

KEN CLAYPOOL TRANSCRIPT

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Damian Macey Interviewer

Transcribed by Donna Duzan, September 2017

D: I am in the home of Ken and Nancy Claypool doing oral histories for the Friends of the Library Oral History Project. Ken's family has an interesting history in Marshall. I will now turn it over to Ken.

K: Thank you for coming, Damian, I have a list of questions that I will answer. I was born in Terre Haute, Indiana, September 27, 1951 and my parents were James and Virginia Claypool. And I have a sister, Connie, who is married to John McNary. I went to grade school here in Marshall, also graduated from high school here. I moved away for my job and school with my lovely wife, Nancy. I lived in two neighborhoods, I lived in the south part of town on Cherry Street, it was a modest home but it was a castle to me. And then my mom and dad built the home that we are in now, on north seventh street, we bought this house from my mom about fifteen years ago.

So I have lived in the south and the north part of town, they are both delightful but different. I went to South Grade School and I thoroughly enjoyed that, and made lots of friends. That was the school where the kids from the south part of town went as well as the country kids. And the north school was where the north Marshall kids went.

D: Ken, was the north school the old three story building still there?

K: Yes, I went to both, I started school in the old Ohio Oil Building, then 1,2,3,4 grades I was in the relatively new south school building and then fifth and sixth grades I was in the old south school building. And what I remember about transferring into the old building was the very very creaky floors and the high ceiling. It was very scary and intimidating to transfer into the old school.

D: Do you remember your teachers there?

K: I do, I had Mrs. Heck in fifth grade, and sixth grade I think was Mrs. Beals. That was in the old building, in the new building I had Elsie Jane Marrs for first or second, Myrtle Shade was my fourth grade teacher, Mrs. Simpson was my third grade teacher. And my kindergarten teacher was Alice Titus.

I can tell you a little bit about my childhood. My mom stayed at home to raise me. I bonded early, I sat at her table and she sewed and I watched her cook and she taught me reading and writing and I would color sitting beside her when she did things, we were pretty close. And I remember her walking me to school for several days all the way when I first started school. Then she would walk me half the way and I remember turning around and looking at her, she stayed right there until I got to the school. And then finally I walked all the way by myself. I remember that very well and then later I rode my bicycle, I loved that. My buddies and I always loved to ride our bikes. I have very fond memories of

my childhood.

D: Did you start out on a small bicycle and then graduate to a bigger one?

K: I started out with a smaller bike with training wheels then my dad took off the training wheels and later on I got the bigger bike. It was like freedom because I could get out. At first I remember my mom limited me to going just around the block, and she would watch me, then I ventured farther and farther out. Then eventually I could ride to the swimming pool and that was a huge deal.

D: Did you have some chores, things that had to be done around the house?

K: I can remember having to carry the trash out ... back in those days we burned the trash and I would carry the bags out and take the cans out...my dad had a sack in the garage where the cans were put and when that got full, we would take those to the dump. And I would help my dad shovel coal into the furnace in the winter time. I can remember coming home and hitting the sheets and they would be so cold, of course there was no thermostat, so I would help dad shovel coal into the furnace. And I would help dad with his two hunting dogs, feed and water them.

I started mowing yards when I was young, it was great. I was able to walk the mower up to my dad's insurance office on Sixth Street, one block south of the square, and I mowed my dad's grass and Johnny Hollenbeck's law office which took about five minutes and when I was done I would go to both offices and get paid a dollar. And then I mowed the Marshall House courtyard because it was right beside dad's office. And then when we moved up to this house I probably had up to twenty yards. It kept me busy and with the money I earned I bought comic books and fishing lures and I went to the swimming pool. And as I ride my bicycle around my neighborhood even now, I can tell you everything about those yards and which ones I mowed. And I made a lot of good friends like the older ladies that I mowed for. That was great because they would not only pay me for mowing but they would sometimes give me a 16 oz. bottle of Pepsi and a large candy bar. Mrs. Hornbrook was one of the nicest ones, down here on the corner.

D: Did the lawn mowing kind of pique your interest that you have today for gardening?

K: I still like mowing my yard and I remember the tips my dad gave me on mowing. He taught me to blow the grass off of the side walk after mowing and to this day, when we walk and see grass on sidewalks, I tell Nancy that those people just don't know how to mow. So, yes, that and my mom being from a farm probably piqued my interest in gardening. She grew up on a farm in Palestine, IL and had a garden and flowers, she was a farm-girl.

