

Kenneth Love

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Kenneth Love

When did you move to Olathe?

I moved to Olathe in 1962.

Why did you move and where did you live prior to?

I grew up in central Missouri, Fulton, Missouri. Graduated from West Minster College with a degree in Journalism. I moved to Olathe to become the sports editor of the Olathe daily news. Prior to me coming here, Olathe had two weekly newspapers, the Mirror and the Democrat, and they merged and became a daily and I took the job as sports editor of the Daily News in Olathe.

Did you have any family that lived here before?

No

Do you have any family here now?

No

None at all?

None at all, all my relatives are still in central Missouri.

Since you were the staff editor or chief editor of the Olathe Daily News.

I became the Managing editor about a year after that, yes.

Could you tell us some of the big stories you covered as an editor and what it was like to be the editor of the paper?

Well we had all types of stories to cover of course, we were publishing six days a week. We had big fires in Olathe, the downtown almost burn down one day on a Sunday afternoon. The block between Cherry Street and Chestnut Street on Park burned. All those buildings were gone. I was at a Chief's game at the time, I'm the head statistician for the Kansas City Chief's and work for them. I've done that for 44 years now. And they called me during the middle of the game to come back to the office and I said, "I can't because of the game, I can't leave." And so after the game was over we came back from the game and published a special edition, an extra, and had it on the streets about an hour after that.

Another big day at the newspaper was the day that JFK was assassinated. That was a tragic day. And we published an extra that day also. Most papers our size, in those days, seldom published an extra, but we did that once in a while.

We also published one when we landed on the moon, for the astronauts.

One of the big stories in Olathe over the years was Urban renewal. As we look back on it we see it was probably a drastic mistake today, but at that time of the history of Olathe, everybody thought Urban renewal was a great thing. And with federal funds they purchased buildings downtown and demolished these buildings. This pretty much killed downtown Olathe. When I first moved here in 1962 we had lots of shops downtown, restaurants, traffic, the farmers came to town and chatted with each other on the street corners and it was a busy place. But ten years later, nothing downtown, like it is today.

You listed in your pre-questionnaire about big fires, was there more than one fire that happened to Olathe?

Yes, the school board burned down also, it was upstairs over a building called George Burns drugs it was on the corner of Kansas and Park Street and that caught on fire and burned down also, losing all the school records and all kinds of things in that fire.

Do you remember when that happened?

70's

Could you tell us what the city really looked like when you first got here?

Sure, Olathe was about 8,000 people, we had a naval air station located between here and Gardner with several military people, and I suspected they counted all the military people in those 8,000. It was not very big. There was nothing east of I-35. I-35 had just been built in 1962. K-150 or Santa Fe Street going over to Martin City wasn't even paved yet, it was still a dirt road when I first moved here. Many of the streets were not paved yet, they were still dirt streets. But it was just a little, small, nice community. The people were excited about having I-35, because you could go to Kansas City in about 20 minutes. Before that you had to take old Kansas City Road, and that took forever.

How has Olathe changed since you have been here?

Oh, it's changed drastically. We didn't have traffic problems in those days, and today that is one of Olathe's biggest problems, I think, is traffic. We've always had the railroads here and they have always tied up traffic downtown, not as much so as today.

Olathe has become more of a metropolitan area, I think it's probably good in a way and probably bad in a way. It's good that people are tied to Kansas City. If they would go to California and somebody would ask them where they are from they would say Kansas City, they probably wouldn't say Olathe. But we've lost a little bit of our feeling of being a community. In the old days, back in the 60's, we had our own library system here (most cities don't) we had our own fire department (most cities in Johnson county don't have). It was just a total community here and we could do things like Old Settlers and everybody came in those days. Today some of the people come, and we still get a good crowd at Old Settlers, but it's not a total community effort.

Going back to the Olathe Daily News, how old is it?

How old is the newspaper? There were two weeklies, the Mirror and the Democrat. The Mirror operated by the Breyfogle family, maybe you have heard of this name before, the Breyfogle, but they were quite famous in Johnson County in the banking industry. And the Democrat was operated by the Rogers family. Buddy Rogers who became a movie star, his father operated the Democrat, Judge Bert Rogers, and he was the marrying judge. He was a justice of the peace and people came from miles around to get married because there was no big waiting period or anything; you could walk right up and get a marriage license and get married in Olathe. There were two different sort of feuding in groups operating these two newspapers and they were furious competitors with each other. And then a company called the Harris publishing company, located in Hutchinson, bought these two newspapers and raised them into one daily and that's when I came here.

How many readers did the newspaper reach?

