



Hillsboro Police Chief Ron Louie
Interviewed by Kim Mikkelson and Alyssa Romane
May 24, 2005

The following interview was conducted on behalf of the oral history program of Century High School. The interviewee is Ron Louie, and the interviewers are Alyssa Romane and Kim Mikkelson. The interview took place at the Hillsboro Police Department on Tuesday, May 24th, 2005 at 9 a.m.

(Chief Louie reads the research question aloud.)

Ron Louie: I got here in '92, but I can talk about some of the trends prior to that, just in general, without giving you a lot of numbers. You're doing historical stuff? I've got tons of material here. I think one way to start is with this article, which I'll give you. It talks about policing in Hillsboro and how things have changed. A lot of the material I have deals with just the past few years and some changes, but that's still good information for you to have. (He leaves the room to get some materials.) What this article talks about (and, for the record, I'm talking about "Pounding the Beat in a New Style," and this an Oregonian article from about a month ago). It's April, 2005, and the best way to describe change is . . .

A couple of things have changed. First of all, in the 1980s, the town of Hillsboro was around 32,000. Today, 2005, the town's over 80,000. And so it's always best when you describe the changes that have occurred to go with demographics. This deals with population, including ethnic makeup and where they're coming from. The demographics of Hillsboro in the 1980s were the V's and the Z's. Hillsboro was founded by people with the last name of V or Z. They were Dutch, Swiss, and European. So this area was founded, culturally, by people from that part of Europe. Today the demographics have shifted, and the town is over 20% Latino, primarily from Mexico, but not solely. You have this huge shift with Spanish-speaking and Spanish-surname families. It's always wrong to refer to people as Mexicans if they're not from Mexico, as you know.

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So when you take a look at what crime has changed, trends in crime . . . In the 80s, you have more "traditional" crimes - property crimes, and you also have crimes that were not reported in the 80s (in Hillsboro and everywhere else). This includes sexual assaults. Crimes against women were not reported. I was part of this team (starting police work in 1974) and I was part of the team that looked into sexual assault, assaults against women, at Stanford University. What we found is that many women were assaulted, but they didn't report it. Or they were ashamed to be assaulted. So there were crimes that occurred in the 80s and occur today, but today women thankfully are not as reluctant to come forward when they've been assaulted. That was a problem in the 80s, everywhere in the country.

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Another crime that didn't exist in the 80s exists every day in Hillsboro. That's all brand new. What other crime? (Interviewers guess ID theft, and he agrees.) Also domestic violence. It was not a crime to beat your spouse, to beat your wife. It was seen as a domestic, non-criminal thing. It occurred a lot. Also child abuse, crimes against children. They happened, but they weren't reported. So you've got to put this in the perspective that in the 1980s, it's not what occurred or didn't occur, it's what was

reported. In the 1980s, we went to the fights, but if it was domestic, even if there had been assaults (let's say the wife had a bloody nose), nothing happened because it wasn't seen as a crime. It was seen as a private issue between a man and a wife. And why do you think that was? The men were in power. Police departments were 100% men. Who made the laws? Men. So when you have that and then you have culturally that men were raised that way, that's how they responded.

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Now you already mentioned ID theft, which is huge today, and it's going to get worse. ID theft will get worse. It was hard to steal someone's ID in the '80s. You may have gotten their Social Security card. You see, there's a plus and a minus to computers. The plus is how easy it is and of course for you it's a part of your life, it's just normal. When I grew up, you even had to share a telephone (a party line, and he describes how it worked in his apartment building in San Francisco.) Now today, it's changed, and with computers, it's not only easier to get your identity, it's easier to misuse your identity quickly. We did not have the proliferation of credit cards and debit cards in the 1980s. So to summarize your question, the numbers are easy to get to. You can make general statements that I make. If you need specific numbers, we can get them from the archives. For me, I care about 1992 to today because I got here in 1992.

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Without giving you exact numbers, what has changed is ID theft, domestic violence, crimes against children, sexual assault . . . all those types of crimes that did occur, maybe even proportionally (though ID theft wasn't proportional) . . .

(He gives the interviewers the 2003-2004 Annual Report.)

High tech crimes (include) crimes against high tech firms, theft of their intellectual property, the theft of stuff that's not even on the market yet. That's brand new. What Hillsboro did in 1992-93 is we formed a High Tech Crime Unit, to work with the high tech companies to track down people who were engaged in theft. What's also changed is we're now a global community, a global economy. An example is some computer chips are made in Malaysia, and they're to be shipped to Hillsboro. When they don't make it to Hillsboro . . . Now Malaysia's a long ways away. How are we going to find those chips? We track them. And we tracked them to L.A., and then we lost them. They disappeared in L.A. We found they were being sold in Los Angeles. Then our detectives put together names of people involved in the tracking and then the shipment. At some point in time we realized the same last name of a guy that works for a shipping company was the same last name as somebody else we were looking at. He was an accountant. And then we found him down in Los Angeles, and he was the one that was stealing the chips. But that's the type of more sophisticated crime that we see more of.

