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## **Fred Meier**

### **Your life here in Olathe. Can you tell us...?**

I can tell you a little about the community and what it was like in 1971. I can tell you about the school a little bit because I lived through two splits and we're getting ready for a fourth by the time I retired. You know things like that. I can think of several things.

### **How did North change with every split?**

For one thing when South opened you know they...everybody's always looked down their nose at North. You know when we opened. When the school opened. When South opened you know, they called us the "hicks". So we started calling them the "preppies". And so...You know "Izod" clothes. And so I remember the second of the two ball games...basketball games...I can't remember the first one...North parents would wear outlandish large alligators on their shirts. And we kicked their butt. And then of course East there was a...some bitterness in the community at East because you know people don't realize what inflation does and the cost of East and the people thought it was too much and so they called it the Taj Mahal. And then of course Northwest (*he shakes his head*) But a...yeah, East a...North always has kind of been on the defensive about things. But I think it's been good because as a faculty and a student body we pull together. I really do. And I think you guys are doing the same thing here. And of course we are facing a new one now. We've opened a new school every 11 years: '81, '92, '03 and I don't think it's going to be 11 years before we get that new one out West. Of course, that one has really got me concerned, because you know all of West Olathe that is now part of us here is going to go there, what's going to happen I don't know. They may just reconfigure North at all, I don't know, exactly what they will do.

### **You came a little bit after Urban Renewal?**

Two years...the evils of Urban Renewal were still being felt and I'm sure all the many guests you had before really told you a lot about Urban Renewal. But I feel real blessed because one of the last things Urban Renewal did was to destroy the old junior high and the Carnegie Library and the Lincoln School and that was all done my first year here so at least I can say I have seen those buildings. It served a very, very useful purpose in the community.

### **So are you pro Urban Renewal?**

No. No. No. Urban Renewal if done right is wonderful...are you familiar with Atchison either one of you? You go up to Atchison and man they have a vibrant downtown. It's all a result of Urban Renewal. They took an old river town and redid it. Here in Olathe they took an old town and destroyed it.

### **What do you think they did wrong?**

You know, I don't know, I wasn't here during the planning stages. I wasn't here when the actual things happened. You know you get a bias account when you talk to people, but...a...you...too many businesses went out of existence. For example: something that really affected us when we moved down here we were always people to have locker beef or freezer beef. So we bought a side of beef and some friends were going to come down and visit us in two weeks so we went to rent a locker; there was no locker plan—they destroyed that in Urban Renewal. We had to go buy a freezer and that was something we hadn't counted on, you know...just little things like that.

You go down along the square you know where they've got all those title companies and stuff like that you know well you can say there was a hardware store here, and a paint store here and a ladies dry goods store here you name it...nothing. Nothing.

### **Can you tell us a little bit about Old Settlers?**

A...in terms of my feeling about it or...what? Well you know I hate to say this because it took me so many years to get into Old Settlers because at first you know I wasn't here long enough to get the flavor and sense of it and then after several years I'd go and had a son who was in the junior high band and I'd see him march by and then I'd go home but...as time goes on I have really gotten into it. And now it is very, very important to me, it's a...in fact I build my whole fall around it.

Last fall is...was...very, very disappointing 'cause I got the flu that week and I missed everything; I saw nothing. I didn't get to the parade and of course it's a neat thing too depending on when North plays football game cause that's usually one of the very first weeks of football and we'll either play a Thursday or Friday night but I...you...my wife and I just like to go down there and walk around because there are so many people that you run into. Students that I have taught over the years and stuff like that and...because I have been retired six; we've been here 37 years now. You know, you meet a lot of people and you get to see them.

### **What's your favorite thing to eat at Old Settlers?**

You want me to say the corndog don't ya? A...the ribs at the Optimist club. Cooks are outstanding. I like the corndogs I mean you know. I'll buy one. I don't eat that much. Do you?

### **I like the funnel cakes a lot and the curly fries. How it changed since you've been here?**

Old Settlers? It might be too much of the same. You know everybody's going to have their little booth stuff like that. It's neat...it's a wonderful thing.

**So do you think the raising of the railroad tracks... do you think that is going to do good things?**

I think it's wonderful, I think it's wonderful. My big fear is...(it still could be a legitimate fear)...is be so occupied from what's going on up there that you run right through and have a train hit you while it's still on the ground level. Nah, I think it's a wonderful thing because Olathe has grown too much, you know, 18,000 people in 1971 to a...130,000 now...I don't know...125.....130. And a...we just can't keep up with the traffic. We just can't. I don't know how many projects we've had over the years and this is no way to be critical, but I don't know how many projects we've had...widen...straighten and make more efficient Santa Fe. Santa Fe still is a bottle neck; you just cannot get around. And of course some of these...the 127<sup>th</sup> over change...overpass...you know...over Kansas City Road and over the interstate is a good thing. But I...I think those elevator railroads are really good. I really do.

**Can you think of any other changes that would be good for Olathe?**

Yeah...I'd like to bring back a sense of community but you just don't have it. You know there are several things that make a community. Number one: One high school and a...like I said we came here 18,000 people, one high school, Olathe High School, 1100 kids in here and a...now what? We have what, four? And so that is a divided loyalty. We don't have a downtown to associate with and that's one thing you compare it to Lawrence. Lawrence is a booming city. People are building like mad over there. You go down to Mass and you know and they've got many side streets you've got businesses. I'd like to see that. That goes back course you know I'm very small town and community background. I grew up in a town of 1,000 people and taught in a town of 3,000 people so. I'm not city. I'm not city.

**What do you hope Olathe will never change?**

You hit me from left field on that one. Let me say this, I...the more I look around...the more I am pleased with the city services Olathe gives us. I just think that you take them for granted but a... for example when we have a heavy snow storm I think they are very quick to get the snow and I know there are some people griping...individual neighborhoods, but we live in a cul de sac. We've talked about that a few minutes ago...but gee, in the middle of the night there they are with a snow plow. In fact one of them tried to take my car home with him a year ago practically totaled it out. But a...I think we have excellent trash system. Also, a...this has been a horrible winter, but a...you're going to see it as we get closer to spring the terrible, terrible a...deterioration of roads you know...because of the wet and cold and everything. But please take note that if you drive in any other communities a...as to as soon our streets are patched compared to...so you know I hope that's one thing that never changes...a dedication in serving the people and I think they do a good job of it.

