

## Clifford Ball

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## **Clifford Ball**

### **State your name and tell us when you came to Olathe.**

My name is Clifford Ball and I was born in Olathe on a cold January day in 1928 on a farm that is west of town.

### **When did your family come to Olathe?**

My great grandparents came to Olathe in 1869. They had been thinking about coming to this part of the country but the Civil War came along and so that kinda of held them up, so they finally did come out in 1869. They were Quakers, I'm not a Quaker, but my grandparents were Quakers and they did not believe in slavery, they did not believe in war.

### **The DVD was stopped and then the conversation picked up with:**

Olathe didn't change much from right after the Civil War until the beginning of WWII. During the Civil War, during the battles, when they had the border wars Quantrill came on September 6, 1862 and raided Olathe and killed about six people. And so right after that, people were worried about the border war. And so the town really dropped where there were only a dozen homes in Olathe right after the Civil War. And then it started growing a little bit, and the population increased to about 3,000. And it stayed between about 3,000 and 4,000 up until the Second World War.

The Second World War came along and they built the US Naval Air Station out southwest of Olathe. And they built the Sunflower Ordinance plant out west of Olathe. And that brought a lot of people here and so the population started to grow, and went up to 8, 9, 10,000. And then in 1956 I believe it was, Interstate 35 was built and that way Olathe became a bedroom community for Johnson County and it's grown. Now we have a 120,000 people.

When I was your age in high school we had just a little over 3,000 people. My father ran a service station right up where the courthouse is and I would work for my dad after school and on Saturdays at the filling station. And we very seldom saw anybody we didn't know. We knew everybody in town. Town had a population of 3,000 to 4,000 people and we knew everyone. Every once in a while someone would walk down the street we didn't know and we would say, "Wonder who they are?" You don't do that today. Joann and I go out now to dinner hardly ever see anybody we know. Town is so big.

### **Where did you live as a child? Where did you grow up?**

I grew up as I said I was born on that farmhouse and then my dad... and the end of the great depression we had to leave the farm because he couldn't make it on a farm. And so he went to

work for the State of Kansas working on the highways and we lived over in Desoto which is just north and west of here and I went to grade school in Desoto for a couple of years and then he thought he had a job in Olathe so we moved to Olathe in 1939 I believe it was. And I went to then finished elementary school, and went to junior high and high school in Olathe. And then WWII came along and a lot of my classmates were a little bit older than I was and they went away to the service before they even graduated many of them. And some of the girls in our class married their boyfriends who had to go away to the service and they followed them so we lost some of the girls in our class because they dropped out of school to get married and followed their boyfriends. So by the time we graduated our class was very small. I think we only had 55 to 60 people in the class when we graduated. And I joined the Navy the day that I was 17. I had so many friends that had already gone, and so the day that I was seventeen I talked my dad into signing the papers so I could go into the service. Later on, my sons and others tried to avoid going to the service, but I couldn't hardly wait to go to the service because so many of my friends were in.

**What was your childhood like growing up during the around depression around this area?**

As I said early on in my childhood we lived on the farm and we had no electricity we had no central heating we had no air conditioning. My folks were very, very poor, but everybody in the farming community was poor, so we really didn't realize, I guess, how poor we were. And I had a very good childhood you know I have no bad memories of it. I loved living on the farm and hated it when my dad left the farm.

Then when we moved to Olathe and I was in junior high school I got my first job. I was walking down the street up town around the square and this lady came out of this dry goods store and her husband had died and she was trying to run the store by herself, and she said would you like to work for me after school? She said I have a department in the store where the farmers come in and buy their underwear and their overalls and their shoes and they don't like to buy that from a woman. She said if you come in the afternoon you could run my men's department. So that was my first job.

Well, I worked so I worked for that Mrs. Hackett and I worked for Mrs. Hackett for a few months and then the Fairmont Ice Cream Store opened an ice cream store and the people that ran that store asked me if I wanted to work at the Fairmont Ice Cream Store after school and on Saturday and they said, "We'll give you \$5 a week to work after school and Saturday". Well I thought, boy, that's great \$5 a week, well I didn't realize that they were going to hold out Social Security which was 1% so my first week I got \$4.95 cause they held out five cents for Social Security.

