

## **Marvin Allen**

- Early Olathe
- School basketball
- Future Farmers of America and 4-H
- Building first shopping center in Olathe and many schools
- Mid America college
- Robert Osborne
- Township chairman board
- Karin Brownlee
- Farming
- Olathe growth
- First high-rise subsidized housing for the elderly

## **Marvin Allen**

**Can you please state your name and tell us what year you came to Olathe?**

My name is Marvin Allen and I came to Johnson County in 1939.

**Why did your family come to Johnson County?**

We rented a farm down by Spring Hill. We were farmers, my parents were farming family.

**Could you describe what the town looked like when you arrived?**

Well, I imagine there was about maybe 2,500 people. Spring Hill there was about 400 people. It was a small town. Most of the side roads were all mud roads at that time. 135<sup>th</sup> Street, as you know it today, was Martin City Road and it was mud. When it rained there would be deep ruts in it back in the early 40's.

**Which high school did you go to?**

I went to St. John.

**And we heard you were on the basketball team, and what position did you play?**

Well, I jumped center and right forward.

**How tall was the tallest player on the team back then?**

About 6 foot 2.

**And the year you went to state where was that held at?**

That was held in Salina, Kansas. And we went out there and it was real bad ice and snow storm and coming back we almost pushed the car half way home I think to keep a going **(he laughs ha, ha)**. That a state tournament out there V.A. Sporn. He went to KU and he was 7 foot tall. And I had to jump center against him and I out jumped him all four times. **(He smiles)** Anybody I see today that been there to see it says, "Yep, I remember you jumping against that tall boy". **(He laughs ha, ha, ha)**

**Were you in the Future Farmers of America when you were at high school?**

I was in FFA and went through it and two years after I was out of high school. I went to college one year and came back. I was farming and I made the American Farmer Award.

**Could you tell us about the award like what requirements do you need to receive it?**

The requirements wasn't really that much you had to have cattle and farm ground and all. Keep real good records to send in too. We had a real good Ag. teacher and he was a big help, A.G. Jensen.

**How many people were in the FFA?**

Oh, I will imagine there might have been 35 to 40.

**Did you do anything when you grew up besides farming?**

Oh, just worked real hard. Ran a hay bailer in the summer time, kept very busy that way.

**We received information that you helped build the first shopping center in Olathe.**

Yes, I built the first shopping center and built the first two dorms on the Mid American Nazarene College. I don't know what all...

**Marvin's wife:** A lot of schools, a lot of schools in Olathe.

**Marvin:** A lot of the grade schools and junior highs. Built the Stanley Senior High, and then went over there...a lot of them in the Shawnee Mission District.

**Where was the first shopping center at?**

It was on the corner of Ridgeview and Santa Fe.

**What year was it constructed?**

**(Marvin make a sound like he is thinking....nit, nit, nit)** It was built in '69, I think.

**Who contacted you about building Mid America?**

Not really anybody, but they put the jobs out for bid and we bid on it and we was the one that got it.

**Do you know why they decided to build Mid America in Olathe?**

Well, Mid America now it came to town because of Bob Osborne, he was the one that really set the tone for what happened on the east side of I-35. He gave the ground to the Mid America. Several business people donated money to help pay for it. Art Martin is one name that come to my mind. He helped on it. He also gave the ground for the new hospital that was built there on Claireborne. He was a well....help to the community.

**If the hospital hadn't been built where would your son have been born? Like what were the other hospital nearby?**

Ahh...Number one daughter was born in Kansas City at the Providence Hospital. Marv Jr. was born in the new hospital. It's been a long time ago. *(He laughs, ha, ha, ha)*

**What organizations do you belong to or did you belong to?**

Pardon me?

**What kind of organizations or clubs have you been involved in?**

I was in the Rotary for quite a few years. Sat on the township chairman board for 13 years. It was a big boost, because we governed what went where and some of the things that we done is still in effect today.

**Do you remember any of those things that are still in effect?**

One thing that comes to mind now is the I-35 auto salvage yard that was along I-35 on the east side. That was just kind of a headache all the time, because there was so many cars that came in and they got to stacking them up. When we was on the board we would not allow that they had to do something else. And that when they put something in there a thing that mashed the cars down to a foot deep. *(He smiles)*

**What is it like to have a daughter that is a senator?**

Boy, *(he smiles)* that is a 64 dollar question. *(He laughs ha, ha, ha)* It's great to have a daughter that is a senator. It's just hard to say? What do you say? You're proud of your daughter. What she had done.