### **When you first moved here was it bigger than then the city where you came from?**

Oh yeah, yeah...we came here from Hays...course I don't know how many people know Hays, but I'd gone there to finish my Master's degree and the school I taught in North Hays, that was 3,000 people, yeah, so...the high that school grew in the seven years I was there...grew from 325 to 375 in four grades and of course I came down here. I got to be honest with you I was in a state if culture shock for a year. Boy, we had a lot of problems here in this school...that a...I was not familiar with...and a...we had them...but a yeah...it was a...quite a bit bigger and course...there's a lot of things the community this size can offer ya. So a...a...everybody thinks the cost of living in a community like this be higher but a...not really...because...you've got competition. You know you got a lot more competition. In the stores and stuff like that and a...housing...we didn't feel our house...our first home we bought was any higher than what we would have paid in Western Kansas and things like that.

### **Why did you move here?**

We wanted to give Eastern Kansas a try. We a...we love sports...a...so we thought...hey...be neat to go see the Royals play and KU basketball and football course back then...you could buy a ticket any time you wanted to KU. A...course we didn't have any money either so we didn't see many games. Um...also there are other things, not that we are cultural lions, but you know things like Starlight Theater and different things...course they didn't have New Dinner Theater then, but...they had the forerunners to it. Yeah...we wanted to give it a try.

We lived in Western Kansas and a got...tired of the wind blowing I guess, *(he laughs)*...if you know anything about Western Kansas. But you know one thing I'd like to mention too is a...when we came here there was one commercial establishment east of interstate and I don't know if you are familiar with it but on the north side of Santa Fe just over the bridge...Ervs Vacuum Cleaner, that was a Mobile Station; that was it. There weren't any stores...businesses what so ever that were out there. Clairborne was there because the hospital was out there and the FAAA was there. A...are you familiar where the old hospital was?

### **The old one?**

It was new to them. It was new...let's see it was the second hospital; you know the first one was right across the street over here where Walgreens is now And then they built out there and then of course OMC out there, That's all there was...there were two housing developments out there. One was North Havencroft and then South Havencroft. You were regarded as being very rich if you live in South Havencroft. Of course there are still some very nice homes out there. But North Havencroft if you go south on Clairborne and back east on Cedar you know that development. And it was...it was...hard to a...kind of hard to get there and I know we had friends that lived in North Havencroft and there along Lindenwood...where Ford has their lot

you know...Olathe Ford they had humongous pine trees maybe 40 foot tall and we'd look for those pine trees so that we'd know where to turn and stuff like that, and a...one other thing I wanted to say...Mid-American was just started being built out there...the college.

**How do you think the city has handled the change in population? Like the growth?**

I think they have...have as well as they can. You know...I am sure that they project these things and I am sure that they do their best to, at worse, stay abreast of it if not stay ahead of it. Like I mentioned...traffic...how in the world do you...you know for every person you've got...or every new family you've got several more automobiles on the road and stuff like that. It is awfully hard to stay abreast but...I think they have done a good job...I really do.

**Can you tell us what used to be around the square downtown by the courthouse?**

Well, believe it or not we did have a few little businesses around there. A...across the street south from the courthouse where they have that new building...I call it the government building there on Park Street...used to go all the way through and there was stores all long there. They had Miller's Department Store, they had a Firestone Store, they had a Coast to Coast Hardware type Store and a...before Urban Renewal they did have some...a...drug store but they are gone. And on the west side of the square...may not exactly...but maybe within the next block...there was a drug store there on the corner...actually there were two drug stores in that block...Taylor's and a...Burn's. A...they're gone now. Then if you get on the east side of the square...where I can't even remember...there was a little wholesale type store there where you know you could buy toasters and stuff like that. But a...yeah, but we've had nothing but loses really downtown. And then on...East Park Street from the corner of Cherry east there used to have a theater in there and I am sure all these people have told you about that. There was a paint store there, there was a little restaurant there called Christian's restaurant in there, was a ladies dress shop in there, and there were two shoe stores in there and across the street there was the big TG&Y store there. So there were...you know...like I said, they...I felt that they ruined Olathe with Urban Renewal. But believe it or not we have more stores in there than we do now.

**What's a TG&Y?**

I don't know what it stands for. It's a dime store. Five and ten, yeah. In fact the big thing TG&Y was best known for in Olathe was burning because they had a humongous fire in it before we ever came there and then in my early years we had...it was gutted. 'Course now you know with the growth of Johnson County it's all those title offices are in there now...but a...yeah...did they tell you about Trail Theater at all? Did any of your previous guests. It was a small theater and ah...we went in a time or two. Thing I remember about it most that everybody spilled pop and they wouldn't mop it up and you take a step and ***(makes a sound of a shoe sticking to the floor and being pulled up)***...you'd stick to the floor.

**Can you tell me about the schools when you first came? Like what elementary schools there was?**

There weren't many and most of them were the 'views'. You know...Northview, Ridgeview, Westview, Central...a...Fairview. And then shortly after we came here they built Rolling Ridge and Santa Fe...not Santa Fe...Rolling Ridge and Havencroft. That was kind of an interesting story too. Because they are "cookie cutter" schools and that's one thing Olathe does is...I think is neat is they built all these "cookie cutter" schools and a...that saves them a lot of money. But a...kind of interesting thing for us...you know depending on where you live...you have different power sources and the old KP&L which is now Westar Energy provides west Olathe and East Olathe is provided by KCP&L. And KCP&L was so much higher rates that the school board asked them to lower their rates because I think there was like \$400 a month difference at Havencroft than what there was out at Rolling Ridge. Junior Highs? A...they had two, Santa Fe it was like new; it was only two years old and they had Millbrook which is a vocational school which was down on Park Street and then of course they later made Oregon Trail. And it's kind of an interesting thing too because a...our superintendent would not allow those two schools to play each other. He would not allow it. And as it happened a...in 19...oh gee whiz...about 1979, I think it was. There was a little tournament that Santa Fe had and Oregon Trail was in it and they both happen to win their...you know they played each other in championship and I could be wrong but I think that was the first time we had two junior highs play each other from Olathe.