III C 4

That's another example of a trend in crime: crimes that are more global, more international. I just got off the e-mail talking to Hong Kong. June 1st I'm having lunch with a Captain from Thailand. And June 1st we will have here for the entire month a Captain from the United Arab Emirates. He's an intern finishing his Masters degree. But he's working with us, dealing with how we can connect better with the international community. That's a huge change from the 1980s. Everybody has to be more global in their perspective. The globe has shrunk tremendously. Right here in my hands I talk to Thailand, and Thailand talks to me. (shows a picture) This guy's a General. You can't read it, it's in Thai, but he's in charge of the entire postal system of Thailand. In two weeks I'll be playing golf with him. So part of what's changed since the 1980s is the need to be more international. This is a picture of me in Thailand just a year and a half

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ago, with my wife, with the General in Thailand. We have connections with Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia. (He shows pictures on the walls of himself in these countries.) I go to Hong Kong quite a lot.

You think of drugs coming from Mexico and from Canada, which is happening more and more because we've been doing a better job of reducing manufactured drugs (meth) here in Oregon.

KM: What do you do to make it better – to stop the meth problem?

RL: One way to do it is . . . the chemicals it takes to make it are called precursor drugs. We make it much harder. One over-the-counter drug is the cold medicines. They'll take Sudafed with its chemical compounds . . . Today you have to get it behind the counter. Whenever you see a guy walk up to the counter with an armload of cold medicine, he's going to be making meth. No one could have that much of a cold. What are some of the other questions you have?

KM: How did you get involved with law enforcement?

RL: I was studying monkeys and apes. As an anthropologist, I was teaching at San Francisco State University. So as a university teacher, I had to study closed systems. That means one of my professors sent me to study a closed society. One type of closed society is a jail, so I went and studied a jail. And as I studied the jail, it became very interesting to me. I was a part time teacher, but you couldn't make a living as a part time teacher in the 70s, so the police force started recruiting college-educated people. They hired me on. One of my first jobs was to identify bones because as an anthropologist, I had the skill of looking at it (if you dug up a skeleton in your back yard) and telling you if it was prehistoric or was it recent. (shows pictures of himself working with bones).

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So I got started in law enforcement by studying a jail. I had just finished my first Masters, and I was teaching. Prior to that, I was forbidden to become a police officer. Guess why. I went to Vietnam and fought in the war and came back, and I had a Masters degree, and I flunked. I wouldn't have flunked the written test. What test do you think I would have flunked? I was too short. I only went to high school for a year, I dropped out, but I was too short. I enlisted at 16. So I got involved in law enforcement as a graduate student. Only one department in the San Francisco area abolished the height requirement, and that was Palo Alto, down by Stanford University. So I ended up down there.

KM: What exactly does your job entail right now?

RL: Right now most of my job is dreaming, visioning. A vision is where you'd like to be, for real, other than on an island with a Mai Tai. My job is really, where would we like to be 10 years from now? Where would the city like to be 10 years from now? Outside the window here is a 34' trailer. It's brand new. How can you move the police department around to different neighborhoods? So part of my job is to figure out where we should be 5 and 10 years from now.

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The other thing is to try and do things that might help the community. After 31 years on the job, I've learned how to reduce the crime rate. I'm one of the few who has solved it. How? Keep kids in school. The prison population is based upon truancy rates. It starts with bad nutrition and bad parents, bad home life, and then now finishing school. So my biggest problem right now is the haves and the have nots. The have nots are some of your own classmates who go home and don't have a computer at home. You've got friends, or you know kids in your school who don't go home to computers. You do. My kids went to Century High School. My son is now a senior at Portland State. They came home to their own computers – brother and sister, so you know they'd always fight. They had to have their own computers. So there's a divide. People are being divided: those who have computers and those who don't have computers. It's called the digital divide. So right now my problem is to try to get kids engaged in computer technology, and also to teach kids how to be careful so they don't become victims and also how to get around the community to communicate with them, and how to keep kids in school. So that's my job. Chasing criminals, putting people in jail, and all those other things are done by the other people in the department. But I get to dream.