**What do your other children do?**

Our first born is a teacher in Bedford, Texas. Our son is an estimator and all for Ash Grove Cement. He runs the concrete part of it. Then Karin is our senator she is busy there. Our daughter, Tina, is a CCA. Debbie, our daughter, is a manager of an arena in Boise, Idaho.

**Marvin's wife:** Sporting arena.

**Marvin:** Our young one is he just bought a business, a medical supply business that rents out oxygen for the people that need it in Lawrence and *(Marvin looks to his wife and asks her where is the other?)*

**Marvin's wife:** Great Bend.

**Marvin:** Great Bend

**Can you identify a few events that have happened since you moved here that have impacted Olathe?**

Oh, I don't know there have been several things that have happened that *(he smiles)* some of it has been good and some of is bad. Just look out the front window we got a big 500,000 square foot warehouse and look out of the back of our house we have one going in right now. The city does it without the approval of the neighborhood. And that is disappointing to me. It's just they ought to...do right. People govern what should happen to the appropriate, but the private individual anymore didn't have any say so. You just survive and that's all you try to do. *(He smiles)*

**How do you think the urban renewal has affected Olathe?**

*(Marvin laughs and says)* I don't know how to answer that. There are a lot of things that are happenin' in the community and the town to the old people or the older people we don't understand why it's happening but they just go ahead and do it. I think where we are sittin' right today...in ten years, this...it's going to be 119<sup>th</sup> Street. Its just kind of blows your mind what is happening. I have seen a lot of changes cause I was in the construction for almost 30 years and in the banking for 17 years. Big change.

**I know you were mentioning that there are some bad things happening about the building out here and stuff are there any good things in your opinion that has happened to Olathe?**

Oh yeah, there are a lot of good things. I think there's nobody in the state of Kansas that has helped the young kids any more than the Park and Recreation here in Johnson County. We're just a quarter of mile away from, I don't know, eight or ten soccer fields right here or baseball diamonds, and it's nice to have it for the young kids to have somewhere to go.

**Marvin's wife:** Marvin, you seen a wonderful, ah, with the hospital and the growth that the hospital has and the heart surgery wing.

**Marvin:** It's all nice to have in a community.

**Marvin's wife:** The F.A.A., the college which is a four year excellent rated college.

**Marvin:** It's neat to have something like that in your community, a college.

**Marvin's wife:** And, and they are going to get overpasses over the railroad tracks, *(Marvin smiles, and laughs)* we have wanted that for years. We have also wanted to see an auditorium for Olathe. We still do not have a facility big enough for housing graduations for the various high schools. We have wonderful fields for the football and we are glad to see those, but those

are the two things Marvin and I had wanted to see, the overpass or whatever for the railroad tracks and a municipal auditorium for the City of Olathe. And that may have to come about in private enterprise. I don't know how that will come about.

**Marvin:** I built the first high rise here in town for subsidized housing for the elderly people.

**When was that built?**

It was built in 1978. The one prior to that was built in about '76.

**Where exactly was that located?**

That is on Popular and Buchanan right behind Price Chopper there, *(Marvin's wife says, Dillon's)* Dillon's Store building. To me, that is a real good program to help so many people that would be out in the cold. We've got one down in Ark City, Kansas that we built and I remember every time I think about it, we had a gentleman come in there and here he is in a brand new one bedroom apartment building and the poor man didn't have no furniture at all. All he had was a couple of orange boxes and all but enough of the other people came in and had furniture they gave to him. He was paying only \$46 a month. Where could you gripe for that? *(He smiles)* You know, them things they set in your mind that was a big help to the community. We got people up here in ours that, you know, very few of them payin' a hundred dollars, but it is subsidized housing. We built a total of five of them.

**How many apartments are in that tower?**

Ah, 67 units in this one here. The one in Ark City is 77 units. We built one in Edwardsville and it is...65 units. The one at Osage City is 35 units.

**Marvin's wife:** And the one that Olathe owns that was the first one built.

**Marvin:** The one we built for the city there are 42, I think as I recall. Them kind of things that happened are a big benefit to a community.

