

Ruth Anne Hackler

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(Video starts when Ruth Anne was already talking)

And my mother died when I was six years of age, so I was the tenth living member of eleven. And...a...older sisters took care of we younger ones; so we were moved from one family to another, so it's three younger. And we lived in Harrison, Arkansas and then eventually we were brought to Kansas City, Missouri, where I went to Sanford B. Ladd elementary school. Then my youngest sister, who was 16 years older than I, married a country doctor in Overbrook, Kansas and they took me as ready-made family, and I was ready for the eighth grade at that time. And so I finished living there through high school, I graduated from the Overbrook high school.

When and why did you come to Olathe?

I attended Washburn and was graduated from there, and after I was out of school, my husband came back from WWII and we met and we were married a year later. And when he finished law school we came to Olathe to be in a practice

You grew up in the depression, right?

Oh, yes.

What was it like growing up then?

It was pretty tough. I think our family had probably more problems than a lot of families because there was so many of us. My oldest sister was born in 1901 and I was born in 1924, so there was a 23 year spread among ten children. The older ones, as they could, migrated to Kansas City, Missouri where my oldest sister lived with her husband and son. And my father, the minute he had a few gray hairs, was not employed and so my older sisters had to sort of assume the responsibility for the family. I still remember my father taking us...a...loading as many in the car as he could down to the bank in Rogers, Arkansas which was closed and shuttered; and told us to...he wanted us to see that and to remember it. Of course that was when the banks failed.

What was Olathe like in terms of schools and the town, when you first arrived here?

Olathe was very small, this was in 1949, we came in the late summer of 1949. There were 4,500 people here at that time. A...I was trying to think...of course we had one high school, the junior high was on the same campus, it was the John P. St. John memorial high school and the junior high was adjacent on that same property. We had Washington School and Central School, Westview was here I believe...a...and Lincoln school, which was a segregated school. I'm not sure Westview was built yet, I'm sorry about that, but I know that Central and Washington and Lincoln were here. Washington school was on the property where the Dillon's store downtown is, across from...it was on Santa Fe. And Central school was in its location where it is now. And that school, now, of course has been here over 100 years.

What did you teach when you...?

I was a business teacher. I taught some archaic things in today's world. I taught shorthand, and typing, and bookkeeping and general business and office practice.

What inspired you to do work on the civil rights movement?

Well, it really started when I was in college. I was president of the pep club at Washburn University and we had quite a large population of black students on the campus. And the pep club was just white girls...and I thought that was very unfair, the black students were paying exactly the same tuition that the rest of us were. And they wanted to be active on the campus and of course some of their friends were playing the various athletic teams. And so I motivated people to make a change in the way that we were organized so that black girls could also be part of the pep club. And that was sort of my breaking into it.

And I was very impressed, there was a women custodian; (I worked for the dean as a student) and she did...was employed in our building, the administration building. And I did a lot of just chatting with her and she was working very hard, that job and another job, so that her kids could get a college education. And I was impressed by that and it just seemed to me in all fairness, that...if the pep club was all I could do at Washburn that was one thing that we could get accomplished.

Were there any hostilities toward you for trying to integrate the pep club?

Oh yes, yes. Not a lot, but there were. There was a lot of disagreement, you have to put it back in the time which we are talking. There was a lot of prejudice as there is today.

Did WWII affect you in any way while attending college?

Oh yes. I had six brothers, four of whom were in various theaters of war. Two brothers were in the Philippines. One brother made the landing through Egypt up into North Africa. Then another brother came in through a tank group that basically was in Belgium. One of my brothers received the Silver Star, so I'm very proud of that, very proud of him. And then my husband, that I didn't know at the time, but made the landing on Normandy, D19.

So you...I was a freshman in college December the 7th 1941, and so your whole life turned upside down. And of course college girls liked to have men on the campus and there were very few young men; those who were either 4-F [*4-F is a classification given to a new U.S. military registrant indicating that he or she is "not acceptable for service in the Armed Forces" due to medical, dental, or other reasons.*] or for some reason were not serving: conscientious objectors and so forth. So my college life would be entirely different from...say...somebody who had been there five or six years before, or ten years later. It was just entirely different.

