

Villa Park Elementary School Oral History & Memory Book Project

Oral History Interviews

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Villa Park Elementary School Oral History Interview: Stephen Hoffman

Interviewer: Audrey von Ahrens

Date: October 27, 2017



Audrey von Ahrens: My name is Audrey von Ahrens and I am here recording an interview regarding the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings with Stephen Hoffman.

Stephen Hoffman: Yes, during roll call at Villa Park Elementary, they would say Stephan, but it's Stephen.

Audrey: Ah, because of the P-H.

Stephen: [laughs] Yes.

Audrey: Okay. We're going to start with the basic question... what is your affiliation with the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings?

Stephen: We moved into the area about 1962 or 1. I actually came in during the middle of the year, or beginning of the year but like the second month. I was a student here from second grade until sixth grade.

Audrey: Great. What do you remember most about the school buildings?

Stephen: Just that it was a very quaint area. I came from Whittier, California. This is just small, a lot of open space. Eucalyptus trees, orange trees, pepper trees. Very few housing. Just a neat old, homey, type place. Not large. Just pretty much everybody you ran into, you knew. It was pretty unique in that way.

Audrey: You've lived here since you were younger?

Stephen: Yes. I was actually born in La Habra, so that's Orange County. I've been here my whole life, yes.

Audrey: What year was that that you attended the schools?

Stephen: I believe-- see if it was eight years old, right? Probably 19-- I don't even know. I could have sworn I saw a report card that said '62. That seems too young. Probably about '63 on, until graduation in sixth grade.

Audrey: What was attending the school here like? Can you walk us through a typical day?

Stephen: I lived in a track. Actually, it's known. They're trying to make it a historical type project now. It is right next door to the Villa Park Fire Department. At that time, it was the Volunteer Fire Department. Whenever the horn would blast, you'd get all the firemen to come running in. Right behind my house was Orange Grill.

We took the bus, primarily. Sometimes I'd walk home. But I don't think I ever walked there. Take the bus across the bridge from Orange. It was pretty close, until it got washed out, I think, in 1966, when we had the floods through here. Just remembering picking up all the kids to go to Villa Park Elementary. Days that were-- it was windy, which we had a lot of, and a lot of eucalyptus and orange groves, like I said. You could count how many eucalyptus trees fell on houses as you're going to Villa Park Elementary. Because that's what it was. It was really more open space, a lot of trees. Kids would run down from their homes, wherever they were, if they were late to the bus, if they weren't waiting for the bus. Then, getting to school, you look for your friends. Some of them tried to pick up a game of dodgeball, kickball, all the fun games, even marbles was big. If not, that was it. You just went to class. Nothing fantastic, but that was the typical day.

Audrey: What made Villa Park Elementary School unique to you?

Stephen: It's funny. I probably have more memories of elementary school even though I was younger than when I attended any other school. I mean, I did go throughout the Villa Park School system. Villa Park High School and Cerro Villa Junior High. But it was just so small, like I said, it was quaint. Not very many people were in the classrooms, not overcrowded. I remember on a hot year, we didn't have air conditioning, so on hot days teachers would take us out. You'd sit underneath the pepper trees. You'd read stories, do riddles, things like that. Even the playground was small. There wasn't really much to the playground. But, just being surrounded by the orange grows and the other trees, not too many homes. It was a few times. Right now the Dodgers are in the World Series, but I can remember one of the times they were in the World Series in the 60's that my buddy and I, he lived close by, at lunchtime we snuck out of campus to watch the game. Because then they didn't put the World Series on during the days, you couldn't watch it. Things like that, there used to be a little store called Bruno's. We jumped the fence, sneak over, buy candy with our lunch money, and then go back. Things that you-- you could do that. I don't know what they're doing nowadays, I think it's more complicated but it was just neat to be able to disappear, come back and not be in trouble too much.

Audrey: What was your favorite room or part of the building?

Stephen: I believe I was the last class to use the original buildings. The very last one. It was pretty cool. I remember it having a coat room. I think they build those like-- that's where the East Coast was. Because, you get coats on the East, more than the West. We had a coat room. I remember we had a stage in our room. I mean, how many classrooms have stages? Even the windows. The windows were more awning type windows.

You don't see big awning windows, with great views. And, again, great views. Views of trees, not just classrooms or people. They were neat, neat buildings, which is strange. You remember the water drinking fountain there, for some reason, was the best one in the entire school because more water came out. It wasn't just trying to slurp it up. Plus, it was always cold. I mean, it was always cold. Just these little minute things, I just remember these things.

Sitting there on those hot days, again, I remember-- because they were so quaint, two classrooms close together. Sometimes we would merge classrooms and read back and forth. I remember, for some reason, Charlotte's Web was a popular book, and had the girls crying at the end. Those had to be the best. But if you got in trouble-- I remember, they had these huge concrete pillars out front. If you got in trouble, you'd have to go out and circle it 500 times. You'd keep your hand on it. That was the other thing. We were the last ones to use it. I think it's because they weren't earthquake certified or whatever.

They said they were always going to get them retrofitted for earthquake safety but, apparently, they never did. Those were the best. Villa Park Library, now, I don't know if this is wrong but, why do I think there was part of a tree going through it? For some reason, it seems like [laughs] where it was built some of the tree was inside the building. I doubt that was there. Either that or the tree was just humongous right next to it. The library was pretty neat too. Just more of a small-town type there.

The library and the cafeteria. I'll go for three buildings. I don't believe there was any cafeterias in any school in the Orange Unified School District, and we had one. We had a hot lunch program, all that kind of stuff. I don't think any other schools had. We had a stage on that too. It was just a unique school compared to everything else that were being built. Those are probably the three major buildings, but the original classrooms were pretty cool.

Audrey: What were the stages typically used for? Did you put on special plays? Was there story time?

Stephen: Back then, the space program was big, right? I remember, I don't know how many times they came, and I don't know what the experiments were, but NASA used to show up and they used to teach us stuff on stage. They'd do demonstrations and things. I can't even remember any of the demonstrations, but it was pretty cool. I mean, that area of time was pretty neat because of, we're trying to reach the moon at that time

and NASA-- I don't know why I didn't become an astronaut, because it was pretty neat whenever they showed up, doing the different experiments.

We'd also gather in the cafeteria, they do sing-alongs, that sort of thing, where they have a big movie projector. For some reason, I remember Jiminy Cricket being on stage, maybe Disney had him teaching students certain things [laughs], I don't know.

But, yes, they used the stage. I don't remember any plays, though, just singing. We'd all get together, all the classes and sing like just, "This Land is Your Land" and others. And that's about it, yes.

Audrey: One thing that's being preserved is the old school bell, do you have any memories of the bell being used when you attended the school?

Stephen: Yes. It was a big deal when you became a sixth grader. Sixth graders can ring the bell when they graduated. So that's [laughs] what you waited for. Yes, that was the time that we were able to ring it, when you graduated. Yes, that's the most memory of the bell.

Audrey: [laughs] Just kind of this moment of achievement you strive for as a little kid?

Stephen: Yes, definitely.

Audrey: That's fantastic. You mentioned one particular teacher, were there any other special people that you remember?

Stephen: Not really. I don't-- besides the NASA people coming, the older teachers were good, I just remember, Miss Ackley, she was pregnant and left halfway, and then we got another teacher, Mrs. Johnson, and she was pregnant--. Mr. Greenwald, my fourth-grade teacher? Mr. Frydendahl, Mr. Miller was on my sixth grade. I don't know why I remember this stuff. I couldn't tell you of my middle school teachers. I just remember all these. It's strange. Mrs. Burton, I think, was third grade. Yes, just the teachers. We did have an odd thing with our principal, where he ended up getting arrested. We never saw him again. But [laughs], yes, and I remember he had a rule.

The rule was if the bell rang you're supposed to freeze in the playground, right? Well, I think I hit it, tetherball. I got in trouble. He took me to his office and slapped my hand. It turns out he was a little different kind of guy at that time, where it was more hidden than it is now. That's-- [laughs] we had to read it in the paper, because we had no idea [laughs].

Audrey: You talked about NASA and you mentioned the Dodgers going to the World Series, are there any other significant town changes/events or world news that you remember experiencing while at the school?

Stephen: Just the space program. We had, locally, and we just had a fire and it actually just stopped like a half mile from my house. When I was here, a lot of my friend's houses

burned down. Because the last big fire was in the 60's, where it just swept through Villa Park and Orange Park Acres. It's funny that it just-- basically, it was happening again just a few months ago. I remember that and then we had the floods come through and washed out the bridge.

Then we had to take a different route to get to Villa Park, which is what? It was at least 10 minutes longer. Any other world--? No, just the space program and whatever sports like the Dodgers. I don't remember any other impact back then besides-- Well, I did have a friend that we used to ride our Stingrays to Irvine Park, when I was in elementary school. That was a long ride. If you know what a Stingray is, it's a small pedal base, so it took a long time to get to Irvine Park, which is like three miles from our house. But that's where the hippies used to hang out on the weekends. We just hung out with the hippies, back in the 60s, at Irvine Park, and that fire ran through there a couple of weeks ago. That's the only other thing. It was peace/love time, and we pretended our Stingrays were Harley-Davidsons, choppers. I don't know if you know what a chopper is [laughs].

