

Early Years

Interviewer: Kate Foutz (granddaughter), 3/22/24

Kate

Alright Grandpa, we're going all the way back to the beginning.

John C. Elsey

Okay.

Kate

What is your earliest memory?

John C. Elsey

That's a good question. And somehow in my mind, I have a picture of me standing with my father when my mother is in bed with kind of a soft glow around her. And I think that was when my brother was born.

And I think, I did not remember seeing him, but I think that's when he was born. I was about two and a half, I guess.

Kate

Oh, wow. That is a good one. Thank you. So what were some of did you live in the same place all your childhood like, what like birth to eight? This is kind of what we're, what we're, what we're going with here.

John C. Elsey

Okay. I was born in Salt Lake City, but we were, my parents were living in Brigham City at the time. And my mother had a family doctor, what was his name? Who'd been in the family and delivered lots of the children.

So she came to Salt Lake to have the babies. So we were, I was born in the LDS hospital with my, some relative as the attending doctor, he was an older man. And we were born there, but we lived in Brigham City until I was seven.

And then it was 1942 when the Second World War was on and we moved to Salt Lake. My dad had a job in the Salt Lake Small Arms plant. And we lived in Salt Lake at 2296 Wellington Street for, until I left on my mission.

My parents lived there until they died.

Kate

Oh wow, what were some of your favorite things about your childhood home?

John C. Elsey

about my childhood home. I can't remember much about the Brigham City home, except it had a coal furnace apparently. And apparently you had to feed it, shovel coal into it, except we got called a stoker, which was a device where you could dump a bunch of coal into a hopper and it had a screw -like thing that fed it into the furnace.

So I guess you didn't have to shovel it. I often wondered, did my dad go down and shovel coal in that furnace every morning to heat it? I remember getting the stoker and watching him install it so that it would feed the coal in automatically.

But it had a big hopper, two or three feet square that you could load with coal.

Kate

Did it have that like the whole time they were living here did they ever up live in there did they update it was like

John C. Elsey

putting that stoker in.

Kate

the stoker yeah but like did they ever get like heat like i went when did when did your parents pass away when when did that house go to someone new

John C. Elsey

Well, in 1942 is when we left that house in Brigham City.

Kate

Okay, all right, so probably not. They probably didn't get any sort of updates to new things. Not in that house. Not in that house. My dad gave us a prompt about rubber band guns.

John C. Elsey

Yeah, that was a big activity I remember. We had rubber gun fights, kids in the neighborhood. There was the Smith home, Donna Smith, who became the wife of Elder Boyd K. Packer. He was from Brigham City.

And so we would go over there and play rubber guns. It was a house on Main Street, but it had some barns. And I can't remember. I was only seven when we left there. So I can't remember a whole lot, but we would play rubber guns.

We made our guns from wood and with a clothes pin that would hold the rubber, cut the rubbers from inner tubes, rubber inner tubes, and they would expand, and then you could shoot them. And we would play that a lot.

The old saying was, if you shoot in the head, you're dead. So you could look and put your head up, but if anybody hit you in the head, that was the rule. Shoot in the head and then you're dead. I remember, luckily, we would watch people and then try and hit them with our rubber guns.

I was really young, and I was one of the youngest kids there. Lee White was one who remembered playing rubber guns at the Smiths. He became the bishop of our ward in California. We lived down the street from him, so we compared notes.

But I don't remember him. I don't think he remembered me. He was three or four years older. But that's one of the early memories of Brigham City.

Kate

Did anyone ever get hurt? Shot in the eye.

John C. Elsey

I don't remember that anyone did.

Kate

So no scarring memories at least, right? What were some of the other games you liked to play when you were younger? Do you remember any that you would get up to when you were playing with friends?

John C. Elsey

In Brigham City, I don't really remember much. In Salt Lake, I was seven when we moved there. Then we had all kinds of activities, from seven to 12 or so. We'd play football in the front lawn and baseball.

We had four houses in a row there that were the same. And one of the balls, we'd play baseball and hit the ball. We'd go in the neighbor's yard to the north of us. And they got upset. So they put a fence up along the driveway between the houses.

And that worked well because it was a backstop for us. The balls were going too far. We played football in the front lawn, baseball in the... There were only four homes there initially, so a lot of it had spaces around in the Salt Lake area.

The Salt Lake Country Club golf course was just to the south of us in the ninth fairway. We were at the tail end of that course, but had big lawns. And so we'd go over and play football on the fairway.

