

Madison Historical: The Online Encyclopedia and Digital Archive for Madison County, Illinois

Kathy Childers Oral History Interview

Keith Sternburg, Interviewer

Edwardsville, Illinois

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Keith Sternburg (KS): This is Keith Sternburg sitting at the home with Kathy Bellcoff Childers, we will be talking about her family and life growing up in Madison, Illinois. Today is July 17, 2019 thank you, Kathy, for sitting down and doing this project with me.

Kathy Childers (KC): You're welcome.

KS: Let's start with how your family came to Madison, Illinois. The first person that came over was your grandfather, Naum Bellcoff, and what country did he come over from?

KC: Macedonia.

KS: And he came over in 1907, he was 20 years old, and passed through Ellis Island. And I know that you and your sister a couple years went to New York and visited Ellis Island, can you tell us what the experience was like going to Ellis Island where your grandfather was?

KC: It was amazing, because we've always been brought up with stories and things about when they came over from Europe. He and my grandmother, he came first and then my grandmother came afterwards after he was settled, but they came with the clothes on their back, and they had several trunks with them that they were only able to bring back what was able to fit in the trunks.

KS: And do those trunks still exist today?

KC: Yes, they do.

KS: Does anyone in the family have them?

KC: My sister does. And they're wonderful, they came with clothes and blankets that my grandmother had crocheted and made and... just very priceless items, I mean in Europe the women would wear what is called a *shayek*. Made of wool, and she brought that with her. Just all kinds of things from Europe that could never ever be replaced.

KS: Do you remember your grandparents talking about what life was like back in Macedonia?

KC: Yes. My grandfather not so much, but my grandmother would talk about, apparently she worked in the poppy fields and picked poppies. When she was a young woman, her mother had passed away, and then her father had remarried, and I think there might have been friction or something with the stepmother or whatever, so my grandmother's aunt and her family somewhat adopted her and took her to live with

them, which was in a village which was in Greece, the northern part of Greece. And they pretty, I mean they were Macedonian, but when the war with the Turks, they pretty much had to live as the Greeks did to survive. So, my grandmother spoke both languages. So, yeah grandmother had a pretty rough life. So, 'cause she was orphaned at a very young age. My grandfather not so much. I mean I never heard a whole lot of stories about him, but he was a great man.

KS: Alright and your grandmother came over in 1915 and ended up here in Madison, and what was her name?

KC: Rochkova. But Rochkova was the name, her birth last name, and then the Markuly family adopted her, which I think Markuly is more Americanized, because it was more of a Greek, like Markulis or something like that. But we have Markulys that live in the Belleville area.

KS: Alright, and both sides of your family actually were from Macedonia because your mother's parents had emigrated from Macedonia, but they ended up settling somewhere else, where did they settle?

KC: When my grandfather came from Europe, he came initially to the Wood River area and was to work at the refineries, and I don't know exactly when he left, he didn't stay here very long, and then he actually sent for my grandmother, who was still in Europe and then they settled in Minnesota, Hibbing, Minnesota actually. My grandfather had a farm in Hibbing and before, they were both married when he was still in Europe, and they had a daughter there, Dorothy, and she had passed away from a childhood illness, and then right after that, that's when my grandmother came and met with my grandfather in Minnesota. (05:38)

KS: Alright, having both families coming from Macedonia, are there any traditions that they passed down that you guys celebrated, whether it be religious, cultural, food, clothing, things that you guys grew up with?

KC: Absolutely. We are Eastern Orthodox. We still carry on all the traditions. My sister and I speak fluent Macedonian. When my, when we grew up my grandparents took care of us, babysat for us, so they spoke broken English, so when they would talk, they would talk to us in Macedonian, so it was kinda like learning both languages at one time, so our holidays, the foods that we eat, we still make the manja, which is stew, we eat a lot of that, and Easter is a big lamb dinner.

KS: What're some of the ingredients and how do you make manja?

KC: It's just like you would eat beef stew. We would call it manja. Just vegetables, beef, just like you would make a beef stew. Pita, which the Greeks would call it the spinach pita, would, the Greeks would call it spanakopita, baklava, we'd make that.