Audrey: I do.

Stephen: Those are good times.

Audrey: To sum everything up, if you had to pick a few words best associated with the school and your experiences there, what about would they be?

Stephen: Just a positive memory. Nothing bad. Just everything was good. I think that's why I remember it. It wasn't complicated. Having small classrooms probably made that good. Maybe 15 people on a classroom instead of, what do they have now, 40? I don't know. A lot of my friends, we moved on, you go to separate schools when you're in middle school but we still kept in touch and pretty much knew everybody. Yes, a positive memory.

Villa Park Elementary School Oral History Interview: Alayne Campbell

Interviewer: Audrey von Ahrens

Date: October 27, 2017



Audrey: My name is Audrey von Ahrens and I am here recording an interview regarding the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings with Alayne Campbell. To start, what is your affiliation with the Villa Park Elementary School?

Alayne: I attended from the second grade through the eighth. I graduated from there and we went down to Orange High School, which I graduated from in '48, which meant I probably left Villa Park in '44. So, whatever it took me to get from the second grade through the eighth grade.

Audrey: Great. What do you remember most about the school?

Alayne: We're a large family. We didn't think about that until-- maybe, appreciate the school until I moved in to Orange and we were fragmented there. But when we were at Villa Park, the first and second grade were in one room, and the third and fourth were in one room, and the fifth and six, and then, obviously, the seventh and eighth. They weren't Orange classrooms, and the teachers were very good.

At least, I ended up having a background well enough that, after high school, I was accepted at Stanford and UCLA. Back in those days, we had four principals in four years on Orange High School, so it was sort of chaotic. I really feel that the elementary background--. Also, we played. We had three large paths from the school down to the corner street. We were allowed to go down those paths, and they had trees and bushes. I remember my grandpa came and put in a cactus garden that would now be con--. You know, the cactus that doesn't have thorns. Everybody thought that this was a big-- it was this, really, more like a family thing.

Audrey: It sounds like it was a really enjoyable place to be.

Alayne: Yes. We did have a paved area where they played dodgeball, and being a short kid, it was always nice to try to smile at the strong boys so they wouldn't knock you out. We had the grass, obviously, in the front. I don't ever remember getting on it, but it looked nice. But we had the paths and then, it was just-- then, of course, the ball fields and the tennis court. It was just nice, I even had a friend later in life tell me her son rode his horse [laughs]. I thought, "Come on."

Audrey: To school?

Alayne: To school, yes, that's what she told me. I thought that was hilarious.

Audrey: That is. Well, what other memories do you have about this school? Are there any specific sounds, smells or emotions that you feel when you think about your time there?

Alayne: Yes. We had the great big bell on the bell tower, and I lived up on the hill. If my parents didn't bring me, you had the school bus. The man that was our janitor was also the man who rang the bell. I remember the third and fourth grade we always had a big Christmas pageant thing, and I remember it had a background of English because we sang those dopy little fa la la things. But he came in, our janitor, with this fake boars head and had a very deep voice, came in and sang that. I just thought that was a very unique experience. I do remember that. There was a little stage, tinny tiny one along the back.

Audrey: Was that in the classrooms or did they have a separate--?

Alayne: No, it was in one of the classrooms, they had that. Then, later on, one of the big things was the home and school league, they didn't want to join the PTA. They wanted to keep all the money for themselves, they would have these big dinners. Mrs. Collins, like the street, she would make the best pies, according to my father. There was this ramshackle old building that we met in, then later on, the parents and people got together and built a big rec room, where we did have a stage. I remember my dad saying, "These people are smart enough, they have women on the committee. Women are the ones who are going to be in the kitchens." So later on when he was on the committee for our church, he have the same bright idea. I really enjoyed those-- that's what made it a community. It wasn't just the school, it was the participation of the parents.

They would get together like that, and we would have a Halloween party every year, and everybody would dress up. I remember-- I forgot the Halloween parties, but we did do that.

Audrey: [laughs] Well, it sounds like a lot of fun.

Alayne: It was, yes.

Audrey: It sounds like that's really what made Villa Park Elementary unique to you, that family atmosphere. Is there anything else that comes to mind?

Alayne: I remember, later on, I saw the principal Miss Bucey. Later on, I was a high school teacher. It was long ago now but we had money for field trips, and there was a Russian exposition up in L.A. So there I was with my class and I turned and there was Miss Bucey. [laughs]. As a person, at your hardest you forget that they are people too, right? And she was kind enough to say she was pleased to see me, and I said, "Well, here I am, a leader." It was very nice. Then another teacher, she had a son who went to school there. I always thought, that would be difficult to be a child right there in your class. The bus driver, his son ended up being a principal of one of the schools here. I always thought that's a nice story.

Audrey: Yes, definitely. Can you walk us through what a typical day at Villa Park Elementary School was like?

Alayne: Well, I just have these-- it flies back. I know that when I first came nobody knew me, of course, for the first and second grade, and a teacher got this idea of having better order by organizing a-- you would call it, like a court, and they voted me the leader because they knew I didn't know any faction. The bad news is they were going to report the things, and I was supposed to say what the punishment would be. I remember telling my father that I wouldn't go to school.

I never talked very much, not unlike now, and finally my mother said, "You're going to have to take her down there and find out." The teacher, of course, couldn't figure out, and she said, "Uhu, she has been elected and she evidently doesn't feel about doing that." We would have a recess-- I don't remember, I think we all took our lunches, I'm pretty sure we did those cute little lunch boxes that they have at antique garage shows now. I also remember going out and they would have a thing of chocolate milk or regular milk, and they gave it to you free. I don't remember when that was, but I was quite excited because I always loved chocolate milk.

Then, I remember this dumb, I thought dumb, game where we played *Ring Around the Rosie* with a May Pole. I had a problem. I just loved sports but I would get bad problems with me knees, so I wasn't really good. But we didn't have softball and everything there. Mainly we were, of course, all lined up like in older movies where they stand up outside the school by rows, by classes, in the morning, and do the pledge of allegiance. I don't ever remember doing that in the classroom.

Audrey: Everybody got together.

Alayne: Yes, and that's [laughs] when you noticed what a small school it was [laughs].

They had these-- I like the architecture because the little tile roof, and going down to the restroom it was a long-- open on one side to the outside, and then, it was really rather attractive. Well, I think the bell's what really got me, I like the bell.

Yes, it was the first thing in the morning, the flag went up.

Audrey: Whether it was cold or not?

Alayne: I don't remember, isn't that funny? It's just like-- there's little snapshots that you see-- Oh, we did have a merry-go-round, hot dog, I remember that [laughs] and wouldn't you have to be a little careful, somebody needed to sat it down. But I remember the merry-go-round. I'm still not a very-- I think as you get older you shrink, but I quite fairly make a five foot now. And I remember trying to get on the-- you know how the thingys come down, not just hold the bar like this; hold the bar and the thing too. But then there's big people would stand outside and they'd push when the bar came around; otherwise, it pushed you at your free will.

It must have had swings too.

Audrey: There was a playground then?

Alayne: Yes. I remember that. I forgot the merry-go-round. How can I forget the merry-go-round?

Audrey: [laughs] Let's see, what else? Did you have a favorite room or a part of the building itself, any particular place that stands out to you?

Alayne: No, I just liked the way the place was situated, of course, over 99 and 44, 100% orange grows. So you would come up and then you would turn down, and there was the water off. My father was an orange rancher so there was that building and then nothing dumb will have to accept the school, all the fields and then you would go down to the left and go all the way past. I always liked coming down up here and going past then you get to see the front of the school and then the side and I just thought with the columns and the -- what am I -- I rounded tile. I just thought it really looked cool. It didn't look like any other school when you have pictures of schools.

Audrey: It's unique in architecture?

Alayne: It was. Yes.

Audrey: What else, did you put attending in particular special events. I know you mentioned the Halloween and --.

Alayne: Yes, the Halloween party. I remember that they would have special fund-raising dinners and that kinds of things because they were the lone rangers. Without a national group but that was just their home and school league, they would have to do stuff. One thing I do remember, there was a very small room off of the seventh and eighth grade and that's where we had. If the wandering people came from the county they gave you shots and I remember when they came with the smallpox and everybody said, "Oh well, no problem." I was in bed for three days. I was one of the three at the school that had this reaction.

They all said, "Oh well, this is really good because if you've had ever gotten this, you would have died." I thought, "Thanks a lot." I remember they vaccinated you on the inside because you were a woman, in case you got a scar. What do you mean in case you got a scar [laughs]? I remember because I just had a temperature. I didn't have smallpox. It was the reaction. When you're a kid and everybody tells you, "Oh, no problem. This is going to be fine." And then afterwards you begin to think, hello. But the county did occasionally wander out for whatever it was because at that time we were not unified with Orange High School, see? We were definitely way out.

Audrey: Back then, did you understand what was really going on when that was happening?

Alayne: I don't really think so. I have lived in Orange, at Chapman, when I was a little kid and I had my best friend next door. So best friend that I have roller skates and gave her one, never learned how to put them together. Moving out there was a big shock. We're on a hill. No children to play with. My sister finally learned to roller skate, go up and down the hall in the house but I never was bright enough to figure that out. It was nothing out there. That's why the school was so important. Also, hello, I'm an old person, that's just during World War II. One did not hop in one's car and just go somewhere. We had gasoline, rye shipping, and nobody ever dropped in. Our friends from Orange would always phone.