While I was working at the ice cream store, and I had worked for my dad and they started building the air base and they needed kids to come out there and carry water to the construction crews. Well you were supposed to be 16, I wasn't 16, but I put down on my application I was 16 then they didn't check and I got a job carrying water to the construction crews at the air base for 42 cents an hour. I thought I was rich. I was going to wear silk shirts and really be big. Then when I started carrying water out at the air base the construction workers would say, "When you go back up there to refill your water container would you get me a candy bar out of that machine up there?" they say, "If you get me a candy bar I will buy you one". Well how many candy bars can you eat in one day? So I decided that I would take candy out there and we had a wholesale candy company, Gene Green Wholesale Candy Company here in Olathe. And I talked to Gene Green and asked him if I could buy candy wholesale from him and he said sure. So, I used to take candy out to the air base and when the guys wanted candy I would sell it to them. So I made more selling them candy than I did carrying water.

### **What did you have to carry the water in?**

It was a big container that fit over your shoulders you put these straps over your shoulders and it was on your back and then you had these paper cups and the workers would take a paper cup and go around your back. It was a tough job because some of the workers wanted it cold and some wanted it not too cold. And if I would put a little ice in it and then someone would say, "What are you trying to do kill us with the cold water?" (*He laughs ha, ha*) So, that was my first job of trying to please everybody.

Another interesting thing was, after the base was built, they built that base in about seven months, really fast. After the base was built, The Frisco Railroad, which is the one up in the east part of town, now its Burlington Northern, at that time it was Frisco, the Santa Fe was down there and the Frisco was up here. The Frisco Railroad came to high school and they said the tracks are wearing out with all the war materials and everything being carried on the tracks and we have to lay new rails from Fort Scott to Rosedale and we can't get any workers. All the physically qualified workers are going into the service or they are going to war plants where they are considered essential and not eligible for the draft so we're going to hire you kids to lay the tracks. So they weighed us and we had to weigh a certain amount and had to prove that we could help carry the rails and all that.

So we went to work laying the track out there that summer and they gave us the name "the diaper gang". We were the "diaper gang". Well when school was out when summer was over and we had to go back to school they offered some of us jobs to work on the weekend, on the section. So I worked then on the railroad on the weekends. That was kind of my contribution to the war effort.

When WWII was at its height early on, before I went to the Navy all of us in high school were really involved. We were involved in scrap drives where we would collect aluminum they had to have aluminum to make planes and so we would talk our parents into giving us their aluminum pots and pans and they put a fence up at the courthouse square big circle fence and we all went up and threw our pots and pans in there. There was this huge pile of pots and pans and then we would save our allowances and everything and buy war savings bonds stamps. They would give you a little booklet then you would buy these stamps for 25 or 50 cents and put them in this little booklet and when you got \$18.75 worth in that booklet then you could turn that in for a savings bond which the government needed that money to buy war materials, planes and ships and everything. Well, at Olathe High School we bought enough saving stamps and war bonds to buy two jeeps and an ambulance. I thought that was pretty darn good.

**Were there a lot of shortages of material things here in Olathe during World War II, ordinary stuff, tires and stuff like that?**

You know everything was rationed seemed like. Tires were rationed, in fact, you couldn't hardly get them and if you got them they were made out of synthetic rubber which wasn't any good in those days. Sugar was rationed. The restaurants would get a small amount of sugar so you would see these sign up on the restaurant walls that would say use less sugar and stir like hell. So sugar was rationed, meat was rationed. When I came home on my boot leave my mother wanted...I used to just love pork chops as a kid, and she wanted to have some pork chops and so she went up to the butcher. I don't know how he did it but he got her some pork chops for my dinner when I got home on my boot leave. In fact, his name was Mahaffie. He was a grandson of the Mahaffie Stagecoach people.

**Can you tell us a little more about Olathe during WWII, what it looked like and more about the war effort and how people lived.**

First let me start off by the first day of the war. I wanted a rifle so bad I was old enough that I wanted to go hunting and everything. So my dad and I were in Kansas City and there was a chain of drug stores local drug stores called the Katz Drug Stores. And they had a sporting goods department in the Katz Drug Store at 40<sup>th</sup> and Main. And my dad and I were looking in there for a rifle and I was hoping I would get a rifle for Christmas. And we were looking at a 22 rifle in the Katz Drug Store when this lady came running in the store and she was crying and screaming and she said, "We're at war, we're at war, they've bombed Pearl Harbor". Well none of us knew what Pearl Harbor was. We didn't know if it was down the road or where it was, but anyway she had heard that on her radio that they had bombed Pearl Harbor. So that's where we were when we heard the news that the Japanese had bombed the United States Navy. The next day at school they had an assembly and we all went into the assembly and they had a radio and

they turned on the radio and we listened to Franklin D. Roosevelt give his talk about, “this is a date that will live in infamy,” and so that where we were that day.