III C 7

So my job is actually to dream. My latest program is to work with children whose parents are incarcerated, in jail. There's probably 40,000 children in Oregon who are related to somebody in jail. They have 5, 6, 7 times the dropout rate, the truancy rate. So if we're able to keep those kids in school or help them, then in the long run, society itself will be better off because those kids won't wind up being the have-nots, taking from you, the haves.

The other thing is our immigrant population. What do we do with immigrants is to try to assist them to become part of the society. If you don't do that, it's going to be difficult. My family – I was born in America. My family's from China, and when they came, you know, my father came over here on a boat. (points to a picture) That's him up there in the costume. They dressed differently. He was an opera actor. That's a stage, and that's his costume on the stage. When they came and didn't speak English, he never really merged into American society. He stayed in Chinese society. He lived in Chinatown and didn't assimilate. But my sister, who did come from China, she did merge into American society. Her kids, my nieces and nephews, and my grand-nieces and nephews, are just like you, part of American society. So the other problem is, because we have more immigrants, especially with those in the lower socioeconomic, we have to work to try to assimilate them into American society. The more you do that, the better off. So that's my job. I get to dream. And then I get to make the dream happen. That's the other thing that's kind of cool.

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AR: How are you keeping kids in school?

RL: We actually started this year. We have one full time school officer, Ed Vance, who visits kids at home and finds out why they're not going to school. Some kids are not going to school because they're 12-year-old girls, or boys, and they're taking care of the young kids at home while mom and dad are working. That was very common when I was a kid. So we're trying to see what's keeping the kids from going to school. Some kids want to go to school, but their parents don't support them to go to school, or help them out. Sometimes you probably need a push to go to school . . . So what we're doing

III C 7

is we're trying to identify (these kids). The other thing we're doing is we're going after parents and punishing them or citing them into court. You won't let your kids go to school? Well, baloney. That's not always fun, but those are the things that we're doing with the school district and the courts now to try to keep kids in school. Unfortunately, there's quite a few. So what we're going to do is spend a lot more time worrying about the 3rd graders than we are about the 9th graders. If we worry about 3rd graders, more of them will be in school when they become 9th graders. I didn't make through high school either. I was a junior for one week. (They discuss what it's like to go to a prom.)

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KM: How has training changed from past years?

RL: Excellent question. Training has changed in that we spend more time not shooting guns better, but thinking about how to shoot the gun. We spend more time teaching officers to use less lethal force rather than lethal force. Training is better in a couple ways. We train people to think more. It's easy to train someone to shoot a gun. It's harder to train someone when not to shoot a gun, to think more. We of course have full-time trainers now, and we spend a tremendous amount of time training now in our department. We spend probably more per capita per officer than about anybody in the state. Hillsboro is huge on training, very, very big on training. Every Wednesday, if you were here tomorrow, and you're welcome to come back, a lot of people will be here on duty, more than today. The way we use the shifts, especially patrol officers . . . we schedule a lot of people so a lot more will be working than normal. On Wednesdays, since we have more people working, we take a group of them, and we put them through training.

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KM: So you just train them in here?

RL: We train them all over. One example is in September one lieutenant goes away for three months to Quantico, Virginia, to the FBI Academy. He spends 3 months training in post-graduate school. Some train here in the building. Some go different places. We had some of the school officers go to North Carolina on a grant. We had another group of officers go to Seattle. So it just depends where the training is.

To answer your question, we focus on . . . Training has changed . . . An example is mediation. We have a 32-hour class on how to mediate, how to talk to somebody and how to resolve issues between people who are fighting, so to speak, often neighbors. Our department's about 148 people. Over 70% of the people have taken the 32-hour training class on just how to mediate. No one else in Oregon has that. Why do we do it? It's because we have special funding that we get from the state to help finance the training and the teacher is a psychologist from Portland. She just had the class 2 weeks ago. It teaches people how to mediate and resolve disputes.

In the 80s, we learned how to use our guns and our batons and things like that. We didn't learn how to use our mouth very well, how to communicate with people. But communication with people is much better than it was. When I was involved as a young cop, we used physical force more. We shot people a lot more than we should have. We didn't try to skillfully communicate with each other. When two neighbors are fighting over a tree, you know, one hanging over the other. We tell both of them, if I come back

Louie ©

here and you're still fighting, you're both going to jail. What was the purpose of the tree? The purpose of the tree . . . there's something deeper going on between the neighbors. We need to find out what it is. That's what's changed tremendously.

We also teach kids more about their rights, and what it takes to be part of the society, how you live within our society and our laws.

KM: What about the equipment? How has that changed? Has it changed for the good?

