

An Oral History of Casey Clark

4th Street | Prater Way History Project

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Interviewer: Alexandra Horangic

Born in North Carolina, Casey Clark grew up in Pleasant Valley, north of Reno, and then northern California. He moved back to Reno in 1996, later spending time in Montana and Arizona. A ceramics artist, he has a studio space at Cuddleworks, located at 545 East Fourth Street, where he also works as a bicycle courier for Bootleg Couriers, and as a bicycle mechanic and service manager for the Reno Bike Project next door.

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CASEY CLARK

Interviewed on March 26, 2012
Alexandra Horangic, Interviewer

Born in North Carolina, Casey Clark grew up in Pleasant Valley, north of Reno, and then northern California. He moved back to Reno in 1996, later spending time in Montana and Arizona. A ceramics artist, he has a studio space at Cuddleworks, located at 545 East Fourth Street, where he also works as a bicycle courier for Bootleg Couriers, and as a bicycle mechanic and service manager for the Reno Bike Project next door.

Photo by Patrick Cummings

Horangic: This is Alex Horangic. I'm here with Casey Clark, who's a service manager at the Reno Bike Project. We are on the campus of the University of Nevada, Reno and today is March 26th, 2012. Mr. Clark, when and where you were born?

Clark: I was born just outside of Asheville, North Carolina, April 3, 1980.

Horangic: When did you move to Reno?

Clark: 1984.

Horangic: Tell me where you went to elementary and high school and where you grew up in Reno.

Clark: I grew up in Pleasant Valley, which is about halfway between Reno and Washoe Valley. I went to Pleasant Valley Elementary School, K through 6. Then I went to Pine Middle School. Then my parents moved us to the Bay Area. I spent my first two years in high school living outside of San Francisco in a little town called Burlingame. I also lived in Millbrae and San Bruno. Then I moved back to Reno in '96. I graduated high school from Galena High.

Horangic: What were your parents' names?

Clark: My mom's name is Afsina Kaeltosh Clark, and my dad's name was Clarence Clark.

Horangic: When you were growing up in Reno, were you always interested in riding bikes?

Clark: When I was a little kid, it was just the normal way to get around the neighborhood and meet all of my little neighborhood buddies. We grew up skinning our knees jumping

bikes around in dirt and lots of stuff like that. I rode bikes pretty much since I was a little kid until now. There was a little hiatus there for three or four years where I decided I wanted to rollerblade. I can't believe I just recorded that.

Clark: I did the same thing most people do. When you turn sixteen, you get a license and scrounge up a car and eschew bikes and everything else for a couple years while you enter the driving world. But I've been riding bikes almost the whole time.

Horangic: Did you think where you grew up in Reno was a good place to ride a bike as a kid?

Clark: Where I grew up, yeah, which wasn't anywhere close to town. It was really rural out there. The houses were all kind of spread out far apart back then, and it was just the best way to get to all your buddies' houses. But I didn't know what it was like to ride a bike in an urban environment for years.

Horangic: Where was Galena High School?

Clark: Galena High School is on the Mt. Rose Highway, real close to the junction of 395 and Mt. Rose Highway. So it's out there quite a ways.

Horangic: After you graduated from high school, where did you decide to go to college?

Clark: After I graduated from high school, I was already living in Reno. So I just started taking classes at Truckee Meadows Community College, without any real direction or aim. I did that for nine years or something like that. [laughter] I was pretty into snowboarding at that time, too, so I would take whole semesters and whole years off to go play around in the woods.

So for the first "nine years of college"—that was in quotes—I didn't really have a major. The way I picked my courses is I would just flip through the catalog and pick out four classes that seemed interesting. Then I'd take them, and I had to take twelve credits to be eligible for Pell grants. I did that until they figured out that I was basically just wasting time and they took away all my Pell grants.

During that time I had started taking ceramics, which I originally took in high school and didn't like, but I took it in college just because it seemed like an easy way to keep up my marginal GPA. It was offered at night, which meant I could play all day and go to school at night. I got sucked in and that's how I got into ceramics. After years of taking the same Intro to Ceramics class over and over again, I ended up working as an informal teacher's assistant, loading kilns, and that eventually led to a scholarship to go to Sierra Nevada College, where I was the lab technician in the Ceramics Department.

Finally when TMCC decided that I was just milking it a little too much, they cut my funding and, coincidentally, I got the scholarship opportunity. So that's how I ended up getting my degree. I never really intended to study ceramics or art, but it just kind of happened.

Horangic: During those nine years you were going to TMCC, where in Reno did you live?

Clark: I moved every six months or so for most of that time, just kind of random houses with friends and apartments and couch surfing. The longest stint I had was in Northwest Reno, off of Seventh Street on a street called Beldon. I lived there for maybe three years.

Horangic: That's pretty close to the highway, right?

Clark: It's pretty close to [Highway] 80. I mean, you can't hear the cars from the street or anything like that, but it's definitely in the 80 corridor.

Horangic: Were you riding your bike that whole time?

Clark: Yeah. At that time I was kind of a fair-weather commuter, so I would ride my bike any time the weather permitted. I was also still snowboarding a lot back then so I didn't ride my bike to the ski hill, and did a lot of driving.

I was also getting really interested in mountain biking back then. I always had a mountain bike but I'd never gone out and really ridden trails until I was in my early twenties. So at that time I was riding my mountain bike off-road a lot and I was working in bike shops in the summertime. I would be commuting to work across town and using my bike as general transportation.

It's great when you're young. You have tons of energy. Riding bikes burns it off and when you go out bar-hopping, you can swerve your bike home without worrying about getting a DUI.

Horangic: What did you think about riding your bike in Reno during that time? Was the city a good place or a hard place to ride your bike? Did you feel safe?

Clark: I did feel safe. I've never felt vulnerable riding a bike around, and I know a lot of people do. I think it's because I had spent so much time on a bike that by that time it never occurred to me that it was dangerous— when you're nineteen and twenty, nothing seems dangerous. We would go out jumping our snowboards off these big cliffs just for fun, so riding a bike with a little bit of traffic never seemed like a big deal.

Back then, there wasn't a lot of bicycle infrastructure in Reno. There were a couple big thoroughfares with bike lanes, but you could get across town safely. I did that a lot. I would live up in the Northwest and I would work in bike shops that were out towards South Reno, so it was about eight miles across town each way, and there was a bike lane for maybe two or three of those miles.

Horangic: That's not very much.

Clark: But there was also a lot less traffic back then. This was before the housing boom really took off. So you didn't really need bike lanes in a lot of places because there wasn't enough congestion to demand it. You would just route yourself on less-traveled

roads. You would find the routes that motorists didn't like and take those, and it never really felt like a scary thing.

Horangic: What year do you think the housing boom occurred? When did you notice the congestion increase?

Clark: I didn't notice it when it was starting because most of the big development projects were happening way on the outskirts of town, and I just never got to see it. So I'm not sure really when it began. It must have been early to mid 2000s when they started building up really hard.