**Do you know who won by any chance?**

Santa Fe. The reason I say this: I had a son on Santa Fe's team, that's why I remember what year it was. In fact, he ran into a good friend of his the other night at a school function and a...his good friend played on the Oregon Trail team and they were reenacting that and a...'course Rob Maggard who's the father of Zach or Josh up here now...Sophomore...I don't know he's got two boys anyhow, Josh and Zach anyway...Rob Maggard was on the Oregon Trail team too and a...yeah, yeah...and of course there...you had the same thing there too a...Santa Fe kids looking down their nose at Millbrook kids...they called it Mill Dew...you know stuff like that...and the Millbrook kids you know...called Santa Flush...you always had this new and old rub...just like we have had here at the high school level.

Then they started building on...I tell you what it is just unbelievable. I can't even remember the sequence that the junior highs were in, but we just had the two, then they built Oregon and then I think maybe Pioneer Trail might have been the next new one, but I am not positive on that. So we've...it's been crazy...it's really been crazy. There is something I wanted to say too about...when I was talking about North Havencroft and South Havencroft...Oh I know what I was going to say...this sounds crazy but in 1976...now we are coming into five years we had some real good friends of ours got married...second...you know both were widowed...and they

built a new home a couple blocks west of a...of a...Mur-Len and used to take the back road in to see them. Like we'd go down Ridgeview and angle in that way because Mur-Len was a rock road and a...we were always afraid we would throw a rock and puncture our gas tank. And I had a son graduate in 1980 and north of Mur-Len about the only thing down there was that fire station just within a block you know. His friends used to do their drag racing on Mur-Len because there just wasn't traffic...things have changed...things have changed.

**Do you remember what your sons would do for fun growing up?**

Well, I am sure I don't know everything...he laughs. Well a...you know they both played ball. You know...especially the second one for Olathe North and a...you know, same old things...movies...occasional concert...if they had the money.

**Where would they have to go to see concerts?**

Kemper...if my memory is correct. Kemper

**So you moved here in 71? So Vietnam was that a big deal?**

Oh yes very definitely...See we got out of....we got out of Vietnam...and signed the peace accord in January 1973. So yeah it was very hot

So can you tell us about Vietnam... (Unintelligible)?

Well my big thing is...my big thing is...fights within the faculty. You know a...the Democrat teachers attacked Nixon for not getting us out and the Republican teachers attack would Johnson and Kennedy for getting us there to in the first place and all that. I don't recall in my two to three years here before Vietnam was settled of losing students from here. We did lose students...graduates of this high school did die in Vietnam. But I don't think we lost any while I was here. I did lose several students from my first school.

**So was the feel here more pro war?**

I think probably...more pro...you know it's kind of conservative...conservative neighborhood...area.

**How about the cold war? Was that...did everyone have bunkers?**

No, no...course now...you're going back in the 60s...now more so...yeah...yeah...residual. There's no doubt about that. I don't know anything about bunk...are you referring to bomb shelters? And yeah...I don't know of any...

**Have you seen anything about that James bond movie where he says, “Oh we are over Kansas, we could do anything and no one would hear about it for years.”?**

That's not nice...

**My dad still has his... *(One interviewer is referencing her father's bunker)***

Did this go back to the...a...a...to the early 60s?

**Yeah, he was born in 59, so he was pretty young in the 60s.**

Well, I can remember...back in the a...60s in my first teaching job I was designated by the district to be a the civil defense teacher in the school and a...and I had to go...they had the classes down in Hays and I had to take several days of classes, and gee, I was given a Geiger counter and the whole bit you know...and taught how to check radio activity and stuff like that...kind of silly but...

**My cousins high school has a...it's probably a year older than North, do you know if any of Olathe schools have a safe designated places in case of bombs?**

No, no I don't know of any. You know we had the procedures where to go in various case of an emergency...course you guys know that...and stuff like that. But, no, I don't know of anything like that...

**Was there still a trolley here?**

No, the Strang Line? The Strang Line. Gee, when was that discontinued? Late 40s early 50s? Something like that. I taught with a man who a...at one point...who, lived on the Plaza or some place and he used to ride the Strang Line out here.

But one thing you know you said you'd like to change in this...there is no way we are going to be able to do it. But...I really got my eyes opened...I was assigning...giving my annual American History term paper assignments and one of the things I'm stressing to them...be careful that you can find plenty of resources, you know a...and remember what you've got to work with. You've got the school library, and this was before internet and all that...and I said, you've got the city library and maybe if you access to the junior...and how many kids didn't know where the city library was...and so a...and this in itself breeds several news stories because at that time I started taking my second semester history classes instead of giving them the written final I would take them on a walking tour of Old Olathe. And I'd take them down to Park Street...course we'd talk about Washington School where Dillon's is now. We'd go down and look at the deaf school and the old John P. St. John high school and so on. And go show them where the original Hyer Boot Co was and all that; and kids don't know the community. As the

town gets bigger it's going to get worse. And a when I go out...I know this was brought home to me. I did three days for a ninth grade teacher out at Chisholm and those kids have no idea of this community outside of their neighborhood. And it's sad...but...that's one of the sins of a big town...it really is.

### **Can you tell us what you know about the Hyer boot company?**

Well of course...I knew Old Mr. Hyer...who was the last of the family course, Nan Bohl...did she interview with you? Nan is delightful isn't she? Anyway these were her parents and I met old Mr. Hyer and of course I got to know old Mrs. Hyer a little better, in fact we painted that huge old house of theirs. Ya ever been there? They live on...well she has passed away now...she was well into her 90s but there on...a...there on Cedar Street they lived on 14 acres of ground there. And had a huge old house. We painted that one time for them but a...a...well I don't know, they just got started.

And one of the things that always amused me, in fact a...I don't know which ones of those big industries out north, whether it was Honeywell or the other one across the road you know...at 110th and a... *(Interviewer voice says "Aldi")* ...10 highway and 7 highway you know...those two big plants. But anyway, the city government just gave...I don't know how many of millions of dollars in tax abatements to settle there.

And a...I went there and I showed them where Warren Hannon Jewelry is, the Hyer Boot Company got started upstairs there. You know just two or three brothers hiring men to make boots and no incentives, make a good quality product and sell it. Yeah...Hyer Boot they had a wonderful product, they really did, and course you have heard all the stories of the presidents and movie stars everybody that bought their boots. Even when we came here I bought a pair of Hyer Boots that unfortunately my feet got too big and I can't wear them anymore but a...they'd last forever if you'd take care of them.