While teaching at the Olathe high school what changes did you notice throughout the years?

Well, I started out...I'm going to back up a year. I started my husband's senior year in law school at Washburn Rural High School and it was a brand new school. There was a lot of funding for that particular school, a lot of interest; we were very well situated in that environment.

I came to Olathe, was very pleased to be granted a teaching position. I was in the first, call it, "draft" or whatever you want to...of degree teachers. You got to remember that not all teachers had degrees back at that time. And we were encouraged not to sign a contract to teach unless we got at least \$2,400 for the school year. And even then, that wasn't very much money. And when I came to Olathe...it was...the building was the John P. St. John Memorial High School downtown. We had the naval air station out here at that time. The then superintendent had never applied for a penny of federal aid; now you can think of all these families coming in who were associated with the naval air station and there was...you know...they just kind of made do.

I taught bookkeeping. I asked for an adding machine (I didn't have an adding machine in my classroom). Now those of you...I know you have palm pilots and all kinds of up to date technological things to help you with school work, but imagine sitting in a bookkeeping class and adding these columns of figures (*she laughs*); the students I had really were very good in just basic math of adding and subtracting because we had to. But back to what I was saying, I really asked if I could have an adding machine. Well, no.

I was a young teacher, I was one of the youngest teachers in the school system at that time in the high school. And some of the teachers had been teaching there before the year I was born, we looked up in the yearbooks and found that out. And I was one of the younger ones who could work the different athletic games; like selling tickets, taking tickets, supervising etcetera. I was female, so I wasn't paid, the men teachers all got paid extra because it was extra duty, but I was told since, quote, I wasn't the "head of the household" that I couldn't get extra money.

So I begged for an adding machine and that didn't come either. So, it wasn't in the budget. So when you think of the things that you students have today compared to what those students had then, and I'm talking about: we didn't even have the "then" technology of the time in a classroom like that. So it was...some things were difficult. Um...I was the head of the household from the standpoint of earning because my husband was trying to start a business in law and that doesn't come with a lot of clients to begin with.

I'll jump around a bit, back to civil rights.

Sure, alright.

What kinds of things did you do to promote non-discrimination for housing and service for African Americans?

A...I agreed that the house next door to me was...it was for rent, and that I would not protest if a black family rented that house; and I did not receive much praise for that action. But the city actually asked neighbors if they would protest, and we said, no we would not; we would be happy to have a black family live next to us.

I was hoping you'd ask me about in the classroom.

Oh, what went on in the classroom?

Well, I told you I had bookkeeping class, and we...at that time in Olathe, we had Lincoln school which was a segregated black school; the students stayed there through the 8th grade, so that meant at the 9th grade, in high school level, they came into the high school. A lot of them didn't come, because they didn't want that prejudice that they knew they would find.

I had three black students in my bookkeeping class who were seniors and I realized that they weren't getting the fundamental concepts of bookkeeping the first week or two of class so I asked them to stay after the class. And a...I said if you fellas want to come in, if you have some free time and I have free time, or come after school, whatever, or early I'll help you because I think you are struggling a little bit with this. And in the conversation one of these boys told me that I was the first white teacher who had ever offered to help him. And frankly I got a little teary when I thought about it later that it just shocked me that here these students who...one of them became the first black police officer we had in Olathe. That they would find that lack of help and so obviously I did meet with them and I did get them on the right track and they did pass my bookkeeping class.

Did a lot of the students have hostilities toward the African Americans at the school?

Sort of ignored them as I recall a...there was no socialization at all. The...interestingly enough the secretary of one of the classes was a black girl: Wilma Glover. The first year I was here, I was junior class sponsor and then the next two years I was senior class sponsor.

In those days, the school was small enough that the schools...a...our school planned a sneak. I don't know how many people really thought it was a sneak, but we were pretty quiet about it. And we made arrangements, the senior class could fit in two busses and we were going to go down to Branson, I mean to Lake of the Ozarks, I'm sorry.