The school was very important in your life because that's where you made your friends. Unlike my life there in Orange.

Audrey: That sounds like a big transition.

Alayne: Yes, it was. Plus, they had told me I would be one of little Harold's sister you could play with, and I was so dumb I didn't realize, after I saw the baby it finally hit. There I was with my dog-- and also they have snakes up there. I would walk around the hills and get cactus on my long pants and see a snake that scared me to death. I really was homebound.

It sounds so good in books when kids are out and roaming and doing things. It isn't exciting to do it by yourself.

Audrey: Sure. You really looked forward to coming to school?

Alayne: I really did, yes. I know it sounds sort of a negative, but you can see why, and that was before television. You had your radio. I love to read. During Mrs. Wagner and Ms. Lambert's classes I learned how to read and love to read, but the social life was all, at that era, all around that school.

Audrey: Was it separated by grades or did you have --?

Alayne: Yes, 1st and 2nd. 3rd and 4th. 5th and 6th. 7th and 8th. There were only -- in my eighth-grade class, there weren't even a dozen people. I had one really close girlfriend

all the way through. That was another shock when we got to the high school. I had an emergency appendectomy as I started high school. How clever of me, because by the time I got back, which was couple months, everybody had found new friends. So, I really appreciated the Villa Park situation that much more, because I know I don't look shy, and I'm not shy, but it was a shock to come in and find my few friends from Villa Park had all made new friends, and here I am, that kind of a thing.

Yes, you can see why I really look back with pleasure on those days.

Audrey: Are there any particularly special people that you met at Villa Park, or that you remember influencing you a lot when you attended the schools?

Alayne: Well, I think each one of the teachers, because you have them for two years, and you were in the same room you didn't leap up and ran around, I would say. Ms. Lambert and then Mrs. Rosenhof lived just a hill away, and had an Orange girl. I think I mentioned that my father was an Orange guard. He eventually started helping taking care of her girl. She was especially nice. I really admired her because I could think, "And how could she teach these classes; 7th and 8th graders in one room." Even though there were a lot of us, I would just think, after I started teaching, "How would those people do that?"

Audrey: Let's see. Are there any other significant changes or events that took place while you attended the schools, whether they are world news or town news?

Alayne: Well, we were there during the war. I went to a retired teacher's meeting the other day and they were singing *My Country, 'Tis of Thee*. We went through all four verses. Of course, I knew all of them. I knew the marine hymn. We knew the Navy hymn. We knew the -- it eventually became the armory, like tank thingies. All patriotic songs because we would stand and sing those in the classroom. I remember that. I remember learning that and we all felt really patriotic, because I was there from '41 to -- Then the war wasn't over, so I got in the high school at '45.

Audrey: So, this was really going on the entire time that you were in school?

Alayne: Yes. Oh, I remember one thing. They sold war bonds, of course, but kids don't have \$18.75, so they had little stamp books. Later on, people had green stamps. We could buy a stamp for a quarter. If you fill about...you have a war bond. Well, they had a sale, and if some kind of a deal at Villa Park, if you bought a bond, they took you down to the plaza in Orange.

You got to ride around the plaza in a jeep. because we had soldiers -- After the war started, we didn't have any tents, so they brought the soldiers in Orange. The only places they -- they had a lot of churches in Orange, you'd sit there in church and you could smell the food because they would put soldiers down in the basement and they had to have a place to live, but they also had to have a kitchen.

Then after a few months, they moved the van to Irvine Park because they got tents and then eventually, they went over and invaded D-Day because we kept touch with some

of them. The Villa Park brought us down on the school bus and I can still remember the corner we stood in by the Wells Fargo first national bank, and these four soldiers were driving a jeep. Can you imagine? Oh, what a thrill, you get to jam these little kids and we went around like classic. That was a really big thing.

Audrey: Yes. Sounds like a great memory.

Alayne: Was really exciting to go about that. We were so excited.

Audrey: I bet. That sounds like a lot of fun, especially when you're little.

Alayne: When you're a little kid on a jeep. Nobody ever really seen a jeep except maybe on the movies newsreel we had. I forgot about that story.

Audrey: No. That's great. Is there anything else that you'd like to add that just comes to mind about the schools? Or experiences?

Alayne: I just think it's really neat that somebody cares. You people are doing this because -- for me they are good memories. Right now with the people's houses burning down, it brings up the bad memories when ours burned in the 60s, and so I'd like to have a really good memory of Villa Park was the school system. I haven't really thought about it till you called me.

Audrey: Oh, I'm so glad.

Alayne: I read that small article in the paper and, of course, the thing that got me was the picture of the main building. I really appreciate it.

Audrey: Thank you. I'm so glad to be a part of this and that you were willing to share your memories. A lot of people will enjoy hearing them. Just to wrap up this interview, if you had to pick three words that best describe your experience and the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings, what would they be?

Alayne: I was an English major too, so this is really difficult.

Audrey: You don't have to keep it to three. [laughs]

Alayne: It was so pleasant. You just felt you were in your own little world especially when we were there when I lived upon a hill, when there was a supposed bombing in LA. What you could see, like in the movies, what do you call it, the searchlights and the clouds. You couldn't see anything. You look down and saw that and you thought "Somebody's going to come marching up here" and then you thought, "Oh, but it's okay." It'll be all right because you got back in the school and it occupied your mind and you kept thinking things are going to get better because obviously, that's [laughs] what we all want to hear.

When you were just a little shaky because you were old enough to know, things don't always turn out right, but you were concerned. And then the thought that the soldiers have to stay in the churches because we don't have enough tents, hello. There are just a few things that made you nervous. So it was just really a very tranquil time. Somehow rather and during those times, I don't remember any fires either. It was 20 years later that it seemed like everything was burning. It was just a wonderful place to live.

Villa Park Elementary School Oral History Interview: Edward Archibald

Interviewer: Audrey von Ahrens

Date: October 27, 2017



Audrey: My name is Audrey von Ahrens and I am here recording an interview regarding the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings with Edward Archibald. Thank you so much for being here today and joining us. We'll start with the simple question of, what is your affiliation with the historic Villa Park Elementary School?

Edward: The fact is that I started the first grade in that old building in 1947. That's about the only affiliation I had with it. I spent six years there – when I reached the seventh grade, that was the first year that the district unified. Because my sister, who's two years older than me, she graduated from the eighth grade at Villa Park, but I didn't, because I moved down to what was, at the time, called Intermediate, and that was the junior high school, which is now the Chavin Law School. In those days that was -- I don't know what it was. It was a school, then it became the only junior high school they had in the district.

I started in 1947, so it would've been 1953. Yes, because 53, 54, then my first year in high school is 55. So, I believe in 1953.

Audrey: What do you remember most about the school?

Edward: School in those days was school. The one thing I do remember, vividly is -- And I don't know what exactly it was. One of the big deals, that was a really big deal, that happened was right out on the very -- I don't think it's there anymore, would be the northeast corner of the playground, throughout the northeast corner. It was a big deal. They got a merry-go-round. It didn't have anything, all they had were swings, but they got this merry-go-round. We're talking before Disneyland here now.

Audrey: [laughs] An actual ride of some sort.

Edward: Yes. It was tilted and it would spin. Every kid that could fit on it would get on it and spin. That was a really big deal. I don't know if I was in the first grade, but it was somewhere along there. And I'm sure that it's gone now, but anyway. That's one of the memories. Beyond that, I wish I could -- that picture that I have there, I wish I could remember the name of the teacher, but I don't.

Audrey: Walk us through what it was like on a typical school day. What you remember about coming to school?

Edward: We rode the bus. I don't know how far reach it was, but I don't think really there was that large an area where the kids came from. But it was very rural. Ride the bus every day and go to school. That really just was routine. It's all part of growing up, you're just there.

Audrey: Sure.

Edward: But I don't have to say that -- Just like this one picture, the one thing I can say is, "This is the picture." And I only recognize really, of course, myself, and then two other people. And this one fellow, he and I were best friends clear through elementary school.

Audrey: That's a picture of which class?

Edward: This is my first-grade class. And this kid right here, he passed away a few years ago. We were best friends the whole time. But all these other kids -- well, this one girl, I remember her too -- but all the rest I don't remember. And they don't have any names with them. If I had the names maybe I would, but I don't. That was about it. It was just an old-time school, and that's what we did in a country school.

Audrey: Were a lot of your friends in the classes? Did they live right in the area too or in your neighborhood?

Edward: Actually, it was so rural out there that I don't think that any of them were next door neighbors. Well, when I started we lived -- it was a kind of little development, if you will, but then I think I was -- well I was -- if I started in '47, it was 1948 that we moved up, my dad bought a five-acre plot, and we moved up. We didn't have any neighbors. Really, your interaction with the kids was pretty much in school.

Then in those days there wasn't a lot of after-school sports programs or stuff like that, those things were starting to be developed. But you did interact through club scouts, and things like that. It was all the same kids, and kids from other -- kids who were in the school, and they might -- like I think the first club scout troop I think was affiliated with the Elks Lodge or something in Orange, and stuff like that. So you would be with other kids from different schools. But again, my whole time even when I was out, we didn't really have a lot of close neighbors. We lived out in the country.