RL: The good. Look at that. Some of the equipment is less lethal, like the tool I have there. Equipment's changed because cops have gotten skinnier. Why have cops gotten smaller and skinnier? We started hiring women. Now good news, bad news. You have a smaller waist than I do, so how can you carry all that crap on your waist? 16 pounds. One way things have changed . . . We did a study and we found that it was easier, we were better off, to try to change equipment. We now have a test. We reduced about 15 pounds off the waist, and we've distributed it over a load-bearing vest. So now officers in our department are experimenting with reducing the equipment on their waists and redistributing it on the vest. So equipment has changed in that they're carrying more equipment, not less. Even with new technology, they have more equipment on them. You're welcome to try it on. It's very heavy. The good news is we were forced to change by hiring women, physically, they're different. So we've had to alter the way we carry equipment. It's healthier, because we'll have fewer back injuries. Now we're one of the few that are going to do it for everybody. We did a study where we've got 5 different body types, and we tested it on all of them, so we now have a pretty good idea what the equipment should be for all of them. Just yesterday we decided what primary manufacturer we're going to go to to carry all this equipment.

The other thing is what we're driving. I drive a gas-electric car, and I drive an electric car.

IVA

KM: What's the biggest change in crime in the past 25 years?

RL: Well, we've already touched on it. You take the ID theft, which is 100% connected to meth and drugs. That's probably a crime that you barely heard of in the 80s. The other is high tech crime, which is under most people's radar screen, because when an engineer steals a multi-million dollar process from his company and sells it to somebody in another country, most people can't handle it because that's that international stuff.

KM: How has the Patriot Act affected Hillsboro?

RL: Tremendously. You're not aware of this, are you, that I was one of the few who objected to Attorney General Ashcroft asking us to go out and interview Muslim males after 9/11. I took a lot of heat over it. The Patriot Act has changed in that, unfortunately or fortunately, in our desire to do more with . . . See, I've given whole lectures on this. (They discuss some pictures.) The Patriot Act has changed in that it's a lot harder . . . As we want more privacy, we have a high emphasis on privacy, but is our security worse off? So the Patriot Act is a way of trying to keep track of information and people, but unfortunately what's happened is that . . . (He shows a large file on the Patriot Act and

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racial profiling.) We are the very first in Oregon to keep track of the people we stop and what their race is. We started in 2000 before 9/11, so we now keep track. Here's an example of 75,000 people we stopped, and it breaks it down by race. You can read that for some information. I gave this lecture to Linfield College. (shows a picture) This is me complaining right after 9/11 where I am objecting to Ashcroft's Patriot Act stuff. This is actually before the Patriot Act passed. This is an example of (Oregon) Attorney General Hardy Myers saying it's OK to participate voluntarily in the questioning to Muslim males. I objected to that. I think it's wrong. My position is we shouldn't do it. We absolutely shouldn't be doing it. If it's not connected to a crime, then we shouldn't be doing it. (He looks through his files for more information.)

IV F

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KM: Do you think racial profiling is a problem with the Hillsboro police?

RL: I don't think it's a problem, but it is a problem in the profession. Across the U.S. people in the past, the police, and they still do . . . Go to the *Argus*, go to the *Oregonian* and look up "racial profiling." They covered a lot of this. There's a better term called "bias policing." Out of 74,000 people we stopped since May of 2000, about 23.7% of the people we stopped are Latino. We seem to be stopping the same proportion of people who live here. So we're not stopping more Latinos than live here. As an example, Seattle is about 9% black, but 18% or 19% of their stops are black. So they're stopping twice as many as live there. These numbers show it's not occurring. These numbers do show that we tend to search Latino males more, but find less (meaning contraband, drugs.) If you really want to find stuff, you should search white males. Now you won't find this anywhere else, because we're the only ones keeping track like this. As a matter of fact tomorrow, Portland State University will have a hearing on this here in Hillsboro. You should go. It's at 3:00. I'll give you the flyer. It's a public meeting, and you have a right to be there. (He reads the flyer.) Centro Cultural will be here. Their director will be here, and they'll question him about his perceptions. Don't bring a tape recorder, but bring paper and take some notes. So our cops keep track of everyone they stop.

IV F

KM: How does Measure 11 affect crime?

RL: Interesting. It locks them away for longer. I'm for Measure 11. I support parts of Measure 11. However, I still support judicial discretion in certain circumstances (and Measure 11 doesn't allow this). For example, the four kids that shot up that house, those Glencoe kids, well . . . (changing tape). That 14-year-old is a real sick puppy. The public felt too many people got let off by liberal judges. I still support judicial discretion. Is it better for this kid to be in McLaren for 7 years? Or can something else be done? Right now, Measure 11 forces them to go to away for 7 years. Part of me supports Measure 11, and part of me supports a "second look" where there would be an opportunity to take a second look at these kids, maybe after they've been convicted, maybe a second look after their second year in prison and see if it's worthy for them to stay for 5 more years. It's not because I'm liberal, it's just that I believe in a second look. When I was a teenager, I got arrested for stealing hubcaps and junk like that. I went joyriding, that kind of thing. So I believe in a second look, but Measure 11 doesn't allow it.