And I rode with Wilma and made the arrangements, and one of the things...there was a little, well it wasn't little, a boat that was on lake of the Ozarks and you could go on and they would take you on a trip and one of the things they did was serve you a box lunch. Well, we made all the arrangements and one day I got a call out of my classroom and the man who owned this little enterprise said, "I forgot to ask you before, do you have any black students?" And I said, "Yes," he said, "we can't serve you anything to eat." And I said, "Well, you can cancel our

contract, we're not coming." I guess that was the first time that I really was hit head on with a simple thing like handing somebody a box lunch that was not appropriate, in their eyes. Well, he thought about it and the next thing I knew I got a call out of my classroom again and he said, "I've changed my mind, you can come down we'll serve all your students."

The other thing I well remember was that...in that capacity as sponsor of a class, we would meet and make our plans and one day after our meeting, there was a drug store called Snips drug store that was right up the street from the high school, and so I went up to get the kids a coke, and we walked in and the next thing I knew the girl behind the counter was...excused herself and went back to where the owner was and she came back and she said, "We can't serve you." And I said, "You can't serve us?" "Well, no," she said, "unfortunately you have a negro with you." And I said, "okay kids, let's go!" We just walked out. Not too long after that, that Mr. Snip got word to me that he would be happy for all the students to come in there and be served.

This was written up in *The Call*, which is a black newspaper, I don't know whether it's still being printed in Kansas City or not, but they were pretty impressed that somebody would stand up for their kids. But...I...it wasn't that people weren't willing, many people weren't willing to treat black students as everybody else, equal to all the white students. I think it took maybe some abrasive action; when it happened to you and all of a sudden you were faced with a decision am I going to lay down and play dead or am I going to stand up for what I think is right? That's basically what I did.

At what point did you start to see this racism go away and see that every African American was treated equal?

I would like to say it has all gone away, but I don't know if you want...a...my commentary at this point, in this... a...of course when the schools were finally desegregated things began to change a great deal. Olathe was one of the last schools in the state to desegregate, a fact which I don't think we can be very proud.

One of the things that I really was impressed with: when they did desegregate Lincoln school, we had teachers...a...Corinthian Nutter, who was quite a woman and was one of my very good friends, died a few years ago. Who actually on her own, she and another teacher broke the pattern in the Shawnee Mission District Schools. I don't know how much of that you want me to go into, but she was the principal of Lincoln school and Meldon Wesley and there was one other teacher, and I'm sorry, I can't remember that teacher's name. Those teachers had to be integrated, some way into the Olathe school system, so the...somebody apparently staff member, school board member, I don't know...suggested that maybe the way to integrate would be to put those black teachers in a kindergarten setting. Little kids have no prejudice it's all talk you know from other people.

So, someone heard about it and called me and said, I understand that Mrs. Nutter may be put out at Westview school, which was my attendance area school for my children, how would you

feel if she were teaching your child in kindergarten? And I said I'd be absolutely delighted! At that time she was the only elementary teacher, classroom teacher, who had her masters. I knew her, I admired her I thought she was a wonderful woman and why would the color of her skin affect how she was going to teach my kindergartner? So, before it was over and before my last child was out of Westview; (I have three daughters) Corinthian Nutter was acting principal there and a...Meldon Wesley was hired at...a...Central, so he was integrated into the system. And eventually Meldon became a principal, I think he was...I think it was Washington school, my memory is a little hazy on exactly some of those particulars.

But this will give you an example of the feeling: obviously the mother who called me was not very happy with my reply to her, because she wanted to use me and other people saying well, those people don't want their child in this black woman's kindergarten class.

When one of my children was in the sixth grade, it was the end of school and we have a pool and so I live just a block and a half away from the school. So they called and said, "If we provide a life guard for an activity for the kids who are leaving the sixth grade would you be willing to let us come down and use your pool?" And I said, "Sure", you know...we'd have to make some arrangements and only so many in at a time because it's not that big. One of the moms would not let her child come because there would be some black students in the pool.