Horangic: Let's talk about your time at Sierra Nevada College. That's in Incline Village, correct?

Clark: Yeah.

Horangic: So you majored in ceramics?

Clark: Yeah.

Horangic: How long were you there?

Clark: Two years.

Horangic: And you got a bachelor's of—

Clark: Bachelor's in Fine Arts.

Horangic: Then after that, what year did you graduate?

Clark: '07 or '08.

Horangic: Did you come back to Reno after that?

Clark: Yeah, briefly.

Horangic: Where did you go after your brief stay in Reno after graduating from college?

Clark: While I was getting my degree, I had applied for a couple of artist-in-residence positions, which is this deal where you go to some ceramics or art-making facility, and you get a studio space in exchange for teaching classes. I applied to a bunch of those while I was in school and I got accepted to the Clay Studio of Missoula, which is in Montana. After I graduated, I spent a summer in Reno working at the Bike Project and then I moved to Montana.

Horangic: How long were you in Montana?

Clark: Almost a year.

Horangic: Did you work at a studio or you had a studio space?

Clark: I had a studio space. I got paid to teach classes at the studio and that was real part-time, maybe five hours a week or something. Then I had a bunch of odd jobs while I was there. I'd pick potatoes for a couple days, and I worked on a deconstruction crew. It was a nonprofit construction firm that went and took apart buildings and salvaged the materials. I also worked at the university there as a lab tech in the Sculpture and Ceramics Department.

Horangic: Do you think your ceramics skills increased while you were out there? Did you develop as an artist?

Clark: My work itself, not really, but it was a really good experience for me because it was really hard. It was cold and I was broke and I missed my girlfriend, and I had a really hard time keeping steady work out there. It was also my first time making ceramics outside the academic umbrella. It's hard to know how much shelter that provides while you're under it, but as soon as you get out from under it, you realize how expensive the materials are and how hard it is to mesh together a normal income earning life with this really time-consuming activity. Ceramics is really time-consuming, especially when you're working in big volumes.

I felt like I was under a lot of pressure while I was there. I had taken on the project of organizing and firing this great big wood-fired kiln, which is what I specialize in. It was sort of a poorly designed kiln. It was really hard to fire, and in its brief history it had never been fired to the right temperature. Nobody could get it hot enough. I didn't know that when I went there. I probably should have done a little more homework.

Horangic: The kiln was already built when you got there?

Clark: It was already built. It had been fired maybe half a dozen times before I got there, with varying results, none of which were that great. And I didn't go visit or really do that much investigative work. I was just so enamored with the idea of Montana, and also convinced that that was the right step for my art career, if you want to call it that. That's sort of the normal route. You get your degree, you do a few residencies, and then you either start a studio practice or go back to school and get a master's.

So my work didn't really improve that much, but it was enlightening to figure out how hard it was to try to pull something off when you don't have this fancy school and all the free clay you can throw.

Horangic: Did you ever get the kiln to fire the way you wanted it to?

Clark: I only fired it once. We had scheduled two firings, but the first one got cancelled because there wasn't enough work to fill it. It's a great big kiln. It's twice as big as any kiln I've ever fired, and I've fired some pretty good-sized ones. It was thirty-something feet long end to end, and maybe six feet wide. At its tallest point, you could almost stand up in it.

It takes thousands and thousands and thousands of pots to fill a thing like that. At the ceramics cooperative where I was a resident in Missoula everyone was kind of employed to make work to fill the kiln so we could fire it. I set the date for the first one a little optimistically and we didn't have enough work to fill it, so I had to postpone the firing. Then we fired four or five months after that, hotter than it had ever been fired before. We did some modifications to the kiln and it was a six-day firing. We burned eleven cords of wood in that six days. It got pretty hot, but I wasn't really satisfied. I'm kind of spoiled because I fire really nice kilns with really experienced potters, and firing a poorly designed kiln with a team of not so experienced potters was tricky.

Horangic: Did the Sierra Nevada College have a fire kiln that you used while you were there?

Clark: They had gas-fired kilns, but I really enjoy the process of firing with wood. There are a couple of guys around Reno who have private studios and fire with wood. I had met them before I went to Sierra Nevada College about halfway through my decade-long tenure at TMCC. I don't want to call it an apprenticeship because it was never formal, but the informal exchange was, I would show up and work and they would let me put my stuff in the kiln, and, in the process, teach me how to do that kind of work.

Horangic: What's the difference between a wood fired kiln and a gas-fired kiln, in terms of the work that comes out?

Clark: There's a couple. The big one is the ash from wood. If there's enough of it stuck to the surface of anything made of clay and you get it hot enough and you keep it hot long enough, the ash will actually start to form a glass. So you can put bare clay into certain kinds of wood kilns and in certain places in wood kilns with no applied glaze, and there will be so much ash on it that the ash will form its own glaze. It heavily modifies the surface of applied glazes. It gives these really dramatic surface effects.

The other one is, and this is the one that I don't really understand the chemistry of and I don't feel like a lot of people have their heads totally wrapped around it, but because the firing is so long and the rise in temperature is so gradual and the atmosphere inside the kiln is constantly fluctuating between having too much fuel and not enough oxygen and having a good balance of fuel and oxygen for combustion, it goes through these real slow cycles of atmosphere changes, and that just gives the clay this quality that's hard to describe. It's really fun.

Horangic: How long were you in Missoula?

Clark: Nine months to ten months.

Horangic: Then did you come back to Reno?

Clark: No, then I packed up my stuff and moved to Flagstaff, Arizona, and I spent about two years down there.

Horangic: What did you do in Flagstaff?

Clark: I was a bike mechanic there and I also worked for a company that prototyped and fabricated bicycle trailers.

Horangic: Did you do any art while you were there?

Clark: No clay, which is ironic. One of the guys who trained me learned how to wood-fire in Flagstaff. At the Northern Arizona University in Flagstaff, they have probably the largest and most varied wood-burning kilns. It's a big deal if you're a wood-fire ceramicist, which not many people are. But amongst that little niche of ceramicists, everybody knows about that place. They have these amazing kilns. I had been there before for workshops and was really excited to find some way to get involved when I got there, but not being a student, it's a little hard to weasel in. I wasn't really interested in signing up and becoming a student again and I was also burned out and broke from the Montana experience.

When I moved to Arizona, I had instant work. My girlfriend was down there while I was in Montana so I got to be with her again, and I was so excited to just live in a warm house and get a paycheck every two weeks, that for the whole first year I didn't even really miss it.

After that, I started thinking about it, and I had made a few calls to the university and tried to wiggle in there. I'm sure that if I would have stayed on it I probably could have gotten a little more involved, but I was having so much fun there riding my bike and being warm.

Horangic: What made Flagstaff a good place to ride your bike?

