



WINDSOR
HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Jody Hart:
Share Your Windsor Story

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Oliver Ellsworth School, Windsor, CT

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Randy McKenney

You're on.

Sulema DePeyster

OK. You can start by introducing yourself.

Jody Hart

Hi, my name is Jody Hart. I grew up on Hayden Station Road. My family moved there when I was about two years old. The house had actually been uninhabited for a couple three years, so my dad had to do a lot of work to get the house up to date. It's 109 Hayden Station Road, built in the 1880s. The story was my mom, when we moved, all of us except for my mom had the mumps or the measles. So, there were five of us in bed, including my dad. She'd load up the car, run over, empty the car, clean some of the house, come back, get us lunch, load the car again. Then go back over, empty the car, clean the house, come back and feed us and go back a third time. My mom was a workaholic. But I did grow up on Hayden Station Road. I had a great time there. We had a nice big field. We played baseball and football in the backyard and neighbors across the street were a little older, but we played football with them all the time.

Jody Hart

I broke my collarbone in his backyard in fourth grade playing football. [00:01:00] Behind our house, we had a couple ponds. We'd go skating on and fishing in [it]. A nice stream in the backyard. We had a lot of fun with the water and the woods. Behind our house is all cabbage fields. It's now a development. They put that in when I was in college. Kind of heartbroken to see, you know, the ponds and stream gone, but that's development. And, actually, I came to Oliver Ellsworth when it first opened up in fourth grade. It opened up on my brother's birthday. February 1st, I believe. I believe that was the day it opened. I don't have a whole lot of memories of the school itself because that was a long time ago. It was 50 years ago. But I remember the pod system for the classrooms. You had the, like, different color carpets for the different grades. First and second, I think were gold and then green and blue. Whatever the colors were. Interesting set up.

Jody Hart

It was a terrible education system for me. Work at your own pace. [00:02:00] I'd rather talk to people than work, but I made it through high school. We were kind of isolated. A lot of my friends grew up in Pilgrim Village and they had a lot of activities going on there, but we were pretty alone where we were at. My two brothers and I had a lot of fun. We'd go around the railroad tracks and take pennies to the tracks to see if we could get them flattened. It worked once in a while. We got some of the glass insulators from the old telephone or telegraph lines. We still have a bunch of them. You know, my brothers and I went through my parents' house after they died and found a handful of those. We still have those, and just a lot of fun growing up in that old house. We'd ride our bikes down to Bart's on a regular basis, 3 miles away. My

parents would take us down every Saturday with our allowance of ten cents, and we'd get penny candy. If my grandparents came into town, my grandfather, Buca, would give us a quarter. We were millionaires [00:03:00] with that quarter to buy penny candy.

Jody Hart

But it's a nice, quiet town. It's interesting to see it built up so much. But there's a lot of stuff we did. Like I said, I grew up in the schools. I was very much involved with band. Mr. Hooper at Sage Park was – he's an icon. People today, if you ask people my age, “who was your favorite teacher?” Mr. Hooper hands down was a name most people would say, even they were just in band barely. They loved Mr. Hooper. He was a great, great man. Another thing I'll say, one of the first classes to come into Ellsworth, my sophomore year of high school is when they finished [remodeling] the high school. And the Big Rock out on Capen Street [near Windsor High School], my brother and I and the band were the first group to paint the rock in 1976 because my brother graduated in '77. It was the night before the Windsor Locks football game. [00:04:00] We went out and we painted the rock. First group ever to paint the rock after it was moved there. I've heard stories it was on the other part of the school, but when he painted it, there was no paint on it, so the band claims responsibility for the first coat of paint. If you strip it down, you'll see band.

Jody Hart

But great time here in town. Again, I was very involved with the band. My high school years, we did a lot of exchange concerts. We traveled to different states and played different jazz festivals we'd participate in. But I still have a lot of friends from Windsor. You young people don't appreciate Facebook like we older people do because I can keep in touch with my friends from elementary school. I still remember meeting one of my friends, Paul Ross, in kindergarten during a fire drill. He and I are still friends. He's in Chicago, but we still keep in touch through Facebook, and there's still a lot of old acquaintances. I remember playing in Little League. My last year playing Little League, Tommy Sheriff was a year ahead of me. He pitched a perfect [00:05:00] game in the town championship game. We won the town championship. We were the Pirates in the International League playing here in Poquonock. So, there's a lot of things to look back on and tell my kids the stories. I love to tell my grandkids, have them hear the stories because I loved hearing stories from my grandparents. How times have changed. I remember in school when there was the moon landing. They'd roll, you know, it was the summertime, but if there was a rocket taking off, they'd roll the TV's in and we'd watch TV. Watch a special event. That technology was pretty new. You know, the idea of TV and VCRs, and the VCR was really new for technology back then. But it was a good time to grow up in.

