Martin.

CP: [Laughs] Where were you born?

PT: San Jose, California.

CP: And were you—was that where you were raised, or?

PT: Well no, I was raised up and down the coast; San Jose, Santa Cruz, Vancouver B.C., Woodburn, Cottage Grove, and then I settled into this area after that.

CP: Were there work reasons for your family to be moving?

PT: We went to Canada because both my parents are from there and my dad was finishing up a degree in British Columbia, and it was during the Vietnam War and my brother and I were, at the time, were middle teenagers and my mom had an opinion about us getting drafted, and it was somehow less likely to happen if we were living in Canada. So, we were basically up there in the early seventies, waiting for the war to wrap up, which it did in 1975, and we came back to the states in '76.

CP: Is that where you went to high school?

PT: Part of, where I went to high school over there, Woodburn, and I graduated from Cottage Grove.

CP: Okay. So, the family sort of matriculated in Oregon, then, it sounds like.

PT: Yeah. My brother actually lives here in Corvallis as well and has been here for a very long time. It was funny because my brother and I seemed to take very well to Oregon and all its vulgarities and all of its advantages. Both of my parents were raised in Canada and they grew to dislike the grey skies and cold weather, so they ended up in Arizona, which there's an element of irony there, but they—but my brother and I both started lives here in the valley, and we really like it here.

CP: What was your father's profession?

PT: My father was an electrical engineer, he went into biomedical electrical engineering. He did twelve years in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, Riyadh and Dhahran working up there in the hospitals there, helping them put in their infrastructure. So, he was a technical person. My mom was a bacteriologist and phlebotomist, so they were—my brother's an electrical engineer and I'm the biker who runs a theater. Run with that.

CP: What sorts of things were you captivated with as a boy?

PT: You're handing me all these straight lines and I'm being so good. When I was—we lived in Santa Cruz, California before it became Santa Cruz, California. We were, my brother and I were basically raised swimming in the Pacific, and I really, to this day, I really can't be too far from a body of water in any capacity. Love the ocean, and I think that's one of the reasons I've stayed so close to the west coast here, is because we have access to that big body of water we call the Pacific. But I think there's something, if you're a kid and you kind of imprint and bond on the ocean, it kind of stays. I

used to love to just go out and bob in the waves and bodysurf and swim out to the quarter mile marker and then swim back, all the stupid shit you do when you're a kid and you don't realize how dangerous it was.

It was fun, because you know out there, there were a lot of sand sharks, which are nothing to write home about, and we'd be sitting on our surfboards or our rafts and they would--of course, they taste with their nose, so they'd come up and run against and you'd see this little dorsal fin, and it was like pfft, whatever, didn't think about it. And then Peter Benchley's book came out and the damn movie *Jaws* came out after that and suddenly it's like everything was a great white: ahh! no, hold it, that's a candy wrapper. Ahh! You know, it was hilarious how we went from absolutely just all day out in the water, we could have, you know, whales, all this crap, I mean we didn't care, it didn't bother us. As soon as the media got saturated with great white sharks, it's suddenly [makes fearful expression]. Then they caught one, like a four hundred footer or whatever the hell it was, and then that really set in the fear, but we still went and still swam.

[0:05:08]

Santa Cruz was great, because it was during the sixties and seventies and it was kind of—it was one of the many epicenters of the social and political movement that was happening in that time. And one of the most interesting—I work with people who are half my age or less, and whenever we talk politics or the like, I realize that they don't have a political context of having watched Nixon get bounced out of the house, of having watched the bullshit continue that perpetuated the Vietnam War. They didn't have that. And what's particularly interesting is their children will probably go "what was 9/11 about, after all? What was that? Didn't like something fall over?" And for us, when these people say "Vietnam War, wasn't that like somewhere in Canada?" and you realize that they have no context of what that is within our political and sociological history in this country. And I find that both horrifying and amusing at the same time. Sorry, I went off there, and the coffee hasn't even kicked in yet. You're in for a treat when it does.

CP: Was film important to you as a kid?

PT: When I was about eight years old, I used to skip school, when I went to Branciforte Elementary on Water Street in Branciforte, and there was Rio Theater up the way and I used to skip school and go watch movies. And I never told anyone what I was doing. I'd go in and I'd get in all sorts of trouble and I would, "I don't know, I went up, I went surfing, I went to the beach." But I was in the movies. I would go and watch, and the guy didn't give a shit if it was an R-rated film. I mean, I was a little eight year old kid [in child's voice]: "hi." "Yeah, whatever, get in there, give me your buck," or whatever the hell it was. And I used to go around and check all the vending machines for change that had never been claimed and I would collect it, and all my friends and my brother were out buying candy and I was out buying movie tickets at the Rio.

And one of the last ones I saw was a double feature of *Mad Dogs & Englishmen* and *Tommy*. And I was too young to drop acid, but as I got older I realized I really missed out on that. But anyway, it was a cementing experience. It made sense to me, to see a movie as a kid in a political climate that was insane. The sociological changes that took place in the sixties with the hippy movement and the many other movements, whether it was eastern religion or free love or whatever the hell it was, it was extremely exasperating, and unless you were there, and I know this is terribly pedantic and probably even arrogant, but unless you were there or have been through a similar time when there was so much upset, grasping how significant that was is difficult, I feel. I've been wrong before, once, but...And for me, there was a certain stability in being able to go see a movie, because I always knew the lights were going to go down, the curtains were going to open, the trailers were going to run—in that day they would make cartoons—trailers, and then the movie started and everything else went away. And that started probably when I was around eight. Here I am at fifty-four, look what I'm doing now. Who saw that coming?

CP: So, you mentioned, I think you said that you graduated from high school in Cottage Grove, is that correct?

PT: Yes.

CP: But your first job in film, so to speak, was in Woodburn?

PT: Shit, did I write about that? I guess I did. Yeah, the Woodburn Drive-In. My friend Ron and I lived under the screen tower.

CP: Lived under it?

PT: Screen tower, sixty feet high and there was a little apartment under it, and we lived under there. So, a couple of teenaged guys running a drive-in, which is just a bad idea. We were heavily into muscle cars; anything American with a big engine in it, we loved it. So, the front was littered with these various machines, and so we would run movies till three in the morning, then we'd get in our cars and we'd go out and be idiots until dawn, because there was no one on the road. We'd sleep a few hours and get up and rinse and repeat and do it again. And it was not such a bad way to be a teenager, or an early twenties person.

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Side note that's interesting: both Ron and I have kept our cars, our main cars that we had back then. I have a '62 Impala Super Sport in storage and he has a '63 Impala Super Sport in storage. He has become a real car collector; whereas I collect ceramic cats, he collects American muscle and luxury cars. He's filled up several barns with them, and they're restored, they're not just crap. But we say we're going to restore our Impalas and try to do a road trip before we hit sixty. I don't see it happening till we're sixty-five.

But anyway, the drive-in was huge. It was a big part of realizing that this is something, you know, I can actually do this. Both my parents were medical people, they were both involved in the medical profession, and my brother became an electrical engineer and worked out at HP. And I'm always building stuff, you know, look at my booth, it's Rube Goldberg meets every shady tree mechanic who fucked up a transmission. But I mean, the fact is, is that it, as much as I enjoyed that, I never had any indication that I wanted to be educated in it. So, when I started working at movie theaters I realized that this meant a hell of a lot more to me then, well, making a living, I guess would be the correct way to put it. Because "you got to get a backup, you got a.." it's like "yeah, sounds like fun, I'm going to run the show now."

And we were playing *Aliens*, the first one, and we were playing it out of the drive-in and it was a wonderful summer night, we had five hundred cars on the field, so you figure probably, conservatively, fifteen hundred people, and it's that scene where Ripley's getting into the pod to escape, and I'm on the, I was—my first job at the drive-in, I was a bouncer. My job was to keep everyone in line, and I'm on the roof and I'm looking down, because the projector booth was on the roof, so you'd go up the projection booth, you walk up on the roof. I'm standing there and I got this beam of light going over my shoulder, there's Ripley on the screen and I look out at the field with its five hundred cars, and not a sound, no one's moving, everyone's doing this [makes fearful expression]. Even the people who are walking turn around, they're looking at the screen as she's getting in the pod. It was [makes impressed face] yeah, I could do this. And I've been kind of doing that ever since.