**Marvin's wife:** Marvin, back when you were in 4-H and we would go to what we called the "poor farm" and sing at Christmas time and all of that property today is all built up in county owned buildings serving the poor and I shouldn't say the poor, ah serving them in various ways both housing, and other entities out there. Yeah, all that property out there. That used to be what we referred to as the "poor farm", when we were little kids. When we were in 4-H and look how far that has come.

**Where's that?**

**Marvin's wife:** That's all out on Ridgeview and on, what's the street? Kansas Ave/Northgate and turns into 119<sup>th</sup>. Yes, yes all of those buildings out in there. And look how far that has come.

**And you guys called it the "poor farm"?**

**Marvin's wife:** We called it...it was always known as the "poor farm" when we were kids.

**What was out there?**

**Marvin's wife:** There was this one old, old structure. When you are a kid everything is old (*ha, ha, ha*) right, right? And, and we would go out and we would sing to them Christmas carols.

**Marvin:** It was kind of a nursing home. They had nowhere else to go. They had no money to go anywhere, they would go out there.

**Marvin's wife:** You know, Good Samaritan, later on here in town and it's been there for years and years there on a, just east of the deaf school you know that project ended until they built out here. So you see there has been an enormous change good change for the elderly.

**I was going to ask you, Mr. Allen, where was the farm located that you grew up on in Johnson County?**

We had the one when we came from Miami County it was out on 169 Hwy just north of Spring Hill. Then we moved from there to a farm out on Prairie Center Road. We dairied out there for two or three years and the next farm we had was out on 7 Hwy about 119<sup>th</sup> from there we went back down to Spring Hill at 199<sup>th</sup> Street. I rode back and forth from down there to high school.

**From 199<sup>th</sup> approximately?**

Yes, I sure did. (*He smiles*)

**But how did you get to school?**

Ohhh, I don't know if you all want to hear this or not (*he smiles and laughs, ha, ha*) I had a 1936 ton and half truck and I drove that back and forth to high school.

**Marvin's wife:** You and your sister. Tell them why it was at that time you could do that.

**Marvin:** Well at that time you could go anywhere in the state of Kansas you wanted to go.

**Marvin's wife:** And why did you want to?

**Marvin:** Back up here they had the FFA and I wanted to be part of that.

**When you were in 4-H did you enter any animals in the fair?**

Oh, yes.

**Did you win anything big?**

*(He smiles and laughs, ha, ha)* We always had some cattle in the fair in Gardner.

**Marvin's daughter:** Well actually back then in the years we were growing up. We actually, us and the Burrus' and the Mackey's took the top every year. There was competition between those three families and who won.

**Marvin:** Marv Jr. he had the state's champion steer at the state fair. Ahh, county fair Annette, did you have one? *(He points to his daughter and she answers no, "I had preserve or something")* We always helped a lot of kids and boys how to show the cattle and try and help them get ready for the fair.

**I have a question, to go back to the shopping mall that you built, what type of shops were in there?**

We had a grocery store, at the time they called Rint Hill, and then we had Alco and they had a 49,000 square foot store there. Then we had several small shops and a laundry mat. We build a small center there on Buchanan and Santa Fe *(he smiles)* back when if any of you remember, Virginia Pies, but she made pies in there.

**And when did you build that shopping center? Do you remember the year?**

**Marvin's wife:** On Buchanan and Santa Fe, do you remember the year you built that one? Is that the one you meant?

**Marvin:** 1968-69

**Marvin's wife:** We lived for 20 years out on 119<sup>th</sup> what is now 119<sup>th</sup> and Strang Line and we bought five acres out there when our children were young, (were tiny) and moved out there and it was a home that was built in '95—between '93 and '95. And a...we had a wonderful plot of five acres which is where that Ruby Tuesdays up to that Bank is that was our five acres right in there. We had one half of it was in pasture for the children's horses and their 4-H cattle was kept at the farm and brought up in time for them to work with them to get them ready for the fair from the spring shows all the way through for about four to five months. Because we didn't have that much space there. And the girls were in drill team where they would ride their horses in precision drill and enjoyed that.

And then we had the gymnasium and our children were small. Marvin built a swimming pool for our children and then he built a gymnasium over it the following year. And the gymnasium housed the swimming pool on the south end and the gymnasium on the north end. And the gymnasium part was a regulation tennis court and basketball court, and it was doubled marked. And a...we had a player piano out there and Marv Jr. had his drums in the gym (**Marvin laughs**)...in the gym. And the girls were always on the piano and various horned instruments because everybody played two instruments. And the drums were in the gym and a...we had lots and lots of Olathe kids a lot of our kids. We had been into various, one specialist, one orthopedic specialist, and I didn't remember him, but he says, "I used to come to your gym." So we've run across so many people that said, "I remember being in your gym".

