



Recorded Events

Space Needle Redux: Knute Berger and B.J. Bullert Eye the Needle

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[00:00:36] Welcome to the Seattle Public Library and Space Needle Redux: Knute Berger and B.J. Bullert Eye the Needle. I'd like to first acknowledge the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish people, and acknowledge that we are on Indigenous land, the traditional territories of the Coast Salish people. This program is being held in conjunction with the exhibit, the Space Needle: A 21st Century View now on exhibit in the art gallery on the eighth floor of this building. Next Tuesday, we will be presenting another program with a film. These are two films by B.J. Bullert, who is right here. Space Needle, A Hidden History. We hope you'll be able to join us then too. So, tonight's film is Space Needle at 40. These films can also be viewed on the library's website. If you go to where it says gallery. It'll take you to the Space Needle and you can see the links to resource lists and the films. We had to make a few adjustments to this evening's program, as B.J. Bullert, unfortunately, has come down with laryngitis. We originally were going to have a panel Q&A, but we are saving her voice for very special moments. We are, however, thankful that Knute Berger will be saying more than expected and appreciate his kindness and willingness to step in. Knute Berger really knows the Northwest and Seattle in particular. His book, *Space Needle: The Spirit of Seattle* is foundational to the understanding of a structure that continues to live among us as an icon for the city of Seattle. In 2011, he was appointed writer in residence of the Space Needle while he worked on its 50th anniversary history. *Space Needle: The Spirit of Seattle*, which tracks the needle's first half century from its conception. Columnists, editor and author Knute Berger is Editor-at-Large for Crosscut and Seattle Magazine. He was previously editor of Seattle Weekly, Eastsideweek in Washington Magazine. He is the host of Mossback's Northwest on KCTS9-TV. Let's welcome Knute Berger to the stage.

[00:03:38] Thank you. It's great, great to be here. Great to be among Space Needle fans, nerds. We should feel free to nerd out, not worry about the people who aren't here.

[00:03:54] I.

[00:03:56] In I went to the Seattle World's Fair. Grew up in Seattle. I was there as an 8-year-old. I think every 8 or 10-year-old should go to a World's Fair. And yes, they do happen. They happen all over the world. There hasn't been one in America since 1984. New Orleans was the last U.S. World's Fair Expo 86 and Vancouver was the last one in North America. The last most recent World's Fair was in Kazakhstan in 2017, and the next one will be this coming year, 2020 in Dubai. In 2010, I went to the World's Fair in Shanghai which was the largest World's Fair in history. Ninety million people visited that fair. I was actually there on the day when they hit the record of a million people on a single day, were on site at that fair. What was interesting about it was the it scale was also in a country of over a billion people that had never had a World's Fair. And so one of the interesting features of the fair was a huge museum was built to explain what World's Fairs are to a country that had never seen one before. And as I was going through this World's Fair Museum, I noticed the Space Needle was everywhere. There was a giant model of the Space Needle next to a model of the Eiffel Tower and the Crystal Palace.

[00:05:33] There were photographs of the Space Needle or posters of the Space Needle. There were films of the Space Needle. And when I came to realize was that in addition to being an icon for Seattle, the Space Needle had become a kind of icon for World's Fairs themselves for what they mean. What do they mean? Well, they're about commerce, they're about trade, they're about governments showing off. But they all have the element of being technologically oriented, aspirational, trying to appeal to the best in people and their forward looking, future looking. All of those qualities reside in the structure we call the Space Needle. When I got home, I wrote a piece about it for Crosscut and they were very indulgent in letting me get press credentials to go to various World's Fairs over the years. And as long as I would write something about it, find a local angle. And I got a call from the folks at the Space Needle who said, you know, we were planning our 50th anniversary and we'd like to have a definitive history of the Space Needle written. Would you be interested in writing it? And I told them I wasn't sure. I didn't know how much of a there there was there were the Space Needle.

[00:06:57] And I think that happens when you sort of you know, you grow up in Seattle and you look at Mt. Rainier every day. And pretty soon it's just Mt. Rainier. For me, it was a little bit that way with the Space Needle. It was a big deal when I was a kid. It was, you know, over the years, I just kind of it was part of the landscape. But as I thought about it and I thought about World's Fairs and I thought about what the Space Needle meant to Seattle, I thought it would be a fun, juicy project. So they hired me to write this history to come out in 2012. I said, well, I think that one of the best ways to research this book is if I could spend part time writing it at the Space Needle. So they, we invented this title of writer in residence at the Space Needle. They gave me a desk it was actually kind of a metallic table with some Jetson's chairs on the

observation deck of the Space Needle. And there was a little, you know, those things that you had like across there before we opened it with those ribbon barrieriers, they had a little thing like that around it. So I looked like an exhibit.

[00:08:13] And so we decided that on the days of the week I would go down a couple days a week at least I would go up and get my laptop out. I had Wi-Fi up there, so I would blog and they had a, they had a Space Needle blog. And then on some days I would schedule lunches with people I wanted to interview for the book.