KS: I know you'd said in the past that your mother made yogurt.

KC: Yes.

KS: Was that something that was passed down?

KC: Yes, that was brought over from Europe. My grandmother, I mean actually up until we were in our twenties, we never ate, as long as my mother was alive, we never ate store-bought yogurt, we would always eat my mother's homemade yogurt. Which was milk boiled, she would, farm fresh milk was the best, and she would boil the milk, and it would have to be to a certain temperature. She would measure the temperature with her candy thermometer, after it would boil to a certain degree she would take the milk and pour it into crocks, and she would wrap them with these woolen blankets as my grandmother would do and keep it on the stove for so long, and it would never curdle, I don't know what the, what made it form into, it was almost like a custard, and when it would get to that point then she would put it in the refrigerator and wait till it was cool, and then we were able to eat it.

KS: Alright, any other traditions, like any clothing, dancing...

KC: Oh, we do eastern European dancing, my sister actually, when we were little we were in the Croatian Junior Tamburitzans, which they play Eastern European instruments, and they dance the kolos. My sister actually continued that in college and was at Duquesne University and was a member of the Duquesne University Tamburitzans. We'd do a lot of Greek dancing, Macedonian dancing, Croatian, I mean we're very into our heritage to this day. (09:28)

KS: And you and your sister bring the Tamburitzans once a year to the area to perform?

KC: Yes, my father has had a scholarship, well my, since my sister was in the group, my dad would always bring them here to our area because of the large ethnic communities that we have here, and he started a scholarship fund with the Southwestern Illinois College which was originally Belleville area College. And each year I guess for the past... 30 years, 35 years he has brought them here and when he passed away my sister and I continue to bring 'em here, and we are able to give four \$1,000 scholarships to students attending the Granite City campus of Southwestern Illinois College.

KS: I noticed you had just mentioned the multi-ethnic groups in this area. I noticed on census records for your grandparents in Madison that they lived on Grand Avenue, and on Grand Avenue in the census records, they're not the only immigrants, that other heads of households in the families came from Bulgaria, Croatia, Hungary, Greece...

KC: Poland.

KS: So when you were growing up in Madison was it still the case was there still this strong...

KC: Oh absolutely, I mean the people that lived across the street, the Marengienies family, they were Greek. So Baba Thrusa, Baba means grandmother in Macedonian, so all of these old ladies, because of respect we would always call Baba Thrusa, that was her name, another Baba down the street. But everybody spoke different languages, and that's one of the ways, I mean, my grandmother spoke both Macedonian and Greek, but then when she was in America she spoke mostly Macedonian, but when my father learned more Greek, was listening to the neighbors across the street conversing with my grandmother. But yeah, it was all ethnic, I mean all over, there was Russian church, Russian Orthodox Church in Madison, Polish, Saint Stanislaus, I mean it was all ethnic.

KS: And were you guys very big in the church and attending?

KC: Yes, actually my grandfather and grandmother, well my grandfather, was one of the men big in the building of our church. The Holy Trinity Bulgarian Eastern Orthodox Church was one of the first Orthodox churches in America, one of the oldest now, but yes, we have, when my grandparents passed, in their memory we have a huge icon window in their memory at the church.

KS: I noticed also in the area on census records is that your grandfather was the proprietor of a grocery store, what was the name of the grocery store?

KC: Bellcoff and Son.

KS: Alright, did he set it up with the intention that he and his son, your father, would work there together, or that maybe your father would take over?

KC: Probably, but, I mean my father helped him, up until the time he went to college, and I'm sure because he went to college at Wash U. in St. Louis, I mean I'm sure when he was done with school he would come and help my grandfather. But then, when dad went to college and after that he went into, he enlisted in the Army and he was in WWII, and then when he came back things changed so... but dad spent a lot of time in the grocery store along with my mother, after they got married my mother would help out.

KS: Alright now your grandfather's home and the grocery store...

KC: Are right next door to each other.

KS: And your grandfather had them both built.

KC: Correct.

KS: He built them.

KC: Correct.

KS: Alright, what were your memories, because the grocery store was still around when you were a child, what were some of your memories with the grocery store?