A lot of people who are in the business, we've been doing it a very long time. As flamboyant as the production end of this business is, the exhibition end is terribly conservative, and a lot of that conservatism I think is bred from the fact that we've all been doing it so long. And when digital came in a few years ago, a lot of people I know got out of it. They said, you know, "fuck it, I don't get this, this is black magic to me." They want fifty to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars for each auditorium to convert. Who in their right mind would stay in this business? And we lost probably a third of all the independents as soon as they stopped producing film. And I love it, I think they're—you know, I love film, I mean I went up to see *2001: A Space Odyssey* in 70 millimeter. It was a very priapistic experience and I had a lot of trouble understanding why I would ever want to see anything else, aside from the movie itself.

But what we do here ain't bad. And there's so much more they can do now. There's so much more stuff that we can show, there's so much more product out there. Some of it sucks. A lot of shit that you'd never get made gets made because "look, I have enough money to buy a used car, I can get a camera and a sound kit and I can make a movie. I can get a MacBook Pro with Final Cut and I can edit it." And next thing you know, they're handing you a thumb drive saying "this is my movie, please play it." And "wow, you got your girlfriend to pose naked, good for you. Get out of my face; I'm not playing your movie." But the business, again, the actual business end is very conservative. So, we've been doing this a very long time. I've been doing it over thirty-five years, on and off.

[0:15:19]

CP: Did you get your first experiences as a projectionist at the drive-in? You've written eloquently about running a film projector and sort of the craft and the engineering of it, and it's—

PT: Well, the drive-in, I was exposed to it. I worked, I learned mostly—there was a hardtop, which is exhibitor-speak for an indoor theater. We called them hardtops and drive-ins, if you couldn't figure out the little difference there, but I worked at the hardtop downtown; Pix in Woodburn, and we ran Spanish films on Sundays, and so I worked there and I learned how to run the projectors, and then we did first run. And I learned to operate with the old carbon arc lamps during *The Empire Strikes Back*. I can do the dialog from that whole movie, because this was from the time when they built projection booths with toilets in them, because the projectionists were not allowed to leave the booths.

This, of course, is a rollover from nitrate film when no one was—the projectionist was the fireman, or woman, most likely a man, who would—if the nitrate film caught on fire, you can't put it out. So, their job was to shut the shutters so it didn't get into the auditorium and close the steel door so that the film could burn out in the concrete projection booth without starting the rest of the building on fire. So, they had toilets to keep the projectionist from having a reason to leave. When I built this place, they told me I needed to put a toilet in, in the projection booth, and I said "okay, you're off by fifty years, let me tell you why." And David Livingston, who did the plans for this, he managed to convince them that we aren't using nitrate film anymore.

But yeah, so I learned to operate there. It was during *The Empire Strikes Back*; back then we were running two projectors, which means it was a changeover house, so we had to change reels every eighteen minutes and rewind the ones by hand that we had just played. So, you don't push a button and go sit behind the snack bar and BS with the customers; a projectionist had to be a projectionist. And we were stupid kids, we were like eighteen, nineteen years old, and these people are saying "here, you have five hundred people in the auditorium, or five hundred cars on the field, have fun with that," and then they would leave us in charge, and it's like, you know half the time it's like "cool," the other half of the time, "these people are stupid." But you know, nothing burned, so we must have done something right.

CP: Well, you've said that you sort of took a winding path for a while, you did a lot of different kinds of things but you always gravitated back towards film. Was the next main job the one in Lebanon? Or were there others in-between?

PT: When I was in, I was in Woodburn for quite a while and I went to school at Chemeketa Community College trying to get my—or to transfer to a four year, and I was in a car accident and I ended up back down in Cottage Grove in my parents' home. They were in Saudi Arabia. So, when I was down there I worked at the drive-ins and did a lot of other work like that as I gradually got my feet back under me. I've always been a photographer. As much as I like movies, I've also been a photographer as well. I'm working on a group of photos that are iPhone only; no lenses, no attachment, but iPhone only, because I find it hilarious when people spend nine hundred dollars on a piece of glass when their iPhone will do that. Moving right along, but yeah, so I did that.

When I was twenty-four, I moved to Salem and went to work in photo labs and I found out I loved being in the darkroom, so I was taking—professionals were shooting stuff and they were bringing it to me and I was then printing it. And it was great, it was a lot of fun. They'd bring me a role that they'd overexposed; "I shot this three stops, too hot, can you do anything about it?" I'd say "yeah, we can put it in cold Microdol and see what we can do. It might reticulate a bit, but we can probably make it work," and all this kind of stuff that I loved doing. And I really enjoyed that for a long time. And then I acquired a family and took over the theater in Lebanon, and we worked there for ten years before building the Avalon in 1996, opening it in '97, closing it in '07, and the Darkside opened in '05 and here we are at '15, I'm sitting here in my lobby drinking coffee with you.

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CP: Well, tell me a bit about the Lebanon experience. You mentioned that you were there for a decade.

PT: I was, wasn't I? Lebanon is a...I liked Lebanon for a lot of things. It's kind of this time capsule from the fifties and sixties in a lot of ways. In the theater itself, there was no exception to that. It was a single screen, 1930s movie theater, three hundred and twenty-seven seats when we had it. The place was a shithole, on a good day. It had been neglected. Ron and I are actually—Ron had the lease on it. He handled everything outside the doors, I handled everything inside. This is

the same person I lived in the screen tower with. And we were trying desperately with the owner of the building to just try to get improvements done, but we couldn't. So, we basically slumped it out and just did what we could.

But you know, I had three girls I was raising and they were raised in that theater and they were playing with their Barbies down by my feet when I sat in the box office and sold tickets. And they would sleep in the projection booth, because the rattling of the projectors would put them out like a light. It was—they speak very fondly of it now. They're in their thirties, so you get to that age when you get into your thirties when you actually have conversations with your parents and you can remember stuff. And they talk about that and they remember the movies and the people and the experience of being in that old building. They're still convinced it was haunted. They tell stories.

CP: So, sort of the beginning of the OSU experience I think is actually at Linn-Benton. You decided to go back to school at some point?

PT: Yeah, I was thirty-two years old and my girls were getting to the age—you know, Lebanon, like I said, there's a lot of really good things about the community, but one of the things that was kind of difficult about them, about the community, was I felt that the high school there didn't push furthering education, and I realized that the exposure the kids were having, that would be something that they would consider. So, it was one of the many things that convinced me that I should go back to school so that the girls would see that this is what people do. And I had never finished up at Chemeketa, so I went back to LB and had to start all over again.

And it was one of the best experiences of my life, because it was really, it was a really good school and they put up with people like me who have businesses and kids and they were able to work around a lot of that, and I could go up to professors and I'd say "there's no way I'm going to make this, I've got a kid, you know, I've got to pick three kids up from school this afternoon, all the afternoons here, because my wife is working in Salem. There's no way she can do it. Let me shut this off so it doesn't happen again [turns cellphone off]. And they would all work with me. It was great. I'd say "okay, what do I need to do to get an A?" and they'd say "well, if you can't do attendance, then you need to do this."

But I had a philosophy professor who knew I was into movies, and I was doing, I forget what philosophy it was, but he says "I want you to do a paper on the philosophy of movies. You don't have to come to class, but you're going to sit down with me once a week and have lunch and you're going to tell me what you're doing, and then I want a paper at the end of it." "Sure, alright." So, I had to write a paper on the philosophy of film and how philosophy is portrayed in modern cinema and foreign films. Gee, that was rough...not at all. So, I handed him a twenty-eight page manifesto when it was all over, and he reads it, hands it to me—he made me sit there while he read it—and he read it, he's circling stuff, hands it back. He says "alright, cut it down to three." I go "you're fucking kidding me. Really, you want me to knock it down to three? I just, you know"—he goes "no, you did good, this is what I wanted. This is exactly what I wanted."

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Anyway, so he said "knock it down to three. Oh, by tomorrow morning." "Shit." Alright, so I knocked it down to three and I handed it to him, he goes "okay, you're now going to present this. You're going to present this to my 101 class." "What?" He goes "yeah. Have fun with that." So, I presented this to all of his 101 classes as basically showing these kids, since I was in my thirties at the time, so there was a certain degree of authority that I was visited with, whether I liked it or not, had thrust upon me by just age. But anyway, the idea was to show these kids that philosophy wasn't boring old books that collected dust, you know; old white guys talking about how they feel about existentialism. He actually wanted to make something that's relevant to them. I didn't realize that at the time, because I was stupid, but so that's what he did.