IV H

KM: How has the type of drugs used changed over the last 25 years?

RL: Good question. Addiction is stronger now.

KM: When did meth start to become a big problem? Was it just this year?

RL: It started creeping on us because it can be made locally easier than growing marijuana or a crop of poppy seeds. It started to become a problem about 4 years ago. Now it's almost epidemic. It affects so many lives.

KM: What goes on in a drug bust, and how many do you have in a year?

RL: I don't have all those statistics. We have a county-wide WIN, which is the Westside Interagency Narcotics Task Force and we have officers assigned to that. I can tell you what happens, of course. The first thing is we surveil and make sure that we have the right house. We want to have good intelligence to know who's inside. We're worried about going in when there are children there. When we assault the house, we have to assault with a "dynamic" entry. We might break the door down and all that kind of stuff, like you see on television, quite frankly. We're running in there with our guns telling everyone to lay down. Sadly, we have to do those often than we want to. How many occur in Hillsboro? We probably have 2-3 a month where our big time SWAT team goes in there. We do this through a partnership with all the other major agencies in Washington County. We have 2 officers (a sergeant and a lieutenant) assigned full time.

III C3

KM: Do you think police have become more militant over time?

RL: The best way to answer that is . . . when police go to a scene, it's not militancy so much as the police, for safety purposes, we have to be very firm as we go on, for example, a narcotics raid. One change with police is we do a better job of not always rushing into the house, but falling back and communicating with them and getting them to surrender. So we're probably better at that now. We're better about calming down and trying to get them to surrender, which we're very successful in doing, by the way.

KM: How has gang activity changed since the 1980s?

RL: The gang activity hasn't changed because it's the demographics that have changed. We have a larger percentage of Latino gangs. The other thing is just the growth. There's a greater percentage of young people engaged in gang behavior. The other thing that's changed is there are more girls in gangs. That's happened in the past couple of years. In our own school district, we have 3 girls who have been kicked out of one school, and 2 others kicked out of another school for fighting. And they were gang-related girls. So that's something we never saw a couple of years ago.

III C2

AR: Do you think the media gives us false perceptions about crime and law enforcement?

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RL: Probably the worst thing the media does is they'll go out on those COP programs . . . I hate those. In most of those, the officers would be in trouble with me if they acted like that. Let's say two people are fighting, they're yelling at each other. And the officers say, "Shut up. You shut up." You don't talk to people like that. (He acts out what a cop should do.) "Ma'am, I told you to be quiet. Please, calm down. You're going to have a chance to talk. Ma'am, you. . . ." Now what am I doing? Look at my eyes, I'm bending my head forward, I'm putting my hands up. My gestures are not threatening, vs. "SHUT UP! YOU get over there. You're going to jail. You shut up and move over there." You see the difference? Our officers are trained not to do that. If they do, they're in serious trouble. I just roll my eyes at what I see on TV. The cops on those programs make the argument worse. They jack people up and make it worse. One thing we do is to investigate every complaint, and we look into it. And once in a while, we find out the officer acted like a jerk. So we send a letter back to the citizen, and it could be someone we arrested, and say, "Sir, you're right. The officer was rude to you, and he shouldn't have acted that way, and we apologize to you." We keep track of all those records. Every citizen complaint is investigated, put in the data base, and every person gets a letter. We investigate every anonymous claim too. Let's say someone writes that Chief Louie was speeding the other day on 25th Avenue. Was I speeding? Yeah, I could have been . . . vs. Chief Louie flashed his badge and said he didn't have to pay full price for the dinner. So we have a data base where we collect all that information. We summarize every complaint in a document. We're one of the few in the state to do that. No one does it as thoroughly as we do it. Why do we do it? To prove to the public that we're doing a very good job. The other thing is it also reminds the officers I won't tolerate it. It teaches me and lets me know what the department's doing. The good news? I'm also looking for complaints of racism, of racial slurs. The complaints that come in are normal, like the officer being rude or failing to get back to the citizen. They're all minor as can be. None of them are serious breaches of policy, which is great. Or it could be the officer's just driving too fast. Citizens love to call you when they see a cop speeding. I warn the officer. Any other questions? We can go look for more data.

IV B

(end of interview)