We had a pretty active National Guard in Olathe before WWII. I can remember going up east Cedar Street about the 600 block of east Cedar Street, and that is what we now call Navy Hill ‘cause they built a lot of houses for Navy Officer’s wives up there. But that used to be a field before WWII and I can remember going up there on Sunday afternoon and watch the National Guard go through their exercises loading the cannons and dry firing them. And they wouldn’t actually fire live ammunition or anything. So we had that active group.

In 1940 the year before the Second World War, the National Guard group was called to active duty and sent to the Aleutian Islands. And they were up in the Aleutian Islands at the time of the bombing of Pearl Harbor. Well they thought they were going up there for twelve months, but they were actually up there for 27 months, in the Aleutian Islands.....the Olathe National Guard. And there is still some of those people around. There is a man that lives right up there behind Olathe North High School by the name of Barney Paulsen. And Barney was one of the ones that went to the Aleutian Islands.

**Does Mr. Paulsen still live in Olathe, did he come back?**

Yeah, he might be a good one to talk to, and you can get his address in the phone book, but he is right there behind the school.

**When you were growing up in Olathe or around Olathe were cars still widely used or were there still horse and buggy?**

I was thinking about that the other day. I think the horse and buggy were about gone. There were the Model A Fords and some people still had Model T’s, but when I was in high school. I’d drive by Olathe North and I would see all those cars, when I was in high school we had no more than four or five cars that kids drove and those were kids that lived out five or six miles from town. But very few kids drove to school. Gasoline was rationed if you had an “A” Stamp you got three gallons a week of gasoline, so that wasn’t too much. But we were kind of lucky, in that my dad a service station and some of the defense workers, building the base and the Ordnance plant, would come out and they got extra stamps for going and coming to work and they would come in and fill up their car maybe would get 14 gallons of gas in their car but they would give dad 15 gallon worth of stamps. So he was one gallon extra so he was always able to help us in high school. If he wasn’t able to help us some of the kids lived on farms and they got gasoline for their tractors so they weren’t supposed to use it. You know, we would use a little tractor gas.

When I was in high school on Friday nights most of our basketball games or football games were on Friday nights. And on Friday nights after the game Olathe, Shawnee Mission, Rosedale, lot of different schools the kids would all go to this one place down on Metcalf and Shawnee Mission Parkway it was called Paup's. **(He spells it P-A-U-P-S)** And the man who ran the place his last name was Paup and he had juke boxes in there. It was a two level deal: booths, and juke boxes and all the kids from all the schools go there on Friday night and dance. He had French fries and milk shakes and cokes and if anyone was caught with liquor—out they went. And boy they had a hard time of ever coming back in at Paup's. He was a great guy. But, a...that's how we used to learn jitterbug and do our dancing going to Paup's. In fact, Joanna's and my first date was a Paup's.

### **What did Olathe look like in high school and kind of going up from there?**

Ok, let me say what Olathe looked like when I was in high school. Now we have 119<sup>th</sup> and Strang Line Road. We've got all these shopping centers out here. When I was in high school, all of the business was downtown Olathe....around the courthouse square. We had seven grocery stores around the square, we had four drug stores, we had four or five clothing stores, we had two barber shops or three, we had three or four hotels, we had the Avenue Hotel, the Olathe Hotel, the National Hotel, we had three big hotels downtown. We had a couple of furniture stores and the furniture stores were also usually ran by the mortuaries. They had a mortuary business and when people weren't dying and they didn't have any funerals they were selling furniture. We had no ambulances; the mortuaries used their hearse for an ambulance.

I can remember one evening, most of the kids older than me already gone to the service and a couple of us who weren't 17 yet were sitting up on the church steps at Cherry Street and Loula which was a big Methodist Church. And here came this hearse by and Mr. Floyd Repetius who had a funeral home and he was acting as an ambulance at night and he said there's been an accident out on the Kansas City Road. And he said I need you guys to come help me. So there we were, we went out we had to help him pick up these injured people and put them in this temporary ambulance and drive...We had no hospital in Olathe we had to drive them down to Kansas City. It's still very vivid in my mind picking those people up out of that wreck. We had another bad wreck in Olathe when I was in high school.

