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John Elliff Oral History Interview

Rachel Gattuso, Interviewer

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Rachel Gattuso (RG): Alright so it is July 13th 2017, I'm here with John Elliff. Go ahead and give your name and background.

John Elliff (JE): John Elliff, well I guess my background is I was born and raised in East St. Louis, Illinois move to Glen Carbon into the late 50s for just a short period of time, returned to East St. Louis. Married in 1960 and then returned to Glen Carbon and still there. In about late 61, middle to late 61.

RG: Ok. And you said that you had lived in East St. Louis and then you moved back here, then moved back to East St. Louis. Can you tell us a little bit about what it was like living in East St. Louis?

JE: East St. Louis was a nice town. I was younger of course at that point but ah, I was able to travel around East St. Louis usually on a bus or on bicycle. Felt very safe, went downtown by myself. I had a paper route in East St. Louis, I'd deliver the East St. Louis Journal for several years two or three years. On Friday nights I would collect my fee for the paper from the people I delivered to. And take the bus downtown and pay my bill. Always went to Hodge's Chili Parlor to have a bowl of chili when I was downtown. That's how I became a chili addict, I guess. Now I go to Wendy's

RG: [laughing] That's awesome. So what prompted your family to move to Glen Carbon?

JE: Well I think it was more my always mother. She always wanted something that was a little further out - out of the city. Where we lived lots were 50-foot-wide by 100-foot-deep, so houses were packed and pretty tight. And her desire, and remember I was young, so I'm, this is what I picked up later in life. her desire was to have a piece of land she could call her own where she could have a nice garden and kind of do what she wanted to, and an opportunity presented itself they moved up here, started to build a house, winter set in house wasn't ready. They were living in the basement of the house at the time and decided they'd moved back to East St. Louis. so they did that and I guess returned for a couple of years and commuted back and forth to finish building the house to where it was a livable enterprise and then returned and lived here permanently. Now when they moved here, they bought land and when my wife Dolores and I got married they gave us land as a wedding present so we in turn then built a house.

RG: Very nice. And when your parents live there, there wasn't very much like race riots going on during the time they were there?

JE: No, the race riots in East St. Louis occurred in 1917? And that's when my father was born so he was just a baby at the time when that occurred.

RG: What about the race riots in the 1960s late 1950s, early 1960s... [John speaks over]

JE: No, I don't remember any of that. I never recalled that occurring again, I always felt safe in East St. Louis. Never a problem to be concerned about anything so I just I can't speak to that because I don't know. And in the 60s, we were living here.

RG: Yeah

JE: So East St. Louis became kind of history at that point to us.

RG: Okay. And what about segregation was there a lot of segregation in East St. Louis?

JE: There was. I probably personally noticed it more when I was in the military. Because when I was in a platoon, we had one black fella just one. And I thought that was kind of odd, but in East St. Louis there were no black families living anywhere near where I lived. There were some in other parts of town, but at this point I can't recall exactly where that was.

RG: Okay. so you moved here in the 1960s and you started working in Glen Carbon / Madison County, Edwardsville area you said that you worked as an IT specialist for SIUE, Southern Illinois University Edwardsville?

JE: Well I wouldn't use quite that term. I worked for SIU for about five years in total. I worked in, at that time it was called the Data Processing Department because it was before computers had hit the scene. And the part I worked in was the keeping of the records. In those days everything was done on the punch card. And so a punch card represented a student and that's how we tracked students and kept track...of ah... they had a book rental system, we kept track of their books and what they rented. We kept track of them, we did some of the financial work at that time using the tabulating equipment, did the financial reports. And then I stayed there long enough for the first computer to be delivered I still remember it was an IBM-1401, one of the first ones on the market. We had to learn how to program that it was when Cobalt came into being. And so I learned how to program Cobalt and became of a computer programmer at that point then anything. So I didn't run the department at that point, I was one of the workers in the department

RG: And what was like, what was the actual campus like?

JE: Well, when I went out there, there were no permanent buildings. The college had purchased the land that makes up the college now which is I recall about 2600 Acres. And I do recall it was 54 or 55 homes, homesteads. So the buildings, the homes on the property became offices. And so when I first went to work there we actually set up shop with our Data Processing Department in the basement of a house that the college had purchased in order to acquire the land. Then we later moved and again I don't recall when and I tried to find that out by looking at some of my old records they're just not there anymore. We moved into the communications building which was one of the first buildings built on the main campus. And I worked there until I left.

RG: Now you said that at SIUE they had the Mississippi River Festival, which I was quite surprised and did some research on it. It was a very big festival and a lot of big names.

JE: It was a big operation. It was big-name people and ran for about what 12 to 15 years. And we went out there a couple times to see some of the big names, but I don't even remember who we went to see. But

the place was always packed, lots of traffic flowing in and out of St. Louis up to the university in order to go to the Mississippi River Festival.

RG: What was the purpose of the Mississippi River Festival?

