

[00:01:45.790] - Speaker 2

I'd be happy to. I grew up just up the street from Century Three mall, a little further up, 51, and it was my mall. It was certainly my John Hughes coming of age outlet. It was a place I went as a child into teenage years and would come back and visit once I had sort of left home. And the way my age falls, I just so happened to sort of ride out Century Three. So sort of as I was growing up and leaving home, century Three was sort of beginning its decline and closing its doors. So it was always kind of a weird parallel had come back and a little bit more would be missing. So it's very much to me like the illusion of loss, of use, that sort of thing.

[00:02:43.450] - Speaker 1

So how far away were you?

[00:02:45.740] - Speaker 2

A few miles. Drivable. Maybe not walkable, but definitely maybe I'm too young or too old for that to be like where the kids were hanging out. Like it was almost past its point by then, at least with my crew. By then, other folks were going to other malls around. So it was the one that I held out and found as like a special place that I would go to. I would often go there alone. It's just like a place to be when you're a teenager, there's no space. And being in that age is really hard. Right? There's not a lot of space when you're in that weird stage of adolescence. So it served that function for me.

[00:03:36.250] - Speaker 1

Awesome. When was, you remember the first time you were there or the first couple of times. And just like the general atmosphere, was it thriving even when you first went, or was it kind of started decline?

[00:03:56.050] - Speaker 2

Yeah, I think when I was really young, it was still in its heyday. I can remember all the stores being filled except for that third floor. I'm not sure if people have mentioned that to you yet. No, it was like sort of a half floor. I think it was maybe built as like a show of grandeur, at least in my day. I don't think it ever quite was filled. That was always pretty mysterious. Yeah, but I can remember it otherwise being filled with stores with kiosks, with fountains and extravagance and all sorts of like, holiday activity. So I can remember being pretty young there when I was very young there, I guess it was still having its moment. So yeah, it can sort of chart it. I remember one of the most vivid stores I remember was there was actually a pet store in Century Three mall, which, looking back on, you're like, oh, I don't know about that. But it

was towards the Sears end and it was like Kennel Cage. Like, a bunch of animals were in that mall, which is like dogs and cats, absolutely like large animals. It's kind of startling to think back on.

[00:05:15.430] - Speaker 2

And it was almost like a zoo. It was like kids were just sort of you go visit.

[00:05:22.270] - Speaker 1

Small cages.

[00:05:23.230] - Speaker 2

Oh, yeah, like tiny cages. So I can remember it back then, which certainly that would have been 20 years ago or something. And then slowly but surely, when you're a kid, you don't have too much memory of those things lost because maybe when the toy store closed, maybe you're out of that era, so you're not looking for it anymore. That was the weird thing, is, like, things would close, but I would almost be like, out of that era. So it wasn't always so interesting. Isn't it? It almost tracked perfectly too. And that's why I kind of hold it dear. And you talk about memories and mystery. It's all of those things because it was able to service these different spaces at different times. But I definitely by the time I was, like, cognizant of space and consumerism and all of that stuff, it had started its decline. It was like, visible by the time I was able to see it, if that makes sense.

[00:06:28.760] - Speaker 1

Yeah. What were, like, some examples of closing stores? If you ever see decay, like they're not maintaining the space.

[00:06:41.120] - Speaker 2

Definitely towards the end it became sad because it's a destruction of space. Right. But I can remember just corners. It would happen in bits and pieces. Like corners would sort of close off. There was this always to be unexplained section of the mall that I, like, ask because my parents remember when it opened. They remember when it was the Grand Gem. And I've asked them about it, and they even don't quite remember what the original function of this section was. But on the Sears side, on the lowest floor, there was, like, this cobblestone section. Like, the floor was cobblestone. It was, like, maybe supposed to be, like a Main Street feel at some point. Maybe that part got, like, a putt putt golf store in maybe the late oughts. And I was like, oh, I know what that means. Right. That's the beginning of sort of a sign of change. This is no longer like a retail space. This is becoming just trying to find something else. And then that space was always just a little bit dark, a little bit, like, unclear of itself. So that one always stands out in my mind as to what that was.