There were Trailway buses that left downtown Olathe every 30 minutes for Kansas City. They also ran to the air base and back all the time and it was a day kinda like this when it was pretty slick. And one of those buses out here at Elm and Highway 7, Parker and Elm ran off the road and hit a tree and several people were badly injured and one or two were killed. And I was in high school that was just before I went to the service and I heard that there had been this bad wreck out here and I can remember several of us from Johns P. St. John Memorial High School came running out here and helped with those injured people.

Olathe was relatively confined and relatively small we knew about what everybody's parents did in the town. We knew which ones were the grocers, which ones was the druggist, which one was a barber. We knew where everyone lived. I am always amazed when Joann and I are out in the car, I'll say, "Now I can't remember who lives in that house, oh that was the Blanekenbaker" or that was somebody else, I mean we knew where everyone lived. Can't say that today. This area right here where this house is there was a railroad that ran right down through here. And now we have this park over here named after the railroad which was the Calamity Line Railroad. It was a railroad that was built to help farmers get their produce out of western Johnson County and it was never profitable, it never made a dime. And so that is why they call it the Calamity Line Road. It was a calamity.

**When did you come back to Olathe after the service?**

Ok, I came back enrolled at KU. My service time was relativity short. So, I only had enough GI Bill to get me through three years at KU. So Joann and I were married when I was a sophomore at KU. After our honeymoon we had \$60 left and I went to KU and she worked, I studied. When she wasn't working I would be working when I wasn't going to class I worked at the Jayhawk Café which is on 14<sup>th</sup> Street and Ohio in Lawrence. I made 35 cents an hour. Uncorking beer for the football team. **(He laughs)** So Joann, when she wasn't working she would read a lot of my assignments and underline for me and then I would just read what she had underlined system worked really well I made the Dean's Honor Roll.

Then so after I graduated and went to work for Hallmark we decided rather than move to Kansas City since we were both Olathe High School graduates and knew Olathe; we knew the bankers, knew the pastors and everything we decided we would come back to Olathe. So we came back to Olathe and for a very short time lived in an upstairs apartment and then had an opportunity to buy a brand new house and pick out the wallpaper and paint and everything. The cost of that house was \$8,750. It was out on north Woodland. So we bought this little...we didn't have enough money for the down payment so she took her check, she was working at the courthouse so she took her check...I had gone to work for Hallmark and I got \$87.50 every two weeks after they held out all the deductions and so with her check and my check we were still a little short so we talked her mother into loaning us some money and made the down payment on the house and our payments were \$44.00 a month on the house. **(He laughs ha, ha)** So radically different from today when you guys go out and buy a house and you have to pay \$200,000.00 for it or so.

**You mentioned a little bit about the businesses downtown. Can you tell us a little bit about what businesses have left what businesses might still be there and how the downtown has changed?**

Ok, downtown has changed in that, really, if you go downtown now there's one retail store, Hannon Jewelry Store. Urban Renewal, was a program the government had back I guess, in the 60's, maybe and urban renewal was going to provide funds for the downtown Olathe to be revitalized. And they were going to buy the older buildings downtown and have them demolished and they were going to encourage businesses like national chains JcPenneys, Sears, to come into Olathe. Well they bought the buildings, they destroyed the Olathe downtown business district but those chains never came. And so that was really...that was the demise of downtown Olathe. Olathe has never been the same.

Olathe has gone from being the retail center of Johnson County which it was in the 1940's to where today, it is the government center for Olathe and Johnson County. Most of the big buildings downtown now are either county buildings, the detention center, which is county or it's the Chamber of Commerce, its government center. And so it's radically changed from before WWII; Olathe was the center of commerce in Johnson County. Johnson County was very heavily agricultural. Many, many farms.

On Saturday night when I was a child the farmers would all come in and to do their weekly shopping. Most of them were in Model A Fords or 1920 cars and they would, early 1930 cars. They would park around the courthouse square. And the women, they would bring in their eggs and their cream and their produce and go to the produce stores and sell that and would have money then to do their shopping. So the women would do their shopping and the men would walk from one car to the next and visiting talking about their crops, how much rain did you get, how much all that. So really it was a social activity on late Saturday afternoon Saturday evening.