Audrey: What were the classrooms like? Do you remember anything about them particular?

Edward: Well, they were just, they were old and, of course, while I was there they built the buildings, we called them -- they were the new building and they were new at the time as opposed to the old schoolhouse, and those, of course, were more modern and newer and all that. But I don't know how to -- Sorry I can't.

Audrey: No, it's okay absolutely. What was the school day like? Did you have a recess or a lunchtime?

Edward: Yes, and I think one of the things that happened, I think while we were there, and I seem to recall this, and I suppose to be historically figure out, is they started the milk program. While I was in school, and all of a sudden one year, and sometime they started serving milk. Prior to that everybody brought their own lunch that's it, that's what you have. There wasn't anything like today where they run cafeterias or anything like that. I just remembered somewhere along they started giving out milk. That started and I always thought, "Why are they doing this?" "We get enough at home." That just was my thought process with that.

Audrey: Do you think anything in particular made Villa Park Elementary School unique?

Edward: Well, it was, obviously when you look at other schools you realize that it was kind of an original, it was one of the, if not the oldest, the newest. It was like the little schoolhouse, and that's what there when I first started. That's what was it. I had talked to -- well, he's actually one my customers, but he is also somebody who went to school there, and he's a little older than I am.

It's hard for me to imagine when he was talking, and you're going to be interviewing him next Friday, in fact. I had called him, because he is a customer of mine, and I just talked to him and I called him I said, "Did you go to Villa Park elementary?" He said, "Yes." And he is three years older than me, he says, "Not not only did I go there, my mother went there." That had to be, "I mean, my God." Then you know it's really unique because that would have probably been in, either, the late '20s or early '30s when his mother went there. Maybe even the mid-'20s, I'm not exactly sure. So you did know that it was the old one horse. As a kid what do you care about that?

Audrey: Did you have any favorite moments during school, any favorite area to be in, or favorite class?

Edward: Well, as a kid, I think the favorite thing was when you were out with PE or sports, or stuff like that, running around. I was never very good student. My favorite time was the end of the day when everybody got to go home. I think that it was just school.

Audrey: Sure. Do you remember if there were any significant events...world news or town news while you attended school?

Edward: Not really. During the time that I was there, the Korean war was going on. When you didn't have any -- the only way you knew stuff like what was really going on was you hear your parents talking about it and stuff like that. But I don't ever remember as kids, maybe I wasn't very inquisitive, being exposed to things like that. They sheltered us—we were pretty sheltered. At least I was.

If you think about where I was when I was this age and there was no television. In those days that was a big thing. Who was the first one to get a TV? I think we were -- For this life of me, I don't know how my dad afforded and how expensive they were. But he wanted one, and we weren't the first ones on the block, but somehow he figured a way to get it. It is a big deal. If you got a TV everybody knew it. I was probably in the third or fourth grade by that time, I suppose, when we finally did that. You got a little -- but you didn't really watch the news that much, anyway. You watched cartoons and stuff like that. The world events -- There just wasn't any --

Audrey: In classrooms today, they have TVs. Did they have the radio or anything like that?

Edward: Yes, they did. I remember one of the things -- I was in elementary school at Villa Park, and I was at the first grade but one of the big deals that they would do right now, this time of year, was when the World Series was on -- they'd have the World Series on, I guess probably because teachers liked it.

But they would have it on the radio. They wanted to listen because that's a big deal. You didn't have any major teams out here in the West Coast, it was all the Yankees and the Dodgers, that was a big deal for kids.

It was an annual thing. There were probably other things that they did that with -- I think the presidential inauguration or stuff like that, political things that would be something that they would have on the radio. Yes, they did -- almost my whole school career they never had TV sets or anything in the classrooms. They hadn't gotten there, yet. You had screens like this, and they showed slides and stuff like that, but no videos or any kind of that stuff.

Audrey: That's an interesting point. Did they hold any after-school programs or did they do anything for holidays?

Edward: There would be all sort of things that they would do. Like this picture here. I don't remember exactly what the deal was with this, but I think this is the old auditorium that was in that building. I think this was a Mexican day or something and everybody dressed up. I wasn't in the first grade, this was later, but I don't remember what year it was, but I brought it because of this building more than the class. This was a kind of stuff that they were having. This was something that we were celebrating. I didn't even know what it was. We all dressed up. I don't remember what it was.

I think this is me right here. I'm not sure.

Audrey: Front and center.

Edward: Yes, I don't know how I got there. [laughs] That's the kind of stuff. They would have Christmas things and Halloween things. The teachers and faculty would have that kind of stuff.

Audrey: One thing that is being preserved is the school bell. Does the bell have any special memory for you? Do you remember the sound of it at all?

Edward: Not really. It was just up there. They didn't ring the bell for class, I don't think. If they did, I don't remember.

Audrey: Did you have anybody that was particularly important to you or special to you while you were there? Maybe a teacher or a faculty member or a friend?

Edward: The one kid, like I said, this one kid here, he and I were just almost inseparable the whole time through to the sixth grade. We went our separate ways once we got into junior high school because -- We just did, because you were in larger classes and you got into classrooms and stuff like that. Here, we were in the same class clear through the sixth grade. Of course, they lived a lot closer to the school than I did. A lot of times, I'd walk home and spend the afternoon there. The whole time I was at school, my dad was a teacher at Orange High School. He would pick me up and stuff like that. Family had a lot of affiliation with the -- My mother and dad both went to Orange High School. My dad was a custodian there for about six years. Then, he went to college and got a teaching credential and came back and was a teacher there until he retired. My sister became a teacher at the district. We went to school there and all that. We had a lot of affiliation with the school. This is my business right there, trimming trees. I used to do this tree-trimming for the district. This is probably taken in the mid-'80s. We were trimming this tree and I said, "I'll take a picture of the old schoolhouse" with my truck in front of it.

Audrey: That's perfect. Thank you for sharing those.

Edward: I thought I really would have more stuff, but I didn't.

Audrey: That ID card, was that something the school gave you?

Edward: Apparently, they issued this. I don't know why -- my mother saved all this stuff, naturally. I wish they'd put my name on it, and the date, and the principal's -- I don't know where it came from. I don't ever remember seeing it but that's me. My mother probably got it. Obviously, she did because she put it in that book.

Audrey: If you had to pick three words, or a couple words, to describe your memory of the school, what would they be?

Edward: Well, I don't really -- I mean, it's such a new experience. This represents my first day of school because I never had any. I was just, I suppose, a little bit overwhelmed by it because I was young. That age, everything is new, and I don't have negative

thoughts about it, it's just -- I wish I could remember more about it, like the teachers' names, some I do. Some of the ones down the line, but not much of the first grade. It wasn't just the first grade, I had other classes in those buildings, it was beyond that, but blends together.

Villa Park Elementary School Oral History Interview: Cyndee Kellar-Paulus

Written response to interview questions

Date: submitted October 31, 2017

Question: What is your affiliation with the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings?

Cyndee: I started Kindergarden in 1954, Elizabeth Parks was my teacher. First grade to Sixth grade teachers were: Carol Burris (Altner), Nancy Inman, Roberta Stark, Margaret Babcock, Curtiss Olmstead and Maurice "Preach" Lyerla. Kindergarden and 6th grades were held in the "old building". That building was the only one that offered any shade so lunch was eaten there on hot days.

Question: What do you remember most about the school (sounds, smells, emotions)?

Cyndee: Gosh. School was pretty much our entire social world. VP smelled of pepper and eucalyptus, orange and lemon trees. And you know, it was quiet. We were so far out of town there wasn't much traffic, many of us rode our bicycles so not much bus noise and very rarely parents "delivering" us to school.

Question: What made VPE unique?

Cyndee: Villa Park was independent. Yes, part of the OUSD but out and away from town. The "rules" didn't much apply. Shoes were optional. My dad, Grant Kellar, who attended VP in the 1930's attributed that to lack of shoes during his time. Not everyone was well to do, mostly citrus ranchers and the people who participated in that industry. For girls pants or shorts were fine. Not so unusual now but then...Oh My! Same reasoning as with the shoes.

No PTA but a Home and School League. Independent! Every year they produced a Halloween Carnival and it was FUN! Confetti eggs, a Fishing Booth; Cake Walk; live auction and food....4 H had a pit bar-b-q. Delish.

When CHOC was in the early fund raising stages the Mothers (and some Dads) of VP formed the Villa Park Players. Using LP's from Broadway Shows they staged the shows in the multipurpose/cafeteria. Complete with costumes and sets the show was threaded together by the "announcer" providing the information that related the songs. The ones I remember are: My Fair Lady; The Music Man, Lil Abner. There were others I am sure but they escape me. They raised several thousand dollars for the hospital. It was a time when everyone knew everyone. As I have mentioned 1000 times to friends if I blew my nose on my way to school my Mom knew by the time I got home.

Question: Did you attend any particularly special events?

Cyndee: It seem so unremarkable (or impossible) now but as a 6th graders on the last day of school you got to ride your bike to Irvine Park for a picnic. Some brave parents rode with us and there was a big spread to be enjoyed. Boat rowing, the zoo just chasing around knowing change was coming for us as we left VP for Junior High.