[00:08:11.460] - Speaker 2

And there was, like, ram spilled up around it almost like a highway, sort of. What I loved about Century Three is the architecture of it, I think is different than a lot of other sort of standard two story malls. Right. But it also, like, a lot of questions, and maybe those were the first things to sort of indicate a change.

[00:08:35.150] - Speaker 1

Yeah. So what were your favorite stores? I guess they've changed over time, but which ones did you go to the most? Do you feel like a hole in your life that they're not there? I guess you don't live in that area.

[00:08:50.140] - Speaker 2

Yeah, it's a good question. I definitely don't go to malls anymore at all. To me, that my era of mall kind of closed with Century Three. And I don't know if that's age or if that's tastes have changed. Like, I don't buy clothes new anymore.

[00:09:08.270] - Speaker 1

Is this thrift?

[00:09:09.180] - Speaker 2

Yeah, literally, just thrift. But I loved all of those stores for a long time. I could remember distinctly, like, the birthday trip that you took when you were a kid was to the Limited Two, which was, like, the Limited kids store, I guess, right. And they had, like, goofy kid stuff in there. So that was a space that I would have been in a lot. It was in the KB Toys lot, which, you know, stuff like, that doesn't even exist anymore. And then another sort of marker of youth is there were a series of stores that I would only really go to with my gal friends when it was like a formal, right. Or like a dance. And so you'd go to the Deb or you'd go to the Charlotte Roost or whatever to find somebody, like a dress or somebody got asked by a junior to prom, so we're going to go get them addressed. So there were a series of those stores that were that memory, to me, I can remember that would have been, like, the first hot topic I had encountered that would have been, like, a big moment of, like, expanded interest and, like, you know, understanding of different, like, cultures through that.

[00:10:34.120] - Speaker 2

So that would have been big. And then I can remember maybe jumping forward towards the end. I like, for several years, only shopped when stores were closing. You'd just go to, like, a store closing sale and you could get everything for one dollars, right? So there were like there were five, seven, nine bodies central. There were a few of them right in a row. And one by one, they each closed. And it was like it became ritualistic. We'd go to those when they were closing. That was something I did with my mother, which was nice because that was like a bonding. We're a little bit different humans, not just because of

nurture nature, whatever, but that was always something we could do together. And so I treasure that for that memory as well.

[00:11:29.450] - Speaker 1

That's cool, right? The closing is crowded, or is the general, like.

[00:11:37.070] - Speaker 2

Those are odd moments, right? Because they would be sort of crowded, but with all sorts of different folks there for different reasons. And also because now I've always had an interest in labor. But those are, like, weird moments for folks. Jobs are coming to an end and you're in that space and folks are making a mess and they just have to do more work. So I always found them a little bit uncomfortable for that reason of, like, everybody is celebrating these great deals and meanwhile, folks are figuring out what they have to do next. So those were always sort of strange and definitely have their own vibe, unlike anything else I've been to.

[00:12:25.430] - Speaker 1

So interesting. Yeah. Do you have any stories about the mall? Were you ever scared or something? I don't know, a good memory specifically?

[00:12:41.010] - Speaker 2

Yeah, let me think of good ways to wrap. I had a very stereotypical early date at the mall that was not very good, but was still sweet in retrospect because it was so young. That involves going to the Orange Julius. A little bit too on the nose. When I think back on it, like, oh, my goodness. Have you heard about the Century Three alien yet?

[00:13:11.760] - Speaker 1

No.

[00:13:12.740] - Speaker 2

Okay, tell me about it. This is a treasure trove, so this is all second hand. I can't claim any of this as my own, but it was a cultural thing, if I can use that word. And it became very popular by high school at that time. And, folks, we got a lot of laughs out of it at that time. When Century Three had sort of passed its peak, it was beginning its decline. It had become sort of a joke regionally, but still beloved, still understood for what it was. There was a reported alien sighting at Century Three. Mom.

[00:13:54.500] - Speaker 1

Oh, my God.