D: In those early years, did you have some hobbies?

K: When I was young, we used to play a lot of pick-up basketball in different yards. We played some baseball, football, we swam a lot. We fished and hunted with my dad. Hunting was my dad's sport. He didn't care that much about football or basketball but he loved to hunt quail and pheasant. I started hunting with him as a young boy and I would carry my BB gun, because I wasn't big enough to carry a shotgun. So what we would do...I will never forget this.. I would get tired and so he would set

me on a log in the woods and he would tell to sit there and not move. And I would sit there with my BB gun for what seemed like a long time and I would be about to panic because I thought he had forgotten me, and then I would see one of the dogs coming back and I knew not too far behind would be my dad. I was always relieved when I saw one of the dogs. And when I grew older, I would hunt with a real gun.

D: Did you continue mowing yards when you went into high school?

K: Yes, I didn't give up all my yards until I went to college. I started working at the Marshall swimming pool when I was in seventh grade.. I was a basket boy.. and then I was a life guard and then I was the manager of the pool. So as my pool duties increased, I had to let some of my yards go. And then when I went to college, I gave up all my yards and just worked at the swimming pool. The earning of money was powerful, to get actual cash in my hands for doing work was a great lesson. It had an impact on how I created my future because I will never forget the good feeling of earning money. And I was taught to save which I did. I had a bank account and I had a little spending money and my parents monitored what I spend my money on. I loved to buy comic books.

D: Did you save any of your comic books?

K: Oh, I wish I had, I had a great collection and I don't have any that were saved.

D: I don't either, but I wish I had. While going to school, was there a particular subject that you liked?

K: I liked Bill Wieck as a teacher, he taught American History, and he was a dynamic and very interesting teacher, he was like a preview of college. And he was a breath of fresh air. Cass McNary was an excellent teacher, she was tough, I took four years of Latin, she was another preview to college, quite the disciplinarian but she earned respect. I would never have thought of doing anything wrong in her class because I respected her so much. And Don McNary as a principal was great, I loved him. He commanded respect.

D: What year did you graduate from high school?

K: 1969

D: What path did you take after graduation?

K: I went to University of Illinois and graduated from there. I had it narrowed down to U of I, Eastern Illinois University and Southern Illinois University and I think what persuaded me to go to U of I was my sister, she was a senior when I was a freshman. I thought college was going to be intimidating and I thought going to where my sister was, I could use her for a crutch and she was a great help.

D: What did you major in?

K: I majored in Social Sciences, I had a teacher's certificate, I could teach grades 6-12, my major was History and minor was policies science.

D: Did you ever teach?

K: No, I was hired my Marathon. When I worked shift work at the Robinson refinery, I did a little bit of substitute teaching at Robinson High School. So I got hired by Marathon Pipeline Company and spend 35 years with them and then retired 3 1/2 years ago.

D: Any unusual experiences that happened in that 35 years?

K: I could write a book. I had a fairly diverse career. I started in Patoka, IL in operations. And I knew nothing about pipelines or the oil industry and so it was a big learning experience. I was in Patoka for five or six months and I was sent on a temporary assignment to Detroit MI, and then I was on a temporary assignment to Samaria, MI, and then to Baton Rouge and New Orleans, LA and they finally told me to sell my house in Patoka because I would not be going back there. That was not very reassuring. Then I went back to Samaria and I finally got tired of the nomad life, so I bid on a job in Robinson because it was getting back close to home. So I spent two years working at Marathon Pipeline Co inside the Robinson Refinery and then I was transferred to Findley Oh, that is where the headquarters are, and that is where I met Nancy.

Nancy was doing a summer internship program with Marathon in the Findley headquarters and we started dating, we played tennis, she beat me. Then I got transferred to Martinsville and she stayed in the Findley area, she was a student at Bowling Green University, and she finished school there. The rest of my career was spent in Martinsville. And then Nancy and I married in 1981, the summer after she graduated. So we have been happily married and living in Marshall ever since. I moved to Marshall in 1980 and she joined me in 1981 and we have been here ever since. It's a fabulous community, we sit out on our front porch and are just so thankful that we live here. And when we travel it is so good to come home to Marshall. And having Damian and Eleanor as neighbors in fabulous.