JE: You know I don't know. I don't know what caused it to be initiated. It was certainly very popular people loved it I think then all the sudden it disappeared whether it was a cost. I just, I don't know the details of why it was no longer feasible for them to do.

RG: And your, um, you said that you had a general location as to where it was before? Like where they actually conducted the River Festival. Can you kind of describe that?

JE: Well it was, let me get my bearings, it was probably on the North-West side of what is the campus. And it was on a piece of property that had a slope to it so it made kind of a natural bowl where the entertainer was down in the bottom. They had a lot of chairs set up where people could actually sit in chairs. I think there was some kind of roof over top of that, but then most people would just throw blankets and sit on the hill as it rose up. Because you know the sound would just travel right up the hill so lots and lots of people could attend.

RG: So your son actually attended the Mississippi River Festival?

JE: That doesn't surprise me [laughter]

RG: and he informed me that they named people that actually went to the Mississippi River Festival were as big as Guns N Roses, Rolling Stones.

JE: That's probably true, yeah, yeah.

RG: Cindy Lauper. Some big names like that

JE: See those weren't people that appealed to me but if you got somebody else like a comedian like Bob Hope or something I would have went.

RG: Yeah [laughing] so then after SIUE you started, uh, where did you retire at?

JE: Well I left SIU and went to St. Louis Community College and I worked over there for 24 years.

RG: And what did you do there?

JE: I did Information Technology again. And I became the director of the department. There were two different kinds of computer operations there. One was the bookkeeping, record keeping that was the one I was involved in. And then there was the teaching of it which at that time was kind of few and far between and wasn't the big deal there it is today. Where almost everyone has to learn something about it but I wasn't involved in supporting the equipment that was used for teaching, but I was not involved directly and the teaching itself. Then I left there after 24 years and went to work for the State University of New York. We refer to that as the SUNY system. The SUNY consist of sixty-five campuses around the state of New York. I worked at one of the smaller campuses. It was a two-year school and, that's kind of my background in St. Louis, was two year. And I did the same thing there, I ran the department. Picked up some additional responsibilities there that went beyond the computer center. And then I left there after six

years and went to Maryland. And worked there one year, that was by choice. And decided it was time to retire.

RG: And when you retired you came back to Glen Carbon?

JE: Came back to Glen Carbon. While I was working in New York and while I was working in Maryland I commuted back and forth. Dolores lived here, and about every other weekend I would fly home, pay the bills, cut the grass, and whatever else needed to be done. And then fly back.

RG: Wow. Now when you had spoken about Kiwanis, did you start that after you retired or before you retired?

JE: Well that was before. I belong to the Kiwanis many many years ago.

RG: Could you tell me a little bit about who Kiwanis are?

JE: Well it's a civic organization that tries to do good for the community. They have fundraisers and then they try to use the funds that they raise to help the community in one way or another. The Kiwanis that I was in was the Glen Carbon branch. There were about 30-35 members. I was probably one of the youngest, if not the youngest member. I kind of felt out of place at time because everybody else was older than me. We did a lot of work, you know, we'd stand in the street corner and raised money like they still do today. One of the things that we did is, as I have mentioned, is we we built the covered bridge. We provided the labor to do that.

RG: And this was the first one, right?

JE: The first Covered Bridge. The first Covered Bridge was the idea of Glenda Korvick who was the Glen Carbon village clerk. And her husband was in the construction business and he was in the business with a Bill Cayman. And so the two of them kind of designed it and took care of all the details of ordering material. And on then on the weekend on the Saturday, Saturday Sunday if possible, members of the Kiwanis would turn up and drive nails and whatever else was needed. So I was involved at that level. But it was, was not very long and somebody set fire to it and it burnt down. And so insurance through the village of Glen Carbon covered the replacement and the second construction was done by the contractor. And the Kiwanis was not involved and that.

RG: Now the first bridge, you said - you had given me some information earlier when I had come over for research and you said that and you had told me why it was built and it was actually Glenda's idea.

JE: It was Glenda's idea; she thought it would be an attraction for the community. That people would flock to Glen Carbon in order to see The Covered Bridge. I don't know if that's happened but that was what she thought would happen anyway. But it's- the village does use it as a symbol of the community which is kind of nice.

RG: And, and we had talked about why was it, why do you think it was burned?

JE: Don't know. Don't have any idea. I don't think anybody ever found out just exactly why it was burned down. It was kind of a, kind of a major disaster though. And it required a little rethinking because the fire department couldn't get through the bridge because when it burned it collapsed on the bridge and

it shut off flow. Fortunately, there was a short loop around where you could get around. But it had to be cleaned up real quick in order to avoid any kind of problems that the fire department would have to respond to. At that time it was fire department only, I don't think they did the the CPR type that they do now, EMFs.

RG: Now Glen Carbon library, there used to be a barn restaurant that used to sit there.