And then you see the cop coming, the security person for the golf course. And they had a scooter that he would come with. We'd say, here comes Clough [sp?]. And we'd all run like crazy to get back across the...

It had a little barbed wire fence. It was the only thing that separated our street from the golf course. So we'd run like crazy and crawl under that fence and watch him putt down the [].

Kate

Did he ever, like, did you ever get, like, pursued? Did they ever come after you and tell you to stop or no?

John C. Elsey

Well, he was pursuing us, but he never caught us. I mean, we had seen him coming from afar, as I remember, and we had a head start. I never got very close to him.

Kate

So he probably didn't recognize you guys at all.

John C. Elsey

he felt, when we scattered, he probably felt he accomplished his job. There was a gully, there were some hills there, because Parley's Creek, which came out of the canyon, Parley's Canyon, ran through there.

There were some large hills that were probably maybe 50 or 75 feet high, and we would go sledding there in the winter time- they weren't playing golf- so all these kids in the neighborhood to go over these hills and slide down. That was a lot of fun.

Kate

Did you and Ken hang out with all the same people?

John C. Elsey

Not really. I don't think Ken and I were really that close. He had a set of friends and I had a different set for the most part.

Kate

I was just curious because, you know, it was you two, so I didn't know if you, like, hung out together a lot or if you kind of just did your own thing when you were young.

John C. Elsey

I think we did more of our own thing.

Kate

Yeah. Has it been that way most of your life or did you ever come together and get closer? You've just kind of been brothers?

John C. Elsey

I think we'd never really been close, even living at home. And then when I was 20, I got married while on a mission, and we were never really living in the same place from that time on. So we would visit back and forth over the years, but I don't think we were really that close.

Kate

Yeah. I get that. That sounds like me and Steve. We've been in the same places, but we're never really that we never really hung out, you know. Are there any other memories you want to add about when you were young?

John C. Elsey

at what age levels.

Kate

How do you what would you classify when you were like in your childhood when you were young would that be like under 18 under 12? I'm just curious what you would think like not a teenager below teenagers.

That what you would

John C. Elsey

I would think it's 12 and under.

Kate

12 and under.

John C. Elsey

Yeah.

Kate

Okay.

John C. Elsey

You're a young, well, you're an adolescent at 12 or so. Yeah. That's the term they use.

Kate

Do you have any other like memories from there that you'd want to add or do you feel satisfied? Well, it was under 12. Yeah, well like obviously you have a lot of memories but there are any significant ones that you that like are really strong in your life.

John C. Elsey

Well, we took trips, vacations with my parents, and I remember the first one we took I was really excited. I

don't remember how old I was though, but I was probably nine, ten maybe. And we went from Salt Lake down to Zions and spent a night in Zions, then spent a night in Bryce Canyon.

And that was, I remember that was a really, really fun trip.

Kate
Mm -hmm.

John C. Elsey
My dad and I, on that trip, climbed Angel's Landing. I don't think Ken did because he was younger. But I think dad and I climbed Angel's Landing then.

Kate
Did you go hiking with your dad a lot or was it like every now and then?

John C. Elsey
It was kind of now and again, but we did go, and I did hike with Dad, particularly when I got older, and then my teens, and I remember we climbed Mount Timpanogos when, I think Dad was 58 or so, and I was 18 or 19, something like that, and we climbed Mount Timpanogos.

We hiked, did some other hikes as well.

Kate
I think someone else is going to ask you more about your hiking and your hobbies, so I'll let them do that, but early childhood?

John C. Elsey
Okay.

Kate
Do you feel good on it? I want to give you an opportunity to add anything you want to, if there's something you want to pass on to all of your posterity.

John C. Elsey
I can't really remember anything else.

Kate
If you think of anything too, just we can add it later.

John C. Elsey
Well, we moved to Salt Lake. It was the second World War we was on, and we moved to the East Bench, which was somewhat new, all housing and whatnot. So there were not schools up there. And I remember I went to first grade, I think, in Brigham City, but second grade, I went to our church building.

And so it was a wooden building at 21st East and 21st South, which is no longer there. It's a service station now. But it was a wooden building. It was where we had church, where we went to church.

And I went to school there because there were no schools near by.

Kate

Were there a lot of kids that went to school with you there or was it small?

John C. Elsey

Oh, I think so. I don't remember how many classes there were or what grades they had in the school, but I just went to second grade there, and I think they had other grades. I don't remember much else, but after that I went to Whittier School, no Garfield School, and Whittier, which were aways away, and I always took the bus to go to those schools.

Kate

Love it.