Question: Did you meet/ do you remember any particularly special people?

Cyndee: All my teachers cared and taught all subjects! Mrs. Stark made reading as natural as breathing. Miss Babcock open our eyes to travel...Hawaii having been her last vacation destination we learned much of the Island Culture. Mrs. Olmstead had the chore of tuning up our math skills and she did! But Mr. Lyerla built the foundation for "higher" learning. His style was pointed; you knew where you were and you wanted to excel. And Mr. Courson steering the ship as Principal.

Question: Did any significant changes or events take place while you attended the school (i.e. world news, town news, changes in the school program, changes to the building)?

Cyndee: John F. Kennedy won the 1960 election.

Question: If you had to pick three words best associated with the historic school, what would they be?

Cyndee: Independent. Familiar. Home.

Villa Park Elementary School Oral History Interview: Bobbie Grayson

Interviewer: Audrey von Ahrens

Date: November 3, 2017



Audrey Von Ahrens: My name is Audrey von Ahrens and I am here recording an interview regarding the historic Villa Park Elementary school buildings with...

Bobbie Grayson: Bobbie Grayson, who went to school under the name of Roberta Baldwin. That was my maiden name. Now it's Grayson.

Audrey: To start off, what is your affiliation with historic Villa Park Elementary school buildings?

Bobbie: I attended school from 1955 through 1962. I was part of the baby boomer thing, and I had in the main building that they're tearing down, I had Kindergarten. Then I ended sixth grade in that building too. But in the meantime, they were expanding the school because there were so many kids. I had first and second grade in the building to the South and East by the parking lot. Third and fourth grade were in the new building they just built.

They went North and South direction and then the fifth grade was in one of the old buildings right by the cafeteria and sixth grade was back in the original building. I must have been in the same classroom because it was hardwood floors and we had a walk-in closet. You could hang up your stuff and you put your lunch in there, and it was interesting. We just kept growing, and growing, and growing in a lot. It was really awesome because a lot of the kids that we stayed together as a corner a lot of people moved. I never moved and I thought everybody owned a house didn't move had solidarity.

The one thing I was trying to remember some different experiences. One of the bus drivers, he drove the kindergarten bus, his name was Mr. Harrington. We lived out in Orange Park Acres, and he was one of the neighbors out there. He would go around Orange Park Acres, and then go around Villa Park, and then come around to where

Randy elementary school was later built. Then we would all go back to Villa park and it took about 45 minutes to get to school.

The bridge was still out there for those across sanding and can ascend the creek at the time. We would go and can tell it wasn't all the way through. It wasn't a through street. We would come and go from Orange Park Acres and go and make a right turn and go across the bridge and then we go up to Lemmon street. Then we would go the back way up to Villa park which is a great big steep hill. Here's all these little kindergartens in the bus, and we almost get to the top of the hill.

But we don't make it and we roll all the way back down the hill and it's all come down. We try to get in and this time we made it. That was kind of an exciting thing happening, and I said we're getting chicken pox in kindergarten. I think most of us we didn't have preschools around at the time. Most of us were at home, but the only time you got together with the kids that's when you got all the diseases. I had a friend that married a kindergarten teacher and he had a very bad immune system.

He eventually died because he's getting all these diseases that the kids brought him. But anyway, we were raised up in Orange Park Acres and we still don't have curbs, sidewalks and we have no lights now and no street lights or anything. When it got dark out there, it got really dark. The thing I was remembering about sixth grade within the classroom with the building I had a teacher named Mr. Laire and he taught us Greek and Latin words. which was really a basis for knowing words for the rest of my educational life. Still, today, you can figure out what the words mean by the roots. Anyway, he taught us that. My sister had a different teacher. His name was Mr. Aston. He was weird and real scary-looking and he had black bags under his eyes. He taught Greek and Roman myths. My sister had nightmares for years.

Audrey: From the stories?

Bobbie: From the stories for some reason. I don't know why. Anyway, I was just really appreciative that I got Mr. Laire. He was really strict. He had this paddle back then that had holes and stuff in it, hanging on the wall to remind you that you needed to be whatever you needed to be.

Audrey: What year did you attend the school?

Bobbie: 1955, that was kindergarten. I left when it was 1962. It was 1962, but my birthday is in August. I was 11 when I ended and we were going into junior high when I was 12.

I met one of the kids I went to school with-- We just had our 50th reunion for the classes of '66, '67, and '68. They were the first classes to go through Villa Park, which was a brand-new school. Anyway, he said, "I have a problem with you and Pam Berkman." He said, "You pulled me off the gym when I was in third grade and I broke my arm." I go, "I don't really remember that." He goes, "Well, it got me out of mowing the lawn. I think it was from something I did to you guys." [laughter]

I'm going, "Who are you?" [laughs]

Audrey: It's funny how people remember things differently.

Bobbie: I don't remember that at all. But I do remember when my neighbor had done something to me and I ended up kicking him in the stomach and he went to the nurse's office. When my mom found out she said, "Good, I don't have to worry about you anymore. You'll take care of yourself." Don't mess with me. [laughter]

Audrey: The next question is, what do you remember most about the school? Perhaps the old school buildings versus the new ones since you experienced both.

Bobbie: Well, it just kept on growing and we got new classrooms for that. But the old building was-- we had hardwood floors. I remember in kindergarten we had to bring our blankets and we got to take a nap, and not like it is today. In sixth grade, we had all the classes, all the seats-- I don't think we had more than 20 people in a classroom. Well, you could look at the pictures.

Anyway, it was a really fun time and a really good place to grow up because you didn't feel afraid. There weren't a lot of bullying going on because everybody had a more kind of self-control. They were more friendly at the time because our granddaughter has been going through a lot of stuff where she's at her elementary school. The experience wasn't all that great because she had all these people bullying her all the time.

Anyway, when I was going to school, we didn't have all the devices. We actually didn't get a television until I was about second grade and then it was black and white when the first ones came out. Then we didn't get a phone either till I was in second grade. Then we were on a party-line and then we had our own single line. Different experience. We have spent more times playing games, playing cards, being outside playing.

Audrey: That sounds wonderful. Let's see. Can you walk us through a typical day at the school for you?

Bobbie: Okay. The typical day started out with the bus ride because we live two miles outside the two-mile limit. Villa Park was the only elementary school around.

Audrey: Was it just the one bus?

Bobbie: Well, there was one bus for kindergarten because they went later. But then there are several buses by the time we finished going through and each bus had their own route.

I fixed my own breakfast and I packed my own lunch. Then we walked about a fifth of a mile down to the school bus pick-up and we lived on a dirt road. There were orange groves on both sides of us. The whole place was orange groves practically. You walk

down the middle of the road but there are orange groves on either side. We all met down by the big tree at Frank and Orange Park Boulevard.

Well, the school bus would always come up from Santiago, go around by the cemetery, and come back down. It was really windy and then come back to Santiago again and stop at Clark Street and Frank Street ours was Frank street. Then when we get there we had finished going around to across the bridge again and then turn left and center and come down this way and there wasn't a whole lot of houses around there. I remember a vacant field that was east of the school, there's a lot of tall weeds and right type stuff growing there. Then to the south of the school, there was eucalyptus trees and orange groves again. It was-

Audrey: It sounds peaceful.

Bobbie: It was really, and we got there in field trips and stuff sometimes. That was kind of fun. My mom always told us to stay on the bus for the whole time so that when we would get to school, you didn't really have a whole lot of time to play and you went right to class. When the bell rang, you took roll to the Pledge of Allegiance and nobody set down for that, at that time. Then we had a couple of different things we study even then we go out for recess. The bell would ring and we'd go out for recess.

Then we come back and do some more studying and then we go to lunch. We mostly ate in the cafeteria or you could buy your food or you could bring it. But everybody ate together in the cafeteria. Then some of the times, depended on who was on duty for the lunch thing. We did everything in songs or we'd be doing rounds or John Jacob Jingle Heimer Smith or different things.

Then we go back out and play a little bit and come back again and do a couple more things and the bell would ring and we'd all leave on the bus. Well, when I was in first grade, I got on the wrong bus and we didn't have a phone or anything. I think I went more toward Orange rather than Orange Park Acres. They brought me back on the bus and I'm sitting there crying.

Mr. Corson was the principal. He puts me in the car, and he takes me all the way home. I think I cried all the way home. I'm just pointing to where we're supposed to go. When I got home, my mom was a little bit upset because she'd gone down to meet the bus and I didn't get off. But she didn't know where I was because she didn't have any phones or communication. I said, "Next time I made sure I got on the right bus."

Everybody either walked or they rode the bus. That was it. No parent transportation so much. We come down here on the Catteler turns into Villa Park Road and then there's so much traffic when they come to pick the kids up. They're all lined up ready to pick them up. We live across the street now from Salem Lutheran school and that's the way it is out there to you. You don't even get past the block and if you're at the pick-up time. You get stuck in traffic. Then we have rancher Santiago up there now and they're all coming down Orange Park Boulevard now. They figured that was a shorter route than going around the other way.

Audrey: What made Villa Park Elementary school unique?

