

Early Jobs

Interviewer: Jessica Robinson (granddaughter), 4/3/24

Jessica

Okay, here's one, um, what jobs do you remember from when you were, my dad wrote down, did you work in a steel mill?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, in a way. Well, it was a summer job. The first job I was in was newspaper care... I had a newspaper route in the early morning.

Jessica

I know my boys were fascinated by that when you told them that they were like how was that like in the movies like when people threw newspapers on the doorstep

John C. Elsey

Well, that's what we did, yeah, we put newspapers on the doorstep, and I threw them, if I could, just get them on the porch, put a couple on the roof for one house, but it was a...

Jessica

Did you get fired?

John C. Elsey

No, because it was a low hanging on the roof and I can pull myself up on the roof and get the paper and put it back on the front.

Jessica

How early did you have to wake up to do that?

John C. Elsey

Well, the papers came at five in the morning, and they were supposed to be delivered by six -thirty. So I was up by four -thirty or so.

Jessica

Oh my gosh.

John C. Elsey

They were going to get the paper. All, yeah, 365 days a year, Christmas, Thanksgiving, Sunday, Saturday.

Jessica

How big were the Sunday papers. Were they bigger?

John C. Elsey

Yeah a lot, a lot bigger. I'm trying to think how many I had on my route, and I can't remember but I think it was over a 100 that I would deliver. I think it was.

Jessica

How much did you get paid?

John C. Elsey

I think we ended up with like \$40 or \$50 a month.

Jessica

Was that a lot?

John C. Elsey

Um, yeah.

Jessica

Like was it was it a coveted job to be a newspaper boy back then because you got paid a decent amount of money?

John C. Elsey

Well, Ken had a route, too. I had mine three and a half years. He only had his a couple years, I think. My mother said there was one job I didn't want my boys to have, and that was to be a newspaper carrier deliverer, but we both did.

It was okay. The summertime was pleasant. Wintertime, when the snow was...

Jessica

Did you still ride your bike in the snow?

John C. Elsey

uh when i could yeah but sometimes you couldn't with the snow so i had to walk and i had to go almost a mile to get to my papers where they dropped them off. They dropped them off in front of a drug store and we would just go pick them up and deliver them from there.

Jessica

That sounds terrible.

John C. Elsey

I worked a couple years as an assistant furnace installer for a guy in our Ward and then I got a job at Chicago Bridge and Iron in the summertime.

Jessica

And was that the steel mill?

John C. Elsey

Yeah, it was the steel.

They fabricated these water tanks. Well, a lot of things. They fabricated big sheets of steel. So they had a big overhead crane that would carry these sheets of steel that were maybe ten feet by thirty feet, an inch thick, really heavy.

I remember one time, we had a bunch of college kids that hired for the summer, and this number one kid was working with, they called them riggers, which would handle the cables and whatnot to hook to the...

I worked for a little bit of that, and one guy didn't get his thumb out from under before they lowered the plate. I remember looking over and hearing him screaming, "Take it up, take it up, take it up".

Jessica
Oh no.

John C. Elsey
He lowered the steel plate on his hand.

Jessica
Oh, was that because you went from high school to college, right? Like, I mean, when did, did you graduate early?

John C. Elsey
I didn't go my senior year.

Jessica
You didn't go your senior year. And so did you work like while you were in college or were you just the TA? Does that make sense?

John C. Elsey
Actually, I think I had my paper route for the first year or so college, and then I had another job working in a lab at the university. In the summertime I'd get other jobs.

Jessica
That's hard. That was probably nice just working at the university and not having to do outside stuff, right?

John C. Elsey
That was better than throwing papers in the winter time!

Jessica
Oh man! Well hats off to you for doing the newspaper because I could... I'm curious- is that why you're so dedicated to still getting the newspaper? it holds a special place in your heart?

John C. Elsey
Why is the newspaper does?

Jessica
Yes.

John C. Elsey
I think it was just old fashioned, so we always, everybody had a newspaper in those days, some had two newspapers with Salt Lake Tribune, Deseret News. And some people would take both, but most people took a newspaper.

Right, anyone in your family? Yeah. That was how we got news.

Jessica
Oh, we used to. We used to for a long time too, because then we, I mean, we liked looking at the comic strips when we were little. And we stayed up today on the current news, the comic strips, so, you know, it was very important.

Jessica

Okay, now I'm going on serious stuff. Are you ready? Not newspaper routes.