[00:08:41] In 2011/2012, there were still some key people alive who had been part of the creation of the World's Fair and the Space Needle, Jay Rockey, who was the PR guy for the fair, and he was the most senior executives still living. Bagley Wright was still alive. Bagley was a philanthropist and developer, an arts patron here in Seattle, and he had been the first president of the Space Needle. He had helped finance it and he had helped determine how tall the Space Needle was, among other things. He had played a huge role in the Space Needle. And so I began, you know, interviewing people. And then I found that people would when I was writing at my little desk there, people would come up to me and tell me these amazing stories about the World's Fair. I had a guy who was a retired Seattle Police deputy chief who had been Elvis's security man during the World's Fair. He'd been assigned to the Elvis detail. And so, you know, you'd run into these wonderful, you know, wonderful things.

[00:09:56] Just talking about Elvis for a minute.

[00:09:58] The famous, have you guys seen the famous movie about *It Happened at the Fair*, which is the Elvis Presley movie that takes place at the World's Fair, was actually filmed at the fair and then came out right after the fair.

[00:10:12] It's really a pretty bad movie.

[00:10:15] But the scenes on the Space Needle, Elvis did go up the Space Needle and they did some filming at the Space Needle. In fact, Albert Fisher, who was a young man during the World's Fair, was only about 19-years-old. He was in charge of media for the fair. Sort of like, you know, the TV was like computer technology back then. You just hired a young kid who was into into technology to run it. He was in charge of film and television for the World's Fair. And he was put in charge of liaising with the movie with MGM was making this Elvis movie told me a great story about how they, to film, the scenes of going up in the elevator. They had to take the doors off the elevator. And the cameraman was, you know, filming. They had to sign a bunch of insurance waivers. The actual scene that takes place where Elvis is wooing this young woman, this nurse. He's trying to pick her up and they have dinner at the Space Needle, was actually filmed in Culver City in an exact replica of the Space Needle. And they built a pie wedge and they took down all the original silverware and all that kind of stuff. And it's amazing how you have to look at it really closely to figure out that it's all fake.

[00:11:42] I wanted to talk a little bit in a few minutes, in the few minutes I have here is to talk about some of the highlights of the research that I did. Since we're at the library, we talk about research.

[00:11:57] There were a couple of things that I think I brought to the Space Needle thing. One was the folks at the Space Needle told me, write the truth. You know, if there's something that goes against our mythology, you know, let us know.

[00:12:13] The files at the Space Needle were in pretty poor order. There were scrapbooks. There were certain things that that were you could find. But so much of the original documentation and whatnot had disappeared.

[00:12:31] So it wasn't like they had a well-organized archive to go through. One of the things I was really curious about, Murray Morgan wrote a book about the World's Fair that came out when the World's Fair opened. It was for sale and it was all about the making of the World's Fair. He described some of the process of building the Space Needle in that book, and he mentions that an engineer was brought in a man named John Minasian and this chief engineer from Pasadena, California, found that the work that John Graham & Company had done on the engineering of the needle was inadequate. And I think Murray Morgan said he added a million dollars to the cost to the Space Needle and the original construction of the Space Needle cost around four million dollars in 1962.

[00:13:19] I think now it would cost about 20 million just to repaint it. Give you an idea.

[00:13:28] So I wanted to find out more about Minasian, but there was very little on him in the Seattle papers. And I called some people I knew in the architectural community in California, asked if they'd heard of him. No, nobody had heard of him. And I was kind of exasperated. I just couldn't track this guy down. And I happened to talk to Eugenia Woo at Historic Seattle. And I said, God, I'm looking for this guy. He was the engineer on the Space Needle. His name is John Minasian And she goes, oh, I went to college with his granddaughter. And that led me to go to Pasadena to look up the Minasian family, and lo and behold, they had a box of stuff. They said I could have it.

[00:14:10] That had a bunch of their father's papers in it. And I was looking through it and there was all kinds of cool stuff in there. And they said, well, this week we just gave all the rest of it away. And I said, well, what was that? She said, Oh, you know, the engineering drawings, the blueprints, you know, all of that. And I said, well, who did you give it to? And they said, well, there's one surviving engineer who worked with John Minasian, and he lives well, he lives kind of near you. He lives on Guemes Island in Washington State. So I hightailed it back to Seattle and found this gentleman named Gary Noble Curtis. Gary Noble Curtis did all of the engineering drawings for the Space Needle, they have his initials on them. They were all drawn by hand. In Gary Curtis's possession were the blueprints for the Space Needle.

[00:15:09] The original engineering drawings, all of the engineering files, the shop drawings from PACCAR Structural Steel Division, which told you how to put the thing together. We had everything you could build a Space Needle with except the money. But we had all the documentation. This ended up proving invaluable because I was then able to find a volume of correspondence in there where the chief engineer of the Space Needle is contacting the main architecture firm, John Graham Associates, on a nearly daily basis. And and he had a chronological file of all of his telegrams, correspondence. Everything you could possibly want. And of course, the first thing in it was a little, a little notepad from his first conversation with John Graham, which was the guy from John Graham's office that called him and he's writing down, you know you know, Tower and Seattle, need by April 1962. Of course, this is March 1961. So we were able to get a picture of how the Space Needle was built and engineered and all of the bits and pieces that were put together. Fortunately, all of those documents are now donated to the University of Washington Special Collections. So anybody who wants to build a Space Needle old school style can go out to the UW and everything you need is there.

[00:16:42] So that was one of the things we uncovered in my research. The other thing is I was able to meet some of the original ironworkers who built the Space Needle. There was one in particular named Jack Edwards. Who was extremely helpful.