My daughters taught swimming, and I had a mother who pulled her kid out of the swimming class because we had some black students in the class. It's terrible, but thankfully it's better. So, I think the question you asked and that was a long answer. I think when schools actually desegregated and people realized whether they liked it or not, our schools were going to be integrated.

You were, I'm sure, teaching, when the Brown vs. Board decision was made. Did that effect students when they felt it came too fast, or did you think that really helped the students out by having this decision?

Oh, I think we had to have the clout of the law, absolutely. And the a...a...even well meaning, good hearted, Christian people weren't going to make that change unless, you know, there was a law that said these kids will receive equal education.

Now I'd like to move on to the school board. What made you decide to run for it?

Well, again. The first time I went on the school board was in 1969. Olathe had a program called growth and development, quote, sex education. We had a pilot program in the state, it was extremely well received and other school districts were taking our curriculum and using it in theirs. And...we...actually, the state department of education was using this as a pilot for this kind of program.

I don't know whether you remember anything or have studied about the John Birch Society? Well, you might do a little research. We think now of factions that try to come in and control what we teach and what we learn and what's appropriate, etcetera. The John Birch Society, I

found something at home: I have a brochure they put out. And somebody gave me this in about 1969 and they had been organized for at least 10 years before that, how much longer, I don't know? So we are talking about '59 organization, at least. And this was one of their points that they were going to project on everybody that you could not teach sex education in a public school; that this was strictly a parental thing. They did everything they could, we even saw...they came into Olathe in mass, they handed out their literature: for instance people who were working in the automobile plants in Kansas City, they infiltrated all kinds of places and handed out information. For instance...um...they said that we were specifically teaching how people would engage in a sex act, this kind of thing.

Helen Voigts (who had been an older teacher in a one room school and was on the school board with me) and I volunteered to view all of the materials...and there was nothing, I mean the accusations were absolutely lies, just terrible, but people believed them. You know, we all have a tendency to want to believe the negative.

So, a... anyway, we did this for the board and I actually ran, you got to remember 1969 I was a lot younger than I am now. But those who were against me called me the sex candidate for the school board. And a...which abused all of us, but anyway, I was elected. And the teachers had gotten behind me, several nurses in town also had viewed these materials and I had quite a range of support from people in this community.

And from that we have continued to have a very strong growth and development program. And sure, parents should monitor it, I'm not saying they shouldn't but a...it seems to be an awful lot of problems that we have. The more you know about yourself and that part of your life, the better off you are.

What big problems happened while you were on the school board?

Growth. Absolutely, a...I don't know exactly, I try to remember how large the system was when I went on in 1969. But I'm sure you are aware that in the 70s and 80s was when it just would double and then it would double again. And trying to convince the community that we weren't over building buildings. People would say, what will you do, say 20 years from now with these empty buildings? And one of our answers was: that well, if we do...IF we have empty buildings they'd be great community centers, we've been wanting a community center in Olathe; here you would have one in neighborhoods.

I think that undoubtedly was the biggest thing that had to be grasped and of course now we have what, over 25,000 students in our public school system? We are still building buildings and we won't be quitting for a while because the students just keep coming. Olathe is a very good place to live. I love Olathe.

While on the school board did you face any opposition reelection campaigns (*inaudible*) done?

Oh yes. Oh yes

And what were those like?

Um...well I remember one campaign the thing resolved around asbestos. We had brought in a group to study how much asbestos was in our buildings, and we were very careful to begin to remove it. And basically it had to be done in the summer time when there weren't any students in school. But we were doing it under the legal guidelines for that kind of removal...hazardous materials. But, I remember one person; (and for some reason when they would write letters to the editor and so forth and their supporters) I was the one they targeted and I guess it's because I'm not afraid to be vocal, I'm not afraid to stand up for what I thought was right.

What made you decide to stop serving on the school board after all those years?

I was elected to the state legislature. And a...again I was...I only won by four votes, it was not an overwhelming victory. I became a target from the beginning. And People went to the newspaper and complained because I was on the school board as well as serving in the legislature, that a person should not have two elective offices.