D: Thank you. You mentioned that your dad had hunting dogs, I think you had a pet for a while.

K: We did. Our dog was Beauty and she was a family pet. And Damian and Eleanor had Lucky and they looked like they were twins. Lucky was a little big taller. And one of the hardest things we ever had to do was tell our boys that Beauty had died. We couldn't tell Ethan because he was a Marine serving in Iraq so we had to wait for him to contact us. Those conversations was extremely difficult and many tears were shed. And we buried her in the corner of our yard back here and that is where she remains.

D: People who don't have pets just don't realize that they are just part of the family.

K: Especially when they grow up and play with your kids.

D: During the time that you have worked has there been a time or event that really impacted your life?

K: I can't think of a worldly event, a personal event is that I was able to witness a miracle and that was

the birth of our son Tyler. I was able to be in the delivery room and witness his birth. And that had a profound impact on me. I could not witness the birth of the twins because Nancy had a Caesarian section with them.

D: With all the modern conveniences that we have, is there anything in particular that is a convenience that you would say you just couldn't live without?

K: Indoor plumbing, without a doubt !! I have never had to use an outhouse regularly and I just really appreciate indoor plumbing. Running water, going to the sink to get a drink of water whenever I want to is greatly appreciated because there are many countries in the world where that isn't possible.

D: With the experiences that you had with Marathon, and you know we hear all kinds of stories about the danger of pipelines, what are your feelings about this Exxon pipeline that they are proposing from Canada to the Midwest?

K: I don't have any feeling either way. I know the upsides and the downsides of that project and there are a lot of politics involved. It can be a boom to the economy, there are construction dollars there to be had, there are a lot of tax incentives to be had, it does raise a certain amount of danger to the environment, that oil is more corrosive than other oils, and any pipeline is subject to breaking and releasing its contents. I had been involved in many oil spills and it's a very sad situation to see the environment contaminated. I will say that my company was extremely responsible and went beyond government standards to clean up. When we had a release we would have presence at that site until the government oversees that and releases us from that site. If there is no visible oil at the site to clean up we would have underground monitoring wells to make sure that there is nothing there. I've seen Marathon do some remarkable clean-up jobs. It was enjoyable to work for a responsible company, it was heartbreaking to come to a spill that did environmental damage. I was usually one of the first people on a spill site.

D: And I suppose that the average citizen has no idea what is required to clean that sort of thing up.

K: No, not unless it's the landowner on who's property the happened. Unless you work through one you will never understand what resources it takes to clean a release. It's an emergency situation because you have drinking water involved, you have nature and wildlife involved, vegetation at risk. The chemicals involved are very volatile and it can be a very unhealthy situation.

D: Did you feel some danger in any of those situations?

K: Yes, there was danger, anytime you are in that area there are possibilities of danger. Now the first responders had more danger than I had. They are the ones who bring in the boom to collect the oil and sucking it up and cleaning it up. I didn't have one of the dangerous jobs but I had a healthy respect for the situation. We had such extensive training and Marathon took it very seriously.

D: Well, Ken, it's been really enjoyable talking to you. If you were in a foreign country and you were talking to someone about Illinois or Marshall, what would you tell a person about why Marshall is a good place to live?

K: I have been in other countries and I have talked about Marshall. I will just site one example, this is one of the more interesting conversations that I had. I think it's very interesting to talk about your town and to hear others talk about their towns. We took a trip to Europe about a year and a half ago and one of the couples on the trip was from Hong Kong, which is a very populous city. We had dinner together one night and he was telling me about how many millions of people lived in such a small area. It was vertical housing, pollution, noise, and I just could not imagine living there. And so he asked me where we lived and I said I live in Marshall, Illinois, a town of about 4000 people. And he said he couldn't imagine living in a town that small and I told him I thought it was very delightful. And he asked what it was like to live in that small town. And I told him we could sit on our front porch and on a Sunday morning we might only see one car drive by. And he about fell out of his chair laughing. The funny thing is, neither one of just would trade places with the other. And I thank God that he placed Nancy and I and our kids here in Marshall.

D: Well thank you Ken for talking with me today. In later years I think these oral histories will be read and reviewed and enjoyed by many people.