JE: Well there were a couple things there. I was thinking more about that, about that there was a tavern that was kind of down in a hole. And there was the post office, the original post office was maybe not that exact location, but right there in that area. It's kind of hard for me to remember exactly where everything was. Adjacent to that was a building that had been a variety of businesses over the years. But the most recent was, it was a restaurant. And a very popular restaurant, people came far and wide to attend. It burnt, and when it burnt the Kiwanis took the initiative to help clean that up. Acquire the property, and then acquire property behind it. And that became Miner Park. So the Kiwanis was instrumental in making that happen.

RG: Now we talked about Miners Park and there was a, there's actually a caboose in Miners Park.

JE: There's a real live caboose. And that was brought in from I believe Granite City. And a couple folks that worked for the railroad arranged to have that donated. It was brought in and it sat on the railroad track kind of at the bottom of Collinsville Street where if you come across the bridge right where the bike trail is now, the bridge crosses Judy Creek and the bike trail was the railroad track. So it sat there for a while and the Kiwanis project was to pick it up and move it in to the park and so we were instrumental in doing that with the help of a contractor out in Granite City. And I don't remember the name of the contractor, I should but I don't.

RG: And with the caboose in miners park how did you guys, like the Kiwanis, they started something to pay for that? And that was the Glen Fest. Can you tell me a little bit more about that?

JE: Well the Glen Fest actually began differently. Glen Carbon when I first moved out here had, oil and chip main road and ditches. And money was acquired, probably state money, I wasn't involved in city government at that time, in order to rebuild the main street. So the first year that it was finished they wanted to have kind of a dedication ceremony. And so we had a street festival and that was done because of the building of the street. But a lot of individual people, the Kiwanis and others were involved with that. And the money that the Kiwanis got was used for the betterment of the park. Any money that they got, again they would use for the community. And at that time Glen Carbon didn't have a city park, Miner Park became that city park, and they were pumping whatever they could into it.

RG: But what was Glen Fest like? What was it like? It was probably a lot different than it is today.

JE: Well not a whole lot. There was ah, the same road leads you into it. There were no buildings or anything in there. As the street festival evolved over the years it was moved into Miner Park. So there was a building built that had restrooms and storage for things that you would normally use to help work on the park. Eventually buildings were built, pavilions. A bridge was put across the creek so you could get from one side to the other because it was split by a branch of Judy Creek. But trying to think... That was about about all, it was- it was not much there at the time. It just slowly continued to grow.

RG: And what were some of the attractions at Glen Fest? Like rides?

JE: They, we had rides. We had somebody come in, we had entertainment come in, live entertainment. We had a group of performers that come from Florissant, Missouri one time. We had some local guys that used to play in bands that came together so that they could play. In fact, I remember a fella that worked for me at St. Louis Community College was a saxophone player that used to play with the Dorseys, and other people. And his wife made him give that up because he was on the road all the time. But he was very good, and he came over he joined in. I asked him, would he come volunteer, and he did.

RG: Now you said that part of the railroads, we're talking about the railroads and the trails, and you said that you also had a prior job not just with the Kiwanis and working on those projects but you were also considered a gandy dancer. [Laughter] could you tell us a little about that?

JE: Well I worked at Shell Oil for a period of time. About a year, maybe a little more than a year. And I held a couple different jobs, but one of them was, and was for about half the time I was there, about half a year, I worked on the in-house Shell railroad. And my job was to lay new track, replace bad railroad ties under the track. You know, retamp those drive spikes and the people who did that I guess, it's all done by equipment today. But at that time people would do that and then were referred to as gandy dancers. Now how that name arrived, I don't know. I will tell you one quick story, I was working there, in fact my foreman was from Glen Carbon, his last name was Perry. I can't remember his first name at this point. But he wanted me to pick up a piece of rail for a little spur we were running up at Shell, and sent me up to the back of the plant where they kept their supplies and since the track was going to go in kind of a round motion it wasn't going to be straight. I was looking for a piece of bent track. I could never find one and I came back and I said I can't find anything that's going to work, he says no track is bent he says it's all straight, we bend after we get it here on site. And I thought my I guess I learned something today.

RG: So part of Miner's Park, and you were talking about railheads and coal mining is a huge community thing here in Glen Carbon, and it's a huge aspect. And your wife had something to do with what is the main symbol for what is this town.

JE: Well she volunteered to the design of the Miner Head flag. The miner head flag became the symbol of Glen Carbon for one of the festivals we had. And I think it was in Miner Park at that time. And one of the older gentlemen we had a contest, a 100 dollars to the winner, who came up with the best idea for a symbol for the community. Came up with the miner head. So we decided we would have to memorialize that in some way. So Dolores, my wife, made a flag. Which was the first miner head flag. The one you see- the one she said was a miner head only and if you drive around town there's a lot of people have the symbol, they put up over their garage door, other places on their property. And some of those are still there but the flag that today is a little different now the miners got like a pickaxe across his shoulder. But other than that, when you look at that basic symbol the first flag she did and it looked very much like that. What happened to it I don't know.

RG: Yeah you said that the museum lost it.

JE: well I can't blame on the museum. But I know the museum told me they didn't have it.