And I'd like to point out in our present system how many people have more than...for instance being on the city council and another elected office. And it doesn't make any difference but with me it was. And it...they said I promised that if I were elected that I would go off, which I did not. But, I did it for a while and I decided that the board didn't need that contention and so I went off the board after 22 and a half years. And that experience really propelled me into some interesting committees in state legislature because I did have the experience with education. And I was on the education committee for freshman legislature, that's almost unheard of.

How long did you serve in the Kansas House?

I was there one term. As I say, I was targeted, and a...the conservative people in town knew my feelings on a lot of these other subjects. And I never hid anything and a...so I was targeted and I was defeated. And then I ran for the state board of education and again was targeted and defeated. But I look back on the time I was in the legislature as a very worthwhile time. My election switched the leadership from republican to democratic by one vote and many of the very good laws that we have for the children and families of Kansas came out of that session of the legislature. We had people who...we had many bills that we would have unanimous 'yes' on; we had many that there were only two or three negative votes. It was...if you ever had a honeymoon in the legislature it would have been during that session.

You said you've done some work with the deaf community. What exactly have you done with them?

Basically when I was in the legislature...I've always had good rapport with the deaf community and some of my students I taught had married deaf people here in Olathe and I kept in touch with them.

Emory Hall, the old Emory Hall was very decrepit and I don't know how old the boilers and all that heated that school were. But the young students, their dormitory was right above that. There was a very big concern that if one of those boilers ever blew that it would be pretty disastrous for those young students. And I got into the budget, money to replace Emory Hall and I remember when the budget committee in the senate had their hearing, they knew I was sitting there waiting (not that I had that much clout—I don't mean that at all). But they knew that I was very much interested in it. It was about 2:30 in the morning when they brought up that part of the budget and it passed. And then the legislature of course voted it in. so I feel very good about the fact that we were able to replace that.

I served on a committee that was primarily dealing with the deaf school and the state school for the blind and I'm interested in education, not just for hearing and seeing people, but for everybody.

Was there ever any hostile feelings towards the blind and the deaf about how they shouldn't get as much money or were they pretty much...?

I don't think its hostile...I think it's people lack the understanding. I believe the present legislature has taken into consideration the fact it has... I don't know if the laws passed, but I've read something about the fact that they're considering seeing to it that the teachers in the state institutions are paid more money. They are not on the same playing field with public school teachers and it's too bad because they have to have specialties, they teach a very unique population and I think they should be compensated for...adequately for what they are doing.

You were in Olathe when urban renewal happened, correct?

Yes.

What do you recall about urban renewal?

Well, unfortunately there was money to buy out some of the old existing companies that we had. It seemed a...after...I'm going to back up a minute. I've traveled in Europe and I was in Paris this last Christmas and you marvel at the beautiful old buildings that have been here, you know, centuries. In America we seem to think new is so much better so we tear everything down. And this being the 150th anniversary of Olathe's beginning I think it's too bad that we don't have some of those old buildings that would mean so much to the community at this time, including our train station that was down the Santa Fe tracks. Um...urban renewal destroyed a lot of the history of the community.

You were a legal secretary for a while, how did having the courthouse here affect your duties of being a legal secretary?

Oh, a...I did work in my husband's office when they needed me to come in. I, of course, had the skills of shorthand and typing and business experience from my basic training. And after I quit

teaching here, I was a mom at home and when they needed some help at the office I would go down and help them do extra things.

And...the courthouse, well obviously, most of the lawyers in Johnson County officed here in Olathe; we didn't have internet and faxing and all those capabilities so they actually...all of their pleadings, and picking up answers to their pleadings, etcetera. Anything they filed had to manually be carried to the courthouse and filed in the appropriate office. So there was quite a big legal community here at that time. I think now, there are still a lot of lawyers here, but they are all over the county, they're not just in Olathe.

Having served on the school board and being a teacher what do you envision for Olathe schools in say, 50 years or 25 years?