[00:16:59] He and his hobby was mountain climbing. He's a member of The Mountaineers. He's in his, must be in his late 80s now. He was sharp as a tack. He worked on the Space Needle from day one all the way to the completion of the ironworkers work in early in 1962. And he was able to give me an unvarnished look.

[00:17:20] He even had his tool belt with some of his original tools that he worked on the Space Needle, and he was able to give me a really great view of what it was like to go up and build this thing without harnesses, without nets, without looking down. And he told me some interesting secrets we were chatting about, you know, the hidden history of the Space Needle. He told me that, the first of all, no, no iron workers were injured in building the Space Needle. And in fact, the entire construction project, including all the trades, not one day was lost to injury. They won a safety award, which is actually one of the miracles about its construction. But Edwards talked about, you know, who these guys were and basically, you know, they worked they worked early in the morning because the big steel parts were delivered, you know, at 4:00 in the morning. They worked all day until it was dark and then they came down. They would repair at the Iron Workers' Bar and Belltown. They get completely plastered and then they'd come back and work the next day.

[00:18:32] He also told me another secret was they often carried something stronger than coffee in their thermoses. The other thing he told me is he couldn't remember which leg of the Space Needle it was, but there was one leg of the Space Needle he used as a toilet.

[00:18:49] Once they once they were up there, they weren't coming down. So if they had to whiz. So someday, somebody is going to get into one of those legs and get a scary surprise.

[00:19:03] Also, by the way, when they were doing the Space Needle renovation recently, putting the new glass and whatnot in the top house, they did some structural work up there and they uncovered graffiti that the ironworkers left on the beams, often dated, you know, saying we got to this level June 6, you know, and that kind of thing.

[00:19:26] So I love the way they signed their work.

[00:19:32] I'll mentioned another thing in connection with the actual construction, and that is something that happened kind of as a consequence of the book after my book came out.

[00:19:46] And did you all get a free copy if you didn't get a free copy, if you came late or whatever everybody can get. Take a copy over here.

[00:19:57] Peter Steinbrueck, whose father was one of the architects of the Space Needle, helped me with research on this book. And Peter called me after the book came out and he said that the wife, the widow of George Gulacsik, a photographer who had been hired by John Graham to document the construction of the needle, that his, his widow wanted to donate his work to a public institution. And he asked me if I would take a look at some samples that he had from the collection to see how worthwhile it was.

[00:20:34] I got some copies of stuff from Peter. I was excited by what I saw. We went over to Bellevue to Mrs. Gulacsik's home. She opened a closet door and it was full of all the negatives, all the contact sheets. He had documented the construction of the Space Needle from. Basically from groundbreaking in May of 1961 until after opening in April of 1962, he had gone to the site almost on a daily basis. And the interesting thing is there was documentation from PACCAR, Pacific Car and Foundry, which was one of the contractors that provided the steel for the needle. They had filmed and photographed the construction, but almost all of their work people were secondary to the actual physical assembly of the Space Needle. So if you wanted pictures of girders and things, they had a great archive. Gulacsik focused on the workers. So there are these fabulous pictures showing guys with cigarettes hanging out of their mouth and dangling at crazy angles. You can see that it was a multi-racial group. The iron workers were almost all white males. No women worked on the construction site. There were a few Native American ironworkers. There's a myth that, that they came from back east. That's not true.

[00:22:02] They were from they were from the northwest. There was a Yakama tribal member and some others.

[00:22:11] But Gulacsik captured the fact that there was a fairly large African-American contingent of workers on the Space Needle in some of the other unions who poured the concrete who did the painting and some of the finish work on top.

[00:22:27] So, you know, the Gulacsik thing is just incredibly rich collection. The Space Needle in the Library here worked together. It was all donated to the Special Collections here in Seattle Public Library. It's all available online, black and white and color. It's the Space Needle helped digitize all of it for public access. And in one of the little footnotes there is that in the collection, I found a couple of odd shots on the contact page when I blew them up. I realized that Gulacsik had photographed John Kennedy motorcade when it drove through Seattle Center during the construction of the fair.

[00:23:16] Kennedy was a great patron of the fair. He was supposed to be here at the opening and. He couldn't make it. He was supposed to be here for the closing. He couldn't make it. He had the Cuban Missile Crisis and other things that kept him away. But he had driven quickly through the site with Governor Rosellini and and Senator Magnuson.

[00:23:37] And Gulacsik was standing on the Space Needle on this, what we call the skyline level, the 100 foot level with his camera and caught a couple pictures of that motorcade. The unfortunate thing is when you blow them up, they look sort of zap rueter, like look a little too much like Dallas.