More than they have now. Our circulation was about--when I first came here--the city was about 8,000 people and we had a circulation of about 5,000 every day. Some people outside Olathe bought the paper, Springhill, Stanley, Gardner.

What do you think the mission of the either those two papers or the Olathe Daily News was when you first came to Olathe?

To make money. That is the mission of all newspapers, and unfortunately the day of the newspaper (I'm sorry to say) is about over probably. Papers are hurting everywhere, they are losing circulation and selling out right and left. The Kansas City Star has been sold a couple times in the last few years. And The Kansas City Star now owns the Olathe Daily News, I don't know if that is common knowledge around, but they do operate the Daily News in Olathe. I think they bought it just because of the competition of the paper. But, the newspaper has never grown a lot and that's partially because Olathe people feel like they are part of the Kansas City metropolitan area, they subscribe to the Star instead of buying the local newspaper.

You are the founder of Olathe sister city, can you explain that?

In 1972 I was chosen to be a member of the U.S. Press corp. for the Olympics in Munich. And I went over to Europe for the Olympics. Since, I have been to several Olympics, but that was my first one. That was the games that the terrorist kidnapped the Israelis and we had lots of problems.

After the games were over I decided to stay around for another week or two in Europe and take some tours. I rented a car and did some driving around and drove down to Rome after the games were over. Coming back up to Munich to fly back home, I was crossing the Alps and got involved in a terrific snow storm. This was in the first of part of September it was snowing like crazy and I thought if I ever get off this mountain I will never get back up here again. I had never

seen snow like this, we thought we had big snows here sometimes, nothing compared to on top of the Alps.

I finally came back down to a lower level and came to a little town called Chur, spelled C-h-u-r, a delightful city. It's an old walled city about 2,000 years old, founded before the birth of Christ. They have an old cathedral there, it's about 500 or 600 years old. Just like if you go see the movie Heidi, you would know what the area looks like because Heidi came from a town right next to Chur she was from Maienfeld. It's a delightful little town of about 30,000 people and at that point in time Olathe was about 30,000 people.

And after I came home from Europe I thought, you know, maybe we ought to have a sister city someplace in the world because other cities were doing this also. One of the first ones was Larned, Kansas who had become a sister city of Olney, England. They are quite famous because they have the pancake race every beginning of lent. So I approached the chamber of commerce (I was on the board of directors of the chamber of commerce for nine years) and I approached the chamber about looking into the possibility of getting a sister city. We formed a committee, we chatted with the mayor and the city manager and they were for it. And so we chose four or five cities and one of my favorites we had thrown into the pile, of Chur.

After we had chosen the cities, we chose Salzburg Austria, we chose Erlangen Germany but several cities around in that area because we thought we would like to have a city in that alpine area because of the beauty of the area it would be a nice place for people to go on vacation, to visit. So we finally voted, the committee did, after meeting quite a while and decided to ask Chur to become our sister city. The Olathe city manager's name was Bill Tschudy and that's quite a famous name in Switzerland because the president of Switzerland at that time last name was Tschudy spelling T-s-c-h-u-d-y. Very crazy spelling, but that was a famous Swiss name.

So through the department of state in Washington we were able to get the name of the mayor of Chur and his address. We sent a telegram, his name is Andrea Melchior, and I have heard him tell the story several times since then. But, the middle of the night he received a telegram signed by somebody named Tschudy from Kansas, in America and he thought it must be some drunken Swiss man, homesick again and so he put the telegram up on his mantel piece and forgot about it. So we were sitting and waiting with bated breath back in Olathe to hear from this proposal on a sister city program and we didn't hear anything. So after about six weeks we sent another telegram over and this time he realized what we were wanting, that we were wanting to be a sister city, so he took that to his city council over there and they voted on it and they agreed to become our sister city here.

So in 1974 we sent a delegation over to Chur for the first time, I headed the delegation along with the mayor and the city manager, the chamber of commerce people, we had a student from Olathe high school (it wasn't north in those days it was just Olathe high school that was the only high school we had back then) and we all went over to visit Chur and spent three or

four days over there. We had a delightful time. We of course invited them to send a group over to us the next year, they did that in 1975—that was the year that we had the bicentennial celebration in our old settler's parade. And they rode in the parade, we entertained them royally here with all types of things: we went to a Royals game, we went to a rodeo, we did all types of things that we thought they might enjoy. We even had some Indians come in and put on some dances for them because they were really excited about Indian folklore.

After that, we established some programs: we had student exchange programs for several years, we have since had to call those off unfortunately. U.S. students just aren't equipped to go over to Switzerland and go to school every day and study in High German. That's our biggest problem, is the language, students are smart enough no problem, but it's the language that causes them the problems. Their students did well over here: they thought it was quite easy—our educational program compared to what they have back home. But the U.S. students we had, a couple that did okay, but most of them that we sent (over the ten year period or so that we had the program) didn't do well with the program.