So, ten years after graduating from—I didn't even graduate, but from getting out of LBCC, Tom would still drag my happy ass back to his 101 classes and have me give that same fucking presentation. Ten years after I had left he would still get ahold of me and say "hey listen, I got a group of kids that I'm having a little trouble convincing them that philosophy is interesting, so could I ask you to come in"—"yeah, alright, fine." So, I would go in and show them clips and do that presentation. So, that was fun.

At the time, I was writing for the *Commuter*, which is the LBCC paper, and I had an editor, Marie Oliver, who figured out that I actually could put a couple of words together without making a total mess of it, and had me writing quite a bit. And I won several collegiate journalism awards with my essays and the like. And from that came an offer from OSU. So, the

Barometer at OSU was not having a good time of it, so they decided it would be fun to bring in an older student to try to take it over and pull it up by its bootstraps. So, Jack Josewski, raging alcoholic, but smart, really smart, he had just done some work for *People Magazine* that was actually really good. So, he sits me down and he says "hey, I want you to come over to OSU." I said "no, I'm not ready, I haven't finished up what I'm doing at LB and I really like the school and I do not feel like throwing myself into the jaws of the beaver college quite yet. I'd like to get my kids a little older." And he said "let me show you something here." So he pulls out, he goes "this is this week's issue," he says, "see this? This is the front page. This is everyone's salary starting at the president on down." He said "this is going to piss a lot of people off. You want to be part of this?" I said "Fuck. Alright, fine."

So, what Jack was doing is he was going around and getting older guys—and at the time, I was thirty-five—and he was getting older guys with some experience in life to bring in and hold the upper editorial positions. So, he brought me in as a wire editor; soon they figured out I knew my way around a camera, threw me in the darkroom, and then when he eventually drank himself out of his editorship, I stepped in and was editor of the *Barometer*. And we had a lot of really good, smart kids that were part of that. It was fun as a photo editor; I had my own office and every once and a while my girls, one of them—you know they were in high school at the time—they would pop in and they would come in and do their homework in my office while I'm out working. So, they would be in there.

And a kind of a weird thing happened, is I had a bunch of my, you know, it would be my girl, one of my girls and maybe her and a friend, and then I remember one day I opened up the door and the place was just lined with all these young kids doing homework, and it's like okay, what the hell happened here? But it was just kind of a weird place because it was a quiet—and I guess my paternal whatever, magnetism or whatever the hell it was, was comfortable for them. So, it was kind of interesting that sometimes I'd come back from a meeting or from a shoot or from a class and I'd open my door and I'd have to wade through all these little bodies laying there reading and writing. It was kind of a strange experience. And every once in a while one of them would be working for me.

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But the *Barometer* was—we won a lot of awards. We did really well with that. We...god, we pissed a lot of people off, which was of course half the fun. But Jack was fearless. Alcohol will do that for you, but he was fearless, but he was really smart. He was a really smart guy. And he would drag me along on the more, I want to say dangerous, I'm not sure that's the right word, but the more stickery assignments. We had a lot of stuff come up that didn't shine a bright light, a positive light, on the university, and we would follow it up until the very end and there were times that we had CNN calling us and the Admin building calling us, telling us that we've done everything wrong, we can't run that story, meanwhile CNN is wanting to know if we have any information on this event or that event. It was a great time to be doing that.

And when we all left, Jack drank himself out of the job and he had to be replaced, I was the one who replaced him; I am not a political creature and someone that Jack had been grooming for quite a while to take over the editorship was in line to do that and I found that person to be underqualified for the position. So, I made it my personal mission in life to see that he didn't get the damn job. So, when I did that, Jack's political allies basically moved me along. But when I left, it was in better shape than when I arrived, so that was all I really cared about. I did a lot of work with a media committee where we made decisions on media content and we also handled complaints from the community and from both the college and the university about anything that happened in the paper; the paper, the yearbook, the radio, TV stations.

And I learned a lot, because I had a lot of good professors who also served on those boards. OSU is an amazing school. I've really loved being there, but most of what I learned wasn't in the classroom. So, what I learned in OSU was how to operate within this monstrous system. And I think if you showed a germ of interest or talent in that process, they were willing to bend over backwards to teach you more. And I think that was the main thing that I got out of that experience, was being able to operate in a system that's convoluted and so big it can't get out of its own way. And I was always very impressed. It's fun now, because I see a lot of the professors who are retired who come in here to see films, and I remember sitting at a board meeting talking about someone who fucked up, whatever it might be, and watching how vehemently they would defend their position over whether that was something that we should be getting involved in or not. And now, they're just nice, glad to see me, talk about their day and their health and then the weather. And it's almost surreal.

CP: Were you an English major?

PT: Sure. I was a Jon Lewis major.

CP: Oh, okay. That's good, because I want to talk about the culture of film at OSU during this time period, and I think a big, big part of that was the International Film Series. You actually reviewed films for the Barometer from that series for at least a little while. Do you want to talk about that film series and the impact that it made on the campus and the community?

PT: Actually it's funny; I'm writing an essay about this right now. So, I took a film class, it was youth culture in film, and this strange little New York Jew got up in front of the class wearing a shirt with cowboy hats on it, and he gets up there and I'm like who the fuck is this guy? You know, he's annoying and he's arrogant, and he was right and he was good. It took me about ten minutes to go [raises eyebrows and points off to the distance] alright, I like this guy. So, he was doing the International Film Series at the time, and technically it was not going as well as he had hoped. They were dealing with crappy sixteen millimeter stuff; the films they were getting, the prints that they were getting was sixteen millimeter prints, had been spliced together by four year olds or something like that, with using paste.

[0:35:43]

And so, he was dealing—the film was in such bad quality and the projectionists were fairly inexperienced that it was just a deadly combination for putting on a great presentation. Plus it was shown in a classroom that was not conducive to comfort. And because of that, Jon was very willing to work with me to see the Avalon happen, and he did. He—at the time, I had the Lebanon theater, the Kuhn; he and his two boys, who were about the size of Beanie Babies back then, would come out, we'd throw a board over the armrests of the projectionist chair, Guy and Adam would sit on that and then they'd have a bucket of popcorn between them. And because it was on an old school projection booth, Jon was watching his kids and I'd have to be watching the film. And so, Jon and I would talk about films, the kids would just love seeing the movies, and I was—I just went to Jon's Distinguished Professor Award dinner and both of his boys were there, and I hadn't seen them in a while. I'm like, they're taller than me. It's like what the fuck happened to you? You were an annoying little teenager last time I saw you. And they both turned into wonderful young men now, and it's so fun to see them, and it's like damn.

So, from that Jon realized I might actually know how to run a theater, and then he sort of talked to me about moving the film series out of there and actually putting into a decent facility. So, I said, hey, I've got an idea.

CP: That's interesting.

PT: So, Jon booked for me for the first eighteen months. So, when we opened the Avalon, he's the one who called the exhibitor and said – excuse me, called the studios and distributors, made the deals, brought in the movies, 35 millimeter.

CP: Did you know Peter Copek at all?

PT: Oh shit, I hope I don't. I'm not remembering the name.

CP: He was one of the co-founders of the series; he was the head of the Center for Humanities. He died in the early 2000s.

PT: No. I know of the name but I don't think he and I have ever interacted.

CP: Well, before we get to that I want to ask another question about film culture in this town, and that's about the State Theater and the Whiteside Theater. The State Theater doesn't exist anymore. The Whiteside sort of does, but very different entities, yeah.

PT: If you look over there you can see the State sign that miraculously ended up getting taken at night from the rubble. No idea how that happened. The State Theater was—it was a sub-run house, which is what we'd call them, or a dollar theater. They made their money off of concessions and they were playing movies that had run their theatrical run and were already in video or very close. So, you pay a buck, go see *Toy Story*, and they made their money on the popcorn. And for

some reason the powers that be thought it was much more important that Citizens Bank have eleven parking spaces, that I have never seen filled, instead of Corvallis having a sub-run movie theater. Silly me. But yeah, it came down, and most of us were not at all happy about that.

And so, sub-run got erased from the cultural landscape of Corvallis, which is unfortunate, because I think there's a very big sub-run mixed cinema available to people who do not have the desire or the means to pay full price for the ticket, and I've always felt that was important. I mean, here at the Darkside we do a free night to bring in people who normally wouldn't have a chance to come up and see a movie. We have really cheap shows. We do a lot of film festivals that are free to the community where people can come and sit, and on a frame you see a movie. And when I watched the backhoe knock down the walls of the State it wasn't necessarily a nostalgic pang that I felt, although that's certainly there. It was I realized that we were erasing a certain element of culture from this community, and no one was going to fucking get it until it'd been gone about ten years, then they're going to wonder, hey, you know, wasn't there a place where we could have seen that for, like, a buck? So, I was very sad to see the Whiteside go—excuse me, hello Mr. Freud, your slip is showing—anyway, to see the State go, I felt that that was an important part of the cinematic culture, cinema culture of Corvallis.