There were two movie theaters downtown. There was the Dickenson and the Andrews. And you could go to the movies some of the men would go to the movies while their wife shopped. Sometimes my dad and I came in one Saturday and went to the movies we were walking down the street and there was a sign there on a marquee of the theater that said, "5 cents to all"; five cents to go to the movie. You went to the movie you saw previews of the coming movies saw a news reel we didn't have television in those days so the only time you get to see actually pictures of world happenings was on the news reel. There was a serial movie like, Superman, or somethin' you know every week you leave him hanging and have to come back like the next week and see him and then there was a feature. So I can remember walking down the street and my dad said, "Oh Will Rogers is in that movie. "I like Will Rogers lets go to the movies". So we went to the movie. And a popcorn was a nickel and had a great time. No air conditioning hot as could be I almost got sick in there it was so hot.

**We had another interview with another person who said there were dances like at “Odd Fellows” do you remember those?**

When you went to downtown Olathe the retail stores were on the bottom level then on the second level were the doctors, the dentist and the lawyers and one or two of these organizations, like the Odd Fellows, Knights of Columbus or something like that were up on the second floor, but if you had to go to the doctor you had to go up the long steps if you were very sick you called and the doctor came to your house. Back when Joann and I were first married right after I got out of KU in the early 50's the doctors would come, we'd call—they would come to your house which was nice didn't have to walk up those steps.

**Was Olathe ever affected by the Dust Bowl? Like did it blow up into Olathe?**

Western Johnson County, west of Olathe, was much...in 1935 and 36 we were still on the farm and it was a disaster that year because it was dry. The crops were drying up. What crops did come up there was grasshopper infestation they would come through and eat your crops. So it was so dry, then the winds came and there had not been good conservation and they had not planted well they had cut down a lot of hedge rows and a lot of things. And the wind came and caused the dust storms. And I can remember as a child not being able to see from the house out to the barn because of the dust. And you know the old houses weren't built like this house. This house was built in 1941 and it's still tight you don't see any cracks in the ceiling or anything, but those old farm houses had hardly any insulation the windows were very loosely hung, and there wasn't any storm windows so when you had a dust storm our poor mother's had an awful time. The dust was half inch thick on everything.

**Can you tell us a little more about the building of the Naval Air Station and the building of the Sunflower Ordinance Plant?**

I think the Naval Air Station was the result of the fact that President Roosevelt was a democrat...the Hodges Family in Olathe were strong in Democrat circles. George Hodges was a governor of Kansas a democrat governor of Kansas I think because of the influence of the Hodges' family they were able to get the Naval Air Station located in Johnson County. We always said we're the largest Naval Station in the country right in the middle of the country. We're safe from enemy bombs and things because we are in the middle of the country. So they decided to build the Naval Air Station and from seven months from the day they broke ground it was finished.

And in the first class of pilots people have already told ya there was John Glenn, and there was a...Bob Barker, from the Price is Right. Those two guys were in the first class of pilots at the

Naval Air Station. They trained people in these little bi-winged airplanes that were little yellow airplanes and they nick-named them the *yellow perils* caused they cracked so many of them. At one point they were losing one a day out here at the station from pilot's errors learning to fly. There were several fatal crashes, but none of those were fatal. But they were losing a plane a day at one point.

Oh also because the Hodges' family was instrumental in democrat politics. When Franklin Roosevelt and Eleanor Roosevelt and two of their sons were on a railroad trip through the country, the Hodges talked them into stopping in Olathe for a speech. I was eight years old and it was right where the Santa Fe Railroad and Santa Fe Street intersect where that brick company is and when we got to town we came early there was this huge crowd out waiting for the train. So we were probably 20 yards from where the train was going to stop. I was eight years old and my dad wanted me to see so I remember my dad putting me up on his shoulders so that I could see the president. And when the train stopped and Franklin and Eleanor and their two sons came out to the platform Mr. and Mrs. Hodges, former Governor Hodges had these huge bouquets of red roses that they took up and gave Eleanor and the train was there probably ten minutes, and then left. But I did get to see Franklin Roosevelt.

### **Do you remember how many people were stationed at the Naval Air Base?**

I should know, but I've forgotten. It was big. They had a huge gymnasium. It was called Kinnick Hall named after one of the first pilots that was killed in the war, Neil Kinnick. Kinnick Hall had a huge drill field inside also it had an Olympic size pool in it. It should have been preserved, because it was a great building. When I was carrying water as a water boy out there, they were building the administration building, which is still out there. And so they had the administration building, they were building the hangers, they were building the barracks, they were building Kinnick Hall. They built a brig for people that came in inebriated and drunk, they throw them in the brig for 24 hours. That little building is still out there.