A...number one, I won't be on the school board and I won't be teaching. *(Laughs)* Um...I think it...as technology comes in, I think there are going to be all kinds of teaching differences. I think this class is an example of what can happen with technology and people being supportive of the budget and the grant that you got in order to do this. I am not...I don't have a crystal ball...I can't really see into the future, but in my lifetime there have been so many changes that...you know they will keep coming. As you young people have more training and be more creative there will...all kinds of things gonna happen.

I think that, for instance, the teaching of language here in Olathe north...you know, I can remember back in high school we taught...we taught Latin, we taught French, and we taught Spanish. To my knowledge those were the only three languages that were taught. And eventually Latin...the people felt was archaic so they quit teaching it...I don't think they teach Latin in any school now do they?

Yes.

Okay, I'm wrong about that, good. I think it's important we know our root languages. But all of the other languages...the fact that...I think...if I have the figure right, we have students in our school system that speak 69 languages at the present time and they are being worked with in English as a second language or whatever that program is called.

The more diverse we become, the more global we become. It's gonna bring changes, there's no doubt about it. The focus is not now 'How I can set up a little business on my own?' isolated, but basically how I can fit into the community, the state, the nation, the global market? I have granddaughters who are...you know...and grandsons who are interested in what they can do as a livelihood overseas or using languages that will help them in that.

I think that what is now called interactive video on teaching that this will have a big effect on schools. And I think some of the problems in our smaller school districts in the state that this is helping that these kids have the advantage of teachers that have multi-skills in various areas and they're not dependent upon just a classroom teacher coming in who may or may not be trained in specifically in what they would like to have.

You were on the Johnson county College Board for a while?

Not on the...no, that's an error. I was on their Foundation board.

What was your time like when of being on the foundation board?

It was very interesting, I enjoyed it a great deal. The campus was much smaller than it is now. And we dealt with things like: how you get the money and the grants and so forth and working to...I know when I was on the foundation board...the...a...the...a...cooperating with the railroad, getting that program in there. You know they train railroad engineers over there, for instance, and we did a lot of things like that with different businesses and organizations. Pretty dedicated group of people serve on those nonpaying committees and boards.

What have you done since being out of the political light in Olathe?

Well, one thing I did, my church asked me to go to St. Louis for training in 2000 for Stephen Minister Leader and I felt I was too old and they convinced me I could go anyway. And that has been a real part of my life a very interesting part. It's not a...we don't do counseling and that kind of thing but it's a listening ministry and it's ecumenical. A number of different kinds of churches have Steven Ministry programs.

I was one of a group that was in the ground floor of starting the Mainstream Coalition which basically is a non-partisan group that we feel it was important to find out who was a stealth candidate; who was running with a hidden agenda that they weren't really telling people. And so out of that the Mainstream Coalition has really grown...and a lot of...I think, credibility in the county and they've started other places as well as Johnson county.

I served 11 years and 11 months on the Olathe Public Library board, which I loved. You are only supposed to have two terms, four years each, and I was appointed, (it's a mayor appointment) I was appointed to an unexpired term of...one month had gone by, so I was allowed to stay on that long.

And presently I am on the Good Samaritan Communities Advisory board, I served as president for about five years and just this last year decided it needed someone else thumbprint besides mine. I still work in people's campaigns, I feel that if they have something to offer the community that I want to support, I will help them. I'm pretty active.

I'm trying to think...right now you've caught me...I can't remember what all I'm doing, but a... Oh, I'm senior serving schools, and I'm a living history volunteer. When they talk about...when a classroom, particularly in the junior high, talks about the depression or WWII, this kind of thing, why I am in the cadre of people they call to come in a bring a little show and tell to the kids and talk with them about it.

You have done a lot of volunteering in Olathe.

Yes, I have.

How do you think that volunteering should be approached in Olathe? Should we encourage...