RG: They didn't have it... And how did the whole ceremony go on with her and the flag and what did the flag look like specifically?

JE: Well it was black miner head image with lettering around it and under it. I think it was under it at the time and now it's around it on kind of a white silk background, and it was a modest sized flag, maybe three or four foot by two, two and half feet tall. It actually flew at one time down somewhere in town, again I can't remember exactly where. But there was a ceremony and the mayor at that time Munser was his last name, I can't think of his first name. I'm getting old. He accepted the flag from Dolores. So it wasn't a major ceremony, it was a small ceremony.

RG: Now, Glen Carbon trail, you said that a lot of the trails run through Madison County, all over Madison County. But can you tell us a little bit more about the Glen Carbon trail and its relations with Madison County Transit? How did that all occur?

JE: Well the railroad abandoned the tracks, they decided they didn't need them anymore for what they were doing, and so Glen Carbon bought the railroad right away. In some cases, those are very wide, I know in some parts of the country there are hundred-foot-wide so they're not just where the rail runs, but it's a lot of property. So Glen Carbon bought it and they bought it for a couple of reasons. one was to turn it into a bike trail. So the track eventual got taken out and the bike trail got put in. Glen Carbon also used it for it for their utilities, if I remember correctly their sewer line that services the community, when they put in the sewer system, runs down through there. Which is kind of a natural because Glen Carbon sits a little higher than everything west so there's just a gradual slope. In fact, some of the trains used to have trouble up the slope if they were pulling too much weight. But they put in a bike trail, it was named after the mayor at that time, a mayor who was instrumental in making that happen, Ron Foster, and he's still around. He doesn't live in Glen Carbon anymore though, he now lives I believe in Maryville. But Glen Carbon maintained those for a number of years and not too many years ago, it's been within the last probably five to eight years, they actually gave the bike trail that property to Madison County Transit because they were also developing bike trails in other parts of Madison County, and as far as I know the one in Glen Carbon was the only one that they didn't control. So Glen Carbon did some repair work to some things and then turned it over and gave it to Madison County Transit who then improved it, so today it's paved for when Glen Carbon put it in, it's paved with rolled asphalt, Glen Carbon put it in, it was oil and chips so it's much nicer than it used to be. I remember some of the board members weren't terribly excited about doing that, and they just didn't feel like they wanted to give away their bike trail, but it did happen. You know I think it was the right thing to do.

RE: So that's a little piece of Glen Carbon history. And then you had mentioned like what the streets were like but what was Glen Carbon like a community in the 1960s like when you first moved back here?

JE: Well it was a nice community. It was much smaller. It's grown ten times. I want to say that the population was in the thirteen to fourteen hundred range when we first moved here back in the sixties. Something in my mind says I saw a placard that said that. I'd have to research that to be sure but it was a community where everybody knew everybody. Or everybody was related to everybody, if you want to talk about somebody you had to be careful because they could be related to the person you were talking about. But ah pretty laid-back community. I always felt again safe. The kids used to walk to school, kind of reminded me of what I had in East St. Louis. When I grew up in East St. Louis I would walk to school and the one place I would walk when I was in elementary school was a mile away. And then later when I was in high school, I would walk to high school because the bus didn't run quite where I needed to go, and I just, I never felt that there was a problem in doing that. And I felt the same way about Glen Carbon.

So there was nothing about Glen Carbon at that time that I would say was negative except that there were no restaurants or other places, you'd have to go to a larger community in order to do your shopping and some other things. There's a small grocery store here in town but typically you'd go somewhere else to go a larger store. so that has changed but you know, I can't there's nothing bad to say about Glen Carbon at all, and we've stayed here all this time, we think it's a good community. It's grown, it's growing now to the point where I'm afraid it's going to become another Fairview Heights where we're going to have too many people and have too much traffic and that just changes the nature of the community pretty dramatically. I liked it the way it was before, I guess I'm kind of- I grew up in the city but I'm probably more of a farm boy than most people would think.

RE: Now the old schoolhouse which used to be the library before the new one was built. What was that one like?

JE: Well pretty much like it is now except it's in better shape today than it used to be. They spent some money to denotative it and clean it and fix it up. But that was eventually became the city hall. So I used to get up there, that's where the clerk's office was, upstairs in the second floor is where the village board would have their meetings. When they built the new village hall out on Glen Carbon road and they vacated that, and shortly after that it became a library. And when they built the library it became a museum. I wasn't involved in any of that. I was involved with the planning commission years ago in Glen Carbon; in fact, I was chairman for a short period of time. Today I'm involved with the police pension board, and I serve on that, I've been serving for about 18 or 19 years. When I was chairman of the planning commission, we developed the building code. We just felt that because construction was beginning to happen that we needed some way to control that and be sure that people were building properly and according to some kind of a code. So we adopted a building code, hired the first building code administrator who's the person who went out to check to be sure when someone was building a house they were doing it properly. That has grown too pretty dramatically. But that was probably most of mine involvement in the past years. The one thing I forgot to mention before, just popped in my mind about the Kiwanis, the Kiwanis used to do a turkey shoot. Where people would bring out their guns and shoot at clay pigeons and they would do it at where Irwin Chapel is right now. That was the field that they would use. In fact, I went out and bought a gun because I thought I try that but I wasn't very good, so it didn't last long. But that was one of their major fundraisers, doing that turkey shoot. In the old days that was very popular, today you hardly hear of it unless you're out in a rural, very rural community.