### **What presidents?**

President Eisenhower, I think wore Hyer Boots, if I am not mistaken. I don't know if Lyndon Johnson did or not, cause he was a cowboy. Yeah, many movies stars, in fact I think some of them would fly into Kansas City and go to Hyer Boots for personal fittings and stuff. They had a good product.

### **Can you tell us about the involvement of the deaf community in Olathe?**

It's a tremendous thing and unfortunately not having anybody deaf in my family; I am not really knowing any deaf people I don't know that much. I do know that...I hate to use the word "culture shock" but it probably was a form of culture shock because when I was a kid we had in

my little home town of central Kansas, we had one deaf family. You know and they were farmers and they came to town to buy their groceries and that was it. And a where I taught, my first teaching job, there was one deaf family and they had two kids who were students of mine and of course I don't know if you know this, but, many times children of deaf parents tend to be withdrawn and it makes sense, you know they don't have anybody to talk to really growing up. But a...these kids were super...super withdrawn. But it was really a shock to me you know go into the grocery store and see all these people signing and stuff like that. Yeah, they played a tremendous role. A lot of deaf people worked for Hyer Boot. And where else did they...were they hired, big time? No pun intended.

### **The battery plant**

...the battery plant? That's...possible...you mean the Delco plant? Yeah...now do you guys remember when the Delco was still functioning?

### **I moved here in 200? (*Unintelligible year*)**

...yeah...it would have been functioning then. You know it's gone now...you know they have razed it and bulldozed and everything...it was a tremendous industry here in town. It's a shame. I don't know how many deaf folks worked there or not, I just don't know. A lot of...if I'm not mistaken...a lot of deaf people...of course because of their training over at KSD went into various trades...printing...a lot deaf printers. That doesn't mean they stayed in the Olathe community but they lived here...course this is their life here really.

### **You worked in the school district, the Olathe School district, for...**

Thirty-one years.

### **So what makes you want to stay here?**

The town. I'm kind of a chicken. I don't want to move you know...and secondly you know...it's a funny thing 'cause my wife and I talk about this a lot...a...so many of our friends are actually thinking about moving elsewhere. And a...they a...you know they are talking about Bella Vista, Arkansas. We've got some friends there thinking about this...super neat retirement community down by Dallas, Texas and stuff like that. And my wife and I say, "Why be around old people?" You know for example...you know where I live because of our friendship. A...you know...those two girls are the oldest kids and we've got all these little kids around there and a...it's neat...it's neat and a...I think we want to stick around for that reason. If nothing else a winter or two like we've got right now might run us out of here. That KU basketball you know guys have got to be able to go over and watch the Hawks play. If you guys are K State fans I'm sorry.

**I didn't know who KU was, because I was from Florida. I made friends and they'd be so angry with me because I didn't know who KU was.**

Well you know it's kind of interesting I did not go to KU; I got both my degrees from Fort Hays but, and a...but when I was a little kid you know, all I cared about was listening to the basketball games. So I listened to whoever was playing KU, K State whatever. But two things: number one, I had this good buddy of mine whose family is KU and a the second reason was gee, I made up my mind in third grade maybe, I wanted to be a lawyer and I continued that string of thought until I was in college and a...so you want to be a lawyer you'll go to KU then. And so you know I just naturally became a KU fan. In a way I kind of hate to leave for that reason that's for sure. Nah, I think we are going to stick around.

**If you wanted to take your wife out to a nice dinner in Olathe, when you moved here, where would you take her?**

Good, good...wonderful...wonderful question...I wouldn't take her anywhere because we had no nice restaurants. The best as far as I am concerned, the best restaurant we had in Olathe in the early years, was Mom's Kitchen; are you familiar where that is? Ok, and they are noted for their breakfast: biscuits and gravy. And I don't like biscuits. But you know on Friday nights they would have buffets, they were very simple very plain you know...you had your choice of mashed potatoes or mashed potatoes and you had fried chicken or roast beef and I think one fish of some kind it was darn good...you know...we had a...we had a chain called King's Food Host; it was not bad, we had Denny's which I despised, I've never liked Denny's, and that was about it. We did not have a nice restaurant in Olathe now all of a sudden...you know we haven't been to all of them. We have not been to all of them yet. Ah...you know we go to a lot of them but a...

**Did you have a prom type thing in Olathe when you moved here in, like an end of the year dance? Where did girls go to get their dresses?**

Yeah. Yeah. My guess they went into Overland Park or Kansas City I don't know. Oh yeah, prom used to be always in the gym...and...where do you have it now? You have it elsewhere don't you?

**Overland Park Regional Convention Center.**

Ok...ok yeah and course; the Friday of Prom is always the big decoration day...yeah, yeah. And the big thing you mentioned girls in dresses and so on...it seemed to me that the girls who worked the hardest on prom didn't get dates and that's sad, it is but a...but a...and yeah, gee and teachers were required...not required, but kind of encouraged to go and you know that's the last thing I wanted to do on a weekend. Yeah, that was a big deal. Do kids still go quite a

bit...I mean do they go...is it still a big deal to show up for 10 minutes and then run and party for the rest of the night and waste all that money on clothes or cars and stuff?

**Oh probably. So did all the teachers went?**

Quite a few did.

**Did they get dressed up too?**

Oh yeah! See, like I said, that was one of the last things I wanted to do. Yeah, I had forgotten about that. Yeah, in fact one of my favorite pictures in one of my old yearbooks is our vice principals sitting there...it was the way they caught him like he had been sucking on a pickle he had that look on his face...like why I am sitting here for? Yeah, gee...teachers were encouraged to do a lot of things and of course this bothers me because a...I would...while I respect this faculty very greatly I think this would be true of any high school around the country that you could go in and see teachers that never been to ball game, never been to a play or musical concert...or anything. And a...we were encouraged to support the kids.

I made it a rule, especially the older I got...I got a little bit more finicky about this, but I had a rule that I would not go to an event for just for the sake of going. If you were a student of mine and you had a role in a play or something like that I would go. And a...and I know I had a stretch there maybe five to six years that I never had one student in a play. Girls soccer was the one that was always hard for me to go watch because I don't like soccer in the first place and so on...I'd go...I'd go at least once a year.