Oh yes, there are all kinds of places where they need volunteers. And, I think the school district is very fortunate to have hundreds of people who are in this senior serving schools. That's a wonderful program, and really you touch kids in the classroom. The sesquicentennial needs volunteers a...churches need volunteers, all kinds of organizations need volunteers. If you're able to drive, senior citizens need somebody to take them to dialysis or to doctor's appointments, this kind of thing. There's no end to where people can volunteer.

What big changes have happened in Olathe, outside of schools in the past (*inaudible*) years?

Oh, I think the big change is the population. I think it's interesting that we still have a sense of community here, where many towns that are sort of on the outskirts of cities just get lost; but we still have a very strong sense of community here and I like that.

I believe that is all I have, does anyone...

Could you tell us about being on the sesquicentennial...?

I'm sorry, I didn't hear you Kristy. Would you repeat that?

About the sesquicentennial, what has your experience been with that?

Oh we started about...a good three years ago. The city had a man by the name of John Andrade, spelled A-N-D-R-A-D-E, I believe, a...to be the facilitator to get people together in the community that would talk about, you know, the upcoming anniversary and suggestions they had about what we could do and I mean, there were hundreds of them, And if you've ever been in a facilitating group, you know that the ideas are put up and then you vote on so many of them, this kind of thing. So we finally got it down. But it's been a very good experience it's a wonderful committee, I'm not sure how many people are on it, I would guess probably close to 30 and we've all accepted different committee assignments; and people do their job and come back and report, it's really been a very, very worthwhile experience. The last year we've really zeroed in on you know, what we were going to do, and the commemoratives that have to be ordered and all this kind of thing. So we are looking into a fun year.

Can you describe how your first impression of Olathe as an outsider moving into Olathe what your impressions of it were?

Sure. We came to town in a Model A Ford to begin with, which was even an oddity on the streets of Olathe at that time. College students working their way through don't have too much money to buy big cars. But it was a very accepting town. It was small, I had grown up in a small town of Overbrook, my husband in a smaller town of Ramona and so we both were accustomed to smaller communities.

We chose this because we did like the fact that Olathe was near Kansas City, that there would be some opportunities you'd have for plays and musicals and this kind of thing. That you

wouldn't have if you were, for instance, out in western Kansas, isolated. So we purposely moved here because we liked the community and frankly because I could get a teaching job which meant that we would have some bacon on the table.

In those days, there were the old Olatheans and then the newcomers. But having the naval air station out here and the people in Olathe had been very accepting of those families coming in and those people and so you know the fact that somebody came in new to town wasn't an oddity. We...we...from the very beginning, we really enjoyed it. Our church was meeting in a funeral home, it was a...it had about 15 members, and my husband and I were Lutheran and we joined St. Marks and out of that helped get a church established and that was a wonderful experience. It was on sort of the cusp of a lot of things happening and you were there at the right time in your life and when you can feel that you can be a part of some things.

I think the other thing that really developed early that was quite a thing for Olathe was the hospital. The Olathe Community Hospital is really what it says it is. In the time that the hospital was started there were Hill-Burton funds that you could apply for and the people in Olathe decided that they wanted to do it themselves that they didn't want the government do it for them. And so all of the money that was raised to start the first hospital, which is where Walgreens is now on Santa Fe, was raised by donations and by people literally doing fundraisers and this kind of thing. But we now have become quite a medical facility for this whole general area. And I'm pleased, I'm on one of their boards, advisory board: charitable foundation. But I think that has brought a whole new influx of things into Olathe having that good medical center. So we're a community which we can be proud.

Where did you enjoy going out to eat in Olathe, say 25 or 30 years ago?

(She laughs) There was basically no place to eat. When we first came, the old Olathe Hotel (which was down on...facing into the square) was...had a wonderful dining room. The problem was it took money to go out and eat, and you know, again I say...these were pretty frugal times in most people's lives. There was a drive-in that was called Custor's last stand, it was on east Santa Fe. The Legion occasionally would have dinners, churches would have potlucks, our church did frequently, um...there just really wasn't the...as my husband used to say, the gourmet gulch that we had on Santa Fe with all the different restaurants and drive-ins and that kind of thing, was very limited. There was a nice restaurant that started in the basement...a...there was a theater on the east side of the square and some local people went in and took...a...put in a nice dining room in there that lasted for, I don't know, maybe two, three years or something like that. There was another one that was on Santa Fe that...a...well, it was across the parking lot what would have been, Chestnut...that corner...Chestnut and Santa Fe and that was very successful for a while.