RG: Now you ran for mayor 1981?

JE: I ran for mayor and lost.

RG: And lost. So what were some of the key political issues during that time?

JE: Well I just I guess it was a little bit of arrogance, I felt I could do better than anybody else running the city, that was part of it. The other is that the mayor was always a part time position and I had a feeling that it was time because the community was beginning to grow that we needed an administrator, that didn't happen until much much later but that was one of my key issues: that we needed to hire a village administrator which they now have in order to oversee the day to day operations. It really fell to the village clerk to do that because that was the only person plus at the time was Glenda Koverly and her staff

that were there full time every day. So that was one of the issues, but it was more just that I thought I could do a better job than what I had seen being done.

RG: And what were some of the people you ran against?

JE: Oh my. Well, I ran against the fella that beat me, and that was Ron Foster. [laughing] But at the time there were quite a few people that were running, that kind of diluted the pot, makes it harder for someone to get elected. Ron was the hometown boy, he had also served on the village board so he had a leg up on me; I had not done that. When I look at it I guess in retrospect a couple times in my life I've said things always happen for the best because I get busy at work, I wound up with more responsibility at work. So whether I could have juggled the two as effectively as I thought I could at the time, it may not have worked out so. I never felt bad about, it just didn't happen.

RG: So he was the hometown boy and he already had a position with the village?

JE: He had been elected to be a trustee earlier. And when the mayor decided he wasn't going to run again, then he decided he would run for mayor.

RG: um-

JE: Timing was bad. I didn't pick the best timing. [laughter] But it all worked out okay.

RE: So let's expand out from Glen Carbon. You were talking about like, there's been a lot of growing in this community, but Edwardsville was also growing as well as outskirts of Glen Carbon. You said one particular person had a lot of influence on that, and that was out Outwine.

JE: Meryl Outwin, I think, I give him a lot of credit for developing Glen Carbon to be what it is today. He was responsible for Ginger Creek, Lakewood, which at the time were some of the nicest subdivisions in the area, including Edwardsville. So he kind of I guess brought Glen Carbon up a notch. Glen Carbon and Edwardsville have always been rivals, I think most of that's gone today, but way back when they- they didn't get along. If you look at even today, I spent some time helping out at the food pantry, it's called the Glen-Ed pantry, Glen is first and Ed is second. There's some other organization that are called Ed-Glen so somebody stepped in and said wait a minute, wait a minute, Edwardsville has got to come first. So it's Ed-Glen, instead of Glen-Ed, and that went on for a number of years. But the two communities grew independent of one another actually because it's, it's you know, it was a nice place to go. It was also the fleeing out of East St. Louis at that time, so some people came up here. people from Granite City wanted to move up to get away from the steel mill and the smoke and stuff, EPA has cleaned a lot of that up today but at that time you could drive through Granite City and you'd stop and wipe your hand across something it was just soot, it was a shame. But Glen Carbon didn't have any of that.

RG: And you said the one subdivision was that he was involved in was Canterbury subdivision?

JE: No that was one I was involved in

RG: Oh that was one of yours?

JE: Yeah, I and a couple of friends formed, we formed a small corporation. We were only eight members, we sold stock. So every, all eight members, had the same amount of stock. And we bought a piece of

land, I can't remember how many acres that was, I think it was 20. And we developed that into a subdivision. We did a two-phase development. First phase, second phase. Some of the people that were part of the corporation fell by the wayside as that was all going on, they just didn't have the same level of interest. But yeah, I was involved with the development of Canterbury Manor. Which is now 35 lot subdivision, and still there, still exists. And that was on the east side of Glen Carbon. When we bought that land it was not in Glen Carbon. We actually petitioned to have in annexed to Glen Carbon. And we did that so we could bring in sewers. Glen Carbon was putting in sewers and they wanted to make those as prevalent as possible. So we annexed to Glen Carbon in order to get sewers and water. It was an interesting project.

RG: What was it part of in order for it to get annexed into Glen Carbon?

JE: It wasn't really part of anything. It just a piece of land that, I think today may be if you're going to annex, you'd have to annex in tandem. At that time I think they kind of annexed around some other property in order to bring us in so we could get the sewers for that development. But the process of annexing is just to put together a document saying what you want to do and present it to the village board and see if they agree and that's when the attorneys get involved in order to draft up all legalese necessary to make it official for the village.

RG: Now you said there was like a mistake with this subdivision?