Clark: Flagstaff is really small, and I lived right in the downtown center. I was an eighth of a mile from work and a quarter mile from everything else that I did around there. Flagstaff also is right at the base of this mountain that has a really dense network of well-developed and maintained trails, and I rode my mountain bike all the time, three or four days a week.

You could ride right from town to the trailhead. You could go shred around for as long as you wanted up there and then just coast all the way back home. It was just too good to be true. So I would ride my mountain bike from home up into the woods, go run around for an hour, cruise down to work, do my work shift fixing bikes, and then go mountain biking again after work.

That was so novel to me. Around here, most of the really great trails are far away, so mountain biking is like a thing. You know, you call up your buddies and you put all

the bikes in the truck and you drive up there. There it was just part of the daily commute if you wanted to make it that way, and that was so cool. I knew I wasn't going to be there permanently, so I just was taking advantage of it as much as I could while I could.

Horangic: What shop did you work for while you were there as a bike mechanic?

Clark: I worked for Absolute Bikes, which is the biggest bike shop in Flagstaff by a long shot. It's a really high-volume, pretty high-end bike shop, and they had a lot of mechanics there. We would always have four mechanics working at least. There were points in the summer when we were working four at a time, from six in the morning till ten p.m. in shifts, just fixing bikes all day. There were a lot of broken bicycles in that town.

They also had old mechanics. I was twenty-nine, I think, when I moved there. Usually in bike shops that makes you the old, crotchety, grumpy guy. I'm kind of used to being surrounded by younger people and being in charge of them in some capacity, either formally or just because I have more experience. I usually end up teaching them how to repair bikes. But there it was just seven of me. The youngest mechanic there was twenty-four. That was the first time I worked in a bike shop where being a mechanic felt really professional, and I didn't have to do anything else. I didn't have to sell bikes or order parts. There were people who handled all of that stuff. We just showed up, flipped the wrenches, and hung them up and went home. It was really nice.

Horangic: Is Flagstaff more a road-biking town or a mountain-biking town?

Clark: It is absolutely a mountain-biking town.

Horangic: We will get back to talking about your time as a bike mechanic in a moment, but I want to ask where did you go after your time in Flagstaff?

Clark: That's when I came home, back to Reno.

Horangic: Where did you live when you came back to Reno?

Clark: Right when we came back to town, for the first five or six months my girlfriend and I stayed at the River School.

Horangic: Where's that?

Clark: It's up in the Northwest, off of Mayberry or Fourth, depending on how you get there. It's off of Mayberry if you ride your bike. It's right on the river, as the name would imply, real close to Strawberry Bridge that goes over the Truckee and connects to Dorkstar Park. Lindsay, my girlfriend, had worked for the River School before she and I left. It's a pretty big facility and there are lots of little outbuildings. So when we moved back, Tom, the guy who owns that property, let us stay there for real cheap while we were shopping around for a place to rent. He also put Lindsay to work, which was really nice.

Horangic: What does the River School do?

Clark: It's a hard business to describe. It has all these little facets. They have a landscaping part that used to be called interpretive gardens. I'm not sure if it's still called that or not, where they would just go out and do contract landscaping and with an emphasis on xeriscaping and using native plants.

There's a lot of space there, so they rent out this little theater and people teach classes there. They host weddings and special events, they do all kinds of stuff. Onsite, they have a big greenhouse and hoop houses, chickens, goats, all that kind of stuff.

Horangic: Where did you and your girlfriend move after that?

Clark: We were pretty happy to get out of there. It's a really nice spot, but there are twelve or thirteen people living there at a time.

Horangic: It was like group housing?

Clark: Well, we had our own space, but there are lots of shared spaces. Everybody shares the same kitchen and we weren't staying in a bedroom; we were staying in this little foyer that used to be the office, and it was right next door to the little dance studio where they taught all kinds of super loud classes. [laughter] So that was kind of hard for us.

Lindsay and I had been living together in Arizona for a couple of years, always by ourselves, and we were totally in honeymoon mode. So it was kind of inconvenient to not have our privacy, and random people would walk into our bedroom, thinking it was still the office. It was really awkward.

Clark: So we moved to the old Southwest neighborhood, which is where we live now, right across the street from Our Lady of Snows Church.

Horangic: When did you get your studio on Fourth Street?

Clark: We moved into that building pretty recently, maybe four months or five months ago, and it's in rough shape.

Horangic: The studio?

Clark: The whole building. It's a 3,700-square-foot warehouse and it used to be a transmission shop. The Bootleg Courier guys rented out the entire space and they sublet some studio spaces to folks like me. When I got there, my studio space was actually two studios worth of space, so I had to subdivide it. The floors were all rotted out and the electrical was a mess as well. We moved in there about five months ago, but it took me three or four months to basically remodel everything and get it functioning.

Horangic: What's the address of the building?

Clark: I have no idea, I just know it's the one next door to the bike shop.

Horangic: It's next door to the Reno Bike Project?

Clark: Yeah.

Horangic: So you share the building with the Bootleg Couriers?

Clark: Yeah.

Horangic: They are basically your landlords?

Clark: Yeah.

Horangic: What's the name of your studio?

Clark: I don't have a name for my personal studio. So far the running name for the whole operation there is Cuddleworks.

Horangic: How did that come about?

Clark: It's a joke. Tim and Chad, the owners of Bootleg, took out the lease, and the only way they could really afford to pay for a space like that was to not pay rent anyplace else, so they've been pretty much flopping there. They pulled in these two little camping trailers, parked them in the corner, and they live in the trailers while we're building everything out. We're doing most of the renovations on our own dime, which is why it's taking so long. Nobody really has any money, so we're all just pitching in and scraping by to make it work.

So Tim and Chad move in and it's pretty cold. There's no heat in the building and they both have dogs. Cuddleworks came from us making fun of Tim and Chad for having to cuddle with their dogs in their trailers to stay warm.

Horangic: How big is your studio space, approximately?

Clark: Twenty-by-ten.

Horangic: Are you able to produce work in your studio space or are you still renovating?

Clark: I was in there last night making pots.

Horangic: Do you sell any of your pottery in town?

Clark: I have historically, at markets, fairs, and a few retail outlets, but I've been making so little for the past five years, that I haven't, really. I always have a call for it, people asking me, because they know I make pots. I sell them pots if they want something that I

happen to have made, but I haven't been producing pots in a volume that would force me to find an outlet for them yet.

Horangic: Is that by choice or just circumstance?

Clark: Both. It's been difficult to find the space, the resources, the equipment, and the time because I'm so busy at the bike shop and doing all this other stuff. I'm sure that I could have made it happen sooner if I felt like it was a huge priority, but I never want making pottery to feel like a job. I never want to put that much pressure on it. It's not particularly lucrative, especially in the capacity that I can do it. So if it's not fun, there's really not a good reason to do it.