Do you know what the name was?

I'm sorry, I don't remember. And then, I'm trying to think...the drive-in that's still there...a...it's not a drive-in anymore, it's a restaurant where they...on Santa Fe, some people from Gardner

own it now or did. But those were...that basically was it for a number of years, not just... And then as the population began to boom then different businesses came in and then of course when that 119th area got going we have all kinds of restaurants out there now.

Did you enjoy places like the B&B café? Or the...were there restaurants...?

Oh, Sure. I'd forgotten about that that was out on the highway. Liberace stopped there one night. One of my former students was a waitress out there and she was thrilled to death because Liberace came in late and wanted some "broasted" chicken. He signed her menu for her.

When you were talking about urban renewal, you mentioned the train station, could you tell us a little bit about that?

Olathe had a very nice train station down on the...what was the Santa Fe tracks before it became part of Burlington Northern. And it was downtown Olathe and you could board trains and go wherever the trains went, if you wanted to. And...a...very picturesque...a...Grace Bilger, who is an art teacher at the state school for the deaf painted pictures of it. I have one at home and...a...that was taken. I'm not sure specifically that that were urban renewal, but I think it was part of that. The Hyer Boot Company went during that particular time, that building. Of course it had had some damage, I believe they had a fire, and...a...but it could have been...the building, in my view, could have been renovated and kept. We had an Old Carnegie Library downtown that fell by the wayside. There was a lot of...a lot of buildings that went...and another thing you asked me about—changes in Olathe. We used to have a lot of businesses downtown: dress shops, and a dime store, and grocery store on the square and this kind of thing that eventually the buildings were taken over for attorneys and for city administration and this kind of thing. So that has been a big change downtown, but we didn't have the mall so we're, you know, out where people could go do those same kind of things.

What was it like raising children in Olathe and what kind of things did you run into?

A...my oldest daughter is 52...53 and that long ago when kids were going to school you didn't worry about them walking to school and if they got in trouble, picked somebody's flowers, I knew about it before they got home. You knew who your neighbors were, and it was a very good place to rear children.

How do you think that's changed in Olathe now? Compare it to when you were raising kids to now a days when kids are growing up? What do you think is the difference?

I think the mobility of kids now and the fact that you have a...internet, you have cell phones and all of that. All this instant communication I think has changed the way kids interact—maybe even in their homes. I don't want to deal in generalities about that.

I tried to know where my kids were, what they were doing and who they were with. And our home was open, I still have contemporaries with my girls say how much they appreciated the

fact that they could come to our home and knew that we would welcome them. It pleases me now to have people recognize that. You know you're only a parent once going through and you have to do the best you can. I've been very blessed with kids that have grown into very wonderful adults and I feel we're friends, we're not just mom and kid, we're friends.

Is there anything else you would like to tell us about Olathe that...*(inaudible)*?

Um...I can remember when Olathe had its 100th anniversary, my husband was on the committee at that time. I think the fact that it has stayed its own community and I hope it stays that way. I think one of the things that we worked hard on is changing the manner in which we govern the city level. We changed it to a different form of government. Where people were elected from wards and not just at large and there is more accountability on the part of the commissioners now. I think that changed Olathe a lot because before that happened we had a person on the city council would be, for instance, in charge of all the roads in Olathe. They had specific job duties. Instead of meeting as a group and making decisions which were best for the community, it was kinda like, well my department needs this and to me my department is the most important thing. So there was a lot of conflict on the city council at that time and we got that resolved by changing the manner in which they were elected and how they served.

I know when I go home I'll think of lots of things I should have brought up...but.

Well, that's it.

I appreciate your asking me to come and chat with you and get acquainted.

Thanks for coming we really appreciate it.