KC: I mean I can remember going in there, my folks always said that my sister and I really never were candy people, but we would just go and, ya know, act like we were helping in the grocery store and, ya know. 'Cause we were very young when the grocery store was in existence. I remember my cousin Bob and I would play in the backyard with all of the big boxes that my grandfather would have canned goods in and stuff like that. We probably got into more trouble than we needed to be, but anyway. I could still remember the setting of the grocery store, I remember stories about, even to this day when people who we haven't seen, elderly people who find out who my sister and I are, they would tell us stories of the things that my grandfather would do during the depression and stuff like that, that when certain families didn't have enough money to put food on the table for their kids, my grandfather would give them food from the grocery store so their kids wouldn't go hungry. I think that's where a lot of my father's habits, and things like that, helping others, kinda came into play. But they were always worried about the other person,

never worried about, you know, getting recognition for what they did. They always wanted to help other people, and he was really big with that in the grocery store. (16:11)

KS: So was this grocery store like a centralized place in the community where a lot of people could have come, and your grandfather would've known who they were...

KC: Yeah, but they were, yeah because he had a lot of food, it was actually in the middle of the street on Grand Avenue, and then down the street was Palchev's Market, which was another Macedonian-Bulgarian store, but then on the other corner on the next block was Schermer's, which was a really large grocery store, but my grandpa's grocery store had a lot of things that you wouldn't be able to get in the other stores. He would have the imported olives, the imported feta cheese, things that people wouldn't be able to get in your regular grocery store, so a lot of the ethnic people would come there.

KS: Can you describe the size of it and what it looked like on the inside?

KC: I can remember walking in the front door, and to the right of the grocery store was the, where my mother would check people out, and that's where the candy was, and right behind her there might have been like, ya know, your bandages and things like that, and then you would walk in and on either side of the grocery store were the canned goods, the bread, things like that, you would walk straight back and was the meat counter. And I just remember the glass and then all the meat, and in front of that were these barrels that had the feta cheese, the kalamata olives, and then another thing too, chickpeas, they would have chickpeas in a big barrel which we called them nublebe, and they were like roasted, and you would eat 'em like peanuts, and all that stuff was in the front, and then to the left of the meat counter was an aisle that would walk to the back of the grocery store, there was the freezer for the meat back there, and then there was like the storage area where they would bring all the goods to stock the shelves, but then there was a door that you would leave the store, and it was right next to the family home. It was great.

KS: And your grandfather maintained the proprietorship of this grocery store until his death in 1966. What happened to the store after that?

KC: They closed it. And it stayed there for a while, and then my dad and my two aunts decided that it was time to tear it down. So...

KS: But the home remains?

KC: Yes, the home is still there. Not in a condition that, I mean, it's just pretty much all gone downhill, but yeah, it's kinda sad to see what they've done to it.

KS: But you have memories of the home and

KC: Absolutely, because we lived there. So.

KS: Cool. So was it filled with things from...

KC: Europe

KS: ...Macedonia?

KC: Yep, like the doilies that were on the coffee tables my grandmother crocheted, just little remnants here and there. (20:06)

KS: And I noticed in the census records that your grandmother was a hand sewer at a shirt factory, and you just mentioned the doilies. What are some of the things that she may have made, craft-wise, at home?

KC: Oh, she crocheted house slippers for us, and she crocheted, all of the grandkids have pillowcases that she crocheted, the ends of, she made quilts. If you ever had anything that was torn or ripped, baba would always sew them for you or get the sewing machine out. She was very handy.

KS: And you still have quite a few of these pieces around?

KC: Absolutely. Still use them.

KS: Alright. Let's move on now to your father. Your father was John Bellcoff.

KC: Correct. John Naum.

KS: Naum. He was born in 1922, and he was one of three in the family.

KC: Yes, my dad was the youngest, he had an older sister Dina, and in between Aunt Dina and my dad was my aunt Sylvia.

KS: Alright, your father ended up going to Madison High School, correct?

KC: Correct.

KS: After Madison High School where did he go?