Bobby: It was that we were together and we were a unit. Like I said, everybody didn't move a lot. You had this core of kids that were always together and you played together, you ate together, you formed a lot of memories and bonds. It was more like family because of all the shared experiences.

Audrey: It sounds wonderful.

Bobby: It was really an awesome time to grow up because everybody was really encouraging.

The one thing I said, too, is they gave us a lot of--In fourth grade, Mrs. Nichols had taught us Phonics. That carried on through everything. We had a lot of math, too, and in sixth grade, Mr. Laire did the Greek and Latin words. That carried me through all the way. Everybody was just really encouraging you and giving you tools that you could use for practical purposes on how to face the challenges you ran into.

Audrey: You mentioned it was where everybody really came together. Did you meet most of your friends there at school?

Bobbie: Well, I lived down the end of a street that only had five houses. Two were older people and the third was-- Actually, the guy next to us helped with the horses at Disneyland when they had the stagecoach there. [laughs] That was fun. But we didn't play on the street because it was a gravel dirt road and across from us was an orange grove. There weren't a whole lot of kids our age to play with.

Audrey: You mentioned a couple of different places in the building, the cafeteria and your classroom. Are there any rooms of the old buildings that particularly stood out?

Bobbie: Just mostly the cafeteria because that's where everybody went and you did the plays and you did whatever certification stuff you were going through and you ate there. They had all the holiday festivals and you could go and meet me and everybody. There was room for everybody to participate in programs. When we were raising our kids we had, they would say, "If anybody has just a kindergartner could you please get up and leave because we have so many people that want to be here and see the program." [laughs] When we finally had our last one, that's what we did. We'd go and we'd see the program, and then we'd go ahead and leave.

Audrey: Well, speaking of the programs and the holiday fun you mentioned, were there any special events that you can remember?

Bobbie: Yes. It was the Halloween carnival, and we used to have all these different booths. They had the fish pond and the throw the darts at the balloons and kick walk and all that stuff. But the one thing that we really enjoyed was the confetti eggs. My dad used to fry his eggs all the time. Well, for a month or two, before the Halloween

thing he would be poking a hole on the egg and squeezing it out he ended up having scrambled eggs. He really liked fried eggs a lot better, but he did his own sacrificing. We got tickets for all the eggs, the dozen. If you brought in a dozen eggs you would get a ticket to spend at the carnival. You try to get as many eggs as you could. It was really fun. It was like a badge of honor when somebody cracked an egg over your head or something, but I think they stopped it when somebody brought real eggs. Then it wasn't that fun anymore when people did that. [laughs]

Audrey: All right. One of the things that they are preserving is the school bell. Are there any specific memories you have associated with the school bell?

Bobbie: Well, I know you could hear it all over. I don't know if that was the bell or if they had wired it into all the classrooms because you could hear it. It was for recess and it was for starting school, it was for ending school. If you had any other special things that's what you heard. But it was really loud because you could hear it all over.

You could hear it outside in the park when you're playing in the schoolyard.

Villa Park was just new so we helped do the benches. We helped do the tree, plant the trees. We helped paint the school. They said there wasn't any classes anymore like that because we did all that stuff together like shared experiences again.

The one thing they had out in the quad, we walked out in the quad and go, "Oh my gosh, there's trees out here," because never had any trees. It was just a brand new school. They had the bell that they had on the little cart when they had the football teams. They had the bell there in the quad that we used to have, that was an important thing it started your day and ended your day. Made you feel secure.

Audrey: Well, that's good. Let's see, you've mentioned some teachers, are there any other particularly special people?

Bobbie: The bus drivers. Well, my dad when he got out the service he ended up going-- he was a pharmacist maid and he was in the navy and he didn't want slog around in the mud. He ends up volunteering to be a medic to go with the marine units. He ends up slogging around in the mud. Anyway, through the bus driver that I had as a kindergarten. He was a kindergarten bus driver.

He lived right close to us. My dad got into the Orange Unified School District and he became a custodian. Well, when he was in the service he didn't get to deploy on his last mission with the Marines because they were getting shipped out to Hiroshima but none of this group came back and he got discharged because he had rheumatic fever. When he became a custodian we were just figuring this out he asked for an hour lunch and an hour to sleep without anybody disturbing him.

He would leave and be work at seven and come back at 5:30 and get off at five. He would put extra two hours in there but it was because of the rheumatic fever and he knew everybody in the Orange unified school district and I think he became one of the

treasurers in the CSCA unit they had here, anytime anything happened he knew about it.

You couldn't hide anything from anybody back there. I got sick for the-- I think fourth grade Christmas party and I went to the nurse's office and I thought I was Okay to come home. I get on the bus and I think about getting off at the first bus stop, mama always said no ride the bus all the way around and we got to Clock which was the stop right before Frank where I got off and I threw up in the middle of those two. The driver gave me a towel and I'm going, "I don't want to get his towel dirty," and I threw up all over the floor I didn't know I was supposed to be throwing up in the towel so we wouldn't have to clean it up off the floor, so my dad heard about that.
[laughter]

Audrey: I'm sure.

Bobbie: We kept on the street narrow with everything too.

Audrey: And just for the record your father's name was?

Bobbie: My father's name was Percy, but his nickname was "Doc" Baldwin and he worked in Olive Elementary and after we graduated from Villa Park he worked in Villa Park and then he opened up Heim Elementary which was the first carpeted school in the district and he stayed there until he retired but he retired early in 1960 when he was 62 because he'd watch all the people that waited until they were 65 to retire but then they'd either die of a heart attack or something so he decided he was going to retire early and he didn't pass away until he was 89.

He helped with the Villa Park fire department. They had a Villa Park volunteer fire department out at station 23 its out at Katella now, and when he passed away we ended up having his memorial service at the Villa Park fire department the station 23 and we were there with the courts and the hats and the boots and all the equipment and then after we had the service-- he was in the navy but because he was a marine they sent marines out from El Toro to do a 21-gun salute. Well they got lost and they had to have a helicopter fly over to lead them to the right fire station and then after all the marines left-- I don't think you're supposed to do this together but they rang the bell for him the fire Villa.

Audrey: That sounds very special. Do you remember any world news or town news that took place while you attended the school?

Bobbie: It was the Kennedy, Nixon presidential race and usually-- Actually, Nixon's birthplace is over there in Yorba Linda and in Orange County everyone usually votes republican but we had a mock election in our class and everybody voted for Kennedy, I think. That was interesting.

I was in fifth grade. I was ten. It was 1960 something around there.

Then, when the Disneyland opened, it was 1955. We didn't go the opening day, but we went sometime in July. I remember my father saying, "There's too many people here. We are not coming back." I didn't really come back until I was in sixth grade, I think. But I was too short. I was always a short person in the class and I didn't get to ride the utopia by myself. I couldn't reach the pedals. Now, we know they have the last poll or whatever is the height check. No matter even if they have one little or not, that's the height check. If your kids are not that tall, they can't go on around.

Audrey: Interesting. I didn't know that. Well, were there any other changes in the school program or changes to the building that happened while you were there?

Bobbie: Well, there were just lots of building expansion because we had the one building. Then, I went to the new building this way and the new building that way and ended up back in the old building. But the cafeteria was really the main place we all congregated. I would take my peanut butter and bell pepper sandwich and they didn't sit by me.

Audrey: Because of the sandwich?

Bobbie: The bell peppers, I think. [laughs]

Audrey: Is there anything else that you would like to add?

Bobbie: I was just remembering on the way here that they had a Catholic, like a church experience or a Catholic experience and a protestant experience. I was always in the one on the wheels that you went to for the Presbyterians. I don't know what was the bible on wheels or something programmed that we got to do. They came to the schools and then you had release time. You could pick either catholic release time or Presbyterian release time or no release time and sit in the classroom.

Audrey: Would it be at the end of the day or in the beginning?

Bobbie: In the middle of the day. I think it was once a month.

Then, in the summer, I think the sixth grade, I used to read a lot. They had a bookmobile down at the end of the street so, I didn't have to go six miles in town to the library. I would go out there and I read 12 hours a day. I think my eyes started giving a little bad when I was in seventh grade because I read so much. But what you're supposed to do when you read is you're supposed to look up and look far away then, go back to reading. But I was just into my books for 12 hours a day.

Audrey: Sounds like a peaceful place to enjoy a book outside.

Bobbie: Yes. We had coyotes running around out there. One time, we built our little fort out of cardboard for the garden. But we would put our pillowcases in our sleeping bags as we were used to go on camping. We had built this little thing out of cardboard.