**So you said you that you did something on Friday before prom, was prom kind of like a weekend...?**

It was always Saturday night but they'd decorate the gym on Fridays...kids would decorate and course you know I taught juniors, you know, obviously it was worthless trying to have class and I couldn't just blow the day off because I would have four or five that wouldn't have anything to do with it...so I had to have something to do with them...it was interesting...it was interesting.,

**What about homecoming? Did they have homecoming dances?**

The parade, it was always a big thing, and a...we had a horrible tradition here...have you been told this? Mr. [Ralph] Dennis or nobody told you about this? You could not buy an egg in Olathe during on homecoming day. Because all these high school boys would go buy eggs and go down and of course the parade went down, if I'm not mistaken, go down...there's a church there now....used to be the Good Samaritan Home...down there on Buchanan and Park Street and then go all the way down town and around the square they'd crawl up on these businesses and

then egg the float and stuff like; that it was not a nice tradition but it was definitely a tradition. No...but who wants to get spattered by a fresh egg. You know.

No they a...that was a...and I might add and I shouldn't say this we had some rough years here for several years. We had a lot of problems it's kind of an off shoot of Vietnam and disrespect for authority and a some racial tensions and a...and that...I am thinking maybe...you know it wasn't an overnight you know a...a day to light...dark to daylight type of transition but a...I am thinking about it took two to three years to start getting better but a...yeah assemblies were terrible they'd boo the performers and our administration seemed to think we need to have a lot of assemblies here you know. Bring in musical groups and they'd pitch pennies on the floor...and...it was sad. To me it was sad.

**Did they have a big pep rally around homecoming?**

Yeah, let me answer your question by asking you a question, do you have pep assemblies?

**During seventh hour sometimes, four times a year...no three times a year. One for each sport season we go down and we sit and kind of it's anti-climactic, I guess. We just kind of sit there and they bring the people down and they play the fight song and we sing it once... *(Cannot hear the rest of the answer)***

We had more than that. We had more than that.

**Will you tell me more about it?**

Well, as a teacher I didn't like them at all because kids didn't want to be there. And you know you had to sit in your assigned areas and a...a lot of times teachers didn't do their duty they wouldn't show up or they didn't...insist that their kids sit where they were supposed to then you are the bad guy if you tried to do something about it. And I know one time we had a bad situation where somebody threw a battery, flashlight battery, cut somebody's (kid's) head open so...on so...they kind of started getting away from assemblies. You know the whole concept of a pep rally I think is great you know...big ball game tonight...get fired up...

**Did you have the bonfires?**

I think they did...that's something I didn't come down for. I think they had some.

**Were you here the year they burned the power line and they knocked out the power to a bunch of houses? Or do you remember that at all?**

I think so...I think so...I think so...that's been how many years? 10 maybe?

**I don't know...no one has ever told me about it I just have kind of heard it from kids.**

One thing I do remember...talking about power...when they built the wing on where Social Science is now, that opened December '77 a...a...they did that and they expanded the office that was the same construction project but for some reason some electrician decided he wanted measure the inside of the fuse box and he used a metal tape measure and how he survived that morning I will never know. It knocked him on his can and he was injured and so on, but it blew...I don't know how many days we went without having school. Two or three days we didn't have school because it blew several transformers around and stuff like that...but the bonfire I kind of vaguely remember that.

**Did you ever teach in one of the rooms, Ms. [Linda] Greiner was telling me that they didn't used to have that first hallway? I think.**

The zero hallway? Yeah

**Did you ever teach in one of the rooms where I think she was saying you could look out the windows and watch the kids get taken away and stuff when they got arrested?**

Well, I never saw anything like that but yeah...my first two years here...I taught...they called it 107 east where Mrs. [Denise] Debonis (I still want to call her [Denise] Leighow). But Mrs. [Denise] Debonis teaches...and the reason they use that because the room next door to it, whatever they use that for now, was 107 west and a...we had just a pull curtain between the two. And yeah...that was another bad thing about that was so darn hot in there and we had window unit the air conditioner built right at the ground level. Well, you turn the air-conditioning on you couldn't hear yourself think. It was so loud and everything. No, I don't recall seeing anything like you said Ms. [Linda] Greiner described; however, I do remember being in the offices a time or two they'd bring a kid out in handcuffs and that's something you don't get used to seeing. You know you don't get used to that very easily.

**Did they do drug dog searches when you were here?**

No, no, not with dogs. I am sure they did drug searches but not with dogs. You know a big thing too I am sure Ms. [Linda] Greiner or Mr. [Ralph] Dennis or any people who talked to you...bomb threats...I don't know...did they mention those? We didn't have a year go by without some good bomb threats. Everybody would have to go out in the middle of the football field. And the cops would come and a...they had to go through every locker.

**Did they tell you about the change in policy? Now they have figured out that some schools are getting bomb threats and when they went out, they would have snipers on the roof to shoot the kids, but there would not be a bomb inside. So now they lock us all inside in our classrooms and just hope that the bomb isn't real and that there are snipers.**

No, I was not aware of that. Of course I'm aware of the various color codes...in fact I think they had that a...they had that color code system already before I retired. I've never in my teaching or substituting now, lived through code red or code blue...whatever the bad ones are. I have been through several code yellows, and I know, I was in a junior high earlier this winter, and...a...they announced a code yellow and of course you just keep your kids in the room and you wonder what is going on. And pretty soon I heard this woof, woof, woof you know and the drug puppy was there. And this past week I was in a junior high and they called a code yellow, but they had a...secretary got sick, you know they don't want an ambulance crew there and fighting kids in the hallway and stuff like that. And every once in a while at the same school, they've got a girl that is in life skills and I'm not making fun of her, but she's a big ole gal and she's very loud and she's very obstinate, a lot of times when they are trying to move from class to class and get those kids a little earlier they will have to call a code yellow just to get her to her class so she won't be out there with the general population.