JE: Yeah, that was kind of an interesting thing. The two engineers that did the, we had the basic design of what we wanted but the engineers did the detailed drawings for the roads and where the sewer lines would be and water lines would be. When we came up with the name and we told them what it was, we didn't write it down for them. We told them we wanted it to be called Canterbury Manor. Well out idea CANTEBURY, they called it CANTEBERRY like a berry bush. And by the time we found out that had happened it had been all recorded with the county and everything was official. And we would have had to backtrack, and we decided it wasn't worth it. So it still carries the name Canterbury Manor.

RG: And then you also spoke with some Meridian Hills also called seven dips that you told me didn't look the way it does today.

JE: Much different, I used to drive that road when I worked at SIU. Because we lived here, and I would go down that hill and the line of sight on that road was just terrible. You were coming up a hill or somebody could have been coming up the other way you couldn't seem them until you were right on top the hill. So it was a dangerous road, you had to be very very careful. But over the years Glen Carbon ended up acquiring funds, rebuilt that road, paved it, put curbs in, sidewalks, smoothed it out. They cut down the hills and filled in the valleys, so it's much much nicer road today than it used to be.

RG: It's not as steep?

JE: Not as steep. I wasn't involved in any of that development of that road or the reconstruction of it. Although I do know the engineer that did the design work on it.

RG: And who was that?

JE: Walt Plotbeau

RG: Ok.

JE: He did most the design on that on when it was done. They also changed it a little bit when they when they did it. It used to be it would come straight out down where the covered bridge is. Now it comes to the intersection up where main street Glen Carbon Road, Meridian, and Glen Crossing all come together. So that little spur was a new leg and it rerouted the road.

RG: Then you also, another, probably another building that was built here was Saint Cecilia's. Which is one of the prominent Catholic churches here in Glen Carbon?

JE: It's the only one in Glen Carbon

RG: Yeah

JE: Although there are others in adjacent communities, but it's the only one in Glen Carbon. I was on the building community. We designed, uh, my job - how I got it I don't recall, was to try to find a piece of land to build on. I talked to some people that had some property out just across the street from where the church wound up. And I just felt that their price was way too high. Nice piece of land but the price was beyond what the going rate was at the time. But I heard that the property that the church, the village hall, Autumn Glen, and Methodist church sit on was going to be available because the individual who developed that was the fella that developed Montclair subdivision. And he had passed away. So I approached the bank and worked out an arrangement where we acquired fifteen acres of land in order to build the church. So that was mostly my contribution. There was no out of pocket cost on my part; it was just the labor part to be able to make that happen. But it all turned out, I thought, pretty good. And then I was on the committee that did the design of the church and later the addition of an adjacent building that we call the Family Life Center. I got busy at work towards when construction was starting and so I wasn't really involved in overseeing what was going on with the construction because I didn't have the time any longer, but some of the local people that had been here for a while along with the church, they did that. So that's been 35 years ago.

RG: Wow. And then so you said the village hall and the police station are currently right next door to it?

JE: They come along after Saint Cecilia's. They bought another piece of land I think probably 15 or 20 acres and built the city hall. And then later cause the original police station was in the city hall building and then as they expanded, needed more space, they built a new police station. And that probably goes back 12 years maybe.

RG: Yeah, and where was the original city hall building and the police station in Glen Carbon?

JE: It was the old, what is now the museum.

RG: Oh, and that was the police station as well?

JE: It was everything.

RG: Oh wow. And then, so going farther out, I know like this is a huge place where everybody goes nowadays is Wal-Mart our shopping centers there in Glen Carbon, which used to be when I was a kid Cottonwood Area, Cottonwood Mall. And then before that time though it was called Cottonwood Station.

JE: Station. That's right. I think it first called Cottonwood Station. And Meryl Outwine was the one that developed most of that. I don't know if he sold the land or if he developed the buildings or just how that all happened, but he was the guy that was instrumental in making Cottonwood Station a reality. And then the subdivision next to it, which was Cottonwood subdivision, he was instrumental in that also. Back where Eden Care center is, all that area back in there. There's a road that goes in next to Eden, and it kind of goes around and loops back around and ties into itself. They call that the Banjo Drive. That was- cause when you look at it from the sky it looks like a banjo. And he developed all of that back in there. Some of that wasn't such good development, that part of it, but most everything else he did, he did well.

RG: So what was Cottonwood Station like?

JE: A couple little places to shop. There was a laundry mat. The Bargain Center was there. They had a bowling alley, fitness center, the indoor tennis courts is what I remember the most. I didn't- I wasn't a tennis fan by any means but I do go out and play once in a while. That's all gone, that's all been torn down been replaced. But that's pretty much what made up Cottonwood Station. Wal-Mart came in at some point and kind of added on to that. And then at some point, I don't know why I can't remember why the Bargain Center actually moved across the road. And built a new building, and that became the Bargain Center for quite a few years. And I think he was involved in that also.

RG: Meryl Outwine

JE: Meryl Outwine, yeah. He did Lakewood subdivision, Ginger Creek, Jodia. And had an option on lots and lots property, and I would have to guess in the late 70s, the cost of money went sky high. The loans, some of the loans- well the loan that we had for the Canterbury Manor subdivision, we were paying like 18% interest. And that hurt all the developers. And I think that's when a lot of the land that he had optioned with the intent of turning them into subdivisions, when back to the bank. It was a bad time for a lot of people.

