

## **Forrest Miles**

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- Changes in Olathe
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## **Forrest Miles**

### **What is your name?**

Forrest Mason Miles II

### **Who are you named after?**

My grandfather

### **Is your family from the south originally?**

Originally most of them are. Southern Missouri and Kentucky.

### **Were you born in Olathe?**

Kansas City, Kansas

### **When did you move to Olathe?**

Twenty-five years ago in 1981.

### **Why did you come here?**

I came here because they hired me as a head baseball coach and I also came out here at that time we were doing a restoration business and so I was looking for an old house that was built in the 1800's, so we could restore it.

### **Is restoring houses your hobby?**

Well it's a hobby and then kind of a side business.

### **How many houses have you restored?**

Ah, 12.

### **Are the majority of them from the 1800's or are they all from that period?**

Not all, the newest house that we did restoration on is from the 1950's but we've done houses anywhere from 1869 to 1915 of the older ones.

### **What's involved in restoring a house?**

When you restore a house you have to go in and you have to tear out everything that is there, that everybody has messed up, because a lot people don't do it correctly. Then you have to come back and you have to get your electrical set up, your HVAC because you have to modernize the house. Like the house that I lived in for a long time, the plumbing was an outhouse in the back yard so what you have to do is set up your plumbing, your wiring, your HVAC—which is your heating and air conditioning and then you have to come in and we tried to do them where at least all the trim work all the wood in the house, things such as this would

match as such, and make sure that they match. Sometimes they do match if it's all there, but a lot of times it's not like the George Hodges house which is over on Harrison where there they made it into a duplex. So therefore, we had to come back in and we made it as a single family home and opened it back up again because it had a wall that separated it.

**About how long does it take to restore a house?**

Well, the one I lived in for most of the time I've been in Olathe, that one took a year. But I was also coaching and teaching at that time, so it was a situation that took that long to do it because in those days I wasn't hiring very many sub-contractors. I was doing most of the work myself, so that took a long time. Now other houses, I don't know, maybe you can do them in a summer if it's a small house; if it's a larger house it takes longer, maybe six months.

**What was your favorite house you've ever restored in Olathe?**

Well, the one that I lived in and that was the Parker House which is on the corner of Park and Troost Street in Olathe. See the major street in Olathe...that used to be...was Park Street and that's the zero street, anything north of there, it starts and goes like Santa Fe is 100 North. It's not really the major street in Olathe in the old days, and then you go south from there. And what Park Street was set up on is where the wealthy people of the old Olathe lived and they lived on estates out there. And they lived, like our house before it was subdivided, in that area with the Parker estate was ten acres. Now he owned farms and things and that and was a lawyer and came out there after the civil war. And across the street was the Stevenson house and that was about a ten acre estate; and then you had the Pickering house which was up the street that is still in existence up there and that was about ten acres that came down and matched ours; and then there was a couple others ones that are on Park Street that are still left like the Lamb Lantern house on the corner of Logan and Park; and then you have the house that's next to it, that's a good house, and he was a doctor here in town. But those houses were not separated. Then there's another one that sits east of Calamity Park and that house used to be the Pallet house. You had the wealthier people in with all these different like estates that came out to 7 highway.

**Are they all named after the family that originally owned the house?**

Yeah, usually that's the way you'd do it; the family that originally owned the house and that's the way they'll name it. Sometimes they use the name of the person that restored it, like they might say the Parker/Miles house but we just never did that, I never put my name on it. The family, the Parker family lived there from 1869 when it was built until the last one sold the house in 1960 and then she died in 1971.

**Do any of the houses have interesting stories to go along with them?**

Yeah, the Parker house...which I know the most about because I wrote it for the national historical register...because it's a national historical register home in Johnson county. There's only about six houses, although there are more now in the entire Johnson County. He was a

lawyer and he came out here to Olathe and established a practice with John P. St. John. And John P. St. John was the 8<sup>th</sup> governor of Kansas. And so St. John and he had a law firm together and of course he backed St. John. And then St. John politically in the election of 1884, he pretty well cost Blaine the election of 1884 because he ran on the prohibition ticket and there was a lot of anti-alcohol at that time. So he was somewhat of a national player in that situation. And so when you put a house on the national historical register they do it for two things: one is the architectural value of the house. And that house since it stayed in the family for 90 years was never torn up, so there was not a whole lot of changes that went into that house and so with that and also because of what he did. And that's how they will put a house or a property on the national historical register.

Now another house that I did was the George Hodges house and that is on Harrison Street, but that house was put on the Kansas historical register not the national historical register. Because on the Kansas historical register, he was the governor of Kansas and he was also a state senator in Kansas, George Hodges was. But the house was completely changed. Because in the 1920's they would take Victorian houses and strip them down to the boxing on the side, take off all the siding and then they would put stucco on it—that's what they would do. So you have to have architectural integrity plus you have to have the value of the historical figure that lived in that house.

**Are any of the other six houses located in Olathe that are on the national historical registry?**

The Pickering house is. Another one now that came on later was the Ott house and that's right off Central Street, it's a smaller house. And Mahaffie house is another one that's up here on Kansas City road.