We're here and we didn't sleep at all because we hearing all these animal noises all over the. We actually had cougars out there, too. Didn't know that at the time. But coyotes and raccoons and all these kinds of stuff. Mom comes out about 12 o'clock and she says, "You girls, get in the house" me going, "Okay, I'm not going to fight you" and I'd go in the house. It was scary out there. Then with my sister, she was a year ahead of me. Because they had so many kids, she went to Yorba Junior High but they had two sessions, they had split sessions. One was in the morning and one was at night. She would have the afternoon session because it was so dark by the time it got six. Then, when the time changed, it was really dark and it was really scary out there with the coyotes. We got the dog we put it on a leash. We got a flashlight so we walked down the road. Then at the end, because we know sidewalks there was only culverts on both sides of the road for drainage ditches. We walked over by the eucalyptus trees and the orange then there was crosswalk no stop light, no lights, no anything. She would get off the bus and hope we were there [laughs]

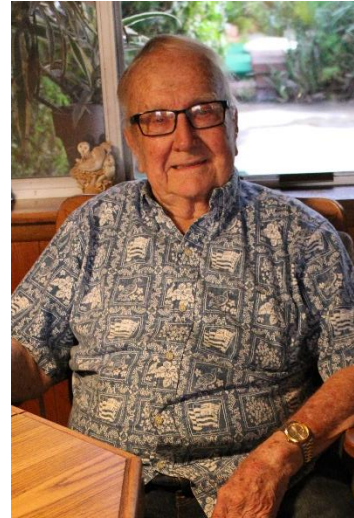
Audrey: Well, to wrap it up, if you had to pick a couple of words that best describe the school, or that you associate with your memories of the school, what would they be?

Bobbie: Family, community, and support. Because everybody grew up and it was a big family and you had everybody helping each other and supporting each other and the teachers were fantastic because they gave you all these learning tools and how to apply them. Seems a little different now.

Villa Park Elementary School Oral History Interview: Ed Berriman

Interviewer: Audrey von Ahrens

Date: November 3, 2017



Audrey von Ahrens: My name is Audrey von Ahrens and I am here performing an interview regarding the historic Villa Park Elementary School buildings with...

Ed Berriman: I am Ed Berriman, I was a principal of the Villa Park Elementary School from the year 1980 to 1983. In that year the school celebrated its 100th anniversary. I was also a student at that school from 1936 to 1944. I was the second bus driver, the second custodian when I was going to Fullerton Junior College. My dad had been custodian there since 1937 and retiring in 1953, he was there a total of 25 or 26 years. Okay?

Audrey: Great, thank you. What do you remember most about the school?

Ed: About the building and grounds? I remember the very picturesque school, very gorgeous school, had two large lawns, the one in front of the school which would be up in south of the school, was about a third of an acre and the one that was east of the building was about a quarter of an acre. There were three paths out to the street, one path went out to Center Street, one path went out to the corner of Center and Lincoln, the other path went out to Lincoln Street. These paths were all very nicely landscaped. It was an absolutely gorgeous setting, whoever did the landscaping just did an excellent job, that's all I can say about it.

[laughter]

It was beautiful.

The picture that I'm showing you now shows additions. The first additions that went onto the school, that would have been about 1951, just a couple of years before it unified with the Orange Unified School District. There was a flagpole, which is there. It was on the same location that it was when I went to school there, before this addition was put on. This addition, basically, is where the big lawn was that had been there. One of the

things I remember most about being a student there was the unique flag salute that we would have every morning.

My father would ring the bell after bringing the bus in and the people were walking or riding bikes to school would hear the ring and know that the school would be starting in about 15 minutes. The buses would come in 10 to 15 minutes before school actually began. About 15 minutes later the buzzer would ring which meant that we were ready for classes to begin. Everybody would line up in front of the columns that supported the building, turn and face the flag.

My father along with a seventh or eighth-grade student would hoist the flag and we would all salute the flag. We were lined up according-- It was always a first and second-grade class, a third and fourth-grade class, a fifth and sixth-grade class and the seventh and eighth-grade class. There would be this-- Actually, it was-- We would line up in front of our teacher but it would be a double line for each teacher, face the flag, salute the flag and that was the morning exercise except on a rainy day. There was a flag in the classroom. We would say the pledge to the flag in the classroom but only on rainy days.

That was a very unique thing and something I remember because I know one of your questions. What are some of your memories from in school and that was one very unique memory of the school.

Audrey: Building off of that, were there specific sounds, smells or emotions you feel when you think about your memories of being at school?

Ed: Well, of course, the spring, you could really smell orange blossoms. I mean because orange grow through all around everywhere. That was something that I can certainly remember. Most children don't get to smell orange blossom in the spring at their schools. As I said, the lining up for the flags, it was also something very unique.

Audrey: Can you walk us through a typical day at school?

Ed: Some of the things that were kind of different back then. I think this was true of every classroom as I remembered. There was a big sand table in the classrooms and we used to do things maybe make a little village and that's depending-- I remembered in the third and fourth grade, we're studying the missions we would make a little mission and we make little teepees and put that in the sand table. I just remember being at that sand table for various projects. Maybe not in the seventh and eighth grade. But I remember particularly in the primary grades that we used that, the sand tables quite a bit. I really enjoyed school. I guess that's why I went into education.

I got to know the teachers so well. Of course, it would be my father being custodian. I helped him a lot. Particularly after my aunt died and left him money and he bought the Lemon Grove. Later on, bought the Orange Grove. I said I was raised with the broom in one hand and a shovel in the other because I had-- Maybe I should say lawn mower in one hand because those huge lawns in front of and at the side of the school had to be

mowed every week. As I think about it, I don't know why he didn't just let the clippings of drop on the grass. Yes, I do know. My dad was a neat-nik.

[laughter]

They had you all go because that was the thing I hated about most of all. It was making you run around and having to stop at the gunnysack. And we hear that he had made a wooden thing to fit the gunnysacks over that would hold the basket that collected the clippings. And he could dump them more easily into the gunnysack because of this thing that the gunnysacks are fastened to.

I've mowed their lawns so many times I can't count them. The other thing I remember so much is there were pepper trees all around the school. The ones that are around the lawn-- A lot of the leaves and so on got picked up by the lawnmower. But those who were in the playground area had to be raked. If I had a penny for every pepper tree leaf, I raked I'd be a billionaire. [laughter]

Audrey: That's fascinating. It sounds like-- as a custodian back then, you had a responsibility for really the entire school property...

Ed: Yes, he was the only custodian and bus driver. Even without the ranches, he could certainly use the help and then with the ranches too, that he had to take care of. He needed a lot of help. I was a helper at both places. The nice thing was when I went to junior college that I got paid for my help because I was officially hired then as a second custodian and a second bus driver who worked my schedule at the junior college or around that before going up to the center, state to college.

That really helped a lot of college expenses there and everything too. Be able to have that time of working there at the school, it was about total of 28 hours a week when I was working there at the school. Luckily, I was a pretty good student.

Audrey: Working and studying.

Ed: Yes.

Audrey: What were some of your favorite classes or what was it like being in the buildings?

Ed: The classrooms were all combination classes, first-second, third-fourth, fifth-sixth, seven-eight. Class sizes were usually right around 18 to 22 students. Most of the time I was going there, the total of school population which usually between 70 and 80 students during those eight years. I remember the names of the teachers, I think I remember them all. My first-second grade teacher was Miss Wagner. As I recall, she was another name the year before I came to first grade, then she got married so she was quite young.

Miss Lambert was the third-fourth grade teacher also the principal. Everybody was afraid of Miss Lambert. [laughs] She didn't have the most pleasing disposition and she could be kind of on the cross side but she was a good teacher. Mrs. Rose Nor who was my fifth and sixth-grade teacher. She was my favorite teacher. She was a wonderful person and a wonderful teacher also and I really liked her except she was going to flunk me, not promote me onto sixth grade. I didn't know this until I came home from school one day, the last day of school and I put on an act until I was crying. The neighbor kids were with me and my mother who I remember was up on a stool at a cupboard she'd drop down fast. She said, "What? She changed her mind." and I looked, "What are you talking about?" "Well, we decided you were going to go ahead to sixth grade, maybe." and the labor kids were all looking. "Well, we decided that maybe it's your eyesight that is holding you back this year." I was taken to the doctor, I was terribly anemic and Mrs. Rose now felt so bad to hear about that because she had pernicious anemia. She could never get over hers. She was always having to take stuff. She said, "I should have recognized that he was anemic."

I went on to sixth grade and I blossomed. I was so slow to just run down and I just perked up when I graduate at my high school. I was class valedictorian. It was just one of those lucky things that she brought that up about holding me back. She said, "I think he's got what it takes but he sure is slow." Anyway, that worked out just fine. She was a wonderful person and a wonderful teacher.

Audrey: Great. Well, thank you for sharing that. In addition to everything you've already talked about, what else made the Villa Park Elementary School unique to you?

Ed: What did it mean to me? Having such a personal connection to me means a lot more to me and it would to most people, that's for sure. With my dad having worked there all those years and my working side by side with him and then working there on my own. The one thing I wish so much, my father often made the comment after I started to become a principal, "I wonder if you'd ever be principal of Villa Park." I was assigned to become principal at Villa Park in about January 1980. My father had passed away a month before.

I didn't become principal until that September but the assignment was made early that the next year I would be the principal of that school. I often thought, "Oh, if my dad had really known that, if it were to happen a month before he passed away, he had been so tickled." I was very happy to go back there. The superintendent they assigned me there, he knew nothing of my background. It was just a coincidence. In fact, I had heard about-- whether it was true or not, I don't know. But I heard his first assignment was going to be North Canyon school but then somebody said well that's not going to work out very well because his wife teaches there.

A friend of mine was assigned to that school and I don't know whether maybe he was going to go to Villa Park, my switch as a watch, but that's what I had heard that I did not go Noel because of my wife being there and then they made the switch and I was assigned to the Villa Park Elementary. True or not, it just worked out. I was so tickled particularly to be there in 1983, which was the year that we celebrated our 100th

anniversary of the school. The original building had been built there on those grounds and opened in 1983.