KC: He was at, he enrolled in Wash U, Washington University in St. Louis, majoring in political science. While he was still side by side with my grandpa, or my dedo in Macedonian as you would call him. So yeah.

KS: Then I noticed not too long after that was when WWI broke out, and according to, sorry WWII broke out, according to military records your father enlisted into the army on October 21 of 1942. What were some of his jobs and what did he do while in the military?

KC: From what I was told he was in the European theater and attained the rank of staff sergeant. He did a lot of clerical and stuff. Those are the kinds of stories I, he met some important, he met, I can't remember who the man was, but he was like a movie star afterwards, and I keep, I might be able to answer that question for you later, after I ask someone.

KS: Alright, he came home

KC: Correct.

KS: And ended up kind of going into public service, and the political life.

KC: Correct.

KS: Is that something that he may have gotten from his father? Was your grandfather involved in politics do you know of?

KC: No, nobody was in our family. But... yeah, I don't know where the political stuff came from. I mean, he majored in political science, but he was always a people person and always wanting to help people, so maybe that's where it all originated from.

KS: So, like you had said earlier stemming from your grandfather helping in the community...

KC: Correct.

KS: ...especially during the depression, he just took it a step further and made it more community service, and politics. Now I know before he got elected to anything, he ended up working for the volunteer fire department in Madison.

KC: Correct.

KS: What can you tell me about that?

KC: He started out just firefighting and then he became assistant fire chief, he loved doing that, along with, and at that time he was already working at the bank, the First National Bank in Madison. And he was vice-president there, and he retired in 1993 from the bank, but he did the volunteer firefighting along with working at the bank.

KS: How long was he with the fire department?

KC: 21 years.

KS: 21 years then he became assistant fire chief?

KC: Correct.

KS: How long was he assistant fire chief? Do you remember?

KC: No.

KS: Okay. And after 21 years do you remember why he stopped working with the fire department? (25:06)

KC: Well, I think my sister actually, he was a fireman when I was younger, and I think right after my sister was born was when he quit. 'Cause we, I remember a story that my mother would always tell us, that he would always tell her that, you know, she would ask him, "Are you one of the firemen that would go into the burning buildings?" And he was like, "Oh no, not me." And there happened to be a fire down

the street from where my parents lived with my grandparents at the time, and my mother was pregnant with my sister at the time, and I guess all the neighbors, whatever had gone down the street to where the fire was, and my mother walked down there also, and she asked one of the firemen "where is John?" And they said, "Oh he's inside trying to rescue the people in there," and I think after that time was when, he came out of there safely of course, and accomplished what he went in there for, to save the people, or whoever was in there, and I think right after that, it probably came to the realization that he had a family and that, you know, it was time to step back. But as long as my father was alive, and when he became mayor, city clerk mayor, that was one thing that he always took care of is firemen. We had a fire down the street from our house when we were older, and I'll never forget, and I was still at home, and it might have been like 6 o'clock in the morning, and my father came into my room and woke me up and said, "Get up, get dressed, and go down to the bakery," because those firemen had been fighting that fire all night long and they were hungry. So, I had gone to the Busy Bee Bakery that was on Madison Avenue, also run by a Macedonian family, and got dozens of doughnuts to feed those firefighters who had been up all night. So yeah, he cared about people.

KS: Alright, so taking a step away from it and living a little more calmer life then, how long did he work for, at the First National?

KC: Until 1993 when he retired.

KS: Okay and he became, do you remember what year he became the vice-president?

KC: Uh no.

KS: Okay. Alright, along with that work, I noticed in 1951 he was elected to Madison School Board, correct?

KC: Correct.

KS: And then how long did he serve on the school board?

KC: He was there for 19 years. Let's see, he was on the school board for 19 years, but he was president for 15 of those 19 years.

KS: How long do you know is a term to be on the school board?

KC: I would guess like 4 years, like any other election, 4, 6 years I don't know.

KS: And he was doing that when he met your mother.

KC: Correct.

KS: And your mother's name was?

KC: Diana Nickoloff.

KS: Alright, your father was living in Madison, but your mother grew up in Indiana.

KC: Hammond, Indiana.

KS: How did it come to be that the two of them were able to meet?