[00:23:54] But you see it. You can see Jack Kennedy's distinct hairline and profile in those, in those photographs. That was a wonderful discovery. There were certain things that I wasn't able to resolve. There are several that well, there are several controversies about the Space Needle and I'll just mention them quickly. But one was who is the architect of the Space Needle? Who gets the credit for the Space Needle? And there's that old saying of, you know, success has a thousand fathers, but failure is an orphan. Well, the Space Needle has at least a thousand, maybe two thousand fathers. But the chief architect was John Graham. He deserves credit for the Space Needle, but he didn't design every aspect of it. He was sort of the taskmaster and the driver of the project. He also was an investor in the Space Needle. He was one of the original five private investors that that made the Space Needle happen. And even Victor Steinbrueck credited Jack Graham with getting it, getting it done. But the Victor Steinbrueck was hired to design the Space Needle in the summer of 1960. They were running into a number of design problems and they hired, you know, a brilliant University of Washington architect to come in and problem solve. He did thousands and thousands of Space Needle drawings, almost none of which exist today. And he's the one that came up with the shape and the structural idea for the tower itself. And this was this was a major breakthrough because they were looking at other options which would not have been as graceful or as interesting. And then the top the saucer top was actually the guy responsible for the sort of the the sunburst and the exposed beams and whatnot of the underside of the Space Needle was an architect named John Ridley, who worked for John Graham. But there was tremendous animosity between Victor Steinbruck and Jack Graham over credit for the Space Needle or over who who should have say when John Graham & Company added on that lower skyline level. Victor Steinbrueck went on an absolute campaign against it.

[00:26:21] He felt it violated the whole sense of the thing. Graham, they they they did not get along. Steinbrueck did a famous drawing, which I think appeared in the weekly where he you know, he he he was saying they're going to turn it into a McDonald's franchise.

[00:26:40] They're commercializing it. He drew a copy of the Space Needle as a dollar sign.

[00:26:48] And so Jack Graham and Victor Steinbrueck did not have much positive to say about each other, but I think I think my book got it right about how that credit that both, both of them, deserve tremendous amount of credit for the Space Needle as we know it. And then the other thing which leads into a B.J.'s work is I was able to tell the story of The Feminine One, which was the sculpture that inspired, that was Victor Steinbrueck's breakthrough. When they were going this summer, they were trying to get this thing designed. They had to get it designed. They were running way behind as it was. You know, they said it had to open in April of 1962 there in the fall of 1960, and they don't have money for it. They don't have a location, they don't have any permits. They don't have any finished drawings, they don't have their engineering plan. They don't have, you know, an engineering plan that's viable.

[00:27:53] They are completely, you know, behind schedule. Meanwhile, Victor Steinbrueck is trying to come up with ideas. And in August of 1960, he had a brainstorm where he saw the sculpture of a dancer.

[00:28:07] The sculpture was called The Feminine One. And it was based on a dancer reaching up to the sky. And it had three legs. It was kind of a tripod, a very beautiful shape. And this, Victor, had contemporaneous notes about.

[00:28:25] This design. And when it came to him and, you know, he had documented it pretty thoroughly. And the John Graham people in later years had really worked hard to play down Victor Steinbrueck's role in the Space Needle. And this had been left out of any discussion about the design of the Space Needle, which if you read the John Graham version came out of his architectural shop. And, you know, everybody else was just kind of, you know, secondary player. And there was no mention of this kind of feminine inspiration.

[00:29:03] I was able to get that into the book and a picture of The Feminine One. And the Space Needle has really embraced the story. There's now a statue of The Feminine One there. And they have, they have it on display. In the kind of ramp area that leads up to the elevators where you go up to the observation deck.

[00:29:22] So there were aspects of the needle's history which, you know, were were not widely known or were in fragments or whatever that we were able to bring together in this book.

[00:29:33] So it was really fun. It was a great project. I still think about the Space Needle all the time and. Yeah. Shall we. Do you want to move on to another phase? I can, look I can talk for hours, you know, on this particular topic. So you'll have to stop me.

[00:29:52] I think he did a great job. Don't you think so? I think we need to.... [Applause]

[00:29:58] Well, what we're going to see now is like a nine minute visual experience, it's not like a regular, it's not like a regular documentary by any means.

[00:30:09] It's more of an interpretation because I don't want to prejudice too much of what you're going to see or perceive. I'm going to just roll the film and then we can have a conversation about it. I'm hoping that you'll all be surprised.

[00:30:27] Well, that was a visual experience, partly because it's a video, but I know that you can watch the entire video. It's free, it's online and it's displayed. I think there might have been a sync problem, but you get the picture. The thinking behind this Space Needle at 40 really comes from for me, looking at the needle and seeing a feminine shape.

[00:30:56] And I started, I was turning, I was in my 40s when I made this film back in 2002. And I started thinking about the Space Needle as gendered and as this ubiquitous and omnipresent entity in our neighborhoods, in our, in our way, in our communities. So I was transfixed by this idea of how the Space Needle - it seemed to represent a female form, but also had this amazing sense of watching. You'll see, I know that you can't really see as well in the in the video, but there are scenes that were intended to convey the idea that the Space Needle is watching what's going on around her. She was watching the changes that were happening in Seattle. She was observing the changes that were happening in this country. The. Now, this is going to seem very weird. OK. I'm going to admit that it's going to sound very weird. But one of the organizing principles, the architecture of this film, so to speak, had to do with this process of getting older. When you go from the excitement of being a teenager, you know where you think that, yeah, you know, the future is out there before me, you dream big and you you you go out with a sense of optimism that may capture very much the spirit of the Seattle World's Fair.

[00:32:34] That was forward looking. That was represented by those two giddy, giddy people at the beginning, her riding the monorail, and they're all happy. But then, of course, what happens as you move toward life, is it, you know, as you become an adult, you start taking on more responsibilities. The dreams that you had of the future don't always come to be. And you can experience a sense of disillusionment or illusions starting to fall away.