RG: Why do you think there was a bad time?

JE: Well, if you had loans and you were sitting on some of that because of the high-interest rate you just couldn't make the payments. That was- wasn't enough money coming in to cover your cost. So the banks who had money invested in some of these started taking the property back. And looking for a new buyer.

RG: And what year was this around?

JE: Well I think it was in the late 70s. I don't think it was in the 60s. I think it was mid to late 70s.

RG: Do you think it was happening just here in Glen Carbon?

JE: No, it was happening all over the country.

RG: All over the country?

JE: Yeah.

RG: Was it a depression or?

JE: I would call it a recession.

RG: Recession?

JE: A recession. A pretty dramatic recession.

RG: What do you think caused the recession?

JE: I'm not sure. I really don't know exactly what triggered it, lack of jobs, I don't know. I'd hate to speculate on that.

RG: Okay.

JE: It didn't, it didn't affect me that much personally except my involvement with Canterbury Manor. You know, that was a part time venture for all of us. We all had jobs doing other things. But how it affected us was the high cost of borrowing money.

RG: And you said that in Cottonwood Station, I have an image of what it used to look like back then, you said that they back in the day in the open fields, between Cottonwood Station and the subdivision right in that corner, right across from where Walgreens is today, they used to do an event that you and your wife used to go to.

JE: [laughing] About once a month, periodically, let me put it that way, they would launch hot air balloons from that site. So you could go out and there'd sometimes be 10, 12 out there. And they'd fill up the balloons and once they get them filled up then they would lift off and drift to wherever they sat down. And it was always interesting to watch those, they were very colorful. But yeah that was where Wal-Mart is now, where Regions Bank is now. That was just an open field, and that's where they used to launch the hot air balloons. There was a fella who started that, I think his name was Hesch, E S C H, can't remember his first name. I'm bad about names. And one of the things that I learned through all that was that I thought you just wanted to do that, you go out and buy yourself a balloon, fill it up with air and go floating. You got to be a private pilot; you got to have a pilot's license. So that was something that I learned at that period of time. But yeah, that was- that was interesting to go out and watch something different in Glen Carbon you couldn't see other places.

RG: Now going a little farther out and I know you were talking about there was a rival between Glen Carbon and Edwardsville. Why would there be a rival between two cities, was it because their proximity is so close to each other or?

JE: You know I never understand that rivalry. Edwardsville I think felt they were the bigger of the two communities, that they were the more affluent of the two communities. And they kind of looked down their nose at Glen Carbon which was more the working-class people. Edwardsville had the courthouse, Edwardsville had the banks, you know none of that existed here in Glen Carbon for a number of years. There wasn't a bank in Glen Carbon when we first moved here. One was eventually built, which I think is the one where Region's Bank is now. And I can't remember the name of it. But I think that was the first bank in Glen Carbon. So I think it was we're the big guy, you're the little guy, you know. We're the better off, you're not, you're more working class. I think it was that.

RG: So it'd probably be for a very long time 'cause Edwardsville, Madison County Court House is there. And then you had Glen Carbon which was mining town and railhead town, so it was mostly working class.

JE: Yup yup. I think that rivalry existed for long long time. Whether the kids when they went to school, because they went to a shared school, picked up on any of that I don't know. We certainly didn't talk about it or try to promote it in some way that would make our kid's experiences negative when they went to school. But they were from Glen Carbon. Yeah, I think over the time that for the most part that has gone away. I actually saw the two mayors, the current mayor of Glen Carbon and the current mayor of Edwardsville sitting down for lunch together. So I figure that's a good thing.

RG: [laughing] Yeah. So there was a huge disaster in Edwardsville 1981, the tornado of 1981. Do you remember anything about that particularly?

JE: I didn't go up there I remember that it happened. There was a major rebuilding of the main street, St. Louis Street, I know that. After they opened some of the roads up, we took a quick run through to see kind of what had happened. But other than that I can't say that I know any of the details of that but it was a tornado. There have been a couple other situations since then. But tornados always seem to tear through Edwardsville not come down into the Glen Carbon area. My theory is that when they come in from the west, they hit St. Louis which is a hop because you got a lot of concrete in St. Louis. And whatever is coming in goes either north or south or both. And so it goes just far enough north or far enough south that Glen Carbon is missed. This last hailstorm we had is the first time I've ever seen anything like that since I've lived here.

RG: Yeah, there- there has been a lot of speculations as to why a lot of the cities past St. Louis that are on the bluff don't get hit.

JE: Yeah

RG: Like even theories like the St. Louis Arch keeps it from- weather [talking over each other]

JE: I don't think the Arch [laughing]. I was working in Clayton at the time the arch was being built, I watched that. The wind just blows right through the Arch. [laughing]

RG: So actually speaking of St. Louis, where you live currently there is a road that runs past your house that is actually part of your driveway and your driveway being built up to your house was used for a specific purpose. Can you tell us a little bit about that?

