

## K-12 Years

Interviewer: Lara Anderson (granddaughter), 3/11/24

Lara

What were your favorite subjects through those years? Did they change through the years?

John C. Elsey

Well, I guess math. I always kind of like— I like to read. So anyway, when I could read on my own. I remember going to library and the librarian. . . we had an hour there in elementary, so I was Sixth Grade. And, the librarian would be reading from a book and I was wishing she would hurry up and finish so I could read my own book.

Lara

Do you remember having a favorite book in elementary school?

John C. Elsey

I don't remember any particularly.

Lara

In later years, do you remember any books that stood out to you?

John C. Elsey

Interesting question. That's a hard one. Yeah. I can't really think of any favorites. I remember. I read the Book of Mormon early and, maybe this was after school, but I wanted to— I read the Bible, and I wanted to read the Old Testament all the way through, but I only got about halfway through before my mission. But I'd read all the Doctrine and Covenants and all the scripture. So, you know, they should be my favorites. Even though they may not have been the most fascinating to read.

Lara

Thinking back to just elementary school. Were there any memorable events that took place?

John C. Elsey

Well, I was thinking about this, and I don't remember going to Kindergarten. And we were living in Brigham City at the time I was born, and I think I started the first grade in Brigham City. I don't remember a whole lot, except when we were learning how to read, the teacher wrote red, r-e-d, and I thought, "Well that's reading?" So it's just to see RED. That's what reading is. So, Uh, it was just kind of a start. I remember singing a hymn in church with my dad, and I would read the first line and go to the second line, and dad would say, "No, you skip down to the next stanza in the next part of the music." So I remember that.

We moved to Salt Lake in 1942, when the war was on. We moved to an area of Salt Lake that had just recently grown and the schools had not been built, so I went to second grade in our church building. So, that was kind of interesting. It was an old, wooden building on the corner of 21st east and 21st south, and I had second grade there, and then later I was bussed to other schools in Salt Lake for third, fourth, fifth and sixth grade.

Lara

About what size were your classes?

John C. Elsey

I don't remember. Typically, I suppose, 30 or so..

Lara

Even in the church building?

John C. Elsey

Uh, I think so. I don't remember too much about that except we used to go there on Saturdays as well and watch cowboy movies.

Lara

Anything memorable experiences or defining moments in Junior High?

John C. Elsey

Well, I walked— Irving was not too far away, Irving Junior High where I went to school. There's Sugar House. I would walk there. Sometimes my dad on his way to work would drop us off on 13th South, and we would just walk a block to school, but I'd walk home and we'd walk by the old Utah Prison— State prison, which was built in the 1800s and had stone walls and turrets and the garner. It was an interesting place to walk by.

Lara

Did you ever see anyone inside?

John C. Elsey

Well, they had a farm just east of the building. And there were people that were trustees that would work out of the fields in the farm and just a barbed wire fence around the farm, so it was easy for people to leave. I remember, a lot of prisoners would escape. And, 21st east was a— 21st south— was like the main highway going up through Parley's Canyon, and I remember in Life Magazine there was a sign which somebody posted and it said, "Drive carefully. Prisoners escaping."

Lara

So you felt safe walking to school?

John C. Elsey

I did. The prisoners were never a threat or a problem there.

Lara

What about high school? Any memorable events or defining moments?

John C. Elsey

Well, you have on your notes the Bunyan Derby. Uh, it's kind of got to be a family joke, maybe more among the older family members, but, people—the kids—would always accuse me of being a bookworm, always had my nose in a book, and I didn't do anything but that, but I said, "No! I won the Bunyan Derby!" And they said, "What's the Bunyan Derby?" And, that was, kind of memorable I suppose because of the way it's been treated in the family. But in PE, If you wanted an "A" you had to participate in the Bunyan Derby, which was a track event held after school and anybody who wanted—they ran a half-mile and a mile race around the track there. Anybody who wanted an "A" had to participate in the Bunyan Derby, so, I said I would. And the first year, I felt the longer race was a better one, so I kind of

trained and ran the mile and kept doing that during our PE time.