**So how has Olathe North changed structurally?**

Well, you know, it is interesting because one thing I was thinking of when you mentioned Ms. [Linda] Greiner's class, my first years here, that 100 hallway was all the English teachers and all the social science teachers. Social science was on the south side of the hallway and the English teachers were on the north side of the hallway. Obviously we must of had pretty big classes because we had like 100 kids in that classroom. But as I said, we had a...they were very proud of it, I thought it was a mess, but they were very proud of it, that they had a campus concept. And that was that the various buildings...now the main building stopped...in the main hallway stopped where the senior hallway was, that was an outside door. And the 200 hallway stopped a...in the hallway going over to the library that little short hallway, there was an outside door there. The 100 hallway stopped there by 109, by where the ramp starts. Then we had the south gym, was a separate building, and that consisted of the gym and then and I don't know what kind of classrooms they got in there now? But I think some science rooms, in fact Mr. [Greg] Beggs' class was there and I think Mr. [Brad] Hankins was there for a while. And then the nurse's office was at the end: that was a separate building.

The first year I was here, the library was built; what had been the library now is that big English classroom, there's a little short hallway going in there but that was the library. But the library was built, it was a separate building. And out here there was a long, tin shed, and we called it a butler building, course that's a brand of building that puts up those kinds of sheds. But it was all

tin on the outside and paneling on the inside. And then outside right out by, well close to, Mr. [Ron] Cotsworth room out that door right there, there was a big old Quonset type building where they had the auto mechanics classes. And so they built a library.

But the biggest project of all was when they built the new gym, because they not only built the new gym but they decided to put everything under one roof. So that tied everything together, well, that created your senior hallway, if you can visualize that, it created your senior hallway, it created the commons area, see where your tables are for lunch that was a student parking lot at one time. Okay, yeah, it created that, it created that big wide hallway going up towards the south gym and stuff like that. And then the next building project, I think, was the building of the new...we had the little theater...but the big theater was built and then we built this...we call it...is this the 800 hall is that what that is out here? They built that, I think that might have been one of the last ones...that might have been the last one.

And then social science...as I told you...that was built...see they used to...they used to play...boys and girls played softball there in their Phys Ed classes where that wing is now and also they greatly enlarged the office. If you can envision this...where Mr. [Bob] Duncan's and those counselors' offices are...that's where the counselors' offices used to be but that was on the outside wall. All the office was north, where the teachers' lounge is now that was the reception room, the principal's office, the vice principal's office, the attendance office that was all in that little tiny little area. And of course the band room was down below there someplace too. So they have had a lot of building projects...a lot of building projects. It's been interesting, it really has.

### **Did Olathe North have open lunch?**

Never, never, the only open lunch is when the kids make it open. No, you know it's kind of a sad thing, the fact that I know human nature, I know the kids want to get out and I know why the school wants to keep them in. Kids never would believe me when we would tell them this, but...two big factors why people wanted kids to stay in: number one the parents: parents say if you go to school at 8:00 and you leave at 3:00, we know where you are; and secondly, the businessmen: they did not...like McDonalds, they weren't geared to that extra, you know...that extra volume and secondly a...correctly or incorrectly they said kids stole them blind. And so there was always pressure from the business community to keep it closed. Plus, the fact there's always the legality of it, you know kids getting killed.

See, When I taught in western Kansas we had open lunchrooms, lunch hours, you know, if the parents gave permission, kids could go home for lunch. When I was a kid we had open lunch, but we had an hour too. Whereas we got what 20 minutes now, 25? It's terrible, I think that is one aspect that is bad, I think you need more time for lunch. But that's beside the point. But, no

we have never had open lunches. My first year or so here, down, oh, at Santa Fe and Ridgeview where that used to be a Christian book store there and now there is a shooters there or something; about half way down that parking lot... ***(DVD chapter ends)***

Ok, we were talking about open lunch.

**Did the schools have kitchens? How did they get there...?**

They have always had from the time I've been here...have always had the central kitchen concept. Where they do all the cooking for the whole district and then truck the food up and stuff like that. And I am sure they do a few things...the ladies do a few things down here but I don't know what they do. Now, like for example, don't you have hot rolls or buns or something with your meals? I don't know if they bake those here or if they bake them down there. I don't know.

***(Interviewer says something about warming things up and that is why it is so bad)***

Do you think it's bad? See I never...I don't recall eating a full meals here when I did eat here. A...you know I'd eat a salad or a hamburger or a sandwich something like that. But unfortunately, man alive this goes back so many years, there was a lady down there...she and I could say the Lord's Prayer together and get in a fight doing it. You know...we'd just look at each other... ***(He growls)***. So I said forget it and a...that goes back...my gosh, that goes back late 70s early 80s when I stopped eating down there. And a...we had a principal who used to give us a free meal for our birthday every year and a...that bothered me to go down there and eat. ***(He laughs)***...I never had any complaint with the quality of food, but you got to remember that is massed produced. You're cooking for thousands and thousands of people.

**Actually one of the groups in Distinguished Scholars is researching school lunches in Olathe. Actually if you eat the whole lunch it has some obnoxiously high number of calories; they're really bad for you.**

Is that right? Well let me ask you this, you are hearing all this stuff on television, have they really eliminated all the Cokes and the different things here...and snacks...that is supposedly bad for you?

**All the soda in the machine is diet. You can't get any soda with calories.**

You mean you can't go buy a real Coke or a real Pepsi or...?

***(Interviewer names several diet drinks)***

Coke Zero is acceptable, but I cannot stand any diet Coke. See what bothers me is...rather than...and I know some of these foods are not good for kids but, a...rather than saying: yeah,

you can't eat potato chips or you can't drink Coke, get off your duff and away from the computer games and get out and...you know, little kids...go out and play ball or tag or something. *(He yawns)*

**I think they cut down in the vending machines the food, I think they changed that, but I haven't been down to the cafeteria...I would guess since I was...partway through my junior the year. I don't know**

Pack your own lunch?

**I buy my own lunch and I eat it in the Quest teacher's room.**

**Do you anything about the mascot?**

Yeah, but I can't tell ya. Did Mr. [Ralph] Dennis touch on that? Did you interview Mr. [Ralph] Dennis?

**Mr. [Ralph] Dennis said that...didn't he suggested the mascot?**

...said...he...I...don't...know...what role he played in it. I know he knows the story...it was down between the eagle and...

**The beavers?**

...yeah...something...an obnoxious animal of some kind, yeah...I knew that story but...I can't...I don't know anything about it.