KC: Well, they would have school board conventions in Chicago, and it just so happened that one of the school board conventions happened to be the same weekend as one of the big Macedonian dances, which happened to be in Hammond or Gary, Indiana. And my father had a cousin, Angie, who lived in Hammond, and she was also one of my mom and aunt Mary's best friends. And so mom and aunt Mary would always go to these Macedonian dances, and my aunt Angie, dad had gone to visit her when he was in town for the convention, and actually they were all at the dance together, and my aunt Angie wanted to introduce my mom and Aunt Mary to my dad. And that's pretty much how it all happened, and then I think six months later he proposed, and that's how it all started. (30:11)

KS: How long were they married?

KC: 54 years when he passed away.

KS: Alright and after your parents got married, they had two children, you and your sister Norma.

KC: Correct

KS: And then he became the city clerk in 1967, how long did he serve as city clerk?

KC: For 18 years until 1985, when he ran for mayor. And he was the mayor of Madison for 12 years until he retired in 1997.

KS: Alright, so having a political life and being the mayor, what were some of the experiences like for you and your sister and your mother in the election and then the following re-elections?

KC: Well, I guess you could say that the politics then wasn't as crazy as it is now, but I mean we worked in the elections We didn't go door-to-door or anything like that, but my mother would have, my mother and another woman, one of her best friends, they would take voters from 7 am in the morning until 7 pm at night, drive them to the polls. We would be out at political functions with my parents. It was a lot for my mom, but my mom was a rock, she was the rock of the family. She was always at my father's side. It would take, I mean being in politics, would take a lot of my father's time, but you know, he would be gone in the evenings for meetings and things like that. Weekends would consist of them going to different functions, they would always go together. I mean you would think that there would be no time for family, but between his job and his politics, one thing that I can always remember and never forget was, we always sat down at the dinner table every single night together, and if there was anything to discuss it would always be discussed there. He always made time for family. So it was pretty interesting. Right before he retired the politics started to get a little more interesting, shall I say. I mean we met a lot of very important people, like my dad was the mayor and the Madison County Democratic Chairman during the Clinton election and his term, so we met the Clintons, we met the Gores, and my father was actually still alive when Barack Obama was president and actually got to meet him before he decided to run for president. So, it had its times, but it all turned out well.

KS: Alright so did you have to do, like fundraisers?

KC: Yes, we did fundraisers.

KS: And dinners?

KC: Yes.

KS: What were some of those like? Getting dressed up, was it fun or did it feel more like work, or campaigning?

KC: It was fun, sometimes it got to be a little too much, it, it um, I mean...

KS: Well growing up in this situation, was the expectation there? Did your father expect that you guys would show up to these things, or was there a conversation of will you guys show up?

KC: He never told us that we had to go, but we were always there for my dad, and we were always a family, so I mean we would always be there for him.

KS: Alright, so he served for 12 years as the mayor, what're a couple, or some of his accomplishments that you can remember him doing?

KC: During his time as mayor?

KS: Yes.

KC: He brought the Gateway International Racetrack here, that was probably in 1996 maybe? 95, 96. That was one of his big things. (35:05)

KS: Do you remember how long that process was, was it a long drawn out process where he had to fight for it?

KC: No. No, not at all. And then also, where the race track was, before that they had a, it was called stages or something like that, but then they wanted to bring in the strippers, which my father was completely against that, so they kiboshed that, and then after all that happened then he brought the racetrack here. Chris Pook, who owned and brought other racetracks, or built other race tracks different places in the United States, met with him, and then they brought the racetrack here.

KS: So, did you get a lot of support then from the city council?

KC: Yes, absolutely.

KS: Were you there for...

KC: The groundbreaking

KS: The groundbreaking and do you remember anybody else who was there and what it was like?

KC: Governor Ryan was here, and then the state representatives, and you know, the city council and stuff like that were all there for the groundbreaking.

KS: Did your father get like a shovel, and everything like in the ceremonies?

KC: Yes, absolutely, and he actually was holding my son, John, who was, I think he was a year old, it either happened in '95 or the spring of '96. But yeah, John was in the picture with all the dignitaries.