Then when the Sunflower Ordinance came along the government came out and bought 9,200 acres from the farmers out there and gave them 30 days to get off their lands out there. Those poor guys there were auctions farm auctions where those farmers were trying to salvage something. There were auctions every weekend, two or three on Saturday and two or three on Sunday till they got out of there. But I don't know if any of you have done this or not. If you drive out on 143<sup>rd</sup> Street you go out west of Olathe about eight or nine miles go a mile south and then go west again you can still see dozens of those buildings that were built to build the Ordinance, the powder.

I can recall one afternoon after school, we lived up on E. Loula Street, sitting in the house when suddenly it felt like an automobile had hit the house. The house just shook. Well that was one

of those buildings blowing up out at Sunflower Ordnance. That building blew up and there was nothing no remains of anyone or anything that's how powerful it was. But I have talked to people who worked at Sunflower that said you know, they would go to work, they would have to leave all of their clothing and put on clothing that had no metal of any kind in it put on shoes that had no nails or anything to work in those buildings. They had to be so careful. But you know they made the ammunitions to destroyed Europe.

Back in those days they didn't worry about civilian casualties or anything. It was a terrible war. When I went to occupy Japan, I got there about eight weeks after the atomic bomb at Hiroshima, they took us, this is how, pardon the word, "stupid" the military was. They took us on a site seeing tour of Hiroshima. We walked through, it had to of been radioactive, It's a wonder my children weren't born with purple hair. But we walked through Hiroshima and picked up things for survivors. I can't believe it when I think back on it. But in occupied Japan, Yokohoma and Tokyo you could stand in those cities and they had been bombed by the B-29's and they had had fire bombs and you could look for miles and hardly see anything. The devastation in those cities was bad as Hiroshima, but Hiroshima was done by one bomb. Those cities were done by night after night of bombing. I can remember going from Tokyo to Yokohoma and seeing wreckages of B-29's that had been shot down. Another vivid memory I have of right after WWII, was being on a ship going through the Inland Sea in Japan and seeing all these Japanese War ships with their fan tails sticking out from the water where the Americans had bombed as they tried to come out of the Inland Sea. It was a great experience.

### **Can you tell us a little about the Street Car system that ran through Olathe?**

The Strang Line was started around 1907 and went to 1940. The streetcars would come from the east side of Olathe. Come down past the deaf school is on Park Street come down to the courthouse and there was a building there that was their little depot and they would go around that little depot and head back up. You could ride the streetcar anywhere from 15 cents, from east Olathe to downtown was a nickel. But from 15 cents to 35 cents. And the Strang Line was built to follow the creeks down to Rosedale and into Kansas City and there was only one bridge on that whole Strang Line.

On Halloween when I was in junior high school, somebody's probably told you this story a dozen times, but we would always have great fun by going up by the deaf school and with bars of soap and soaping the tracks. So that the streetcars would come downtown Olathe and then when they started back their wheels would spin they couldn't get up Park Street hill. So the old conductor would have to get out with his bag of sand and put sand on his tracks to get back up the hill. We were kind of ornery when we were kids.

But the biggest mistake that was made, was when the Strang Line was losing money in the late 1930's and at the end of the depression and before WWII. They were losing money and they were actually went bankrupt and so they sold the assets, the cars on the courthouse steps in a sale and if they could have just held on another year or two until WWII when they were building the Naval Air Station all those people from Kansas city were coming out here they could have made a pot of money. But the cars had been sold, the tracks had deteriorated, but Strang was the name of the man who started that company. I haven't been in the building, but I think in Overland Park is the building that was his headquarters. And somebody said if you'd go down there and go into that building there are some wonderful pictures of Strang Line. I intend to do that one of these days.

### **Do you know how long it took to ride down to Kansas City?**

It was pretty fast, I would say we could go to the Plaza from Olathe in 35-40 minutes.