[0:40:57]

CP: And the Whiteside, a grand movie palace that's searching for an identity now.

PT: So yeah, the Whiteside. So, before I built the Avalon, or, the Darkside in '05, and the Whiteside closed I think in '01, was it? I don't remember. Something like that.

CP: Yeah, I think so.

PT: I had my ticket, *Lord of the Rings*. My daughter and I went to see it there on the last showing, the last night before they closed it down. And after that I spent three months going through the building trying to figure out a way to do this there, but I couldn't make the numbers work. I had a couple people willing to invest, philanthropically more than an actual business pursuit, and those all fell apart, and every time I got close to it, it became a nightmare. And I knew the building very well structurally, and the infrastructure as well. You know, I crawled in the ceiling, I did all of that stuff. I brought in contractor friends of mine to tell me what electrical and plumbing it needed, and I realized that I did not have what it would take to make that. I was pretty pissed about that because I thought it'd make wonderful cinema.

And actually I'd come up with a plan to turn it into a triplex, which is basically what they did with Hollywood in Portland. It was the same design idea that I had. The Hollywood in Portland is still amazing; it's still a really nice theater as far as 2001, with a new owner. So, that's one of the reasons I named this the Darkside, because I didn't get a chance to do the Whiteside. So, the Whiteside was owned by Act III, which sold it to Regal, and Regal gave it to Whiteside Theater Association, or Whiteside Theater Foundation. Brad Bird, the filmmaker who did *The Incredibles*, he's an animator, is from Corvallis. So, he got in the middle of it and got it to them.

Brad Bird and I were communicating for about a year, because he said "I want you to do something," and I said "I am in this business, I do not know about nonprofits, I do not know about anything except this business. I've been doing this long enough and I have enough resources available to me I can tell you there's no way we're going to make that work as an operating cinema, so we need a plan B." And he said "well, there's a foundation owner, they've got a nonprofit status and they want to take it over." I said "that's all very nice, but look around the country at the history of places that have been taken over by foundations, by people who do not know the business." He didn't care.

So, I'm—I remember it, I still remember doing this, I'm pulling on my coat and I get a call and it's him and he says "hey, I just arranged for—I used a little of my clout and got Regal Cinemas to give the theater to the Whiteside Foundation." And I said "oh, really?" He goes "oh, I thought you'd be a little bit more enthused." I said "yeah, I bet you did. Well, talk to you later." And I think I threw my phone at that point. I wasn't rude to him, which I think that speaks well of me.

[0:45:11]

So, I come down here and the first thing I see: "thank you Brad Bird" on the front of the building. So, I called Brad back and I said "if you have any pull with these people, tell them to take that down, because what that means is you are now

financing it, and if they're trying to get funding, no one's going to give them any money if they think you're the one doing it, so get that down as quickly as you can." And within ten minutes, it was down. I had left him a message, I didn't talk to him. So, he picked up the voicemail and immediately got that pulled off the marquee.

So, at that point the Whiteside started shifting and moving. They were granted a lot of latitude that I would not have been granted if I were doing it as a business, but because they were nonprofit, a lot of stuff that I never saw as possible, because of my business perspective, they managed to make happen. One of the things that always bothered me about that building is its main structure. The main structure is concrete columns, but it's filled in with bricks. And the trouble with the way those buildings were built; I was in San Francisco shortly after the '98 earthquake, so I saw a lot of this, but this wonderful, the framework will hold up nicely, chances are it will never go down, but it'll do this [holds up both arms parallel and moves them together side-to-side]. And as the framework shifts, it exerts pressure on the bricks, and those bricks will shoot out like watermelon seeds. Kind of unhandy when you have a lot of people in the auditorium, to have that shit going down.

So, when I was looking at the building, they told me that I'd have to put chain-link over all of that, and I had no problem with that, that made perfect sense to me, especially after having seen what happened. I was down in San Francisco during an aftershock and I heard what sounded like someone taking a sledgehammer to the side of a car and when I looked at the car, a brick had shot out of a building and it was half into the metal fender, about a quarter pound. And I had visions of that every time I went to the theater. We're not terribly seismically active here, but we are. We're still seismically active. So, I of course immediately had three hundred thousand dollars to do all this. Well, they got grandfathered out of it; they didn't have to do it. Whether that's a good idea or not I guess depends on your perspective. Yes, we saved the building, but you know, twenty-five people died during the last tremor because they got hit by flying bricks, but we saved the building.

So, I had, you know, we have a complete blackout policy on talking to the press about the Whiteside. Anyone comes to me and says "what do you think about the Whiteside doing X, Y and Z?" I will say "I have no comment," and I still don't, because they were, I was—it's petty, but I was pissed off that they managed to push through a bunch of crap that they never would have let me get away with, which, you know, good on them. But the other thing about it is that these people had no idea what the hell they were doing, and they were quoting me and I was— "when the hell did I say that?"

So, we had a press blackout so they could never say "Paul said this," because the only thing Paul ever said was "I have no comment." And I think it created a bit of, I won't say acrimony, but there was a little tension between us, especially as this place was starting to take off. And eventually it became obvious that they were going to find their own little niche in this town and probably the biggest effect they were going to have on me is occasionally I would lose a little bit of gross on a night where they're doing a big event, and I'd have all their fucking cars in my parking lot.

But anyway, the point is, is that we all found our own level. The thing about Corvallis is that we—the town is a very conservative town; business-wise it's extremely conservative. Trying to do anything here that's radical is—it doesn't happen. With the legalization of marijuana, I am going to be extremely interested to see how we deal with that in this community. But the thing about the Corvallis community is that we—everything moves very slowly. That's bad if you want to open, oh I don't know, an art cinema, but it's good when there are problems that need to be solved without pyrotechnics, because it allows you to move slowly and deliberately.

[0:50:19]

So, everyone kept their mouth shut. I actually fired someone because they spoke to the press. And we did a Kickstarter last year and they actually gave us a very large donation, which didn't hurt the process of reconciliation, not that we had anything to reconcile, but still, we now coexist very comfortably. I'm a tech head, I know most of this equipment inside and out. I had a friend who was doing a presentation there who became very oblivious, very quickly, that the tech person they had at the time was not, you know, Nikola Tesla. This guy was not really grasping how difficult this particular situation was. It was an interesting connection between the computer and the projector, which I'd done here successfully many times. So, the person who's putting this on, who's paying a lot of money to have the building, he called me and he said "I need a big favor, I need you to be in Starbucks, so if shit goes sideways you can come running up here and fix it." And I said "they don't want me in their booth, this is the Whiteside, they fear me, if I show up there, they're going to throw me out." He says "I will make sure you get in the booth, you don't worry about that. I just need you there with your cellphone on the counter so if something goes crazy, you can come up here and help me make it work." So, I sat there and

drank lattes. I was on my computer like everyone else in Corvallis for two hours while he did his show, and I never got called. I guess everything went well. But they're doing their own thing, I'm doing my thing and we're all getting along.

CP: Well, on to the Avalon then. Now, am I interpreting this correctly that kind of the germ of the idea emerged out of these conversations with Jon Lewis—

PT: Yes.

CP: --And sort of transporting the International Film Series from a campus entity to a business?

PT: Yep. Yep, it...

CP: Had you thought about opening an art cinema in Corvallis before then?

PT: Yeah, I'd been doing first run for a long time and was really starting to hate it. We got three and a half weeks out of *Dumb and Dumber*; I think after realizing that that movie did so well for so long, that I really needed to start doing something else or else suicide was starting to look good. So, I loved art film and Jon was willing to help with his connections, and I knew how to swing a hammer. So, the Blackbeard's building, which is now the Tap Room, but the Blackbeard—or Sky High—and Blackbeard's was a mercantile; was a junk store. And this kid, Alan Ayres, bought it. Kid; he was, shit, I don't know, he was probably early twenties. So, he bought it, he bought this building. And I came to him, I said "I want to build an arthouse," and he goes "oh, that sounds kind of cool. Here, have a lease." I said "don't you want to check on this?" "No, you sound alright, here, go ahead and do it." So, I signed the lease. It took us six months and we built a hundred and twenty-one seat, single screen movie theater with a 35 millimeter and a snack bar. Opened September 12th, 1997.