**Can you tell us anything about the sporting events here? Like football games and what happened? Did people really come out and support the eagles?**

I noticed that more so in basketball. I think that the community would come out, and football too...obviously. A...when we came here...in 1971 they were so happy that in the '70 season they had the first winning football season in...in 9 years...in 9 years...and a...then it went downhill. Coach Wheeler, Bud Wheeler, really put football on the map here in Olathe. Cause he came here from Ottawa, in fact the last year he coached at Ottawa he beat us 33-0. And he really got things going and then of course he went to South when it opened that's when Coach [Gene] Weir took over here; but...and Coach [Gene] Weir coached for him here...but a...Wheeler was the one that put Olathe...but we had good basketball in those early days and a...believe it or not I have sat at regular season basketball games, no tournament...season basketball games in the North gym and sat in the stair area...steps area because I couldn't find a regular bleacher seat. We are talking here...what does that seat? 3,000 people I believe.

But we used to have some knock down games with Leavenworth High School and Sumner when Sumner was still the Black school for Kansas City, Kansas before the Academy days and man they had some good teams; and Coach O'Dell had some really good teams then. Yeah...a...but once again...a you know a few minutes ago I talked about...you know...if you want to ruin a community sense...why, have more than one high school...and that hurt a lot. You know I find it very sad cause I came over to...my wife and I came down to...see...Olathe East and Olathe North played several weeks ago...jimmy Christmas! It was hand full of people there...what do you got...1400 kids in high school now and maybe 100 kids at the game and stuff. But It's a different life...it's a different world.

**We are only six kids behind East in enrollment earlier this year.**

Yeah, that's what I understand...yeah. Well I maintain, and I am dead serious about this, Olathe North is the best kept secret in town. It really is. And a...one time that has really...really one thing that has bothered me and a...I know part of it is paranoia, but a...I really think that incident out here with that kid killing those two people in the parking lot, I think that has hurt us and it is going to be many years for we'll get over it.

**What happened?**

Well...the Homecoming thing you know...you know that story? For some reason...course we already had ODAC but we thought...somebody came up with the idea wouldn't it be neat for nostalgia sake to have the Homecoming game out here on Marshal Ensor and...ask Mr. [Ron] Cotsworth (and I think Mr. [Paul] Williams was even here when that happened). And so they had it... and so we played Shawnee Mission North...but they were undefeated and we were undefeated it was a good ball game and we beat them and of course there was jawing on in the parking lot all that and so...yeah, we'll get together Sunday night and we will settle this.

Well, there was a whole bunch of kids from North and hangers-on and relatives and everything and they were here and a...they were going to...fix those guys if they showed up and everything well...but...bunch of kids from Shawnee Mission North showed up and they were standing and no blows were made or anything they were just standing around jawing; a car drove by and a kid stuck a gun out and started shooting and a...killed two guys and wounded about three others, I believe.

The one kid that was wounded, was a student of mine and I knew another kid. The one kid that was killed I didn't know him at all, I think he was sophomore and then another boy was killed; it was a tragic thing he was up playing...a lot of kids would like to get together and played touch football on Sunday nights on the field...and he was up with some cousins and he didn't live in Olathe; he was here visiting and playing football with his cousins and a...a...it was a stray bullet

that got him. They found his body several hours later lying across by the fence. But a...I really think that has just really...really hurt us big time.

And a...in fact, I was talking to a police officer the other day and a...he lives in the Olathe South neighborhood and they were having some work done at their house and the man doing the work had kids that went to Olathe East. The woman was telling her son...I'm sorry...her husband was going to work Olathe South/Olathe East basketball game for security said, why do you need cops at a...an East/South game?...said they're aren't even going to be people from North there. You know that is a horrible image and people carry that image and they are perpetrated it. Maybe give us enough years and we'll over it. It hurt us....it hurt us big time.

### **So only North kids were killed in that...?**

One North student, like I said, was...just a guest here visiting his cousin...I think he was from Kansas City, Kansas if I am not mistaken and he was 19-20 years old and he was there with cousins. And the boys that were hurt were all North kids. I think most of them were juniors. Oh yeah...you see when one...did anyone in the previous interviews talk to you about the border wars?

**No**

Ok, the borders wars were a year or two before Northwest opened and they were trying to come up with district lines...you know, boundary lines...and of course the people from East they didn't...they didn't want anything to do...because they were afraid that they would have to have some kids to come over here. They wanted to redo the lines, so they put signs...wrote a lot of letters to the editor and they put signs out along 119th Street, "East, the only safe high school"...stuff like that and then when they were pressed on the issue...they said, well, we mean safe, you know...we don't have to drive over there, you know...be unsafe. Well, heck they drive to their...

You know I said a little bit earlier, we open a new high school every 11 years...well, my younger son was a senior that first year that North and South split. And my memory is: there were five...but they were all boys...a...who were supposed to go to South and for whatever reason...one kid...by gosh, you know I went to high school here I am not going to finish at a brand new school and this is where my family has always gone and I am going to go here...and boy...and they used every device: vacant lots and they used grandma and grandpas addresses and everything a...to...you know...to claim that they had the right to go here and boy they pulled them out and they sent them to South. And now, you know, you go wherever you want to go and a...that's not right. And when you mentioned PRT and Santa Fe...Santa Fe has been wrecked by that...it has really been wrecked by that.

**Mrs. Lane, Kerry Lane is there now...**

I understand she is good and I tell you one thing that's going to help Santa Fe...a...those faculty people who are left there, they hunkered down and they said, we're going to fight this and that's a great attitude. That's a great attitude. But they've got a battle.

**Did we talk about the racial issue?**

Not we didn't, but we definitely had them. A...as I told you a little earlier a...the very first...the last day of school in 1972 we had two bomb threats, and an arson, and a race riot by noon. But you see we had the worse elements on both sides we had some unbelievable rednecks who would want to fight a Black kid at the drop of a hat and then we had Black kids...you know...were nasty...it was an ugly scene. But gradually things came around.

**Now, did it gradually build up to that one last day of school? Or was it expected?**

Oh it was always there...it was always there...I remember little incidents a...I remember an incident not too far from my...my classroom...it was just the shoving and name calling and you know, they didn't want to fight that battle because you know, as soon as some teachers got in between them they'd disperse. And then we had a little incident up by the trophy cases by the office I remember...but, a...that thing in the cafeteria was a...a...really nasty.