### **Were there a lot of stops along the way?**

Yes, there were quite a few. Definitely stopped in Lenexa, Overland Park, and Fairway and then into the Plaza. After the demised of the Strang Line, the Union Pacific or Trailways or someone started that bus system. Every 30 minutes the bus left Olathe downtown for Kansas City. When Joann and I came back to Olathe after KU and I went to work for Hallmark which is now Crown Center we decided to stay in Olathe because we knew everyone and everything and we knew the schools were good. So I used to buy a ticket book that had ten rides in it for \$3.50, 35 cents a ride on the bus. And I would go up to the drug store by the courthouse and get that bus and I would get off at 25<sup>th</sup> and Main and walk on down to Hallmark. If I would miss the bus there was another one in 30 minutes. Well after a while, I-35 came along, people started carpooling the buses stopped running that frequently.

Then I found out that I could ride the train from Olathe to Union Station. In the morning, there was a train called the Tulsan that ran from Kansas City to Tulsa. Well it went to Tulsa in the evening and it went to Kansas City in the morning. So I found out that I could go up to the Santa Fe Depot and get on the train go into Union Station walk over to Hallmark work all day, go back down to Union Station and the Tulsan would be leaving Kansas City for Tulsa just right for me to ride to Olathe. People couldn't believe when I'd say, "Yeah, I commute. I ride on the train." I was one of the few people who rode the train to Kansas City every day. Well after a while, passengers trains went out so then I had to form a car pool. When I first started at Hallmark, I think there were about three people that commuted from Olathe to Hallmark in Kansas City. One by the name of Hollinger, Bonair, and myself. After a while, people were moving out this way there were all kinds of carpools and everything so. I formed a carpool.

### **Can you tell us a little about the Civil Rights Campaign here in Olathe?**

Yes, right in the midst of the Civil Rights Movement Olathe had a young pastor by the name of Ted Surdodo. He was an Italian. Ted had been raised in a Catholic family in Boston. He and his brother had gone to the Navy expecting to come back and become priests. While they were in the Navy, I don't know what went through their heads, but they decided they didn't want to be priests. They wanted to become Protestants and go to seminary and become Presbyterian pastors. Their sister became a nun. The Presbyterian Church over here had a pastor who had a sister that's a nun. But Ted was very young when he came to Olathe, probably mid 20's. He was very much for Civil Rights, wanted to advance the Civil Rights Movement.

I had started attending the Presbyterian Church over here on Hershey and Lee. Ted got several of the guys my age together and said we are going to get involved in the Civil Rights Movement. On Wednesday nights we would ask the black pastors in town from Second Baptist from the AME church and any of their elders or any others that wanted to come out to the Presbyterian Church and we would meet on Wednesday night and talk about what we could do. Far as I know, that was the most active organization other than NAACP or something.

Ted Surdodo was from an Italian family from Boston. One of the derogatory terms for an Italian was "wap," did you ever hear that? I can remember going with Ted up to the post office for something and as we were going into the post office this man came up to us and said to Ted, "You dirty wap, why are you doing this?" You know, it was terrible. But one of the Black families that I met over here was the Person family, Joe Person and Dan Person. I still admired Joe Person. He became a leader in the Kansas City Black Minority Group. He ran a Barbeque shop here in Olathe; he ran an automobile beautification shop. Great People! His son, Dan, ran a business here in Olathe that shined brass and restored brass. In fact, they did this little floor lamp and they did that hanging lamp there he points to the lamps in the dining room. So that's my memories of the Civil Rights Movement was those meetings we had at the Presbyterian Church. I can remember Ted Surdodo saying that Martin Luther King is the Apostle Paul of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century.....his writings and he wasn't far wrong.

### **Can you talk a little bit about the growth of Olathe?**

I think the biggest factor in the growth of Olathe was the building of I-35. It opened up quick movements for people to get to Kansas City to work, but it also opened up opportunities for small businesses to come out this way. In fact, I can remember, in the 1960's early 70's when Hallmark actually had a branch in Olathe. At Hallmark we had trouble sometimes finding workers so we opened up a branch in Olathe we opened one in Emporia, one in Lawrence one in Topeka, and the one in Olathe was probably here for three to four years. Hired a lot of housewives came out and did hand work on greeting cards. Yes, there was one in Ottawa. The

big one is still in Leavenworth for designing the signage. Under my responsibility was three fixture plants that built fixtures plus, what we call three show place stores is where we would try new ideas, and everything. Those show place stores were, one in Disneyland, one in Disneyworld, and one on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue in New York City. And so that was great, great duty. Because those managers of those places reported to me and I would have to go give them their performance reports I would take Joann along and we would go to New York and go to a show, go to Disneyworld, see Epcot Center. If I could sit down with a piece of paper and design a career, I could not design one more satisfying than my Hallmark career. The founders of the company were still alive when I went to work in 1950 for Hallmark. There were 800 people with the company. I knew most of them. When I retired in 1990, there were 22,000 people in the company. So it was great.