JE: Well the piece of property behind us which is still, well there used to be house ask there it burnt on a July the 4th, but I don't remember what year. But the- the St. Louis Press Brick Company, which is a large company in St. Louis used to haul clay in order to press and make brick. And they would use the road right in front of our house, we still have an easement there, there's a 20-foot easement to be able to get into that piece of property. And so that's how this road occurred. That's the reason it was put in, in order to let the trucks get in and out of the property behind us, which is really west of us, in order to haul out the clay to provide the necessary resources to St. Louis Press Brick Company. Part of the deed, our property deed when we got it specifies specifically that St. Louis Press Brick Company had a 20-foot easement for ingress, egress to that property back there across our property.

RG: Wow. And then talking about you know, your- where you live now your parents actually used to live across the street or they lived here? Or how did that all work on your family background?

JE: You mean in Glen Carbon?

RG: Yes.

JE: Well the long story is that we lived in East St. Louis.

RG: Yeah.

JE: The fella who lived just kind of caddy corner across the street had been an old farmer and had wanted to get back in the farming business. We didn't know that what he meant by farming was raising hogs. But he found a piece of land, this piece of land here which across the way, 40 some odd acres. And it turned out that Collinsville's street actually split 9 acres off of that. And he was having trouble coming up with a down payment to buy the property, talked to my parents and was explaining what was going on, and my parents said well we'll buy that 9 acres. Which will hopefully, give you the down payment to buy the other property, so that's how it all happened. That brought them from East St. Louis up to here. He raised hogs across the street and depended on the prevailing winds this was not a pleasant place to be for [laughing] a couple years but he finally disappeared. But my parents built a house at the top of Collinsville Street. And later put in a pond next to it, which is the pond that is behind our house. I helped do that when the time came. We did have trouble with the pond it wouldn't hold water, so we had to pump it out and try to repair it with a product that was supposed to seal it. That helped a bit but not significantly. And then it filled back up to be what it is today. They, when I was married, they gave us a half acre of property off that 9 acres. Later I bought another half-acre. And they eventually sold that original house that they built and had another one built further south which is the one Scott lives in.

RG: Your son?

JE: Yes. So, yeah, they- they made a double move, built a house and moved. In addition then, a piece of property to the north of them, they decided they didn't need so they broke off a one-acre lot and sold that. So there's been a house built up there. But otherwise what you see is pretty much the same as what it was back when they originally acquired it. Except there are a lot fewer trees because they've gotten old and died.

RG: And what did your family do for the longest time when they were here?

JE: My father worked on the railroad. He started with Pennsylvania Railroad and then it became Penn Central and then it became New York Central Railroad. And he did that for 35-37 years, somewhere in that range. My mother, when I was in elementary school, worked at a cafeteria in a- what would now be a middle school, down in East St. Louis, Lansdowne Junior High is what the name was. After she retired, after they moved out here, she kept working for a while and then eventually just retired and became you know a stay at home housewife. My father worked until he was able to age wise retire. And then after that they ran around to all the flea markets and bought stuff they didn't need [laughing]. But they were both hard workers, very hard workers. And always had some project going, I used to hate that because I'd have to get involved once in a while and help and I didn't particularly like that.

RG: Like the pond?

JE: Like the pond. [laughing] Yeah the pond, Dolores when we pumped out the pond we rented a couple of pumps with big fire hoses on them and we pumped them out across the dam down into the creek behind. And we had my father had stocked the pond with some catfish and others. We went down and Dolores dad came out, he was a fisherman, he liked that. All those fish when you skinned them and tried to eat 'em tasted like mud. So that futile effort.

RG: Is there- so what do you do today for Glen Carbon?

JE: I serve on the police pension board.

RG: And what does that entail?

JE: We invest the funds that pay the retirement of the policemen when they retire.

RG: So you're still really much involved in the community today?

JE: Probably not as involved as I used to be. But I am involved, yeah. Now I don't know how much longer I'm going to be doing that. It's probably time for somebody else to move in and do that. The problem is the state of Illinois in their infinite wisdom, has made it a little more difficult to get people to serve. And the reason for that is when I started you were appointed, you were on the board, whatever you needed to learn you'd go to the books or talk to somebody or you had an attorney sit with you that would help you. Now you have to do continue education. So a lot of people either don't have the time or don't want to take the time to do that, which means they're disqualified and they can't serve. So at this point, I've asked the mayor if he could start looking for somebody to replace me because I think after 18 years, you know, it's time to think about moving on and doing nothing. And I mean nothing; I'd like to do nothing.

RG: Alright well thank you for your time.

JE: I hope that helps. I know that I had some sketchy memories of things that happened in the past. I did try to go through some of documents that I had and pictures and stuff. I didn't find a lot that would help, to give you any additional information but

RG: This is great.

JE: Good luck with your project.

RG: Thank you.