**What happened in the cafeteria? Was that the race riot?**

Yeah...that's when they all got together. It all started on the football field we had...we were talking...(I believe off camera) in the old days whenever you had a bomb threat everybody had to go to the football field while the police went through the building and it started out there and it spilled over. Unfortunately, two of the biggest protagonists were in my 4th hour class...and so on and they were on the verge of a...of a...slugging it out. I told them to shut up and sit down; one kid did, and one didn't and...a...the administration got on me about it and I said hey...so I kicked the one kid out of class and of course he called in support and a...the administration got on me and I said the other kid obeyed me you know I asked him to sit down and he did...so that was the end of that. But that was...it was a pretty ugly scene, course the next year, why, they started working on it: trying to prevent things like that. I remember the principal got some of the nastiest kids on both...both sides and formed a committee and made them sit down and talk together.

**Did that work?**

Well it helped...it helped...I just don't know...you know it was just such a gradual thing we never had anything that came close to that...that the lunchroom situation. Course that's when the

lunchrooms were over where the library is now. See, that was originally built to be library...oh excuse me...built to be the cafeteria then they converted it into the library. *(He sighs)*

***(Unintelligible question—Mr. Meier brushes the microphone)***

Yeah. I know what you are saying...well...see they have in turn...they have since I have been gone from here, they have changed that building some...for an example that lower level...isn't that classrooms now or something like that? See, they all used to be lower reading area for the library...I don't know, you guys wouldn't have been in high school yet.

**It's the culinary arts facility now.**

Oh is that part of culinary arts? Ok, that's where they got the room for culinary arts. How's that program going now?

**They keep winning nationals actually...**

Well wonderful, you know whenever you change instructors you worry, and what was that guy's name? Tatley? Or something? He is here now? Oh, I thought they had a lady now...I see. I see.

***(For the next several minutes there is a lot of personal conversation between the interviewers and Mr. Meier. None of which is Olathe history related.)***

**Do you think having 119<sup>th</sup> open with the big AMC and all those restaurants over there on 119<sup>th</sup>, do you think that has had any influence on Olathe?**

Oh tremendous, yeah. Course I really am intrigued, I don't want a recession...but you know it looks like we might be headed towards a recession, but we are a ways from it yet. And studies show that the first thing people do to cut back is their eating out...and so how many restaurants will fail? And let's face it: we've had them fail already, they had that when...a...there at 119<sup>th</sup> and Black Bob; that Olathe pointe...that Italian restaurant that was the first building there...it's gone already, it's sitting there vacant. Of course I thought...they frankly...I thought they were a little bit lousy.

**Gambucci's?** No, not...Gambucci's was great. You know what killed Gambucci's?

**Wasn't it owned by Perkins?**

They were part of the Perkin family, right and Perkins drug them down. No, it had a name it started with a 'C' it was just almost across the street from Olive Garden, a little bit east and it faced 119<sup>th</sup>.

***(Unintelligible)***

You're very close, you're very close...I thought it was really quite poor. But, a...yeah, we've got a tremendous number of restaurants in town, like I told you a few minutes ago, you couldn't get a decent meal in Olathe, you had to go to Overland Park; I know some people that are older than I am that will tell you that if you live in Overland Park, you'd have to go to Kansas city cause they didn't have any good restaurants.

**Do you think having that has helped Olathe?**

Oh I think it has. Yeah you know...make it more...little bit more of a destination than...like I said from a retail point of view, my disappointment is the lack of a downtown. And a...to buy clothes, you know at one point when I was mentioning all the little stores there along Park Street, even after urban renewal there was a pretty...I don't want to call it upscale...but they had a men's clothing store that you got pretty good quality clothes in and stuff...I never bought from him. But you know it's kinda bad when a man wants to buy a suit and he has to go to Overland Park to buy it. But anyway, that's life I guess. How long have you lived in Olathe?

**I moved here when I was in second grade.**

Oh you know a little bit about the town then. And where did you come from?

**West Palm Beach, Florida.**

Boy

**No ocean here. I love it though the people are so nice.**

I maintain that Midwest people are the salt of the earth I really do.

***(There are now a few exchanges and pleasantries with one of the interviewers about moving from Florida)***

Yeah, it's a...people are good people. And a...it's a terrible thing to say but, I can show you areas of the Midwest where people might even be better than they are around here. Where you...I mean...you'd be a fool not to...um...to do business this way, you know but, where you can seal a deal with a handshake you know as opposed to a contract and stuff like that.

**I moved from Dallas TX and I thought when I moved here I thought that everything would be black and white because (unintelligible...)**

Horse, yeah. A lot of misconceptions. Really are...we find this out, my wife and I when we travel (we can't do it all over and every time) but we really like Bed and Breakfasts, yeah you pay a

little bit more, but it's kind of neat to sit around the breakfast table with people from all over the world and visit you know. And they are so unbelievably ignorant about here, and my wife has a good line, and people say where are you from she said, "Kansas, do you know anything about Kansas?" And they don't they don't know jack. And a...we had a young Chinese man, he knew that Bob Dole was from Kansas one time, but they'll..."does it snow there?" But what do they want to talk about? What do you suppose they always want to talk about when you mention Kansas?

### **Wizard of Oz**

Wizard of Oz and tornados. And I know one time we had a flight from Boston. We had to switch planes in Philadelphia...a lady from...my seatmate a...was from California and...two hours she spent a good hour and a half asking me about tornados and do you have basements? And do you go to your basements? You know, and I don't care about the earthquakes, you know, but they want to talk about tornados. Yeah, Midwest I think is pretty nice. You lived in Dallas, you lived in Florida, so adjusting to humidity was not a problem for you coming here?

See it tore me up...it tore me up cause out western Kansas you know you have a lot more wind, but it's very dry out there. And a...hot days and cool evenings and a...humidity really was hard for me to adjust to...and I'm not so sure I'm still adjusted to it.

### **It's harder for girls, because of our hair.**

Yeah, Well I...I can relate to that...my wife has...her hair gets real frizzy on her and she gets really upset.

***(The balance of the interview is a conversation about humidity and hair until the camera is shut off.)***