CP: And you did pretty much all the retrofitting by yourself, is that correct?

PT: Yes. Boy howdy. My first wife remembers that I had a fever of a 101 and I was working at the top of a three-level scaffolding, and we both had the flu, so Grandma came over to sit with the kids—I think it was Grandma—and Tam and I, Tam was on the floor with the dog in a sleeping bag and I was working, because she didn't want me up there without anyone else in the building. So, I'm up there working, I think I'm putting in wiring or whatever, I forget what the hell I was doing, and she's down there trying to stay awake and watching me, and if she fell asleep, the dog would bark if I fell. And we did it. We got the damn thing built and open. And Jon booked movies.

CP: You talked about the conservative culture of business in Corvallis; I assume that that played into trying to get this place up and running.

[0:55:19]

PT: I have friends who are contractors of various stripes, and none of them wanted anything to do with trying to do work in Corvallis. They said that the permit process and all of that was a clusterfuck of epic proportions and they did not want to get in the middle of it. "Gosh, sorry we can't help you, however I can recommend someone in the area who is good, who knows how to deal with the city." And so, I used some very good local people who did a lot of work for me, and I think I owe some of them money still. Anyway, we got it built. My daughter Leah, at the time, shit, she was fourteen, fifteen, she was doing very well in school but socially she wasn't. Her grades were good but she was having some difficulty with the other students. So, we cleared it that two days a week she would come work with me at the theater, building it, and she would get credit at school for it. So, I taught her how to do sheetrock and how to mud a wall and how to do texturing. She got pretty good at moving that broom around, too. And she would come in two days a week and help me do it. When it was over, that kid had a lot of pride in that place when it opened up. She still does.

And I have a policy about not hiring family in any way, shape or form. I don't hire family, nothing good ever comes of it, but she I hired. She was the only one that I would let work there, because she earned it with sweat and blood and everything. You remember all the stuff, like her falling through the floor when we were putting in the projection booth, because one of the boards that I put across slipped and she actually fell down and her feet went through the sheetrock. She was hanging there and I was telling her "please don't move, don't move," because if she had caught a nail when she tried to pull her leg up, it would cut her open. And she's in there and she's just crying and she says "I'm so sorry, I didn't mean

to break anything." It's like "oh shit honey, its sheetrock, I can fix that in ten minutes. We're just going to get you out of here without you getting hurt." And I remember slowly dragging her out. She was a big kid, right now she's six feet tall, but I remember at the time dragging her out of there and her just being so sorry that she had broken the sheetrock, and it's like "am I that much of an asshole that you really think that I care about the sheetrock over your health? Now you're going to learn how to patch sheetrock, it's not that hard. Come on, let's get it done before we go home." But she got a lot of mileage out of that, she got a lot of pride out of that. And those were some of the best years of my life with the kids.

CP: You mentioned Jon Lewis booking films for you, is that important because it was one less thing that you had to do? Or was there something more to it, the process of booking a film?

PT: Jon had contacts in the studios because he had been booking films for the International Film Series. So, he had people that he knew so he could call Zeitgeist, or IFC, or any of these other ones and say, "hey, listen, we want to play this movie." The one slight miscalculation is that the people who run the educational side of studios, they're not the people who run the exhibitors' side of the studios. So, you very quickly learn to hate the same people that I've always hated, and we had a lot of fun with that. I remember he was writing a book, and he calls me and he says, "Alright, I need a quote, I need a quote about exhibitors." He goes, "What's the worst fucking studio you've ever worked with?" And I said, "I'm not going to answer that, I still have to work with these people." He said, "Come on, give me something." And I said, "No, I'm not going to shoot myself in the foot. You know I love you to pieces and I hope your book is successful, and I'm not going to do it at the expense of my ability to make a living." "Just make something up, just, I need to have a quote." And I said, "No, I'm not going to do it," and the guy was pissed at me for that. But I think he made me buy lunch the next two times we got away. But anyway, he—so, this is what he did: He managed to – he would look at the films that we wanted, bring them in, and he did alright.

[1:00:00]

But after eighteen months I realized that I needed a theatrical booker, and a friend of mine recommended one who I spoke to, and I brought him in, and I said, "Jon, you're fired." And I think he was crying with relief, but no, he was delighted. But it's like, to this day he's — he always comes in, he doesn't pay because he earned his stripes the hard way. But that was basically where he came in. Plus, we were friends, you know. And we wanted to see it work. And the first few years, the Avalon, we have no idea why the damn thing survived. It shouldn't have. Everything went wrong that could have, and somehow it became fairly successful after a while. I was making a pretty good living, we were getting a lot of really good films, we were doing very well. And then at that point Carmike opened a multiplex, a twelve-plex, a mile and a half away, and we lost half of our gross.

And that's when we realized that Darkside was going to have to come into existence. Rather than having one big screen that we have for one product, we needed three screens that we could use three products in, and diversify, and then bring in more money. We still are just now starting to gross what we did at the Avalon in its best years. So, we are just now crawling up to that point. But Jon has been part of that all the way around, because he's good with advice, he's good with making his—he makes his students come down and watch movies and pay for them [laughs]. Probably shouldn't have put that in there. But no, he's—aside from being a really good friend, he also, he loves this shit as much as I do, if not more, and it gives him an incentive to see that this continues. And he doesn't know business, he's not rich, but he did everything he could with the power that he had to make this thing work. And I will never know everything that he's done.

But it was kind of funny sitting there at his Distinguished Professors Award dinner, and I'm sitting at the table with him, I realize fuck, I'm the only non-academic here. I am an idiot. I never graduated from OSU. I never got my degree. I built my theater instead. And I'm sitting here and I'm looking at him and I realize that this is all great and it's very significant, but the most—the biggest contribution I think he's given to film in this community is that without him the Avalon never would have taken off, which would not have led to this. The fact we have an art house in Corvallis at all has to do with me looking at the guy with that weird shirt with cowboy hats on and then saying maybe this guy can teach me something, and then fuck the program, I just took everything I could from him. I didn't worry about my degree, I didn't worry about anything. When I got done taking classes from him, I dropped out and built theaters.

CP: So, the Darkside came about as a sort of a response to Carmike. Had you been thinking about expansion before then, or is it a sort of a necessary reaction to a change in the community?

PT: We had a good gig at the Avalon. Alan, who owned the building, was very easy to work with. And people knew where we were. The building had its warts; there were a lot of things that were difficult about it, but we had that wonderful picture window that opened up to the street and the lobby was colorful. And at night all the lights were on and you would look in there and it would be whoa, what the hell is that? We had that sign there in the window. And it was a really good set-up. And we were playing one film at a time, sometimes two, and we were able to bring in some really good product. We brought in *Life is Beautiful*, *Amélie*, movies like that, that because they had subtitles, the Regal wasn't going to touch them. They had a four-screen, so they had enough first-run product to fill.

Meanwhile, Carmike comes in with three times the screens that Regal had, and so they've got to fill them, so they start going after our product. And they're predatory, they did not give a shit about what happened to us, and they actually were fairly glib about what was happening to our little venture. But here we are.

[1:05:20]

CP: So, it was expand or die, basically.

PT: Adapt or perish. Darwin would have been proud.

CP: Tell me about finding a location for the Darkside and retrofitting it.

PT: Bob Baird, who owns the Book Bin, he and I were at some event, I forget what it was, and he comes up to me and he says "I have seventy-five hundred square feet with no windows. Who do you think might be interested in that?" Here we are. I spent a year building it. I was the contractor, hired a bunch of people who knew nothing about contracting or about doing anything that involved construction and taught them, one step at a time. We used twelve hundred sticks of twelve-foot two-by-fours in these walls. The reason I know that is because every one of them had to come up the elevator shaft because we couldn't get them up the stairs.

So, much to the chagrin of Bob Baird, when he wasn't in the building, we would run the elevator up to the third floor, we'd force open the doors on the first floor and put down a platform; we'd force open the doors on the second floor and I would fling the two-by-four up, a kid up there would grab it, drag it in. Every one of those twelve-footers came in that way. I know because I did all the flinging.