This space is the first time where it's been affordable and where I felt like it would fit into all the other things I have going. It's right next door to work, right next door to both of my jobs, and it's really inexpensive. I've been collecting equipment to set up a studio for about a year and a half or so, just slowly picking up little bits and pieces as they present themselves. I finally just had enough to get going.

Horangic: Do you have a wood-fired kiln in your studio?

Clark: No. The kind of kilns that I like to fire are pretty big, smoky, and a little messy. They need a lot of space, and having one downtown is probably not an option at the moment. So I have a small electric kiln that I bisque-fire, which is a low-temperature firing that I do before I glaze and wood-fire the work. So I'll be wood-firing everything with the same guys who taught me how to fire wood kilns.

Horangic: What do you think of the art scene in Reno, in general?

Clark: Man, that's a loaded question. I should preface by saying that I'm not super involved and I don't necessarily consider what I make art or consider myself an artist. In school you get pigeonholed into the Art Department, but at lots of schools, making functional stuff, making dishes, it's not very provocative. So if you're at any school that has avant-garde aspirations, it's a tough sell, which at Sierra Nevada College, it was a little bit of a tough sell. Nobody really minded, nobody told me I couldn't do it, but I also didn't get a lot of feedback or support doing it just because nobody really knew that much about it. I was probably the resident expert in the field while I was there. There were other ceramicists there, sculptors and stuff like that.

I don't have a huge tie to the gallery scene or anything just because I went to "art school." Most of my friends are painters and printmakers. I've always been going to openings and shows and it's been really, really fun for the last couple of years, ironically while I wasn't making anything. There are enough people engaged in art-making now that is there enough momentum to do our own shows, and in some cases people are opening their own galleries, and spaces like ours where people are pooling resources to come up with enough space to spread out and make stuff.

In some capacity that's always happened, but it seems like lately there's been more of it, which is really comforting and really fun to watch. It's great for me to have a

place to make work, but it's also really fun to be in a place where I can watch other people make work and to be involved with all these other artists. We are not the only warehouse full of artists making stuff in this town, but we know almost everybody who is, and it's cool to see people able to do that and afford it. One of the reasons it's possible is because warehouses like ours are so cheap now since nobody wants them because the economy is trashed.

Horangic: Are there any other warehouses of artists/businesses similar to yours on Fourth Street?

Clark: There was the Salvagery, which was officially or unofficially Burning Man-affiliated. It was a big warehouse just east of us on Fourth Street. A guy named Spencer Hobson owned this building that used to be a beer bottling plant, and there were a bunch of artists working in there, but since last year they all moved out and the building was shut down again.

On Fourth Street, that's the only one that I know of that's similar to ours, but there are a couple of galleries that have opened on Fourth Street in the last couple of years. I think there are some kids taking over this warehouse that's real close to us, right behind the bike shop, but I'm not sure what they're doing there.

I know a couple of them are painters, but I'm not sure if they're using that space as a painting space or if they're using it to hoard and store stuff. It's a pretty recent development, and I haven't toured the place yet.

Horangic: Could you describe what the warehouse your studio is in looks like?

Clark: It's a pretty interesting building. I can't remember what date it was built, but I think it was the mid-thirties. It was originally built as a transmission repair shop. It's shaped like a giant airplane hangar, so 3,200 square feet is basically just a big rectangle with a huge kind of dome over the top of it. It's got big skylights and it is all steel rafters and open ceilings. In the main section when you walk in the front door, there's a little seating area. Right behind that is a small office where the courier company dispatches from. Everything else in the main building is basically just open space. We're in the process of partitioning, subdividing, and splitting up all the work spaces.

At the back of our section there's a big wall with a man-door in it and behind that there's even more warehouse. There's a guy name Paolo Cividino who has a steel fabrication shop right across the street from us. He rents out the back of that building and stores surplus materials and random stuff back there.

That building used to be separate from the building next door, which is the Bike Project. There used to be an alley in between them, a pretty wide one. At some point, somebody boxed in the alley and closed it off, and in the boxed-in alley is where my studio space is.

It's closed off and divided into two stories. The bottom floor of the alley now is part of the Bike Project, and I'm above the Bike Project. There are five studio spaces on the top floor. So if I'm in my studio, people in the bike shop can hear me clomping around upstairs.

Horangic: Through the renovations that you guys are doing, are you trying to maintain the industrial character of the building or change it in some way?

Clark: Yes, that is the part that is moving way slower than the remodels in the alley, mostly because everything in there is huge, which makes it more expensive. We always struggle between being able to imagine the way that we want it to look and build it, and being able to afford to build it the way that we imagine it. So in a perfect world, it's all steel and plexiglass, but those are really expensive materials to work with, so we're always having these conversations about what to buy new, what to scrounge, what to spend money on, what not to spend money on, and how much money do we have to spend.

We haven't done any permanent changes to the original building, to the transmission shop. It's mostly just been paint and temporary partitions and building furniture and stuff like that.

Horangic: Was the alley there prior to you guys?

Clark: Yeah, it's been there for a long time, but it's way newer than the original buildings. I don't know how much newer, I just know that it's not original.

There's really not much to preserve in the alley. It was all cheap MDF floors and those gross foam ceiling tiles with the little fake snowflakes in them, so we have no qualms about gutting and remodeling, but the original building is cool. It's a really neat building. We probably are never going to do anything permanent to it because it's not our building, we're just renting. So we're not going to pour a bunch of money to doing in any huge renovation.

What we're not doing is being super cheap and partitioning stuff off with cyclone fencing and walls made out of old pallets, which gets done a lot by folks like us who have a big space, need to cut it up, and don't have any money. We'd rather wait and spend a little bit of money and try to maintain a little bit of the building's character as much as we can.

Horangic: Who is Bootleg Courier renting the building from?

Clark: The bike shop and the Cuddle Factory are both owned by a guy named Fred Meyer.

Horangic: Did you have any impressions of East Fourth Street before you took a studio space there?

Clark: Yes, because I had been working at the bike shop prior to that, for a long time. So by the time we took over that building, we had all spent so much time down there that we knew the scene.

Horangic: You knew what you were getting into?

Clark: Yeah. Before I started working down there, I didn't know that much about East 4th Street. I thought the same thing that everybody else thought; I thought it was just skid row or whatever. Everybody imagines it a lot worse than it really is. Don't get me wrong, there's a lot to be desired. There are some problems with that area, but before we had moved the bike shop down there, I hadn't really thought that much about it, honestly. It was just the place that people make jokes about, like, "Oh, yeah, that's where all the hookers are and that's where all the drugs are," blah, blah, blah.

We moved the bike shop there in late 2008 and that was really my first time spending time on Fourth Street, other than just riding my bike down it, trying to get off of it.

Horangic: How and when did you become a bike mechanic?