[00:33:03] So in that phase of development, I thought, wow, that really syncs well with what was happening in the country at the end of the 1960s and in the middle of the 1960s where you saw these bombs coming from Vietnam. You saw the news medias shining a light on the injustices and the discriminations and the inequalities in our society.

[00:33:30] But for me, watching the Space Needle thinking of her in her 20s, 30s, coming into her own. You know, it's the romantic illusions falling away. Romantic illusions, in terms of American history, in terms of the dreams that science and technology would save us and that the U.S. is always on the right side of things. So I tried to give that visual representation by having the raindrops dissolve into bombs falling and the images of Vietnamese prisoners.

[00:34:09] But, you know, life can even get worse, when you think it's bad, it can get worse. And so that's followed by another another period. I just happened to be at the Seattle Center on 9/11. I went out there because I found out that the Space Needle was closed. And of course, as a filmmaker. That's great. So I ran out there and I grabbed my camera and was able to capture this woman who was just come here from the airport. She had a few hours of a layover and she didn't know. So when I told her, you know, her gesture says it all, you know, she goes like that. Seattle Center and the Space Needle, you know, became this this communal space where people come together and gather to to celebrate and to mourn. So that became that section of life where you realize that that people around you, people a generation ahead of you start to pass and suddenly, you know, you're in this place of middle age where you survive, but you're not as full of the dreams that you were in your youth. I used music as a way of trying to cue those experiences.

[00:35:31] Again, somebody looking at the film isn't going to get any of this because because it's not made explicit. But it was part of my thinking as I did the film. I'm also fascinated by this idea of being watched. You know, when you walk around Seattle, when you drive on 99 even before the you know, even even still, if you're coming from 99 from the north, you can get these scenes of the Space Needle hovering above Queen Anne Hill or or if you're driving around town, you might catch a glimpse of her looking at you through the mirror.

[00:36:08] I had heard the story of there being this special place, at the Five Point Bar. You know they were just right at that five corners area, five that triangle. What is that area called? You know, it's where the Chief Seattle statue in Belltown on, on Denny. And so I thought, wow, wouldn't that be cool to represent the idea of being watched?

[00:36:32] So, I had my little camera. And I had a I had a male student that I dragged along as sort of an escort. And we went into the men's room. And that scene where you see the flying-saucer-like shape at the Space Needle. You could still see it. But that's an example of this kind of idea of how the Space Needle is everywhere. And she's watching you, even if it's in the men's room of the Five Point. And, just just by circumstance, you know, I ran into this this this guy who had the Space Needle tattooed on his arm. So that was that was like an extra oneness. But, you know, just like as in life, you know, you you get through and you survive. You observe things happening. You sometimes take action and sometimes you don't. So I began to think of the Space Needle, not just as female, but as having this, this observational presence, this watching things going on around her even when she was no longer the tallest babe in town. So that's basically my backstory for making Space Needle at 40. And of course, I

well, just recently, like 19, 18 years ago, I later I made a new film called Space Needle A Hidden History that really draws on that feminine side and tells the story that sort of fleshes out one of the stories, the origin stories that that Knute mentioned. About the, the inspiration for the Space Needle shape based on this sculpture called The Feminine One. So that's going to be shown next week here and by then I should have a voice back. Peter Steinbrueck will be here. And so we'll I'm Alan Maskin, who is the person who is heading up the renovations where they had the glass floor.

[00:38:32] But, you know, just like my film that you just saw is not a conventional documentary. It's really more of an art piece, more of an experiment. This next film is also something that skirts the line of documentary. It's partly documentary and it's part an invitation to re-imagine this icon of our region as gendered, as female and as having not lost her figure. By the way, have any of you been through TSA at the airport? Or, you know, what that looks like? You know what you do - you put your feet apart and you have to go like this?

[00:39:15] That's like doing the Space Needle. So. So I've been thinking a lot about continuity of shape. So I think we could start something going.

[00:39:26] We could all start doing the Space Needle. Are there any questions? Yeah, it looks like.

[00:39:34] Are there any questions?

[00:39:37] Thank you. Thanks for being here with your film. How did you find all those reflections and use the counter images of the Space Needle that took a lot of work,

[00:39:48] I'm guessing. Well, it just keep, means keeping your eyes open. And I can tell you some locations where I was able to shoot. For example, if you're driving down Fourth Avenue near Battery Street, there's the wherever you see a glass building, it's an opportunity to see the needle - well, so long as it's within within sight range.

[00:40:12] But it really has to do with thinking about, you know, buildings like the Space Needle not as simply solid and the building itself, but seeing how the buildings end up getting refracted in imagery. So, you know, one thinks of a building as solid and the Space Needle certainly has strong roots into the ground. You know, it's pretty earthquake proof untold. But if you start looking at the image of the Space Needle as it's.

[00:40:46] As it appears in your daily life, you know, you might be walking by, be the Microsoft spheres and see it, you might be walking along the, you know, at the Seattle Center and see the MoPOP, formerly EMP, and you can see the distortion that happens in a way that was another kind of deep psychological idea that I had, which maybe speaks to what you were saying is on one hand, something can look very strong and solid from the outside, but the interior life can be one that's warped or there can be one that's distorted. I don't know how

many. If you had the experience of looking in the mirror and, you know, other people think you're looking okay and you look in the mirror and you see, you see every flaw. Or, you see whatever it is. You know, if we mentally we often do a distortion on ourselves. So there's a sense of how others perceive and how you perceive yourself. So when I was looking particularly at some of the juxtaposition of the Space Needle reflected in the EMP and then the real Space Needle standing there, I kept thinking about this dualism.