And the city of Corvallis, they didn't make it easy. There were a few of the inspectors whom we wished a great deal of ill will upon. There were many who we did not, who did everything they could to help us out. Most of the subcontractors, most of the contractors who did the various work around here were amazing, awesome people, and the ones who weren't, we all wished that they would die in a fire. In other words, it's like every other construction job: it doesn't matter what you do, you're going to be dealing with idiots at some level. Officious bureaucrats are part of it, and they can be fairly truculent on a good day. And it's a construction project, it doesn't matter whether it's a theater, a restaurant, a marijuana grow facility, whatever it is, you're going to be dealing with the same things. You have the regulatory landmines that explode all around you every time an inspector walks in; suddenly you have to spend ten grand more to be in compliance. All this stuff is all part of it. And my second wife and I did it, we got through it and we got this place open. It opened on April Fools' Day, 2005.

CP: I want to go back to the film projector bit for a minute.

PT: Sure.

CP: You've written a couple of pretty interesting essays about some of the engineering feats you had to pull off to show films in your—one involving a periscope and another finding a way to show a single film in two theaters at the same time.

PT: Yeah. A very popular film came out, I won't say which one, and the studio got ahold of me and said "do you have a hundred seat auditorium? Because that's the minimum we're putting this in. You need to have a hundred seats or we're not giving it to you." I said "hell yes, I have a hundred seats." I had fifty seats. "You bet." It was the highest grossing film we ever played here. So, I get done with that, get off the phone, it's like "shit." So, I had to build what was an interconnect, and basically what happened is the film came out of one projector, went through a dancer reel to take up the slack, or produce slack, and then went into the next projector. And it was regulated by a ballast resistor. In this case, the ballast

resistor was a series of lightbulbs. So, in order to control the screen, the speed, you had to unscrew lightbulbs or screw them in, to affect the resistance across the load.

[1:09:54]

And when I first set it up, the workers went in and said "oh hell no, we're not touching that. You're on your own." And then after a while they were like "okay, this is actually kind of fun." So, projectors change speed as they would cool down and warm up, so you would start the movies simultaneously with both projectors starting and one always took longer to get up to speed than the other. So, the one that's dragging behind you would start adding resistance to the one that's keeping speed so that it would slow down. So, you would start screwing in lightbulbs to produce more resistance. So, Projector A would start to slow down enough and so Projector B wouldn't be snapping the film. And then when they both got up to speed, they were pretty close. So, we had a dancer reel that would go down and hit a switch, which would slow down one projector, and then when that hit a switch it would speed it up, slow it down, and it moved about one movement per minute. So, we'd sit there and we'd watch this. And one employee said "you know, it's like sitting there watching a campfire. You've got the bulbs blowing and this thing's just moving." And I left part of the mechanism up there just so that every once in a while we'd look at that and we'd go "oh yeah, digital is a lot easier than this."

But anyone who runs an independent movie theater, more than half your job is making shit up on the fly, whether you're lying to an exhibitor or to a distributor or you have to fix stuff. 35 millimeter film sits on big platters and it feeds out of the center and wraps around a cord, and they're run by motors. Every once in a while the motor would die and you'd have to spend the whole movie moving that thing by hand and keeping it in sync, and so we often had to stand there and fling that film by hand.

And you'd blow—when we opened the Avalon, this is back in the days of mono, when you can get away with having a mono house, mono meaning single-channel sound, so we had built it to have mono in; one big ass speaker behind the screen. And it's time to open; oh shit, the amp didn't arrive. No amp, tonight we open, we don't have an amp. So, I went down to RadioShack and bought a PA amp and shoved it in the hole and wired it in, I dialed it in and the damn thing worked. So, we opened with a RadioShack fifty-dollar PA amplifier. But this is the stuff you do.

I mean, we do film festivals here; we do a lot of film festivals for OSU and for other people, and you get all formats. One of the funniest things that happened here recently is—all DVDs and tape come on, you know, there's PAL format, which is European, Asian, and there's NTSC, which is the North American format. So, they'll send us a PAL disc, which is not compatible with any North American machines. Let's hear it for the MacBook Pro; they'll play anything. So, about half the time, we were slapping in a MacBook, jacking that in and playing it through that. Luckily my porn files didn't come up in the middle of the—but anyway, so we had one a while ago and they sent us the disc and of course we plug it in and it's PAL, even though it said NTSC. It's like "oh, shit." So, we had to pull up the player and jack in a computer. Alright, not a problem. We put it in there, and it's a Korean film, which is lovely, a lot of really good Korean cinema out there; the bad news is all the titles were in Korean. And it's like "well, how the fuck do we turn on the English subtitles?"

So, I'm looking at Sebastian and he's like "ahh!" Then I'm like "ahh!" And so, we have the menu up and I'm looking at the porthole and this very ancient—that's probably not too kind—this Asian lady, would be a better way to put it, she walks up to the screen and she points. So, we move the cursor down and we click on that and then the next menu comes up and then she points and then we click on that and the English subtitles magically appeared. Everyone applauded. It was—so yes, when you do anything like this, you need to be, you have to channel Rube Goldberg, because you have to be able to just make stuff up.

And we, I had a very colorful employee; when you blow a bulb in the projector, which usually is quite a percussive experience, because you hear it, the projectors are actually armored, because when those bulbs blow there's a lot of drama. And you got to give it ten minutes to cool down before you can put your hands in it to replace the bulb.

[1:15:18]

So, we had a full house, it was in Auditorium 1, and the bulb blows. Shit. We all heard it. And so, I go running in and I said "alright, we got ten minutes," and I looked at Flynn, I said "get your ass in there and keep them entertained for ten minutes." He goes "what do you want me to do?" I said "I don't really care. I have to deal with this, you're going to deal

with that." "Okay." So, it cools down enough that I can pull the top off, I'm in there cleaning up the glass, I have a—usually you have six or seven used bulbs that you can put in, so I'm cranking and it's like "what the fuck is that noise?" I'm hearing a noise that I haven't heard before. Most of running a 35 millimeter projection booth is audio. You got to be able to hear, and I'm like hearing a noise and it's like oh shit, I figured the other two projectors were having a problem. And I'm looking around and then I looked out and I realized it was coming from Auditorium 1, and there's Flynn standing in front of the room, and we're full, and he's reading from a book of Leonard Nimoy's poems, and they're horrible, but he's having fun with it and everyone in there is just having a great time and they're yahooing and yelling. So, I struck the lamp to burn it in, to make sure that it was right, and I let him finish the book because people were just having a great time. We were late getting on the second show and then he came out of there and we rolled. And they applauded, and I said "you done good, son."

But I mean, this is—we had a lot of experiences like that where you just kind of make stuff up just to make it through. You know, it's trite and it's corny, but the show must go on. It really does. It isn't—giving up isn't an option. There's been a few times where literally we're completely out of options, but I mean you go into the booth, equipment is crammed everywhere. It's like the fucking space shuttle, because if anything goes wrong, we've got prosumer-quality processors that you can buy for your living room, and there are more times than I care to admit where we've actually had to yank out the professional processor, I've got alligator clips coming out of my ears, and we've jumpered everything together and we run the damn movie off of a home Sony processor, because we're out of options. And it's awesome, it really is. I mean, at the time you're like "oh fuck, oh fuck, oh fuck," but then when it's all over it's like "yeah, we rock. This is pretty good."

And when something catastrophic like that happens, whether you blow a bulb or you lose a processor or you blow a power supply and you're off the screen for what to you seems like hours, but for the audience it's like three minutes, four minutes. And they leave and they thank you for the show and you realize they didn't even notice it. Done good. But you know, this is what we do here.

CP: We've talked a lot about film and a little about digital. There's a big moment in the history of this cinema that came about, I believe last year; the Kickstarter campaign you referenced briefly. Want to tell me about that?

PT: We were told by the movie companies that we had two years where we were going to be able to get occasional prints, and we were using another digital system that was all the small studios. So, like IFC, Magnolia, the Weinstein Radius, this company was able to give us that product in digital. However, the big studios wanted nothing to do with it. Warner Bros, Focus, Fox Searchlight, they would not use the system. Everything had to be DCP, which is Digital Cinema Projection, which is the standard. So, DCP is what we use, which we have in our auditoriums, in two of our auditoriums now. The third one is the older system. Well, okay, well we could use the older systems and then we had the 35 millimeter, so we were good to go. And then the memo came out; "kidding, you have two weeks, and then you're going to have no more 35 millimeter." And Joey and I, Joey my manager, he's been with me for eight years, we went "ohh shit." And I got ahold of my ex-wife, who's half owner of the business here, and I said "ohh shit." And we were done. There was nothing we could do about it.