KS: What happens to the shovels that they used, did your father get to keep it?

KC: I have no idea. I think he might've got to keep it, which is probably in my sister's basement right now.

KS: And when the racetrack opened, was there a ribbon-cutting ceremony that your father had to take part in?

KC: Yes, that was awesome.

KS: And then similar people showed up for that as well?

KC: Mm-hmm

KS: Alright and I noticed you had mentioned bringing in strippers to that one, I did notice in a newspaper article that they were claiming that they could bring in extra economy and revenue and your father went against it, and the city council fully supported your father in that one too.

KS: Correct

KC: And so, what were some of the moral issues going into why your father would not accept the...?

KC: Well he didn't want that brought into the area because bringing the strippers into the area would start bringing other things that weren't accepted into the area and he just wanted to keep it a clean place to live.

KS: Overlooking the possible revenue that could come out of it.

KC: Yeah exactly.

KS: Okay. Alright. I also noticed that your father had his funeral director's license

KC: Yes he did.

KS: Do you remember when he got that?

KC: I think it was the time when probably, probably when he was on the fire department because during that time, in his free time I guess you would say, he was assisting at the Sedlak Funeral Home that was in Madison, and he and another gentleman, because at that time they didn't have like ambulance service

with the fire department etc., so Sedlak had an ambulance service, and he and another gentleman, who also had his funeral directors license, on the weekends that they, you know, weren't at the fire station or whatever, and this was prior to him being married to my mother. They would work at the funeral home and do the ambulance service, but then he continued. After he retired at the bank, that's when he pretty much picked back up with the funeral director. And he worked for Sedlak and he also worked for Davis Funeral Home in Granite. And he went to his continuing education classes to keep his license up. He did that probably until... well... I don't know, they moved up to Edwardsville probably in 1997, and his arthritis started to bother him and stuff like that so he would work part time, but he did it for a while. (40:22)

KS: Now did you go to the funeral homes frequently, 'cause I know you have a degree...

KC: Funeral Directors, yes. No, we would go there once in a while, when he was on duty. But no, no.

KS: So, you ended up getting your degree though in embalming?

KC: Correct, I started out in nursing school and worked in an intensive care unit for a long time and started seeing the different nurses that I worked with leave the field and go into different areas, and I don't know if it was because of the pace or whatever, but I thought with my father's funeral director's license etc., I thought hmm, that might be something interesting to go into, and I also kinda liked, like the, the autopsies and things like that, so I switched my major, and I had a lot of classes of course for my nursing already done, and then I transferred over to Forest Park and finished there with my funeral director's license.

KS: Okay, with your mother's family being kind of farther away, how often did the two families get together and how often did you get to see some of those other cousins and aunts and uncles?

KC: Well we would split holidays, I mean, we would go to Indiana for like Thanksgiving, Christmas or Easter and swap out, but the two families were very close, and in the summertime my mom, my sister, and I would go to Indiana for 4 or 5 weeks, so we could, my grandmother was already gone by that time, she passed away when I was 2 years old, but my grandfather was still alive so we would go and spend 4 to 5 weeks with my aunt Mary, my uncle Steven, and my grandfather and all of my other cousins and uncles and aunts that lived there. So, we were always very close, the two families.

KS: And I remember that there was a picture I believe with you, your sister, and your aunt Mary in front of the home that they actually grew up in.

KC: Yes.

KS: And that was in Hammond?

KC: Yes. Aunt Mary passed away last year, and this was probably, my mom also passed away the same year that my father did, like three months after, and that was in June. And that following, I guess it was December, January, we were in Indiana to visit my aunt Mary, and it was a very snowy day, and my sister decided that we were going to go to see the old house on Merrill Street, and so we drove to Hammond which is not, I mean like 5 minutes, 10 minutes from Munster, and we parked in front of the house in the