But when I ran the race as a sophomore, I just finished in the middle of the pack, and I thought, "The heck with that. Next year I'm just going to go plod along for half a mile, instead of a mile. And then just go participate—play softball or whatever else we were doing—which was fun. So when we started the race, most guys were just there in their gym shoes and stuff. One guy was there with track shoes on with spikes in his shoes and he was all decked out, and he was out to win. So we started, and I completed the first lap—it was a two-lap race and about halfway around the second, I noticed I was passing guys, and this guy with the track shoes, he wasn't too far ahead, so I said, "I'm going to try what I can do." So I put on whatever speed I could get, and actually passed him and won the race. So, the track coach was there. Our time was—I don't know what our time was— but he did not ask me to join.

Lara

Were there any other times in high school that you remember? That stand out to you? Or were you in the books?

John C. Elsey

Um, well, there's all the high school stuff. I don't remember anything special.

I didn't go my senior year because they offered the Ford Scholarship for High School students to leave their Senior year and go to the University of Utah. And so, I did not really officially graduate from High School. So I did not go my Senior year. I went to the University of Utah and started there as a Freshman..

Lara

So did you just do two years of high school? Or did you start high school as a ninth grader?

John C. Elsey

I had just two years. Junior High was seventh, eighth, and ninth. And High School was, for me, just two years.

Lara

Did you have any standout teachers in your memories from any of the grades? For good or for bad?

John C. Elsey

Not really. Yeah, they were all just. . . Oh, I remember one who was really bad. He taught algebra. And—Perch. And we would go to class, they'd make assignments, and we'd do the homework, turn it in. Never got it back. Never got it graded—the homework. And he never gave a test. And my report card came out. We had three report periods during the semester. And I got to "C". And my mother saw that, and I said, "I don't know how he graded because I never took a test, I never got any homework back. I don't know what he graded that on. She went down to the school to talk to Mr. Perch—he was an older guy. So, after that, he started paying attention to me. And the next semester—the next report period, I got an "A", and he had changed "C" from the previous period to a "B." Then the third period, I got an "A" as well, and he changed the "B" to an "A". So I had straight A's in algebra because he was paying attention. I just had one "C" all my High School years and that was the first report card in Typing. And, my mother went down to talk to the typing teacher as well. Good ole mom. I don't know what she said, but the teacher did not change my grade because it was pretty obvious how well you type, how fast and how many mistakes, but I improved and got B's and A's after that.

Lara

Were your parents pretty involved in your schooling?

John C. Elsey

We didn't really spend. . . Well. . . Yeah, we had a blackboard in our kitchen. And my dad—we would often do problems on the blackboard. My dad would be there as well. I don't remember a whole lot except they were concerned, like I said, my mother went down to talk. . . Yeah, they were good. I mean, mom was not angry. She just wanted to talk to the teachers to see what was going on.

Lara

Because you and Ken are only a couple years apart, did you guys ever mix in school together?

John C. Elsey

Not really. Not really. Yeah, he was kind of a renegade in High School. He cut a lot of classes and got into some trouble. I don't remember cutting any classes. And the friends he ran with, I did not.

Lara

What were your hobbies during Elementary School time?

John C. Elsey

I always enjoyed PE, reading. I remember In elementary school, we had snowball fights. Which I understand you can't throw any snowballs at school up here. But they were pretty organized. They had two sides. We were kept, I don't know, 50 feet apart, and we would just lob snowballs at each other. Nobody was chasing around and tackling somebody, nobody washing their face in the snow or anything like that. No, they weren't throwing snowballs at a short distance. We were just out there, lobbing snowballs back and forth

Lara

Were there other recess activities that you enjoyed doing?

John C. Elsey

I guess, yeah, when I was in High School, I always liked to shoot. We hunted a lot, and I became a member of the Salt Lake Small Arms Club. And there was a shooting range under the basement of South High School, where I went to school, and so I would shoot down there, I think, every Friday night they had the range and they would shoot. I bought a target rifle, Winchester 52, built a box to carry it in, and I would take that and go shoot. I got shooting coats and participated in a few shooting matches, but I was never really very good. Got some patches.

Lara

Any other hobbies?

John C. Elsey

Not really. I liked to play basketball—played basketball with the church team.

Lara

Did your school have a team?

John C. Elsey

The school did, but I did not participate in any school sports. I always had to take the bus to school, and if I stayed after for school sports, I did not have a way home. South High School was about three or four

miles away from our house. So I did not really stay.

Lara

Did you have any high school dances? Or any dating social life?