We have had several exchanges since then, fire department exchanges, police department exchanges we've had an art exchange, they sent a folk lore choir over to us a couple years ago, Chur did. And the program is still going on and it's been quite successful but that's how it started back in Olathe.

I talked to Larry Huckleberry who was a builder here and I knew he was building some new homes out in a new area, so I asked Larry if he would name the streets: one of them Chur and one of them Chalet, and we did that so today we have Chur Street and we have Chalet Street in Olathe.

The air traffic control facility was built in 1962 did you cover any stories on it or do you know anything about it?

I don't know much about it. We've had a few things: we've had emergency landings at the naval air station, for example. I was out there one night and that was handled by the FAA facility here. But they handle air traffic between Chicago and Dallas and Denver etc. all in the Midwest here that's all routed through the Olathe operation here.

Do you know anything else about the naval air station? Any stories about it?

No, I just know it was quite an operational thing in those days. A lot of the pilots for the Second World War came through Olathe naval air station. It was on the decline when I first moved here, it was going downhill then there weren't too many guys stationed out there anymore. But I do know that they did quite well for a while

What made you choose to take a job in Olathe?

The company, Harris publishing company had a good name. I started out with a newspaper in central Missouri, in my hometown. I started out as the sports editor there. The woman who

sold advertising for us, her son was the treasurer for Harris Publishing Company and that is how I heard about the job in Olathe and I applied through him.

Would you say that Olathe has changed for the better or for the worse?

I'd say it has changed for the better probably, a lot more opportunities—especially for people like you with schools. We have fantastic schools here, just fantastic schools. A lot of the congratulations probably should go to people like Ron Wimmer, and of course a good school board too, plus the people that are willing to spend the money for the facilities and the teachers and etc. but we have great schools here.

What would you say the future of Olathe looks like?

Big. Population wise, the economy is going well; when people like pro bass operate from Olathe, then you know there must be some reason to come here. But I would say that Olathe is going to be 150,000/200,000 people ten years from now. Fortunately we are getting the railroads up off the streets so we can get traffic through. But traffic is one of our biggest concerns here.

Was civil rights a big deal in Olathe?

Not when I was here. Never, we've never had any big problems as far as I know. When I first moved here they still had the old Lincoln school here and that was originally a black school for black students over in the black part of town. I guess George Washington Carver went to that school for a while he lived in Olathe for a while. But we didn't have any big civil rights protests here that I can remember.

Were there any big civil rights groups that were in Olathe at the time?

Not that I recall. We had a Klu Klux Klan group out in Gardner that was a little bit active, but never in Olathe, I don't think.

You mentioned how Olathe has wonderful schools, how have they changed throughout the years?

Well, they have gotten much bigger. When I first moved to Olathe, this facility—Olathe North now, had just been built. They used to go to school down at the old John P. St. John High School, there was a Junior High in those days called Millbrooke Junior High. Olathe probably had 600, 700 students. In the high school here, all these little additions that you've added on out here, weren't here in those days. It was just the main building—is all that was here.

There was no football facility behind the school. They played their games down at Washington field, which was behind a little elementary school that was torn down later and the Dillon's on Santa Fe Street is now locate there. That's where the games were played every team that played football: the junior high school, the high school, Kansas school for the deaf, they all

played their games there. It was the only lighted field in town and the lights weren't very good. You could hardly see across the field with the lights.

But the schools have become much bigger, I don't know how many thousand students you have in Olathe now but, what 25,000 students probably? It's amazing that we've grown this much. We are probably getting ready to build another high school. And the facilities, I'm sure that the students are getting a much better education than they did in those days they didn't have programs like this one.

What do you think was the biggest story that you covered or had while you were on the Olathe Daily news?

Local or nationally? The biggest story nationally was JFK's assassination for sure! Probably the most shocking and probably effected more people than anything else. Locally, probably urban renewal. It was a major thing back when I was with the newspaper. Of course, we had the normal murder trials and this type of stuff.

We had a murder trial right after I had moved here. A guy named Lloyd Harsh killed his girlfriend, Donna, on a little campout over the weekend and that became a big story in those days. Everybody in Olathe knew each other. That doesn't happen today.

If we could go to Dillon's in those days you could know everybody in there, back in 1962. I seldom see anybody that I know anymore. Which may be bad or may be good, I don't know. But it's not the small community any more that it was in those days, it's now a major metropolitan area, Olathe is.