snow storm, and my sister said, "Oh let's all get out," and we're gonna to take a picture in front of the house. So the three of us stood in front of the house looking, you know looking at the house, and it had been painted and everything and very well kept, and a woman came from behind, and she stopped and was kind of looking at us like, what on earth are these three people, especially this elderly woman, doing in front of this house, and she actually lived down the street, and so she got out of the car and said, "Can I help you?" And we said, "Oh you know," we explained to her that my aunt Mary lived here, she grew up and was born and raised in this home, and the woman was so excited, and so we said that you know, we were from out of town, we brought aunt Mary to see the house, and she said, "Oh well I'll take your picture," so she took our picture and apparently she had lived in the neighborhood for a pretty long time, so she and my aunt Mary, you know, aunt Mary was asking her about the different neighbors and stuff, there might have been a few that still lived in the neighborhood, but for the most part everybody was gone. But yeah, we, the house is still there on Merrill Street. So it was pretty cool. (45:09)

KS: Sounds like you had a really strong family bond.

KC: Yes. Absolutely, still do. Even though all of the aunts and uncles are all passed, our generation now is still very, very close.

KS: Is there anything else that you would like to share about the family, about your father and his politics?

KC: Well he was mayor for 12 years, and then he was also Madison County Democratic Chairman from 1990 to '94. He not only served the people of the city of Madison, but he also served the citizens of Madison County and the surrounding Metro East bi-state area. Serving on the Madison County Board of Review from 1957 to 1961, he was on the Tri City Regional Port District from '63 to 1997, and he was chairman of the port for 5 years. He was a charter member of the Southwestern Illinois Law Enforcement Commission from 1968 to 2013. He was past president of the Southwestern Illinois Metropolitan Area Regional Planning Commission, executive board member of the East-West Gateway Coordinating Council, he was past president of the Bi-State Development Agency, Executive Director of Boy Scouts of America, and he also served on the board, advisory board of Saint Elizabeth's Medical Center, which is now the Gateway Medical Center in Granite City. He was a lifelong member of many organizations, he was with the Madison Vets, the VFW. He did a lot. He loved serving people. He loved helping people. I mean, that was his big thing.

KS: You mentioned he was with the Boy Scouts, was your father a Boy Scout?

KC: That I don't know. I remember there was kinda going back to my grandfather and giving people free groceries, when my son was in middle school we met a family who actually, the mother grew up in Madison, and when she found out who I was, she actually saw my mom and dad at one of John's middle school basketball games, and she saw him, and she said, "Excuse me are you Mr. Bellcoff," and my dad said, "Yes I am," and then she proceeded to tell him who she was and who was her mother, and my dad, you know, recognized the last name etc., you know and they talked for a few minutes, and then she came to me and she said, "That man right there, I will never, ever forget him," and I said, "Yeah he's a pretty cool guy," not knowing what she was about to tell me, but he happened to be in the Schermer's Grocery store, that was the big grocery store in Madison at the time, and she said that he was in there for

something, and her and her mother were buying their groceries and they were running short of money, and he went ahead and paid for the rest of their groceries so, once again, they would have food on the table. And I don't know, stories like that are really awesome to hear. You just, that was just him. Always wanting to help others.

KS: That sounds like he's leaving a really nice legacy behind him and how people are remembering him. You mentioned the VFW, and I know that he was in the service, do you remember if he was doing any like Veteran's Day parades growing up?

KC: He always did, yeah. When he was mayor he always did the Veteran's parade, and I mean he was involved in all of that. He was also a Shriner, he was with the Ainad Temple, and he was in DeMolay when he was younger, and then he also received the highest honor with the Shriners in 2000 with the 33rd degree. So.

KS: I'm not familiar with the DeMolay, what exactly is that? DeMolay do you know?

KC: It's like right below the Shriners. I'm not exactly sure, but I know, it's like the younger, the younger boys, you become DeMolay, and then I think right after that then you go into the Shriners if I'm not mistaken, 'cause I think it's all within the same organization.

KS: So still community?

KC: Absolutely. Community service.

KS: Alright so your father belonged to a lot of different organizations, which kind of reminds me of your sister, your sister Norma, appears to belong to a lot of organizations that she caught on from your father with that.

KC: Correct.

KS: Alright, is there anything else that you can think of?

KC: I don't think so.

KS: Well okay, why thank you for sitting down and taking the time out of your day to participate in this project with me.

KC: No problem.