Clark: There was this particular bicycle ride that made me want to be a bike mechanic. I was mountain biking at the time quite a bit. This was maybe in the early 2000s when I started getting into trail riding. I had decided that I wanted to try disc brakes, which were not totally new things at the time, but it was my first time giving them a shot. I'd been riding bikes quite a bit at that point and I had some friends who worked in bike shops. I bought a pair of disc brakes secondhand off of one of my bike shop buddies. At that time, I didn't own any real bicycle tools. I didn't really know what I was doing. I just knew how to ride them and break them pretty good, but I relied on a bike shop to repair my bike. So the bike shop installs these disc brakes. There's a part in the disc brake system called the rotor, which is just a metal disc and it just bolts onto your hub.

We're riding this trail down Mt. Rose, from the summit of the road all the way down to Callahan Ranch at the bottom. It's late afternoon when we start, and about two-thirds of the way down, I'm riding down this rocky section of trail. My friend Matt Raker's behind me, and Matt Raker describes the crash as following me and then seeing nothing but the bottom of my shoes. I didn't know what happened. I just went flying over the handlebars and tumbled, just lost it. The sun was just about going down at this point.

I get up and I look at my bike, and the rotor where it attaches to the hub had snapped because the bolts weren't fastened adequately. So I have to basically take off the rotor and ride the rest of the trail without my rear brake. I had to ride down the rest of that trail, which is pretty rocky, in the dark with just a front brake, which makes it a little bit tricky to steer. I was pretty bruised up and it was a bummer.

So on the way down after the crash, while I was brooding, I decided that I wanted to become a bicycle mechanic just so I could learn how to work on my own bikes, so that if that ever happened to me again, it would be my fault and not somebody else's. Two or three days later, I got a job at the bike shop that I had bought my bike from.

Horangic: Which was bike shop was that?

Clark: Sierra Cyclesmith. I worked there for probably five or six years during the summers.

Horangic: So you learned to be a bike mechanic while you were there?

Clark: Well, you never stop learning to be a bike mechanic or really any kind of mechanic, I imagine. When I first started, that bike shop was owned by these two brothers, Tim and Leon Zasadny. Tim was an ex-track racer and he was a mechanic for the Olympic track team for a little while, a really good mechanic, really hard to work for, very strict and short-tempered, never yelled or screamed, but he was not a good teacher. Leon, most of the time, was a good teacher, but when he got tense, you had to find somebody else to learn from. Between those two, I got my start, I guess, and probably a pretty good chunk of my middle. I was there for a long time.

It was neat shop, pretty high-volume, which is always good for a mechanic because it means you get your hands on a lot of different kinds of bicycles. That shop never turned down a bike for any kind of repair. There are a lot of shops that won't work on low-quality bikes. But one of our pitches at that bike shop was that we would work on anything.

We also charged a flat rate for tune-ups, which meant that to remain profitable and to be an asset, you had to be fast. You had to be able to do a tune-up on a bike in about forty-five minutes to not cost money doing it. So there was always a lot of pressure to be a really efficient mechanic, which is impossible to do when you're learning. When you're a young mechanic and you don't know what you're doing, it takes a long time to figure stuff out and you always have to ask questions and consult manuals. That made a really big impression on me. I didn't like it. I didn't like feeling rushed. I thought it was more important to do high-quality work and be proud of it than it was to remain profitable. That was the biggest effect that that job really had on me. It's where I developed my ethic as a repair person.

Horangic: When did you go to the Reno Bike Project?

Clark: That was a slow entry for me; it would have been 2007 when I actually got hired. When the Reno Bike Project started, it was running out of the garage of my friend Eric Carter. This happened while I was in Incline, in school.

While I was up there, I was living in this little twenty-something-foot camp trailer in a parking lot, which did not have room for the hoards of bicycles and parts that I had accumulated working as a mechanic for years. I had maybe one or two bikes in my trailer up there, and kept the rest of the fleet down at Eric's house. He also had this big cache of all my parts. All bike mechanics are sort of bike-component hoarders. We all have these milk crates full of stuff that we latch onto.

So all my stuff was down there, and the Bike Project ends up running out of Eric's garage while I'm at Incline. The guys who started the Bike Project weren't bike mechanics by trade, didn't really know that much about repairing bikes and they weren't very good when it started.

Horangic: This is Noah Silverman and Kyle Kozar?

Clark: Yes. They're the co-founders, and they didn't know what they were doing. It was all enthusiasm and very little technical prowess. Carter and I had worked at Sierra Cyclesmith and had been friends and co-workers for years. He would call me up or I'd come down on the weekends and we'd be hanging out at his house drinking beers and stuff, and he would tell me all these horror stories about stuff that they were doing to bicycles, while digging through my milk crates full of parts, cherry-picking stuff off it and selling it to god knows who.

I thought it was neat. I admired the enthusiasm. I think all cities where there's any kind of developed bicycle culture, all have a shop like that and they all start out like that. Nobody just gets a huge grant, buys fifty-thousand dollars worth of tools, rents out a space and then figures it out. You know, it's a real slow learning curve. That was just how they were starting out, but when they first got going, I didn't want anything to do with it.

Horangic: What changed your mind?

Clark: It took years to change my mind. I had finished up in Incline. I came back to Reno, I started worked at Patagonia. I was pretty unhappy there; it was a really great company but a really boring job. I had already got accepted to move to Missoula and take that residency position. I had the summer to kill and I was getting in a little bit of trouble at Patagonia for drawing cartoons on all these different boxes. [laughter] My boss at Patagonia takes me outside for the third time and lectures me about how I need to find another outlet for my creative energy. So we just decided that day that I should quit.

While I was there, Noah had been calling me off and on and offering me a position as a mechanic. By that time, the bike shop had moved out of Carter's garage. I had moved back in with Carter, and the bike shop was operating out of this little warehouse on Bell Street.

I had turned Noah down a couple of times for all the same reasons. It was still a little sketchy to me. I didn't want to work there because they weren't well-tooled and they didn't have access to a lot of parts. They were getting their parts through guys like Eric, who would order it for them using another bike shop's account. They didn't know what to order, so they didn't have basic stuff, chains and cables and things that you just need to repair bikes. At that point I had been fixing bikes long enough to where I couldn't hack six chains into one chain and put it on a bike and go to sleep at night. I just couldn't do that kind of stuff anymore, and that's the sort of thing that they were doing.

It just turned out that I had quit the Patagonia job and I had four or five months to kill before I had to move to Montana. The day that I quit/got fired from Patagonia, Noah called me again and offered me the job. I was like, well, it seemed pretty non-committal. How bad could it be to hang out there for four months? It was all my friends and I had known those guys since before the bike shop existed. It seemed like a fun job. It was always really busy. There were always lots of people in there working on their own bikes, shuffling through the parts. It was just an active fun environment, and not like a normal bike shop.

Normal bike shops had, in some ways, gotten kind of boring to me. By that point it's the same crowd, more affluent people with these really expensive toys that they ride

on the weekend. There's nothing wrong with that, but after years and years of working on the same kinds of bikes and meeting the same kinds of people, it was neat to see this other side of it.