[1:20:10]

And then we said "well, you know, there's a strange thing called crowdsourcing." So, my life became learning about that. So, I read about it, I went to visit theaters, I talked to other people about it, I talked to people who had successful Kickstarters, people who didn't have successful kickstarters, what other theaters had success and how they did it. I traveled, I got on the phone and I emailed. I spent two months learning everything I could about this. And then Joey and I sat in that little red chair there, the red bench in the snack bar, and we pushed the Go button. And we asked the community for forty-five thousand dollars to convert one of our auditoriums over to DCP. We hit that goal in fifteen days of a thirty-day Kickstarter, and then it kept coming up. So, after we got done paying off the hookers and our cocaine dealers—kidding.

So, we got enough money where we put in a brand-new projector in Auditorium 4 with a brand-new sound system. And we just installed, last week, a used DCP with a good sound system in 3. This is with money from the Kickstarter. And we have a hundred new seats in 3 and 4 with money from Kickstarter and we've paid help to install them, with money from the Kickstarter. So, we made enough over of what we shot for to, first of all, pay off Amazon and Kickstarter—the worst part about doing this was dealing with those two—and all the premiums. So, people got t-shirts, they got reels

of film, they got on-screen ads, they got free shows, you know, all the stuff is—and all of that. So, even after the smoke cleared, the net we had, the net profit from that was enough to put in two DCPs and a hundred new seats. And hookers and cocaine.

But that was the thing about it, is that we did so well, it was the first time we had ever had to ask the community for help, and I'm an arrogant prick on a good day, ask my ex-wives, but I'm not good at asking for help. I had, you know, "god damn it, I'm going to do this on my own and no one's going—I'm not going to need help from anyone, etcetera, etcetera," usual arrogant testosterone-driven bullshit that I spout from time to time. But we were done. We were done; there wasn't anything else that was going to happen. So, I actually, very humbly, had to say "we need your help," and the community said "well shit, what took you so long to ask? Here, have thousands of dollars." We had people who didn't want to deal with the Kickstarter who would come in and they'd give me a check and they'd say "please don't tell anyone you got this from us, because we don't want them hitting us up for money, but you do good stuff."

One of the coolest one of those is this guy comes in and he hands me a check [makes shocked expression]. I'm like "sweet wound of Jesus, what the hell did I ever do for you?" which I literally asked him, and he said "several years ago when my wife died, I came here almost every night." I said "yeah, I remember that." He said "you and your staff were always kind to me, because everywhere I went people were like 'oh, we're so sorry,'" and he goes "that's fine, and people mean well, but you get really fucking tired of it when you're dealing with a loss." He said "I came here and you were always nice to me," he said "you even stopped charging me for my popcorn after a while. If I bought a ticket, you gave me popcorn for free. And I just sold some property, I got some money, so here, some of it's yours." And now he's become a good friend, which is a lot of fun. We try to go out every once in a while and chug a beer.

And I had a kid, came in; messenger bag, grubby little messenger bag, and he comes up and he says "are you still trying to get money for a new projector?" "Yep." Reaches in his bag and he sets down a bunch of dollar bills, and I was hoping none of them had blood on them, but anyway, I said "what's this?" and he goes "oh, it's what I have." And I said "dude, we really, we're fine, we don't need to take your lunch money. I mean seriously, thank you, but we're good." He says "no, no, no, this is—I'm fine, I'm good, I'm okay." And I said "this is a lot more than I think you can afford, so why don't you just give me a few bucks and we'll"—and he goes "no, you're taking it."

I said, "but you need to tell me why," because I didn't remember him. And he says "a long time ago I came in here and I came to see a movie, I had just enough money to see a movie and it was raining, and when I came in I was wet, and when I was done, you gave me a coat." I said "oh, shit." He said "yeah, you went into your lost and found and you found a coat and you gave it to me." He said "I never forgot that." I was like fuck, I did.

[1:25:56]

And that happened at the Avalon once. We had a homeless guy, terribly articulate, spoke very well about film. Big. And he knew that he was imposing and he always held back when we had customers and he would come in and buy his ticket, and if he didn't have enough money I would pretend like "oh yeah, tonight it's only two bucks, go on in." He was smart, so he knew what I was doing, but we both played the game. And there were a few times where he would come in and my daughter would always just [makes ushering-in gesture and whispers] "go on, it's okay."

So, one time he came up and he did the same thing; he put a whole bunch of money and change on the counter, and it's like "I'm not taking that, fuck man, that's your drinking money, I'm not taking that." He goes [in stern voice] "yes you are." "Okay, I guess I'm taking your money." Now, this is someone who's a lot more used to pain than I am, and I'm looking at him and I go oh fuck, please don't kill me. We never saw him again after that. So, he was going somewhere. I guess he was leaving the area or whatever and he said "this is nothing compared." You know, for a second I tried to take like a five and a ten and say "okay, we're good." No, he didn't have that, said "take it all." And it was the only time that I saw the potential for him to get aggressive. And it was because I was not taking this money. All the other times, not even a hint of it, but this time it was like "I will fucking kill you if you don't take my money." Of course he wouldn't, but I mean it was like, my daughter was there so I actually had a moment where it was like I'm just going to do what this guy wants and get him out of here. But it was very strange how that played out.

And this kid, I didn't know who he was, I didn't remember him, but I remembered giving someone, you know, I probably do that twelve times a year. We have two lost and founds. We have a lost and found that's like a month and then it gets

stuffed in the other one and then it's a month. Because people will come in and they'll say "oh, two weeks ago I lost my scarf." Well, if you have a box with six months of stuff that's lost, forget it. So, we fill up a big box and then we take it over to Vina Moses and then they distribute it to the people who need it. So I mean, I just went into the one month plus box and yanked out a coat and gave it to him. Anyone would have done it. I mean, it's right there, it would have been stupid not to.

So, the community came out. It was fun, because when we made our goal with the Kickstarter, we all went up to the Motor Vu Drive In in Dallas, one of the few drive-in theaters left, and I know the owner. So, we sat out in the field in lawn chairs and watched a hideous movie, whose name I can't even remember, and we popped open a bottle of champagne, which of course violated all the rules at the drive-in, and we all had a—we all sat there and drank champagne and toasted the success of our Kickstarter out at the drive-in, which is where I started, out of a drive-in. And I actually ran this drive-in that we were at, I actually ran the Motor Vu. It was owned by my good friend.

So, it was very significant to sit out there and do that, and we were with these young people, these kids. You know, they're not kids; Joey's got two kids of his own, he's a mature adult and an amazing father, and Amanda's going into phlebotomy school and Sabrina's got three science degrees, Arthur's a graphic designer. So, these are kids chronologically, to me, but as far as adulthood, they're there. But you know, I'm sitting out there with these kids and I realize they really do not know the history of this industry and how far it has come. And that's fine. Let them watch the movies without having that shit clouding their head.

CP: Well, a couple questions as we sort of close-up here. I want to ask you about downtown Corvallis and the business community here. You've been part of it for eighteen years.

PT: Boy howdy.

[1:30:09]

CP: How would you characterize downtown and the people who inhabit it?

PT: The business people?

CP: Sure, well and those who patronize the businesses, I suppose.

PT: We're pretty close-knit. As much as we like to say that this is a community of fifty thousand people plus, it's actually a community of about twelve. Thousand, not twelve, although there are those who'd say. Seriously, the business community is very close-knit, it's very incestuous, we all know each other, we all know way more about each other than we should. A lot of businesses are connected, we all know each other's landlords and whether we can work with them or not, we know way more about each other's personal lives than we should. And mine, as you can imagine, is quite colorful, so through my most recent marital foibles I got to find out how many people actually knew about my life, which I found disturbing.

But it's a very cooperative community and I like that about it. Like I said, there are times when it's like everyone knows each other too well, but we cooperate well and there's an ethical fiber that seems to run through all of us. And those who don't embrace that tend to vanish pretty quickly. We don't fuck over our populations, we don't do that. We don't screw our customers and we certainly don't screw over other businesses. I've had a couple of interactions where I have inadvertently or unknowingly stepped on someone's toes, and I've paid for that for years and years and years. It doesn't matter how many times I apologize, I've done it. And so, there's an almost pachyderm-like memory with the stuff you do wrong. And I don't think that's necessarily a bad thing. I think for a lot of people it keeps them honest. But there is an integrity here that I have noticed by its absence in other communities.

CP: Well, the last thing I would ask you about is just the future and the future of the Darkside. You've got some momentum coming off of the Kickstarter, but you're also facing headwinds; it's never been easier for people to access information in their homes, less and less of the emphasis on going out and being part of a community. What is your hope or your vision of the Darkside, heading forward?