[00:42:02] And I don't know. To me, it's just kind of interesting to think about because if you look at different kinds of realities, you can see that there are multiple coexisting realities, in the environment by virtue of where people are coming from.

[00:42:17] Any additional questions?

[00:42:21] Well, the Space Needle does have protected view corridors. But still, she is kind of dwarfed. You know, I remember shooting that last bit in one of the last scenes where she's standing out there by herself, you know. But you see these gigantic you see like the Sheraton, all these tall buildings around her. And she does seem like a like, you know, small. But I grew up in West Seattle and in West Seattle looking out at the Seattle skyline. The Space Needle is still off there on the northside of downtown. And viewed from from, say, the beach near, in West Seattle, facing facing the city. You can still see this absolute jewel of a city, particularly at night, with the Space Needle crowning on the other, on one end. I can't tell you exactly what they are - oh. Knute knows about that.

[00:43:23] Yeah. Was for the turn of the century.

[00:43:27] So it was in the, when Paul Schell was in office and they decided they wanted to protect the view corridors from certain city parks. So it's in, it's in the ordinance the city council passed. I think they're five something like five view corridors. So from Karrey Park, I think from Gasworks Park there, there's another one from West Seattle. So, you know, they've tried to make sure that the development as it occurs, as you can see, you know, long term, like in a city like Paris, all the high rise development is a well away from the Eiffel Tower, which stands sort of isolated. There are also some height limits immediately around the Space Needle. But even so, a lot of those views we're used to having, have have changed.

[00:44:18] When I was a Cub Scout in 1961, we went to the top of the Smith Tower while the Space Needle was under construction and they were just starting to put the top on. So as it was in December of 1961, I think, and you could see the Space Needle unobstructed from the Smith Tower. There was nothing in between, and so a lot of the views of the Space Needle have changed, but they've they anticipated this and have tried to mitigate it.

[00:44:53] Any additional questions for, Knute or B.J.? I actually have one for you. When I was reviewing, my colleague and I were both reviewing the Gulacsik, I Can Never pronounce

Gulacsik photographs for the lovely exhibit on the Space Needle, which if you have not seen, please visit the Space Needle exhibit level 8.

[00:45:13] It's open when the library hours, during library hours.

[00:45:17] So I noticed during the photographs or in the photographs that no one was wearing harnesses and that really surprised me. And then you mentioned it. And I was wondering, can you explain that?

[00:45:30] So the safety gear of one era is not the safety gear of another. One of the interesting thing I talked to a number of the ironworkers about this. I wasn't able to track many of them down, but I talked to two or three and they all agreed that they at the time they thought safety harnesses were a hazard. And the reason was that the unsung hero of the construction of the Space Needle was the guy who ran the the crane that brought the girders up. And so you're bringing up these incredibly heavy steel beams. And when they would get up to the higher levels, these beams were swinging in the wind. They were twisting, turning. And the iron workers wanted to be able to jump out of the way. They didn't want to worry about some kind of a harness or something tripping them. They they thought that would be even worse. And Jack Edwards, the guy who is my best informant on the on the ironworkers, he told me, says, well, one time a beam was coming in and a bunch of us were, were trying to guide it. And it snapped a guy's leg in half at the shin, just broke his leg. And then he paused and he said. But he was a member of the carpenters' union.

[00:47:01] The guys who worked on the Space Needle were all, most of them had quite a bit of seniority as ironworkers. Like many unions, they were multi-generation these guys with the union nepotism, you know, had the jobs, their grandfathers, their fathers or whatever had. But many of them had been the guys who got first crack at working on the Space Needle, where the senior guys, they had been building towers in Alaska. They built things like Colman Dock, the original Colman Dock Tower. And a bunch of them had actually just finished working on the I-5 bridge over the ship canal, which is also a very dangerous project.

[00:47:43] At least two ironworkers were killed in that project. And anyway.

[00:47:51] Well, the so-called erection crew was probably about 50 - 50 or so guys who actually did that, that included the the ironworkers, included the crane operators on the ground, it included the the foreman and that kind of thing. And they were working long days to get it done. The ironworkers topped out the Space Needle in December of nineteen sixty one. And then a whole bunch of other unions came on the work site. They sort of had the ironworkers had the run of the place right up until the last few months. There was actually a brief work stoppage when some of the other unions showed up and there was a kind of macho standoff at the top about it. You know, we're not given you given, you know, turf here. I think there were a total of something like 20 unions that had work up there because the top house alone, you

had guys working on glass, you had painters, you had people who did floors, you had plumbers, electricians, natural gas, all that kind of stuff.

[00:49:09] Yeah.

[00:49:11] They were working? Yeah, they were pretty much working seven days a week. And to get it done, they were making I think an ironworker at that point was making maybe four fifty an hour, which was considered a really good wage, his good union wages at that time.

[00:49:28] Yeah. They were they they were doing pretty well.

[00:49:33] Any other questions, happy? Yeah.

[00:49:35] It would be really neat to have a survey of the difference that it makes coming over I-90 from the east to the west in the traffic. If the view of this Space Needle wasn't there, I bet it takes like edge off because it's always breathtaking every single time.

