

Chris Amirault was born in Melrose MA during the mid 1960s. He attended Brown University between 1981 and 1986. As an undergraduate he lived on Governor Street, John Street, and Power Street. He was also involved in the neighborhood through his work at School One, an alternative high school located in a building owned by St. Josephs Church on Hope Street. He was a volunteer teacher there for a few years during his undergraduate years. After graduate school, Amirault returned to Providence and worked for the Institute for Elementary and Secondary Education at Brown University between 1997 and 2003. In 2003, Amirault took over as the director of Brown/Fox Point Early Childhood Education Center, which is a pre-school located at 150 Hope Street.

Amirault recalls his experiences in the neighborhood and also connects his experience to historical trends. He says he learned a lot about Fox Point from talking to people about food because he believes that one way to know a community is to engage people in conversation about an aspect of their community. Because good food is very important to him, he has found that talking to people at Eagle, Friends, and other mainly Portuguese stores has been a great source of information, although he admits that these relationships are not very strong. Taken as a whole Amirault paints a picture of the downfall of a predominately Portuguese neighborhood—the loss of families and sense of community. He says, “So, I’m pretty cynical I guess about the changes of Fox Point.”

He attributes the flight of families, in part, to Brown University’s relaxation of policy regarding off-campus housing for undergraduates. As a student worker in the Housing Office he saw first hand the increasing number of students granted permission to live off-campus. In fact, he took advantage of this and moved off-campus as a junior. Although he lived off-campus, he did not identify with the other predominately wealthy off-campus students because he had to write a budget to convince his parents to let him move off-campus. He contends that off-campus housing hurt the neighborhood because it created a “secondary housing market for Brown students” that drove rent up 40 to 60% because there was constant student demand. He is quick to note though that Fox Point would have changed more quickly if there were not so many triple decker style houses. Such houses he argues are not attractive for junior faculty or professionals so the neighborhood has remained a student neighborhood. He remarks that it is possible in the future, especially with the completion of the I-Way that the neighborhood will become even more gentrified as the triple-deckers are converted into more desirable housing.

Moreover, Amirault contends that Fox Point is not considered a neighborhood by many. He says, “I mean it was never, it was never about being in the neighborhood, it was about going to where I lived, which is a strange thing.” Students and faculty do not have a relationship to the neighborhood beyond thinking of it as a place where the University or their house is located. Furthermore, Fox Point is a place where people do something particular such as send their child to school or go to the coffee shop but it is not a multi-generational neighborhood like South Providence where Amirault lives now. The lack of children adds to the sense of Fox Point as a transient place, and he wonders whether Fox Point is anything more than a “collection of streets and houses.”