[00:13:56.650] - Speaker 2

And the story is like any other. It's, like, unspectacular in that it is just sort of goofy, but it made, like, local news. I don't know if it was a slow news day or what, but it was picked up. And so the story is like an alien story. And a lot of it I've lost at this point, but it's like someone sees this alien. What became spectacular about this otherwise normal sort of hoaxy story was that the person who spotted the alien was asked to draw an image of the alien that they saw. And it is one of the funniest pictures I've ever seen in my life. We don't want to say anybody's art or anybody's artistic ability, but it is just a very silly looking creature. And so it became like, in high school, if you were any kind of reference that even with somewhere close to an alien or like any sort of any opportunity to reference the Century Three alien was taken. He made appearances on billboards, he wanted pictures around the school. He was very well known locally. Honestly, that might have been what Century Three was most known for. In that sort of section of yours was the legacy of the alien.

[00:15:46.970] - Speaker 2

It seemed like it was just like a sort of man on the street scenario, but maybe the visual look like it was sort of a child imagination. But that's awesome. Yeah. So that definitely is, like, worth capturing. I think it was a silly moment for the Mall because the Mall had been kind of villainized. It had been sort of used to perpetuate racism locally. It had had this sort of dark moment. So that was like, I think, in terms of my memory, like, frames it out as much more silly and innocent and is a better touchstone for the function that it serves.

[00:16:33.150] - Speaker 1

Can you tell me more about the evil racism?

[00:16:36.660] - Speaker 2

Oh, definitely. That's, I think, a really central part of the Century Three story is that, like, Century Three is built on, like, a swag dump. Right? It's like very post industrial as they come. Side note, my grandparents told me they would go in, like, the old end. Like, they would go and make out on that before it became the Fall, which is very funny. We all know the story of the Mills clothes and what that raw on the rest of the region. And so Century Three became, over time, a more integrated space than it would have originally been. It would have been at least the late 90s, if not a little earlier, into the early 2000s. Mall kids have always been a concept in malls, right? Like kids hanging out in malls. We celebrate stories and movies about this, but when the color of those kids changed or became more predominantly black or not in white, it became this sort of it changed the narrative about them all, especially by a lot of the older white folks who would have seen that as their space previously, and so no longer can be such. And so it was perpetuated as a place of the word gangs that have been used, or violence.

[00:18:27.200] - Speaker 2

I mean, this all predates me. I had no experience with any of that whatsoever. I was never bothered. You were left alone in this. It would have been a more integrated space than a lot of Pittsburgh in my memory and my experience, which was very beneficial. But to me, those were literal boogeyman stories that a lot of folks, my parents generation would say sort of were the beginning of the end for the mall. It's really interesting because it's definitely something I only learned kind of post facto and, like, talking to folks maybe who are ten or 15 years older than me who were there more when it was in its prime and there were just, like, a lot of folks there, period, by the time I got to it, there weren't kids hanging around because nobody was there. That, I think is maybe more telling of the broader story of Pittsburgh, which is interesting.

[00:19:32.690] - Speaker 1

Awesome.

[00:19:33.380] - Speaker 2

Yeah.

[00:19:36.270] - Speaker 1

So now that it's like closing the bandage, have you ever snuck in or know anybody that snuck in?

[00:19:42.890] - Speaker 2

I definitely have no folks that did it. I did my own personal salute to it when it was in its last few days. I went and said goodbye, and that was good enough for me. I'm not a huge fan of, like, the no, I shouldn't say I'm not a huge fan. In my line of work, I deal a lot with what folks would call like, ruination porn and sort of like what once was. So maybe because I grew up in this region, I'm a little numb to it. Like, I've seen so much of it that it's not as spectacular as, like, when Century Three goes viral or something. And so for that reason, I am very content with sort of leaving it in its sort of stumbling phase that I'll always have it in my mind. I don't think I'd want to see it with its roof caved in at this point. I think I am content with my memory of it.

[00:20:48.970] - Speaker 1

Yeah. I recently heard that they're thinking of turning it into Amazon Warehouse. How do you feel about that? Does it make you sad or also live like a few miles from, like, a giant Amazon place?

[00:21:07.670] - Speaker 2

What a good question. Yeah, I mean, it's complicated for a number of reasons. I definitely because I'm interested in space. I work in sort of related fields. I've gone through my head and my rolodex of like, what could it be? How could we repurpose it? Could it be a bunch of small businesses? Blah, blah, blah, blah, blah. And at this point, it's like, probably not going to the building, probably isn't going to stand. It's probably going to be repurposed, bulldozed down. I love it for its weirdness, and I'll be sad when they do so. But also, what could possibly fill the show, right? So I'm okay with Newness, which ten years ago would not have been it would be Century Three forever in my mind. But to go from one thing, which is a loss of a deer memory to the most villainous is quite the jump. So I would really love if it could be something a little bit more community oriented. I remember a few years ago folks were talking about how there's such a high demand for different sports spaces in that particular region, particularly ice space is really limited, or different fields, that sort of thing.