[00:49:55] Wanted to speak to something that B.J. said that also speaks to that, when the Space Needle was first constructed, there were a lot of people as it went up who didn't like it.

[00:50:07] Seattle is skeptical often of new things. You know, it felt like a little bit of an alien invader. Maybe because of the saucer element and people - there were some people that complained about it. I thought it was an eyesore. And quickly that changed. And you can see it in the real estate ads for apartments on Capitol Hill and places where suddenly they're saying Space Needle view apartment, you know, and the there was a story and think of *The Seattle Times* about a well to do family on Queen Anne Hill that had just had a painter paint a formal landscape portrait of their view, which they hung in their living room. And they had to get the artist back in to paint in the Space Needle to make make the view up-to-date. The other thing is it would B.J. was talking about - so people were aware from the very beginning that the Space Needle was to provide people a view to look out and see the city and see the landscape.

[00:51:21] That's really what its main purpose was in many respects, because the World's Fair was built on a site that did not have a view. And so they were, they were desperate to build something that showed off the Cascades and the Olympics and all that.

[00:51:39] Paul Thiry was the chief architect of the World's Fair. He wanted a tower to be built for where the U.S. Pavilion, what we know is the Science Center. He wanted Minoru Yamasaki to build a tower there because that was the highest point on the property and it had a view of the sound. Yamasaki instead did the opposite and built a cloister with no view. The Space Needle bailed them out. People were very conscious, though, when it went up that they could be spied on.

[00:52:12] And this showed itself up in joke postcards where men with binoculars are leering at women like voyeurs through their windows. And after the fair.

[00:52:25] A radio disc jockey, Frosty Fowler. They built a studio King radio, built a studio on the observation deck and Frosty Fowler was the number one morning drive time show. And Frosty Fowler would sit there with his binoculars. And he did traffic reports, which were, I think the first in the city where he'd say, well, he'd be looking out at I-5, you know, and he could see it was getting backed up and he would talk about that or he'd talk about traffic downtown. But he lost his job. He was fired at one point because he was going on the observation deck and recording the license plate numbers of local cars that were in the Edgewater parking lot in the middle of the day and then reporting the license numbers on his radio show.

[00:53:23] And this was seen as a step too far, so Frosty bit the dust. So voyeurism and watching in all of its forms.

[00:53:36] It's still going on.

[00:53:39] Yeah, when I was working on this, you know this too. The Space Needle, it does take photographs. They have. They have that camera at the top. That takes a photo. I don't remember how often it is, but it's really frequent.

[00:53:53] Yeah.

[00:53:56] Yeah. So there's a 360 degree digital camera recording the skyline on a day in and day out basis. And so it's interesting because if you want it for evidence of a particular,

[00:54:11] What happened on a particular day or what the weather was like or what was traffic really like at, you know, in a particular point, on a particular day, it's been recorded.

[00:54:25] In the exhibit upstairs, they mentioned there was like a 40 foot flame coming out the top at one point. Is that, was that true or?

[00:54:33] Oh, yes. So do we have time for me to answer that question? OK. So, yes, the Space Needle used to have a flaming rainbow colored natural gas torch on top.

[00:54:48] And when they were building the Space Needle, it was during the era of tiki torches, Trader Vics and things of this kind. And they decided that showing off natural gas would be a really cool thing. So they didn't want to use it, they didn't need to use it as a broadcast tower. The tower that inspired the Space Needle, Stuttgart Tower was a broadcast tower in Stuttgart, Germany. We didn't need that because we had these towers were already built on Queen Anne Hill. They decided to put this flaming torch up there. So one interesting aspect of that story is with Washington Natural Gas is that they got the gas company. They needed natural

gas for the kitchen. So the gas company said, OK, we'll put it in for you, except we're just going to bring it to the address site, which is at the ground level.

[00:55:44] And they said, well, no, we need it 500 feet in the air and the gas company said we don't do that, you know, we bring it to the address, the ground floor. If you want anything else, you're going to have to pay for it. Well, this did not go down well and the powers that be in the city and the fair and everything got together and Washington Natural Gas eventually put the entire line in, up to the top. And they did it by calling it a vertical street main. So many corners were cut legally in getting the Space Needle done in time, and in fact, the top of the Space Needle is bigger than the private property line of the property it sits on. So it was, it was trespassing on public property until I think in 2000 they corrected corrected that. Anyway, the natural gas tower went on top. They had chemical spraying into it to create kind of a rainbow pattern. Every night they would turn it on at the fair. And, every night after they the fair was over for the night, they turned it off and they sent up guys to clean it because the charcoal. So these guys are on top of the Space Needle tower scrubbing this natural gas torch in the pitch darkness every night in all kinds of weather. And it turned out to be a huge hassle about midway through the fair. It turned out that the torch was leaning. They had to shut it down. They fixed it, and then they continued to light it for a while. I remember seeing it lit. And then after the fair, they would light it for special occasions. And eventually they just took the whole thing out because it was a headache. It was very difficult to maintain. And they also bragged about how much gas it used.

[00:57:37] It's in my, it's in my book somewhere. But it's something like every night we burn enough gas to heat 100 hundred homes, you know.

[00:57:44] And this was seen as a great, a great thing technologically. Oh, and by the way, when in the Minasian engineering papers, I found all the engineering drawings for the torch. That was really cool.