**Do you know why the Pickering house was put on the national historical registry?**

He was a mayor of Olathe, he was also a senator and he was also a partner with John P. St. John in the law firm. St. John's house is gone—it used to be on the corner of Loula and Water Street where the parking lot is next to John P. St. John memorial academy, which was a second Olathe high school built in 1927.

**What is the most popular style of architecture in Olathe?**

Well, as far as old Olathe there really is no popular style. Most of old Olathe has been torn down there's very few of the old houses left. Olathe was very kind of unkind to that situation and it really built into urban renewal in the 1960's and so all of downtown Olathe was torn up. If you ever see the original movie "In Cold Blood", Truman Capote's famous movie, that's kind of been famous even more so this year by the movie "Capote". If you look at that movie that is where you can get the best pictures of old Olathe is from that movie because they filmed part of that movie right here in Olathe. But most of old Olathe is torn down. There is very few houses left. At one time though there was a lot of Victorian houses because the people used that type of architectural style.

**What is required to restore a house? I know you mentioned trying to match the woodwork, what else goes into it?**

Well, what you have to do, you have your tear out; and then you come in and you make sure your lines are cut (because a lot of the lines: the old type of line where they used positive and negative is called knob and tube); okay, then you have to make sure that your plumbing is okay and what was put in for plumbing is there; and you have to make sure your heating and air is alright, and what you are going to do there; okay, then after that you have to patch all your walls. Sometimes you have to tear it out to the stud basis and then you come in and either you veneer (what's called veneer) you put it over the sheetrock, you put another 3/8 sheetrock over the plaster walls then. From there you wallpaper, you paint, things like this and then you paint your woodwork or you can strip it. Some people will strip the woodwork back to the oak or hard pine or whatever is there.

**Was paint or wallpaper more popular in old Olathe?**

Well, in old Olathe in expensive houses you would have had wallpaper. But in the lesser houses of course they used paint because paint was cheaper.

**Since I'm assuming that none of the wallpaper/the majority of it is no longer intact, what do you put on the walls?**

Well, what you do if you want to keep the historical integrity of the house—what you do is you go back to old wall paper books and you will look there and see what is historical appropriate for that age and time span of that house. And then you get that historical integrity from that because they will have copies and they can run reproductions. There are certain companies within the United States that will do that and the same way with the hardware like the doorknobs and things like that. You will go to a company like Restoration Hardware or there's one out of Connecticut, can't think of the name right off, they have catalogs and magazines and things like that.

**Have you ever done a house where you even put back in period furniture?**

Well, yeah we did that in the Parker house because we turned it into a bed and breakfast in 1993 and ran it as a bed and breakfast from 1993 to 1998. And then we used a lot of Victorian furniture and things, such as this, in the house but it was mainly tables and some Victorian beds and things like that.

**How do you get the funding to restore these old houses?**

You dig it out of your pocket, is what you do.

**You said that you also came to Olathe to teach and to coach the baseball team?**

That's why they hired me, to coach baseball.

**When you came to Olathe was Olathe North still the high school?**

No, it was Olathe North, the first year I came here it was Olathe North and they split the schools at that time. Of course they pretty much split it on I-35, and then you had [Olathe] South was on the east side and [Olathe] North was on the west side.

**So how did your baseball team do?**

We won second at state that first year I was here, we did pretty good, but anyway.

**What are the major changes that you've had come to Olathe high school while you were here?**

Well, in Olathe High School the changes basically—I've always felt this was the absolute best high school in Johnson county. And my kids went here to school. They used to always say we were the ghetto school from the other side of town. But we weren't we had the wealthiest people in Johnson county went to this school. Some of the wealthiest people in Johnson County and in the Olathe school district plus we also had some of the poorest kids. But in the school that we had, the wealthier kids really brought up the kids that didn't have much; and nobody really tried to flaunt their wealth or anything like this at the school. Because I have seen other schools like Shawnee Mission East where I did my student teaching—where it was like: I live in Mission Hills and my dad has this, my dad has an airplane (that was an exaggeration there) but here it wasn't that way and it was very diverse and really a good school and such.

**You said it WAS that way, what made the change?**

Well, the change came when they split our school along pretty much socio-economic lines with the opening of Olathe Northwest and that was sad to me. I do think we are coming back in some ways, because of programs like the one you guys are in, and this attracts—you know—a lot of kids that are more interested in school. But with the student body as such as it is today, it's mainly I gotta work, I gotta support my car and my cell phone and I'm outa here. That's where we have a lot of kids, it's kind of sad to me to see that our school is not what it used to be.

**When you came here what did Olathe North look like?**

Olathe North at that time looked a lot smaller, we didn't have this wing over here, we didn't have the wing that is 800 hall, and we didn't have the wing that is the biotech region of the 21<sup>st</sup> century programs. Everything else was here, Olathe North has probably been built onto, I'd guess eight times.

**You said that there was another Olathe high school that opened the year you came?**

Olathe South, it was the new school.