Horangic: In the beginning stages of the Bike Project, was it more a place for people to come and work on their bikes?

Clark: Yeah. That's why they hired me, as it started to change. When the bike shop first started, it was this open format space. There were a couple of stands and a little collection of tools and some bins full of used parts, and anybody who showed up could work on their bike. At that point there technically weren't any employees, and the people who were running it, Noah and Kyle and Eric, were the main guys when it was running out of Eric's house, and that was cool. There were no barriers between the professionals or the experts and everyone else. It was kind of this free-for-all.

At a certain point, people started bringing bikes in that they didn't really want to fix themselves. They wanted to drop them off and pay somebody to fix them because they wanted to support the organization. At that point, the volume got overwhelming and they were also starting to get repairs that they just didn't know how to do, and that's when they decided they needed somebody who already knew how to do that stuff.

Eric was working at another bike shop at the time and didn't want to leave, so he didn't want the job and I had not wanted the job previously for the same reasons I already talked about. By the time I got hired in an official capacity, we were starting to form a Service Department and were starting to do repairs for money. Once we started charging money for repairs, everybody realized that you couldn't just hack stuff together and then charge people money. You could only do that if you weren't charging people money. Good intentions only get you so far if you don't know how to fix the machine.

So that's about when they brought me in. When I started, we were on Bell Street and there were no mechanics' stations. I worked in the stand next to whoever happened to be working in the stand next to me, and it was chaotic. There was one big bench with two sets of tools hanging on it, and people would just walk up and borrow stuff. Tools were all over the place, making it really difficult to get anything done.

When everybody's there trying to figure out how to fix whatever they're working on and they get wind that there's a trained bike mechanic in the building, questions, questions and questions start flowing. So when working at my bike stand, it would sometimes take me two or three days to do what would normally take me an hour and a half because I was constantly getting dragged away to either help somebody work on their problem or to hunt down some tool that I had just set down three seconds ago. There just wasn't enough space and there weren't enough tools to fill all the demand. So for that first summer, doing repairs was pretty inefficient, really chaotic, and a ton of fun.

Horangic: Then you left and went to Missoula?

Clark: Yeah. I had already committed to go to Montana, and I never imagined that I was going to enjoy working at the Bike Project as much as I did. When it came time to get up

and go, I had some hesitations. I left right after we moved the bike shop onto Fourth Street. It was the last thing I did before I skipped town.

Horangic: How was the move to Fourth Street?

Clark: Oh, man, it was a ton of work, but it was fun. It was a really good experience for everybody. We didn't really have much of a budget when we moved into that space. We just knew we needed to expand. We were running out of room on Bell Street, and the Fourth Street place was really cheap. That was the big sell.

I wasn't too involved in deciding on where to move to; that was Kyle and Noah. But I was heavily involved in actually doing the moving and setting up the new shop. It took us probably three or four full days, with two trucks and two trailers dragging all the bikes, parts, tools, and equipment down there. Then we spent a lot of time building new workbenches and getting the place ready to go.

Horangic: When you came back from Flagstaff, did you start working at the Bike Project again?

Clark: Yeah, when Lindsay and I decided that we were going to move back to Reno, after she finished up grad school in Arizona, I came back to visit and tell Kyle and Noah, that I was coming back, and they agreed to put me back on, which was really cool because I was coming back right at the end of the busy season. So they were going to put me on for the winter, which in the bike shop world is unheard of. That's when you lay people off.

Horangic: Did you come back as the service manager?

Clark: No, when I came back we didn't have a service manager. I just came back as a mechanic. Since I've been back, there's been tons of restructuring and lots of changes, and that's when we gave everybody grown-up-sounding positions.

Horangic: Do you feel like you were a part of organizing the service part of the bike shop?

Clark: As it exists now, yes. It was totally my baby. When I came back, Kyle had gotten accepted to school in New York. He's currently at Pratt, studying urban design. Kyle is a huge part of the bike shop's infrastructure. He did a lot of work. At that point, nobody really had a job description. It was just a bunch of friends figuring out what needed to get finished and scrambling to patch holes, which worked great for a long time. We didn't realize how dangerous that was until Kyle left. We were all confident that we could handle all of Kyle's responsibilities, but we didn't really know what they were. We had never sat down and written down what everybody's in charge of because we never really needed to, I guess. But it shook things up. There was a whole year after Kyle left where things were pretty unstable, and that was our fault for not thinking that would be a problem.

Horangic: About what year was that?

Clark: That was about a year and a half ago. It took a long time for everybody to figure out what their job was and settle back into it, especially Noah. Having a co-executive director was I'm sure very comforting and a lot less pressure than being the only guy responsible for the organization. It's become a big organization, and I don't think anybody ever thought that was going to happen. Now we have seven or eight employees on staff, and they're all our friends. So that's a lot of pressure to make sure that all your friends have jobs the next day.

So for that first year, things were pretty wild around there. There was a lot of chaos. Another one of our guys, Anthony, took my position when I moved to Missoula. He helped us move onto Fourth Street, and after I left he was the guy who basically managed the shop. Back then, he managed everything. He did all the parts ordering and managed all the repairs. He was also in charge of all the different programs. He did a ton of work and he just got burned out. He would call me while I was out of state all the time, and we'd just have these sessions where I would basically listen to him vent because he didn't know what to do. I would offer whatever advice I had, but that's not much good from three states away. So he totally held it down while I was gone, and when I got back, I think he was just like, "Tag me out. Tag me out." So he stepped down from a lot of his responsibilities. I took over some of them and then we split up the rest.

After about a year of hiring some new people and figuring out what everybody's job was, we all just sat down and talked about what we thought we would be best at. I know how to repair bicycles. At that point I had been a mechanic for probably ten years or something, so I was really comfortable fixing bikes and I also understood how the flow of parts and repairs should move through a shop, how they should be tracked, how to remain profitable, and what to charge for repairs. I'm really the only person that's worked there who's had a lot of experience in other bike shops. So it just made me a shoo-in.

I think the first winter after I got back, I thought that we should remodel the shop, reorganize it, and move some stuff around. What I really wanted to do was build a space in the bike shop that was just for the employees who were repairing bicycles so that we could partition ourselves off, so that we didn't have to spend so much time hunting for tools that other people had come to borrow. My goal was to make a little space in there that was a place where you could be an efficient mechanic, because at that point there was a lot of service to do and it was a big part of our revenue and I thought that it was important to maintain it.

Horangic: Did you accomplish that?

Clark: Yeah. I mean, it hasn't been that long, but it's been a lot easier since we did that. We had a lot of arguments about it. There were a lot of reasons not to do it. It doesn't really fit the ethos of the shop in a lot of ways, because we are a public bike shop and our job is to be an asset to the community, and we're not really supposed to be a profit-generating machine, and that part of the business does make money. The difference between The Reno Bike Project and normal bike shops is we spend that money on things that cost money, like public workstations and programs and stuff like that.