**Marvin:** The kids were real active in "people to people" before the foreign student come over. And we had a wall there...

**Marvin's wife:** That wall divided the swimming pool from the rest. So you didn't retrieve balls out of the swimming pool.

**Marvin:** We had them sign that wall. And it was just full.

**Marvin's wife:** I think that was the hardest thing of leaving that property when we sold that property and came out here because of the wonderful memories and all the young people we have some times young people would come for summer stays or maybe on a short visitation when they needed a break from their family or their family needed a break for some reason or another. Because we never got to have a student full time because we were so busy keeping up with our own six children. But we had wonderful, wonderful, experiences with young people both coming to the gym all the time and it gave our children a place to have other children and other young people come. We've lots of experiences and all kinds of stories.

**Marvin:** We hardly have a week go by that we have somebody that says "Yes, I was out there working in that gym" (**he laughs, ha, ha**). It's amazin' how many people remember that.

**How many were in your graduating class? Did you graduate in 1950?**

**Marvin:** Yes, as I recall it was 96. We took second in state and that was a really a lot of fun because the business people in town. They wanted all the basketball players all come have dinner with them. It was a lot enjoyment there.

**Marvin's wife:** But there was the town's people followed you. Back then everybody, its kind a like the story, "the last guy out turn the lights off". Because everybody followed the sports team and then you know we're talking before TV engulfed the family and the activities and before all those other a...the town's people were totally behind the local teams. And the support was

phenomenal and the way they went Perry Nease, Keith Nease was on that team and Perry flew his plane out and I don't know how he got home because the snow storm was so bad.

**Marvin:** It was very bad.

**Were there a lot of people that traveled from Olathe to go to the game in Salina?**

**Marvin:** Yes, when we go that on side would be full. Cause my junior year we lost one game and senior year took second in state and we lost only one game.

**Marvin wife:** But you made the free throw that got you the second didn't you?

**Marvin:** At state that's what kept us in the free throws, kept us in the game. *(He smiles)*.

**Marvin's wife:** And it's so neat because our grandson, Justin Brownlee, Karin's son, then got to go and be on that same team and of course that's how many years later you know that Olathe got to do that and it's awesome.

**Marvin:** 65 years.

**When you came here I figured Olathe was a very small population, do you particularly think that the rate we are growing now people-wise not building-wise is a good thing, like the growth we've had over the years. Do you think that is a particularly good thing?**

**Marvin:** Well, yes and no. I am not really giving you an answer *(he laughs ha, ha, ha)* but there is no way you can keep down growth. I don't know, I hate to see it gettin' so big, because it's out of touch. But back then we used to know almost everybody in town. Today you don't have that, and that's sad, because too much going on too much...you don't have that you used to go neighbor with people and talk to people and all, but we don't have that. Back then, there wasn't hardly any murders and all that you have today you almost have one a day, and it's sad to see that in our community.

**Marvin's wife:** Kansas City, more or less.

**When did you two get married?**

**Marvin:** *(He scratches his head and says :)* Well, it's been a long time ago. *(Ha, ha, ha)* I think it was on June the 21<sup>st</sup>, 1952. He smiles; we've been married 64 years.

**Marvin's wife:** Tell him where we lived. Tell them the farm we lived on. Our first home.

**Marvin:** It was right here over on Ridgeview just south of 159<sup>th</sup> street. Right there we had 320 acres we had there.

**Marvin's wife:** On the eastside. It's all developed into homes.

**How did you two meet?**

**Marvin:** We met at 4-H.

**Marvin's wife:** Marvin's sister was a good friend of mine. Now when you get into those early years of farming you get into a lot of interesting stories. **(Marvin and she laugh, ha, ha, ha)** They have nothing to do with the history of Olathe. **(They all laugh, ha, ha, ha)** I can assure you!