### **Why did you choose to stay at Olathe North?**

Well, that was where they hired me to coach baseball, but anyway; no, I wanted to be here. Because this was better situation because over there it was not as diversified as this school on the socio-economic minds.

When I came out here, because I restored this older house and all and a lot of people really thought that it was a pretty good deal. And the fact that these were people who had been here a long time and a lot of the older families lived out on Park Street there, and so I got to meet a lot of the older people that were here. And I even had a man tell me about how they had Chautauqua in the Parker meadow (is what they called) by little cedar creek there which is just south of where the Calamity Park is now. That was one of the things. Just the fact of seeing the abstract that fit that house; and seeing how it went from Indian territory and, you know, all the way up; and how part of the land that was sold off, and just different things such as this, and met a lot of the old families. A lot of them have died off since the people I met, but they were older people at the time I came out here and that was kind of a neat experience.

### **What was your favorite story of some of the older people that you met?**

One of my favorite stories was where Murray Hodges told me that they used to box. There's a three car garage that's out back of that house on Harrison Street; and how they had a ring up there, and had a bag and workout up there, and then they used to box up there; he and his friends a lot and I thought that was kind of a neat story. It's a really nice building and then there is a whole second floor to it up there in the garage.

### **How has the population of Olathe changed?**

Well, it's changed from when I came here in 1981 there was 37,000 people and I moved up here from northeast Johnson county at that time. I lived in the city of Countryside, which was surrounded by Mission and I moved out here to basically a pretty small town. I moved into the small town part of it what is called the old town today. It was a lot different change because I was moving from suburbia into an old country town basically. In a lot of ways and that's really changed because that old part today is the intercity Olathe and we are pretty much surrounded by suburbs all the way around. But, like where I live now, along Woodland that was all farms and everything out there for the most part, there were some houses out there, but not the subdivision that are coming in and things like that.

### **How has Olathe changed socially and economically since you came out?**

Well, when I came out here, at that time, people looked down their noses at Olathe—kind of like you would Spring Hill or Gardner, you know that was country—those people are not part of Shawnee mission so to speak, because that is where I lived was Shawnee mission and so on. But Olathe now is, of course, a part of Shawnee mission and part of the suburb. I think we are the 7<sup>th</sup> wealthiest suburb in the nation right now and Olathe has become part of that we aren't Mission Hills yet.

### **Why did people move to Olathe?**

Why? Because the housing was cheap. And because of the fact that there were a lot of starter homes and people could come out here and buy cheaper housing; the land was cheaper than it was up in northeast Johnson county.

### **What was the main industry for people who lived in Olathe?**

Delco battery, in the beginning, a lot of people worked Delco battery. And then you had the Olathe Naval Air Station and all. And so a lot of people were here and they came in and worked at the airport out there or were in the services and then they stayed in Olathe after that.

### **What was Delco battery?**

Delco battery was where they made batteries and they made batteries for Chevrolet [Jillian]?? Motors and it had a big plant over on Dennis which they are tearing it down now and it's environmentally hazard, I mean, I don't know how they are going to clean that place up but we'll see.

### **How has downtown Olathe changed since you came?**

In some ways it has changed for the better because they have a new courthouse there and I think that was good in having that across from the old courthouse. But it's kind of sad because if you'd have had the originally courthouse which was absolutely beautiful. If you go down to Paola and see the courthouse for Miami County you can see Washburn courthouse which is kind of a replica of what Olathe's courthouse use to be. It's too bad they couldn't keep the old part of Olathe, it would have been really neat if they had. Progress tore it all down. They went into urban renewal real big; it was a Johnson program of the 1960's and all the idea was to tear down the old cities and build it new. But what happened was the build it new didn't work out very well.

### **What all did renewal tear down in Olathe?**

It tore down everything except the Park/Cherry building which is at the corner of Park and Cherry and that's on the north and east corner and the building that sits just to the north of it— everything else is gone.

### **How long did renewal last?**

Well the major part of it lasted from the late 1960's into the 70's and then they would also come in and tear down some of the rest of it. There was a section there where the new courthouse is and those were all stores and store fronts; and we used to walk from the Parker house and we would walk up to T G & Y, take the kids up there and they could mess around in the so called dime stores back in the 80's which was kind of neat that you could be in a small town. It was kind of like a small town, really I don't think that's there is too much there anymore.



**What do you think changed the small town feeling?**

So many people moving here, for sure.

**What would you say the main industry of Olathe is now?**

Garmin, and that's a high tech industry making GPS systems and all that. I would think that is probably number one; it is a billion dollar company that's probably the major company in Olathe. There's other companies and all, like cisco and UPS got a big dock and loading center and so on, but Garmin I think is probably number one.

**When did these big companies start coming to Olathe?**

Garmin probably came in in the late 80's. There were some guys that worked for Bendix which was over on Rogers Road and then they decided to form their own company. I think that they thought they could do it better. Then they split off from Honeywell which is another big one out by Cedar Creek, that's another big one too, and they split off from them again to make their own industry and really has prospered since that time.