At what point in Olathe's history did you see the most significant amount of change?

Physically? Probably 70's because of Urban renewal. The downtown changed drastically! That whole area where the jail is now downtown in Olathe that was shops. We had shops down Kansas Avenue all the way downtown. The old city hall sat on the corner of Kansas and Santa Fe—that's long gone. We had hotels in downtown Olathe when I first moved here. When I came here for an interview I stayed in a hotel in downtown Olathe. There are no hotels down there now. Of course, hotels have changed over the years too; there is no room for a hotel in downtown Olathe. Hotels, to survive these days, have to be 100 rooms 200 rooms. Back then you could have a six room hotel and make money.

What else do you think has contributed to the change? What other things have had great impacts on change in Olathe to what it is today?

I would say the style of living in Olathe has probably been the most thing that has changed the community. People want to move here, we have affordable housing. We have excellent schools. We have all the facilities. A city government that's stable and good.

When I first moved here, the city government was not too stable. The police department all walked out one night, all resigned. We had a mayor that used to stop traffic on the streets and

make citizen's arrest back in the 60's. And the city commission meetings was just a knock down drag out screaming match over there.

Do you think the growth of the city led to a little more professionalism?

Oh yes, we didn't have a city manager in those days and that was one of the problems. We had three city commissioners, and they tried to operate the police department, the fire department and there was a lot of friction and a lot of politics. And the hiring of a city manager calmed things down.

Do you remember when that happened?

Probably '67, '68. The first city manager's name was Harley Lucas and he came to Olathe and things got much better then.

Was there pressure to hire a city manager?

Oh yes, we led the efforts, the Daily News did.

How old were you when you first came to Olathe?

When I first came here? Twenty-two

What would you do for your leisure time?

Well, I bowled on a bowling team. I coached baseball in Olathe. I didn't have a lot of leisure time because we were a morning newspaper and I worked until one o'clock in the morning or so every night getting the paper out.

Where was the bowling alley?

The bowling alley, it was out on Dennis Street and 56 highway—owned by Charlie Boyd (?) It's still there, I believe, I don't know if it's a bowling alley anymore or not, it may be still, though I think it is, that's the originally bowling alley.

We are the city of governors correct? How many governors would you say that you saw go through your life?

I only knew one, since I have been here, John Anderson, but there have been five governors from Olathe. One of them was not a Kansas governor, he was a governor someplace else—I believe it was Arkansas maybe, but we have had four Kansas governors from Olathe.

The night the police officers resigned what was the issue that they were having problems with?

The Mayor.

They just didn't like the mayor?

Nobody like the mayor, he finally left town and became a mayor of this little city down in Florida. He has since passed on, he is no longer alive, but he was something else.

Do you remember how he made them mad?

Oh they had just had enough, I think, of it. There was just little things that had built up. We didn't have a big police department. In those days it was like a three or four man force.

What other big trials or murders trials did you cover while you were at the paper?

The trials that we had here were not necessarily Olathe trials. The big ones were usually Johnson county trials, this being the capital seat of Johnson county. We had an attorney that was murdered in Fairway, Christmas time. I don't know, we had a woman who hired her son to kill her step-son that was 15-20 years ago. We haven't had a lot of murders. I don't want people to think this is a murder capital, it's not. It's a very safe city actually—go for crime wise but we have had a few murders.

What was the most outrageous story that you covered?

Probably the night I was hung in effigy down in Edgerton Kansas. I was the sports editor and I wrote a daily column called "Second Guessing" in those days and I predicted football games every week for all the high school teams; and Edgerton had a terrible football team. And in my column, I said Edgerton shouldn't even have a high school. It wasn't big enough to have a high school, and this really ticked them off down there. So they hanged me in effigy and sent a group up to the newspaper to threaten me. If I ever came to Edgerton, I'd be killed. So, we covered that.

Fortunately, the next year we had unification among school districts in Kansas and Edgerton joined up with Gardner to become the Edgerton/Gardner school district, and that solved the problem. Edgerton didn't have a high school anymore, and their guys played football on the Gardner team, and so that solved all the problems.

This is an unusual county, Johnson County is, in the fact that we have so many different cities. I mentioned a few minutes ago to you that I was the head statistician for the Chiefs and have been since 1963. You might wonder how I got that job.

Back in those days, the Olathe news tried to be the Johnson county news—we wanted to cover everything for everybody. So we covered every high school game Shawnee Mission North, Bishop Miege, Stanley, Stillwater, there was no Blue Valley in those days, Spring Hill, Gardner/Edgerton, all these different schools. And I, as being sports editor, I had to hire student reporters to covert these various games, because we couldn't afford to have a reporter at each game.