The Villa Park school, the old school was built in 1919 and addition was added about four years later in 1923 or 1924. The main building burned down. The addition was left which was the first and second-grade classroom. I couldn't believe that the building was rebuilt in one year's time. They had rebuilt the school, that kept the school going as I understand it during that time by using that one classroom, using the bus garages and some-- I think they have a stable or something at that time but they rushed it then for a year while the building was being built. It reopened then within a year. I felt so badly what happened to that old building.

The first year I was principal there, you could use the library building, we could even take children into it and there was a museum set up in that room, a Villa Park museum. A couple of the classrooms are being used by the district as offices, the recreation and PE offices, I believe it was being held there. That first year that I was there, the home and school league which is what they call the PTA. They were not officially a member of the National PTA. They called the home and school league, they could meet in that one wing that had been the first separate classroom.

The next year when I returned as principal, they had closed off the whole building. They said we don't want anybody going in that building because it's not quite safe and I've forgotten there's a slight earthquake, anyways. Some reason or other, all of a sudden, earthquake became a real big issue. Everything was closed off at home from school. They could no longer meet there. Kids could no longer go into that library. Everything was verboten.

The third year when I went there in the fall, I couldn't believe what they had done to that building. They had painted that old building just a couple of years before I came there. At that time, that paint was very popular. All of a sudden, now, lead in paint was supposedly bad news even though for years and years and years that building had lead paint on it. They decided that they had to get the lead paint off. Whoever they hired to do it just did a horrible job. They didn't just sand the paint off, it looked like it had been-- Like a bomb had gone off and shrapnel had just put holes. The building just had pockmarks all over it. It was the most hideous thing you'd ever want to see. Of course, that became an invitation to the kids to pick at it which is worse than anything. They weren't bothering it all before but now, it's interesting. Then they had to put a fence all around it. Here's this what had been a gorgeous building that looked like it had been hit with shrapnel all over and a chain link fence all around it. It was just the biggest eyesore you'd ever want to see.

On 1983, when we celebrated the 50th anniversary of the school, I was so glad that it was at night so that a lot of the people came back. In fact, I was so tickled to see Miss Bucey, who had been my seventh and eighth-grade teacher. She had even come, too. It was a massive turnout for that celebration that evening. I thought, "Well, at least they're not going to see that beautiful building looking as ugly as it does." I read somewhere in trying to prep for this meeting, that the original plan had been to-- After

they had messed it up like that, they were going to wrap it in some type of a plastic. They talked about all the rebuilding that they were going to do.

It never happened. There was never any plastic wrapping put around it. The rebuilding it because they were talking about strengthening the building so it would be earthquake-proof and do some other things and making use of the building, turning it into a library, computer rooms. Not to use it as classrooms but to use it as auxiliaries to the classroom. Would have been so wonderful if they had done that, it wouldn't have cost them all that much money. It would have been worth it, not just to save the beautiful architecture but just to have use of extra rooms. It would have been so good but it never happened.

In fact, just yesterday, I was out to look at the school to see what it looked like without that building being there. It was great. It was nothing but a horrible eyesore. The school, I would say, Villa Park is probably the nicest area in the whole Orange Unified School District but it's got the worst-looking school in the Orange Unified School District. It's better that they did having that building gone. But the buildings that have come in since are not very attractive. They have a lot of portable classrooms. It just is not an attractive building at all. It just doesn't fit the community, we'll say that, which is a shame.

Audrey: In comparison, thinking back on the earlier buildings, did you have a favorite part or a room of those buildings?

Ed: One of the things that's so unique and wonderful about that building was the third, fourth and fifth-grade classrooms were next to each other. The seventh, eighth class, the two classrooms were together. Then there was a hallway. That hallway led to the first and second-grade classroom. That was the building that was built a couple of years later. That was not burned by the fire. Then there's the seventh, eighth-grade classroom with the library in the back of it. That had all been burned by the fire.

When they rebuilt the building, my understanding is it was built just the same as the original, done within a year. One of the things that's neat was, they structured the wall between the classroom that it could go up into the ceiling. You could make an auditorium out of it by bringing the two classrooms together.

The third and fourth-grade classroom had a stage. For example, every year, there was a Christmas program. Various things would happen on the stage. Also, they would often have a little stage built over the side. They would have a little choir. Some of the better singers would be used to sing for the Christmas program while things are happening on the stage. It was used for graduation and other special activities that would happen every once in a while. It was neat, the way that you could make an auditorium out of that because of the wall going up into the ceiling. That was a neat characteristic about that building that I really liked.

Audrey: It sounds neat. How about special events? Any ones that you remember in particular?

Ed: As a kid growing up there, we really didn't have too much in the way of special events that I can recall. We did have a carnival every year for raising money. I think that was a very, very old tradition. I know when I was principal there that that was still happening. They'd have a carnival. I remember my first year, they had a dunking machine. Guess who had to be the one, the person that got dunked. [laughter]

Everybody threw the ball, hit this gong. The seat that you were sitting on goes down and you go into the water. [laughter]

I had to spend an hour on the dunking machine. Oh, did the kids love that. [laughs]

Audrey: I bet. [laughs]

Ed: The next year, I said, "Not again." [laughs] That one year, that was enough. Mostly, it was kids that were going on, dying to be dunked. Boy, did the kids enjoy seeing the new principal getting dunked. That was great. [laughs]

Audrey: That's fun. How about while you were there as a kid? Do you remember any other world news or town news or changes, major changes that took place in the area while you attended the school?

Ed: No. I would say during the eight years that I was there, things stayed pretty much the same. Now, of course, the latter years that I was there because I graduated '44, the war was going on. This meant that a lot of things had happened right after the war. That's when Villa Park started to really start to grow. The Orange Groves were being sold off and homes, they were going in. During the time I was a student there, the school remained almost static so far as size went.

It wasn't until after the war ended that they started spurt up and that's when they had to built some additional classrooms and they built a regular auditorium which also served as a library. They had a lot of books in there and they're all on movable carts. The carts could be pushed over the side and it left a lot of room to set chairs up and so on for-- It made an auditorium that was probably about twice as big as the old auditorium was and the old building where the roof went out. Probably about three times that size, I would guess.

Oh, that's one thing. I was a pretty good pianist. Starting about sixth grade, seventh grade, when they'd have a Home & School league meeting, a couple times I got asked to play the piano. When graduation came along they said, "We want you to play the piano at your eighth-grade graduation." I played Beethoven's Sonata Pathetique which is pretty darn rough. In fact, when I went to college and had a minor in music I relearned it and anyway somebody, when we're setting up for the anniversary, somebody remembered that I had played for the home and school league as a kid. Somebody else, darn them, remembered that I played at the eighth-grade graduation. I hadn't touched the piano in probably 15 years. I played quite a bit when I was teaching. Six years I was teaching, I've played for the kids. I love to teach music but after that, I didn't touch it. I never worked so hard in my life trying to relearn that Sonata

Pathetique and it went okay. I think I played it better. Just as good probably at the eighth-grade graduation. I played it quite well in college but I get through it okay.

In fact, I'll bet you, I haven't touched that piano since. I think I did that in 1983.
[laughter]

Audrey: Speaking of sounds, one of the things that is being preserved from the old school is the school bell. Do you have any memories about the school bell?

Ed: Yes. Like I said, my father rang it and you see, he would often, he'd see an eighth grader, you want to ring the school bell today? I still recall I rang it once. That's when I was in the seventh or eighth grade. He would often see. At first, everybody's anxious. He'd always be right there as the kid is ringing the bell but he was the official bell ringer but he knew that the kids like to ring it.

Audrey: I bet that was exciting for everyone.

Ed: You had to be fairly strong in order to do it.

Audrey: Heavy?

Ed: Yes.

Audrey: Great. Well, thank you for sharing that. What other photos do you have?

Ed: Let's see if we have some other things here. This was Ms. Lambert. The one that was the principal. This was me at that time. And this would be in third grade. I recognize some as being fourth-- a year older than I was. Okay, this would be Miss Bucey. She was a seventh grade and eighth-grade teacher and this is a seventh, eighth-grade class. You want to count the students here? It looks like quite a few at a class. A lot more student say that in this room.

Audrey: 24, it looks like.

Ed: Okay. It looks like there's only about 20 or so in that one. In school, school wasn't growing about. That's a lot more than I usually...here's my dad.

Audrey: What was your dad's name?

Ed: Cecil. Actually, William, but his middle name was-- he was from England-- Cecil was the way they pronounce it there. This is my dad on the bus.

This is a group in front of the old original school. That's the school that's when they built a new one in 1919. I don't know whether I have it or just saw it. I know I've seen one picture with the kids in front of the new school and you can see the old school off to the side. It got torn down then right after.

Audrey: Is there anything else you'd like to add about the schools?

Ed: I think I pretty well covered it

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Audrey: I think so too. Well, just to sum up the interview, if you had to pick three words or just a few words to describe the school or that you would associate with the historic school buildings, what would they be?

Ed: Villa Park school just couldn't be beat. I just loved it. I loved everything about it.