John C. Elsey

Not really, I didn't do much. I remember my first date, though. We ate dinner in the cafeteria, and at the table there were seats that were connected to one place, but they swiveled away. So two people sat in the seats and swiveled but they were separate. There was a girl that sat in one, and I sat in another, and my mother always wanted me to go to the Prom. So I asked this girl if she'd go to the Prom, "You wanna go to the Prom?" "Okay." So that was it. But I wasn't driving at the time, so my parents had to drive us to the Prom. I was only—I was not 16. That's a no-no these days.

Lara

Do you remember anything about the actual Prom?

John C. Elsey

Not that well. Just that I was nervous and wished it was over. Nice girl though. I think I dated her later. She was a nice girl. Carolyn Carr.

Lara

Who were your close friends in Elementary School?

John C. Elsey

I don't remember too many from Elementary School. Mason Stout became a good friend in Junior High. We took Latin class together. My mother wanted me to take that. She knew the Latin teacher. Mrs. Law, I think it was. And anyway, I took one year, and Mason was in that, and he got rheumatic fever or something. I remember taking homework over to his house after school. Then working with him on a project.

Lara

Did he remain your friend through high school?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, he was a lifelong friend.

Lara

Any other close friends during your school years?

John C. Elsey

Richard Sager was one. He lived in the ward just a few blocks down. He and I palled around. I think he ran for an office in Junior High. I think I was his campaign manager. I didn't do a whole lot.

Lara

Is there anything else you want to add about those years?

John C. Elsey

I don't know. I guess. . . I got good grades. I got A's all the way through High School. But I was not a good

student. I was out just to get a good grade because I wanted to go to college, and I wanted scholarships and stuff, but I was just out to get the grade instead of learning, so I wish I had been a little more interested in learning for learning sakes, instead of just after the grade.

Lara

But did that develop in later years? Because you went on to get a PhD, so did you feel that way the whole way through your doctorate?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, until I got to Digital Logic as a Senior at the University of Utah. Then I fell in love with that stuff, and it was fun. I enjoyed that a lot.

One of the things that we did do a lot during the High School years was shooting. I'd go hunting with my dad. For some reason we never went with Ken. I don't know why, but it was mostly my dad and me, and we would hunt ducks, pheasants, doves. And with the Lucas' we would hunt deer. That was always an adventure. But, we had a very small home, initially, in Salt Lake, and dad added two rooms on the back—essentially about 50 percent increase in the square footage for the house, including the full basement. We had a full basement under the house. And so, uh, we liked to shoot and so, essentially, dad planned a shooting range.

We had a 50 foot, 22 range in the basement of our house. We had to put about 20 feet of concrete pipe under the back lawn to build a little box where the targets would be. It had a metal lid on it. It was very secure. We had heavy plates that would deflect the bullets into the sand pile. You had to stand back at one end of the basement and shoot down across the other, but you had to hit the pipe, which was 24 inches in diameter, which wasn't really hard to do. There was a window that was above, and I often thought, "What if you shot up that window?" Now, it probably would be illegal in Salt Lake to discharge a firearm in the city limits. A bunch of the shooting ranges, like there was at South, maybe you get a permit, I don't know. Anyway, we used to shoot down there.

And Dad had a—He was a model railroader and he built a lot of stuff—had a lathe and a lot of tools in the basement. I remember I built a couple of guns that would actually work. 42. I was going to build a little Derringer, made it so it could fit in the palm of your hand. I made it with a wood thing, but he had a lathe, so I would drill the barrel and a chunk of metal, drill a barrel out and worked out the trigger mechanism. And the little Derringer, every time I fired it, it broke. The wood cracked. So I built another one, one that was much bigger, sturdier—the bolt action pistol. It worked well, but It was a big clunky gun.

Lara

What happened to your guns?

John C. Elsey

I don't know. I don't know where they are. We did a lot of stuff in the basement—building a lot of things.

I did pretty well in Shop in High School and in Junior High. The shop instructor in one case, he asked me to—he came across a little interesting motor, a little gadget to show motor effects and so he asked me to build it, I think. Anyway, I built it, and we entered it in the competition with the Ford—I think it was the Ford Motor Company competition.

And, we entered that, and I think I got some kind of honorable mention or something. So that was kind of interesting.