Sulema DePeyster

And were there any other questions on the board that you would like to answer? But you did share a lot of good stories.

Jody Hart

The population, what looked like. Very white. It was very white back then. I think there were [00:06:00] two or three Puerto Ricans when I graduated high school in my class. I looked through my yearbook recently because a couple years ago was my 40th reunion. There were more people of color than I remembered. Pond Road was, in my mind as a small child, was an all Black street. But it was -- I don't remember any issues growing up. We just were people. We didn't see any things like, you know, we saw in the 50s and early 60s before I was aware of things. But I just loved the school. Again, we had clicks, we had different people. Did you attend school in Windsor, let me see. Oh, my neighbors. Mrs. Foy was 70 years old when I moved into the house when I was two years old. She was at 101. There's actually a picture of her house on one of these billboards down here. [00:07:00] She had sheets all over her floor so she wouldn't scruff the floor.

Jody Hart

We'd go in, we'd help her mow her lawn, shovel her driveway, but she still had one of those little push mowers. You know, the powerless mowers? She'd mow her back lawn on her own at 70, 80, 90 years old. She was non-stop. But she was a real interesting woman. Very frugal. That's the politically correct word. Frugal woman. But she was a sweetheart. Some of the other questions. I do not live in Windsor. I live up in Springfield, Mass. My parents left town about 20 years ago. They realized that the one house with one bathroom -- yeah, four kids and one bathroom. That was an interesting time to grow up. They raised the bathrooms upstairs. They ended up selling the house and moving, building a small prefab. But they were there. They were told, "It's a nice starter house." [00:08:00] It's an old farmhouse with tiny rooms. Tiny, tiny rooms. But it was nice and quiet. Very quiet. I thought it was suburban. My wife, when she came to visit, said it was very rural. But from her perspective, growing up in Milwaukee and Clearwater, Florida, I guess Hayden Station was rural back in the day.

Sulema DePeyster

And were you saying you moved to Springfield 20 years ago?

Jody Hart

Oh no, I moved to Springfield 30 years ago. My parents moved out of Windsor about 20 years ago. Yeah, I met my wife in Syracuse. We've been all over the place. I was in the army for a few years in the army band. Thank you Mr. Hooper and Mr. Johnson for giving me the love of music. But we settled in Springfield with a large family. It's the cheapest place to live with a large family with seven kids. It's kind of [hard] to find a house big enough in in Windsor for a family of seven. What did my parents do for a living? To this day, my brothers and I can't figure out [00:09:00] what my dad did. He worked with computers in relation to credit unions, travelled all over the state and to Massachusetts. Some type of computer expert. We still don't understand, but my mother was a teacher at John Fitch School. When I got to junior high school at Sage Park and

people found out my mother is Mrs. Hart, they laughed at me because she terrorized the children because she was a disciplinarian.

Sulema DePeyster

Oh no. [laughs]

Jody Hart

If you were misbehaving during recess, she would walk on the playground holding your hand, humiliating you. She thought humiliation was a great form of discipline. But so, if anybody spent any time at John Fitch School in the 60s and 70s, they would know Mrs. Hart, and they would probably get cold sweats just thinking about it right now. And I lived with her. That's why I'm as straight as I am right now. Another thing about Hayden Station, when it was there when I grew up, Clap Road [00:10:00] – we called it Clap Lane – went all the way through from Hayden Station down to Palisado Avenue. They blocked it off when they built the big warehouse so the trains could stop there. But we would ride our bikes from what we'd call the triangle, from our house to Clap Lane, down to Palisado, down to Hayden Station Road and back up to our house. And so, at the V at Hayden Station, there was a gentleman that had a Bait and Tackle shop. Walt's Bait and Tackle. He was missing one hand. We'd go up there and just talk to him all the time. He was probably annoyed with us, but we'd get our hooks and sinkers from him to go fishing, but everything was self-contained right there. I guess that's about it.

Sulema DePeyster

OK then. Thank you so much for sitting down with us and talking about your childhood.

Jody Hart

My pleasure.

Randy McKenney

[laughs] Thank you.

Jody Hart

Thank you.