I actually was kind of against the idea of a full-service department for a long time. I didn't think that it was our job to do that kind of work, and I was really hesitant to compete against local bike shops. I was also the only one really sympathetic to other bike shops because they'd been paying my rent for the last decade. So I didn't want to damage the local bike shop scene.

When we restructured and remodeled, we basically started operating like a normal bike shop. It was the first time where we had a set pricing schedule. We charge just about the same as any other bike shop in town does for full-service repairs. In that sense, we're competing with other bike shops but we're competing on a fair market. Since we're nonprofit, we get lots of donations and lots of grants but none of that money goes into the full-service part of the shop. That little part of the business runs almost autonomously in a lot of ways. We can't really spend grant money on that part of the business.

So that was my project when I got back. That was one thing that I thought was important. I took it on and I planned the remodel and organized the workdays. Now it's done and it's going pretty good.

Horangic: Do you think the homeless shelter on Fourth Street affected your clientele at all at the Bike Project?

Clark: Yeah, a lot. Back in the Bell Street days, we were giving bikes away, but we never really had a program or funding for it. We just had a lot of bikes that we couldn't sell, that were department-store mountain bikes. There's not a lot of call for them; nobody really wants to pay for them. But people donated them all the time, and we just thought we could put them to use. So we would fix them up a little bit.

At first, it would just be some random character who would walk in and ask for a bike, and we would make him volunteer at the bike shop for it. We'd make him sort parts or strip a couple bikes or help us clean up and then when they were done, we'd hand them a Roadmaster or Huffy or whatever, and they'd ride off on it.

After a while, word got out and more and more people started showing up wanting to work off a bike, so it turned into a program, which is not a unique thing. There are programs like that all around the country.

When we moved onto Fourth Street, the difference was we were right across the street from where most of those people came from, so they didn't have to wander through downtown and find us in some back alley. We had this big storefront right on Fourth Street. It was easy to find and it was twenty-seven steps away.

We moved into the Fourth Street location right about when Tent City opened up, which was a result of overflow from the shelter right there. When we opened the doors there, we were inundated with those people. There were so many people. They were like, "Oh, you can go over there and get a bike. Oh, you can go over there and get a bike." For folks like that, that's really the only way to get around efficiently and independently, other than walking to the bus.

I didn't really have that much exposure to it because I had moved the bike shop in, got everything set up, and I was gone within a week. We all imagined that was going to happen, but I wasn't really confronted with it until I moved back from Arizona and started working there again.

Horangic: Have you seen any significant changes on Fourth Street since you came back from Flagstaff?

Clark: Yeah, right in our neighborhood there have been a lot of changes. Since I got back they dismantled Tent City. Tent City at one point started enforcing all of these curfews and all of these no-pet laws and stuff like that, and a lot of the residents moved out of Tent City and just started sleeping on the sidewalk on Record Street. That got dubbed Sleeping Bag City. It was this hodge-podge of tarps and tents and people just out there all night freezing. That was in full swing when I got back, and since then they expanded an ordinance that forbids people from lying down on the sidewalk. The police came in and made a big push to disperse all of the Sleeping Bag City residents and then the city dismantled Tent City.

Those homeless folks don't disappear; they just disperse and go someplace else. So that's been a big change. I mean, that's right across the street from the bike shop. I ride right past there on my way to work every day, and for a block there used to be all this crazy traffic and people walking in the streets and wandering around and shopping carts everywhere. You had to sort of play Frogger, skipping between all these moving obstacles when riding your bike. Since all of those folks got displaced, that's probably been the biggest change to the area of Fourth Street.

There's also been lots of stuff like the warehouse next door. There's been a lot of people moving in and taking pride of ownership in the spaces they occupy. I'm proud of the bike shop for doing that. We don't have a ton of money to soup the place up, but with what little we have, we do a lot. We stretch it a long way so it's organized, it's presentable. We painted the front of the building. Even little things, like just painting the front of the building makes a huge difference in the way people perceive an area. A fresh coat of paint psychologically is loaded and not expensive, and that's a really easy and cheap way to change the way a place looks.

Horangic: Was the dismantling of the Tent City a positive or a negative thing for the street in your view?

Clark: I don't know. I think that concentration of people in that little tiny area is not good and that happens anytime you put too many sardines in a can. There are a lot of fights and a lot of violence, and I'm sure that it was a pretty big burden on RPD and the folks who run the shelter to deal with. So I guess it's good that it got dispersed because at least it spreads out the load a little bit and it looks nicer. That's an intimidating scene for a passerby to walk through. If you were just ambling down Fourth Street on the sidewalk and it's the fifth of the month and everybody just got their check and they're all out there spending money, and the ones that are drinking are probably drunk, it's not a very inviting atmosphere.

So for the corridor as a whole, that's positive. I don't know that it really solved any problems. I think it just shuffled them around a little bit. So I have mixed feelings about it.

Horangic: Do you feel that there's a sense of community currently on Fourth Street?

Clark: There's probably several. We have a good relationship with most of the business owners in our area, the bike shop and Bootleg, and everybody who's working in the warehouse. We've been around here long enough that we know the bar owners, we know Paolo across the street at the steel shop. We know the guys at the motorcycle shop across the street. We all have a really good rapport. So there's that sense of community. We all have a lot in common.

Our businesses really are nothing alike, but just running a business on Fourth Street has its challenges. The big one is dealing with the homeless population. For us especially it's tricky because they're our customers, and part of our mission is to make sure that they have what they need to get a bicycle and stay on it. Putting ourselves in that position has been a little bit tricky because it also intimidates other people. Maybe folks who would normally want to come check it out are too intimidated to park their car down on East Fourth Street and walk in, because people always imagine it being a lot worse than it really is, and that street has a pretty long and sordid history of not being a great place to take the kids.

I imagine most of the other businesses think of the homeless population as negative or non-influential. For example, Paolo at the steel shop doesn't really have a retail outlet, it's just a fabrication shop, and it's not like homeless people are wandering into his workspace and bugging him or anything. It's just where he parks his car and goes to work and does his job. He probably doesn't really have too many thoughts either way about how it directly affects his business. Whether he likes driving down Fourth Street and parking his car there, that's another story.

But one of the reasons that we're all there is because it's inexpensive, and one of the reasons it's inexpensive is because of the homeless population. So in that sense they're kind of helping us. We pay forty-something cents a square foot, which is pretty affordable, and if Fourth Street didn't look like Fourth Street, we wouldn't be paying forty-something cents.

Horangic: Is there anything that you don't want to see change on Fourth Street if it goes under a revitalization project?

Clark: The only thing in the plan is that historical buildings get preserved. Other than that, as far as I know, it's pretty fair game. They want to install bike paths and put in landscaping and stuff like that.

Horangic: Do you think that would be positive?