**Marvin:** I will mention this, I think it's kind of interesting, but it was just a short time after we were married in the winter we went to Kansas City to a basketball game. No doubt KU and KS State, cause that's the one we always went to. **(He laughs ha, ha)** It started snowin' and man did it get bad; Comin' home the road was full and about 103<sup>rd</sup> and a...Pflumm? **(Marvin looks to his wife for approval and she replies, probably, yes, Pflumm, now. Marvin continues)** Couldn't go on down the road, but out in the field all the snow had blown off so I cut up through the field went over terraces **(he smiles)** and the one terrace we hit high center. **(He starts to laugh, ha, ha)** There we was, sittin' out there about midnight after the ball game. I just got out, jacked the car up, and I had a couple boxes of nails in the trunk of the car, I put that under my tire and drove on off the terrace and came on home. **(He smiles)**

**Marvin's wife:** And why we had to go through the field is because the road grader was stuck on 103<sup>rd</sup> so there was no getting through, so we just go right around a fence and go right around the field there and got caught up on a high center we had nothing to drink stronger than a hot coffee or a hot cocoa; **(They both laugh, ha, ha, ha. She continues)** and here we are caught high center on a terrace at midnight. But we always, always attended the big eight conferences, tournaments right after Christmas. It was a big thing.

**Marvin:** It's been a very busy and interesting 74 years I guess.

**When you were a high schooler, what did you used to do for fun, like at night and stuff or on the weekends? What did you used to go around the town for fun?**

**Marvin:** Oh, normally there would be a dance down at Paola sometimes we'd go to it, maybe go to a movie. And that was just about the entertainment there was available.

**Marvin's wife:** Andrew's Theater, Andrew's Theater, and that is located on the east side of the courthouse was the theater. But to dance you didn't...but you got to remember this guy was a milking cows early in the morning and would go to school and you had to have the cows milked before you went back in for a game, didn't you? And how many cows?

**Marvin:** At one time there was milkin' 42 by hand. Two of us, so we're pretty busy.

**Marvin's wife:** And when he was going to school he would be so tired he'd be dozing in class. He did get in trouble a few times with Mrs. Hodge *(she laughed ha, ha)*.

**Marvin:** Mrs. Archer, she couldn't understand why I couldn't stay awake. You know, I'd get up at four in the morning, milk until seven and buzz in there and I was in the band and had to be there at 7:30 and then you go home and start over again. *(He smiles)*

**Marvin's wife:** Music, band and athletics.

**What instrument did you play in the band?**

**Marvin:** Trombone *(He laughs)*

**Marvin's wife:** And in Junior High you had that big drum that Tina, later in 4-H, antiqued it and it's in the basement in the rec room. It's a great big drum.

**Marvin:** Bass drum.

**I have one last question for you, and I always ask this question maybe it's because I like to eat, I don't know, but if you had to take someone out to eat in Olathe say 1960, 1965 where would you go, or was there anywhere to go?**

**Marvin:** There was a little restaurant there on Santa Fe, and in 1965 we would have usually go down to Overland Park to John Francis Restaurant.

**Marvin's wife:** But in Olathe there was that little shop on the east side of the courthouse that I would go have lunch from when I worked at the courthouse during the 50's and that was so good. Marvin, I can't remember the name of it, but it was just this side of the theater.

**Marvin:** It wasn't very big.

**Marvin's wife:** And was that where you could get ten hamburgers for a dollar?

**Marvin:** Right. They weren't very big, but there was ten. *(He laughs, ha, ha)* But back when I was in high school, you know maybe we would get 25 cents to go to town.

**Marvin's wife:** How much did it take to fill the car with gas? Marvin says, I don't know. His wife says, two dollars, and you'd fill the tank with gas. When we were first married in '52 all of our equipment, we had to borrow the money for the farm equipment, do you remember how much we owed on it?

**Marvin:** Wasn't that about \$10,000 and that was the cows, equipment and all.

**Marvin's wife:** I did a scrapbook even of our very first tax statements our income tax that we filed Gene Hackler did that and I don't remember what our income was but it was under three thousand dollars for the year.

**Marvin:** That's right.

**Marvin's wife:** And a...I was trying to think what else pertained right to that era.

**Marvin:** Today three thousand dollars wouldn't buy very much.

**We always give you a last chance if there is anything we've not asked or if there is anything you wanted to say. We give you the floor one last time if your want to tell us what you want to say.**

**Marvin:** That's unusual, very seldom I get that. *(He laughs ha, ha, ha)* No, I have enjoyed it very much and thank you for coming out and I hope it came out and where you have some benefit from it.

**Thank you for letting us come into your home.**