So we hired students to do that, and I hired a young man at Shawnee Mission North his name was Kent Pearson. His father's name was Ike Pearson and Ike Pearson was in the stats business. He did stats for the NAI tournament every year. Back in those days, the NCAA final four was in Kansas City every year. It wasn't moved around like it is now. And so we did the stats for NCAA and he asked me to join his crew, so I did.

And then in '63 he asked me would I be interested in doing the Chief's stats on Sunday and I said sure that might be fun. So we approached Lamar Hunt in those days and got the job of doing stats for the Chief's. I did that until 1970, and Ike passed away in '70 at a King's game. He died, and at that point I became the head statistician and have been ever since with the Chiefs.

I have gotten to go to both the Super bowls we have been in. The very first one—kind of a crazy deal—you could walk right up and buy tickets for \$7.50 and the stadium was only half full. It was at the coliseum in Los Angeles. But many things have changed, even in sports. In those days you know, things were completely different. Not just Olathe changing, but the way we do stats even has changed. Everything now is computerized—we did it on paper in those days.

In 1970 if you wanted to go out eat here in Olathe where would you have gone?

You went to the B & B restaurant that was about it. The B & B was located just across I-35 on Rogers Road and they were quite famous for what they called roasted fried chicken, and it's much like what Kentucky fried chicken has today. But they were quite famous for that and they did a big business out there. A family named Laylock (?) operated that and that was about the extent of being able to go out to eat. Of course, if you wanted a cocktail you couldn't do that in Olathe. We didn't have liquor by the drink in those days, you had to go to Martin City and go over to Jess and Jim's or someplace like that to get a mixed drink.

Did I-35 bring a boost to the economy?

Sure it did. It brought a lot of traffic too. But it made life so much easier going to Kansas City. Back in the old days before I-35, when you had to take Kansas City Road, it meandered up through Lenexa, Shawnee, and Merriam all of that with stop signs and it took you forever to go to Kansas City.

How much time do you think it cut off?

20-30 minutes. And of course we didn't have 435 in those days, it came later, but we had a two lane highway to Kansas City.

Is there any you would like to add? Something we haven't touched on?

Oh I could tell you all kinds of things, I guess—I don't know, depends on what your interests are.

Anything we haven't touched on that you think we should know about Olathe or about yourself?

I think one of the amazing things about Olathe is the fact that we have something like Old Settlers every year. Most cities don't have this and it is something that we ought to protect and be proud of and to continue. Of course, I speak being a former president of the Old Settlers association but I'm still on the committee. It involves a lot of work and it's all volunteer work by the people who do that every year. But it's a great thing! And this parade that we have on Saturday morning is just fantastic. It has to be the biggest parade in Kansas for sure, maybe in the Midwest. An hour and a half parade in a town this size—it's amazing. That's longer than the St. Patrick's Day parade is in Kansas City.

But it's just a fabulous place to live. I don't know that the people who live here really appreciate what they have, but it's a fantastic place. The opportunities are so great. We could probably use a shopping mall sometime. I was excited when they were going to build this "Great Mall of the Plains" out here, that didn't turn out to be what I thought it was going to be. I've shopped out there a couple times, I've yet to find anything to buy to speak of. But, I do shop at Oak Park. I wish we had Oak Park in Olathe—that would add to our quality of life. I think as far as going out to eat, we have plenty of restaurants these days. So many that I can't try them all out. Every week I see something new coming in.

How has the format of Old Settlers changed since you came here?

It hasn't changed very much, actually, except on the Saturday afternoons they used to have a political assembly, where people would give speeches. That's no longer going on.

When you say people, were they candidates?

Candidates or representatives—if there wasn't an election year it might be the chairman of the county commission or something.

But other than that it hasn't changed too much. We still have the kiddie's games on Friday afternoon. We still have the flower show, all the little touches make it what it is today. They've added a few things: we now have a 5k race and we have the car show (that's the last ten years or so) but it's stayed pretty much the same.

Is there any other stories you'd like to talk about?

Not that I can think right now. After I get home I'll probably think of a million things to tell you.

Another big fire downtown was when the boot factory burned. Maybe somebody has told you already, over your period of study that Olathe was the cowboy boot capital of the world and they made boots for everybody. Roy Rogers to Dwight Eisenhower even ordered boots from the boot companies here. We had two boot companies here and the one over on Chestnut Street burned down one night and that was kind of the end of Hyer Boot Company.

Do you know how we can get ahold of old newspaper articles and use those for this project?

Yes, the old, old, old ones are at the Daily News. They have them in bound copies down there. The ones since 1962 are at the Olathe library on microfilm.