PT: Internet throttling. No, just kidding. No one wants that. When TV came out, it was the end of cinema. When color TV came out, it was the end of cinema. Still here. Cable TV came, cinemas are gone. Video, VHS came out, that's going to do it. Blockbuster is going to open up, all theater is going down. And indeed, there were impacts from each of these technological advances. There were impacts. Blu-ray, oh fuck, Blu-ray, High-Definition, that's the end of theaters. Still here. Still grossing a lot. VOD, Video on Demand, alright, Netflix is going to screw you. Nope, still here. Torrents; give me ten minutes, I can have any movie you want in 1080p. You know this as well as I do. We've had several server crashes where I've actually had to go onto my laptop and download a 1080p version and then load it up into there, and we pray to god Taiwanese subtitles or a ten-minute porn shot doesn't come up in the middle of it, but the fucking show must go on. And we've done that, we've actually had to do that, so I'm very familiar with torrents, I know how easy.

You know, in all seriousness, as much as I am capable, the fact is, is that I am acutely aware of how easy it is to get a torrent. We have shit internet here and still in ten minutes I can have a 1080p version of a movie when we need to play it until we get the server back up. It's usually it's quicker to download than it is to get tech support to actually log in and fix the damn thing. So, I mean we've done that, so I know that this is there. I do it. And we're still here.

[1:35:22]

So yeah, there is not a logic to why we are still here, why we are flourishing, why every year we are grossing more than the year before. I have no idea why we're still here. I honestly cannot tell you. Why do bumblebees fly? It's the same thing. But, you know, it still happens. There is no aerodynamic principle that applies to our particular soaring. I don't know how this works. Hopefully it's not going to be like Icarus. But anyway, the thing about it is what I think we offer here, and I think this is true of all cinema, is that we are an inexpensive way to get the hell the way out from the TV. And it's cheaper than just about anything else you can do. So, when you have an evening away, you're going to go to a theater. And something that I'm fond of saying, my other passion is motorcycles. Just a little bit. But one of the things I like saying, the thing I like about motorcycles and movies is that that's two things you can do with someone else and not have to fucking talk to them. And my ex-wives can attest to that. "Well, why don't we get an intercom so we can talk to each other while we're riding?" "Are you high? That's not happening."

Anyway, but I think that's another thing about theaters is that it is a shared emotional experience. It is not something, you know—a long time ago when dinosaurs ruled the earth and we didn't have recording, we didn't have VHS's, it was a cultural event when we all, at the same time, watched the final episode of *M*A*S*H*. We all were able to do that. You could feel it in the air. You knew that everyone was going to go home, you knew the streets were going to be empty, you knew the bars were going to be filled if it had a TV, because the last episode, or the first episode, or the significant episode, or they would be playing a movie. You know, the first time *Gone with the Wind* was on TV, holy shit the whole country shut down. I remember where I was when I watched the last episode of *House*. I was on the road, I was on my motorcycle, I was in Reno, at a shitty hotel in Reno and I watched the last episode of *House* with a thing of Chinese food in my lap.

And as much as we enjoy our Netflix, as much as we enjoy our torrents, as much as we enjoy our VOD, we still want to have that experience. I still go to premieres, because people are excited. I may not be too excited about the film, but people are excited. And that's not going to go away. There are not a lot of places where you have this communal emotional reaction to some piece of art. I went to see the new *Mad Max* and it was full of people and it was awesome. It was great. Oh, they were talking, some asshole had their cellphone and [mimes texting] and all that stuff and it was irritating, but it was awesome. It was what we go for. This is what we do this for. And that's not going away. It doesn't matter how easy it is to get a movie. You know, it's our main product, it's what we show. If we didn't have movies we wouldn't be here, that's true, but we have movies and you have this [gestures to theater lobby]. You have a place that is not your home.

You have a place where you don't have idiot teenagers who would rather be doing something else. We have people who work here who are actually glad to see you. You have an interaction. Chances are I know your name if you've been here a few times. If you liked a movie, or didn't, you can come and talk to me about it afterwards, you can talk to any of the employees. If you're a senior citizen and you're having kind of a bad day, we'll walk you to your seat; we'll make sure that you're alright. We don't give a shit if we have to make the whole line wait. And anyone who in the line doesn't like it, they can go to Carmike, because this is someone who needs a little extra time, so you can just chill the fuck out while we take care of this person, and you'll get the same attention when you get up there. And these are all great words, but this is our

ethic. This is really who we are. And I think that's the reason people gave when we did the Kickstarter, because this is really who we are.

[1:40:04]

And if we can't be this way, if we have to start doing business another way or we have to disconnect from our audience for whatever reason, then I'm going to repair motorcycles for a living, because that's the only other thing that really makes sense to me. We are—a lot of people say we're an anachronism. You know, we're an idea whose time has come and gone. I think in the sense of getting movies to the public, that's very true. We don't exist for that purpose anymore, but what we exist for, as a venue, to come and be outside of your normal existence, be in an auditorium where you are expected to shut up and respect the people around you and watch a movie. If you don't, you get to deal with me.

The movie's secondary. It's primary in business but it's secondary in the history of what we're doing now. We don't—we aren't the only source for news anymore, you don't come to the theater to see newsreels. You and I can watch that on our phones right now, we can bring up CNN or FOX or whoever and we can watch this on our phones, literally right now. So, you don't need to come to a theater for that. Cartoons, you can get cartoons anywhere. You don't need to come to the theater to see that. So, the days of the theater being the information bonfire around everywhere, around which everyone gathered to get, you know, War World II, their news about this, or the place you went to watch porn, because it wasn't available on the internet. Those days are gone, for now. But we are still a place where people gather.

The porn industry, as much as we joke about it, is actually—they technologically have pushed most of the advances that have happened in this industry. Porn is what made VHS popular, porn is what created the upgrades in presentation. There's a lot of stuff that was used in the porn industry to keep their expenses down that were actually magnificently clever, that most people will never know about. And it used to be that movie theaters were the only place you could get that. And so, as scummy as it was, that was yet another example of a place that you could go where you would get that.

Those days, for the most part, are gone, thank god, but every year up in Portland and in Olympia and at Seattle they do HUMP! Fest. HUMP! Fest is a porn film festival that's all amateur, each segment can only be five minutes long, and they're all submitted by local people, and a lot of times the actors are in the audience. It's emceed by Dan Savage, so he gets up there and talks. And I go every year. I'm not particularly fond of porn, but there is a magnificence to going into a theater that showed, you know, *Sound of Music* back in the day, and here we have five hundred people, most of them from our demographic, from our educational backgrounds, from our social status, all going in and sitting around together and watching XXX-rated porn. Most of it's absolutely hilarious. And you grab a beer, you sit there and you watch this. In the day it was titillation, of course, which is why you went. Now it's an event, because most of it's funnier than shit, so you can sit there and laugh.

And other professors from OSU go there. I'm not saying who, and no, not Jon Lewis, and we all go out and have a drink afterwards or go to the Indian restaurant and eat a lot of food, and we talk about what we just saw. But this is the thing, is that the cycle is coming back around, and for HUMP! Fest people are going to the theaters to watch porn. Not for titillation, but it's because it's you're not going to see this anywhere else, because the rule of this event is that, as Dan Savage put it so eloquently, "everyone here wants to be a porn star for the weekend, not for the rest of their lives, so if anyone's holding a phone, holding any type of recording device, even if it's off, we're going to take it from you, we are going to smash it in front of you and we're going to throw you out." And I watched him do it. And they have twenty guys who look like me standing up there with their arms crossed, and they have plants in the auditoriums to make sure if someone pulls up their cellphone, starts doing it, god help you if you walk in with Google glasses. But this is it.

[1:45:08]

So, what they have done, in essence, is they have brought the cinema back to the sixties. This is the only place you can absorb this product. This is the only place you can access this product, is in this theater on this night. It will never be on the internet. And people tell me that this is going to die, that cinemas are going to become a thing of the past. We're just getting warmed up. I think that there is an amazing future out there. There is an amazing future out there. And I'm very sorry for those who didn't see it and got out of it. And you know, a couple of them are happily retired, they're having a great time. But shit's just getting real. We're having some fun here. And I'm really grateful to be in the middle of it.

CP: Well Paul, I want to thank you. This is the 150th interview we've done and it's been certainly one of the more entertaining ones.

PT: Well, what do I do? I'm an entertainer, this is my job. So, you're very welcome, and thank you for considering me for the project.

CP: Of course. Best of luck for the future.

PT: I think we're going to be just fine.

CP: Great.

[1:46:26]