Clark: Yeah. It could be, for sure. I mean, obviously I'm in favor of the bike lanes because I ride my bike there every day. I'm not an urban planner and I'm not heavily involved in any kind of cycling advocacy from the top down. I don't go to those meetings. I don't know exactly what their plans are. I think projects like that are always just a delicate balance. You want to be able to fix the place up and make it attractive to businesses to move in. You want to generate activity in that area. You also don't want to

destroy the area's heritage, and you don't want whatever links it has to the past to be cheesy. It's not really that cool to tear down a beautiful old building, put up some new industrial building and then put a plaque with a picture of the beautiful old building in front of it. It doesn't really make any sense. So the other thing that I worry about is that if it gets too nice, all the folks like us are going to get pushed out.

Horangic: A gentrification issue?

Clark: Yeah. I guess we're kind of the first step in gentrifying that neighborhood, but we're not pushing anybody out; we're filling in vacant spaces. But that's always the pattern. The artists move in and spend some time souping it up, and then the restaurants and the coffee shops and all that stuff move in. Then pretty soon the artists have to go find someplace cheaper because all the property values increase to the point where nobody can afford to stay. So I'm a little concerned about it getting a little too ritzy. But that'll be a long ways out, if it ever happens, and I don't know if I'll still be around by then.

Horangic: I would like to spend a few minutes focusing on some of the transportation issues in the Fourth Street corridor. Do you think there are any transportation issues on Fourth Street?

Clark: Yes.

Horangic: What are they?

Clark: It's a pretty heavily-used thoroughfare. It's one of the only quick ways to get out to Sparks without taking the freeway. When I go out to Sparks for Bootleg Couriers, that's the quickest way to get there, straight down Fourth and Prater. It's one of the few places where on some days I feel nervous about riding my bike in traffic. There are no bike lanes and there is a lot of truck traffic. It would be nice to at least get it widened and put a bike lane strip in.

The other thing that I notice is that people ride their bikes on the sidewalks everywhere around Fourth Street. I'm sure it's a combination of people not knowing the law and people being nervous about dealing with traffic the same way that I am. I deal with it on the street, and I just get on the sidewalk where it's safer. But that's always a bad thing when you've got bikes and pedestrians duking it out for sidewalk space. Those are the bike-specific issues that I know they are addressing in the RTC plan.

As far as traffic congestion, I really don't know. I don't really drive on Fourth Street that much.

Horangic: Do you think they should maintain the four-lane status it has?

Clark: Well, if it were up to me and it came down to reducing traffic lanes to make a bike lane, I'm all for the bike lane. But obviously I'm biased. I don't know. I don't notice the

traffic being really significant enough to demand two lanes in each direction for the entire stretch, but I've never looked at statistics, so I'm not sure.

Horangic: Have you noticed any other safety issues, other than the lack of bike lanes and people on the sidewalks on their bicycles?

Clark: Yeah, there are a lot of pedestrian issues in that area. When Sleeping Bag City and Tent City were in full swing, it was bad. There were times when I'd be riding my bike five miles an hour, weaving through people in the car lane. There's also been a huge increase in pedestrian traffic in my neighborhood since the bus station went in. There's lots of the normal jaywalking which I think is pretty normal when there's that much pedestrian traffic in a little space like that.

I get nervous around there for the pedestrians. There's a lot of drug and alcohol use and there are a lot of drunk people just wandering around in the middle of the street at night. I see them all the time. I don't know that putting in pedestrian infrastructure is really going to change that. They're obviously impaired and not making good life decisions.

Horangic: Do you think that's more the homeless population or also the bar population that is contributing to the night pedestrian traffic?

Clark: It's totally both. I see people that I recognize as people who stay in the shelter. They come to the bike shop all the time at midnight, one o'clock in the morning when I'm riding home from my studio or they're out wandering around. I see twenty-something college kids doing the exact same thing. I don't know if putting a bunch of money into pedestrian infrastructure fixes that. I don't think you could spend all the money in the world and force people to make safe decisions. But it's a dangerous place to be in when they're wandering around in traffic at night.

Horangic: Do you think the sidewalks are wide enough on Fourth Street?

Clark: Yeah, I think so, where they exist. East of us, I don't know if the sidewalks totally disappear, but I feel like in sections they might not be there. I'm not sure.

Horangic: What do you think about parking? Do you think parking needs to be changed?

Clark: Yeah. It's an issue at the bike shop or it has been, historically. Right on the corner of Fourth and Valley, there's a little mini-mart with parking and there's parking against Club Bass, which is our neighbor to the west. The guy who rents that space for the club has rights to all of the parking that touches his building, and that's where our customers park, because there are one or two two-hour parking spots right on the street close to the bike shop, and that's it. So they park there and walk around the corner.

For a while the guy who owns Club Bass, his name is Ray, was towing all of our customers' cars. He wasn't even there. He's only open a couple nights a week, and whenever he's busy, we're closed. So there was never a conflict for parking, but he had

called a towing agency and basically given them the plate numbers of his and his employees' cars, and said, "Anytime there's a car that's not one of these guys, tow them away." So for almost a month customers would come in, go shopping, go outside and their car would be gone, which obviously was not good for us. It took a while and some shenanigans to finally resolve the issue. But I'm sure we're not the only ones with that problem.

Horangic: How did you resolve the parking issue?

Clark: We tried to track him down for a couple of weeks to work something out. He was dodging our calls and he's not around the club much, when we're around, anyway. So one night myself and one of my friends went out and let all the air out of one of his car tires while he was in the club.

I went back in the bike shop and waited, and him and a bunch of his club employees, who are all these young guys, bouncers, come over pounding on the bike shop door. He's freaking out, screaming at me because I slashed his tires. I calmed him down. I'm like, "I didn't slash your tires. I just removed the valve stem." I had it in my hand. [laughter] I don't think he knew what a valve stem was, so he was kind of confused, but still livid mad, livid mad. I'm like, "It's okay. I just needed to talk to you."

So I take the valve stem and the valve stem tool and my air compressor outside. While I'm gassing up his car tire, I have the conversation with him about how towing our customers is hurting our business, and we need to figure something out. So we agreed to meet when he was less angry, and a couple days later we met and hashed out a plan. We have a lot of volunteers at the bike shop, and now one of the duties of our volunteers is to go out and help us clean the parking lot. There's broken glass and beer bottles and stuff lying around there all the time, so we keep the parking lot clean and he lets us use it while the club's not open.

Horangic: Well, that's a good compromise.

Clark: Yeah. It was a long way to get there but it worked out. [laughter]

Horangic: Do you have any last thoughts about East Fourth Street that you want to add that you don't feel got covered?

Clark: For the recent stuff that I've been around for, I think we nailed it down. It's got this really long, long, cool history we didn't even delve into, but there are other people who know way more about that than me. So I think we did.

Horangic: Great, I appreciate your time. Thank you.

Clark: All right.