[00:58:05] It is a kind of like Woodstock for the Space Needle. Everybody says that they went up in the Space Needle during the World's Fair.

[00:58:14] Oh, yeah, I'm sure they, I'm sure more people think they went up than in fact, went up.

[00:58:20] One of the things I did was, the Space Needle people asked me, they had a number. And I can't think of it offhand. They had a number for the number of people the Space Needle said had been up the Space Needle at the end of the fair.

[00:58:34] And the president of the Space Needle said, would you please check that, because my math doesn't.

[00:58:40] My math says that's impossible. And because they knew what the elevator capacity was, they knew, you know. Yeah. And so I looked into that and I did find that it was mathematically possible to hit that number.

[00:58:54] And the reason was most people don't know this. The Space Needle opened in March of 1962, not April. They opened it for a month when they finished the observation deck and they also had finished the monorail and they invited anybody in Seattle for free to come and thousands of people went up the Space Needle before the fair even opened. But then they closed it again at the end of March. So there was an extra month of traffic. That when you when you looked at the numbers, it was possible that they had hit those numbers, but I don't think they kept accurate counts. I think they just ballpark it. And I think they did that with fair attendance. You see figures of eight million, nine million, 10 million for the fair. I've even seen 12 million.

[00:59:45] I don't think they know I, I think 10 million is a fair number. And, you know, they were so good at PR, they just it was whatever they said it was.

[00:59:55] So the Space Needle footprint is a private circle of property within Seattle Center.

[01:00:02] Yes. So what happened was, and I'll keep this really brief, but it's it's fascinating. The Space Needle came along so late they didn't know how to pay for it once they had it designed. They couldn't sell bonds. The county was tapped out. This is the city didn't want to do it. In fact, they said it would be a white elephant. They didn't want to touch it. The state didn't have any more money.

[01:00:29] They put everything into the fair. So they got five investors, private investors, to agree to put up the money for it. So Jack Graham, the company was called Pentagram. John Graham did the, did the architecture. Howard Wright that firm did the construction management. And then Ned Skinner, Norton Clapp and Bagley Wright were the millionaires that put in the money. So it's a space age object. But all of the investors were old Seattle timber money or shipping money was like old school money.

[01:01:11] They needed a piece of property and they couldn't, most of the fair site had been assembled based on a public bond issue. And the bond issue would not allow them to give any of that property over to a private entity. So they had to buy, they had to find property on the site after it was basically done where they could build this thing and it turned out on the site of the Space Needle was an old fire station that was owned by the city and it was their control office where all the alarms came in and then they would pull a chain and ring the right station. It was very old school and it had, had been if it had been a horse drawn, you know, fire engine station back in the day. The city surplus that property without any real public process sold it to Jack Graham, who was able to write a check for I can't remember what it was.

[01:02:11] Fifty thousand dollars to get the property. And they owned, they've owned it ever since. So the Wright family, the Howard Wright family over the years bought out the other partners. So one family, the Howard Wright family, owns the Space Needle and owns the land it sits on. Interesting, when they dug the foundation for the Space Needle, they found two interesting things. One was the tooth of a woolly mammoth.

[01:02:42] And the other was a horseshoe from the horse drawn fire department. Yeah, and the horseshoe was put up over the construction shack to bring luck to the project, which it clearly did.

[01:02:58] So we're going to open up the floor. If you'd like to share your Space Needle memories for the podcast. You're welcome to do so verbally. We also have these postcards which you can share your memories and they will then be added to the gallery exhibits on level 8. So you will be part of the gallery exhibit. And these are actually by the table over there.

[01:03:24] And does anyone want to share any Space Needle memories?

[01:03:29] So I have a friend who worked as an elevator operator at the Space Needle in the late 90s. And she was telling me that one of the things that they would sometimes do to kind of freak people out as they were taking them up the elevator was they would throw themselves against the elevator doors. They knew the doors closed, they were not opening, but it would really, really freak out all of the tourists in the elevator. That's awesome. Just hearing that scares me. Yeah. Yeah, there was. She had shared another story, too, where at one point during the 90s there was a lawsuit going on with the union.

[01:04:06] She had been a shop steward where.

[01:04:12] The union members felt that the the management company was trying to break the union, there was a lawsuit. There was one point where one of the managers was in court giving sworn testimony about what the different classes of employees did. And the lawyers were asking him, OK. So what did the ticket sellers do? Well, they sell tickets. Do they do anything else? No, they only sell tickets. That's it. Well, a bunch of the ticket sellers are in the courtroom hearing him say this under oath. And so for several days, weeks, I don't know how long it went after that. That was what the ticket sellers did, was they sold tickets. People would come up to the window. Excuse me. Do you know where the restroom is?

[01:04:52] I'm sorry. I can't give you that information. I can sell you a ticket. Would you like to buy a ticket? Do you know how long the Space Needle is open tonight? I'm sorry, I. All I can do is sell you a ticket. Would you like to buy a ticket? So.

[01:05:07] Well, thank you all for being here tonight. And thank you so much, Knute and B.J., we really appreciate it. It was lovely.



[01:05:15] [Applause] Thank you.

[01:05:21] This podcast was presented by the Seattle Public Library and Foundation and made possible by your contributions to the Seattle Public Library Foundation. Thanks for listening.