### **If you could shape the future of Olathe, how would you shape it?**

One thing I would do is even put more emphasis on the network of streets. It's getting awful! Many of our streets are the same streets that we had before WWII. It's amazing how many people will go in this under pass over here on north of the courthouse.

We need to do something. They are doing something on the east side of town but that doesn't help the west side of town and the future of Olathe is "this way" (**he motions west**) It's not this way or that way It's this way (**again he motions west**). Walmart is going to come out here now and build. If you get in your car and drive down to Prairie Center Road which is 135<sup>th</sup> Street that way, (**he motions west**), more and more housing.

If you go out by Cedar Creek out in there more and more housing. The future of Olathe lies on the west side and the railroad track, four blocks up here, is bad. They're going to have to do something for underpasses or overpasses. And I don't think they're putting enough emphasis on creative thinking about what to do about that. They're aren't doing something about the retail value of our homes. They are down and they are down because of the noise of the trains. They are anywhere between 80-100 trains on this western track each day. And each one of those trains has to blow their whistle at every one of those crossings. The noise in the summer time when we sit out here on our patio is so bad that we can't even carry on a conversation. We need to do something and Olathe is trying to put in a quiet zone where those trains are not going to peep their horns all the time. That will help. But that's not going to ease the traffic flow.

They need to make sure first College Blvd is made four lane clear out to Hwy 7. They need to do something with 119<sup>th</sup> Street make sure it comes right on out. The biggest challenge to the growth of Olathe, to me, is the movement of the traffic. I was opposed to the building of the 127<sup>th</sup> Street overpass. I think that should have been an exchange where you can get on and off

I-35. If at 4:30 in the afternoon you are coming out of Kansas City, lots of times it is a mess getting off at 119<sup>th</sup> or up here at 135<sup>th</sup> Street. And I don't think, I know it's going to be expensive, but it's going to be cheaper today than it will be 10 years from now or 20 years from now.

**Is there anything you want to talk about that hasn't been covered before?**

I think you've done a pretty good job. Probably been covered before but, Olathe really needed a hospital for years before we really had one. And there were a couple of ladies who were nurses Margaret Desler and a lady by the name of Lane, I forget her first name. But they were really the emphasis the-driving-force to get a hospital. And our first real hospital was built up here where Walgreen is now just across from Dillon's. And when our first child was born we had to go into Kansas City to St. Mary's hospital. That was in 1952. In 1955 when our second child was born we had the hospital. So our second, third, fourth and fifth child were all born in Olathe Hospital. I am amazed today when I go 151<sup>st</sup> Street and see the size of the Olathe Community Hospital. It's amazing. I am pleased with that.

I am pleased with care for senior convalescence people. I have a sister in the Good Samaritan Home, an older sister, she gets excellent care. Used to be when you walked into a rest home the smell was terrible it was just a depressing thing. I go out on Saturday morning every Saturday morning to see my sister. It always smells good there are so many lovely people to help her it's a great place. Cedar Lake Village, she was at Cedar Lake Village before she went to Good Samaritan, that's a nice place. We have a place on 119<sup>th</sup> Street the Presbyterian Manor that I think when Joann and I can't take care of two acres here I think that's where we are going to go. I have a lot of friends out there. There are a lot of former teachers out there. Irish Lubberts, who is a beloved teacher, she lives out there.

**I always ask this question, if you were going out to eat in the 1960's for a nice dinner with your wife, where would you have taken her?**

The Olathe Hotel. Maybe. If they were open. They opened on the weekends for sure. Hotel Olathe, it was at Santa Fe Street and Cherry. In the 70's it was out at the B & B Café. But there were a few little cafes around downtown, there was a Dinner Bell Café it was run by Mr. Moore. Dick Crowd had a restaurant. His restaurant was interesting in that they sold beer but he would not sell beer during the lunch hour 'cause we kids most of us went home for lunch or ate up town. So no beer was sold at lunch hour at Crowd's Café. But Olathe was really short of good eating places. It's only been the last six, seven, eight years when we had a good choice. But now we find that now we go to the same places we've got dozens of places but Joann and I end up at the same four or five places.