[00:22:37.040] - Speaker 2

That could potentially be a really great location for that because it's between a bunch of different municipalities that could use it, again, different kids, a space of integration, perhaps, between otherwise sort of often checkerboard municipalities that are not diverse. If that site could serve that function in the South Hills, I think the best it could possibly do.

[00:23:05.960] - Speaker 1

Yeah, that's a great idea.

[00:23:07.520] - Speaker 2

I mean, it's a slag heap, though. It's hard to kind of overcome its original function. I don't know if they want kids, like, running around and falling into, like, you know, decaying coal. But yeah, I think I think it probably well, let's say this. It would be even sadder if it just sat and decayed for another 50 years. Right?

[00:23:36.660]

Yeah.

[00:23:37.140] - Speaker 2

That, I think, would be an ultimate sadness because then it can actually serve anybody that's around. It will have not that space will be purposeless or be not accessible by folks. So that, I think I fear, reminiscing it too much and coddling it too much for that reason of like, a kid growing up now can't access that at all unless they're sneaking in for a night or whatever. But it's complicated. It's always hard to think of what next.

[00:25:24.290] - Speaker 2

So those are just kind of cool and worth looking at. I'm trying to think if there's anything, like, regionally specific that's worth looking at. I can't think of any actual century three writing because I would try to have been all over that. But there's definitely a lot on, like, brownfield reuse and all of that. But it's a little bit different. Right? Because it's, like, set back. It's not on a river. I have to think a little bit about it, but yeah, just like, familiarity, I guess, with that little area that surrounds it, I think, helps, like, what those communities are and how they've changed. That might help a little bit. Just because that's, like, a real part of, I think, the mall story in my mind.

[00:26:20.770] - Speaker 1

Yeah, it's a great idea. Is there anything else you'd like to.

[00:26:26.620] - Speaker 2

Add or the alien was at the top of my list.

[00:26:31.020] - Speaker 1

Yeah, I've never heard of the alien.

[00:26:33.210] - Speaker 2

Good. I didn't do it justice, but there's definitely alien content out there. There are so many silly anecdotes of it, but I just think it was a different the most unique mall experience I've ever had. Is that that one?

[00:26:59.190] - Speaker 1

Do you still go to mall?

[00:27:00.750] - Speaker 2

No, not at all. I don't think I've been in a mall. I was just talking about this with some of my friends the other day. I don't think I've been in a mall maybe since Century Free sort of closed its doors. It's hard to think of malls moving forward, honestly. To me, they're so time capsuled in that moment.

[00:27:22.470] - Speaker 1

Unless they're like the high end malls or something.

[00:27:24.810] - Speaker 2

Yeah, the fancy mall. I like malls. I should mention this, like, Century Three mall is what got me interested in urban studies in space. Oh, definitely. Yeah, because it just coincided again with my area of work I

particularly work in a lot is like, Main Streets and small businesses, and Century Three was one of the first spaces I got to watch people's consumption habits and shopping. And I just got really interested in retail and how that works, and not from consume consume way, but just from a habits way, like what drives people to buy something from Walmart versus something maybe more locally. And of course, we know economics has a lot to do with all of it, but when I was especially, like, a teeny bopper and figuring out putting together what all these ideas were, I had no idea what urban studies was, of course, at that time. What does that mean? So when I did run into it, I was like, oh, my gosh, this sort of is piecing together a lot of these random, fragmented thoughts I've had over time that I credit them all with being sort of a catalyst of beginning a lot of those thoughts about space and about small business and about just general, like, understanding of public space and that sort of thing.

[00:29:02.470] - Speaker 2

So, yeah, I do give them all some credit in that story. That's probably my last note on it. Yeah.

[00:29:08.580] - Speaker 1

Great. Thank you so much.

[00:29:10.000] - Speaker 2

Of course I'll.