

EARL CARR
Interview 106a
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Billy Kujala, Interviewer
Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with student Billy Kujala, Earl Carr recalls going to school in Diboll in the 1940's and 1950's. He talks about his teachers Mrs. Dixie Cook and Mrs. Beatrice Burkhalter, walking to and from school, his favorite subjects, and what he remembers of World War II and the Korean War as a child. He also touches on the differences between schools in the 1940's and the 1980's.

Billy Kujala interviewing Earl Carr from Diboll, Texas. December 11, 1986.

Billy Kujala (hereafter BK): What was school like for you as a kid?

Earl Carr (hereafter EC): It was probably a lot different than it is now, probably the main difference was the fact that there weren't as many kids in school when I went. I think in my graduating class there were probably twenty-four people who graduated in 1954 and most all of those I went through school with. It was, for me, school was easy, I didn't particularly like it that much, I guess because I was an old boy but it was pretty easy for me, probably just like you, I had favorite subjects and some subjects I didn't like. Our school was probably two miles from where we lived and my brother and I walked every day. Like it is now, we had a whole hour for lunch and we walked back home at lunch, then we walked back to school.

BK: Two miles?

EC: Yes, for a long time we didn't have a cafeteria. I don't remember when it was in school that we got a cafeteria but we did start eating at the cafeteria. I don't remember what the price was, I know for a while I swept the cafeteria out in the evenings after school and got my lunches free. We weren't what you could call real poor but we didn't have a lot of money either and every time we could save some money like that we did it. Then I mowed lawns, stuff like that, to help the family out. We did have to walk to school. The school, I can remember in the winter the school being real cold. We had steam heating and you could sit on the heaters and they wouldn't burn you, they just didn't get that warm. I can remember it being cold in the wintertime, but it wasn't too bad in the summer, it wasn't real hot. Of course, we had the windows open and fans and we didn't notice the heat in summer as we did the cold in the winter. I especially remember it being cold in the winter. I don't know if you are going to ask me these different questions or not, but my favorite subject in school was geography. In the lower grades I liked geography and I still like to get maps and look at different countries. I take the National Geographic Magazine and different magazines like that because I like to study different parts of the world. But school, when I first started to school it was easy for me and I enjoyed it. It got a little harder in high school but I enjoyed going to school, but like any

other boy, I was glad when summer time came. What I remember most about spring and summer, not pertaining to school, but the fact that we could take our shoes off and go barefooted. I really looked forward to that, it's not a big thing but it was something special to me. School was different then and I think the big difference probably was the fact that there weren't as many students in school as there are now.

BK: Did they have the same kind of punishment as they do now?

EC: Yes, I think, we had corporal punishment then which is paddling and I think the school still has paddling now but probably not as much as there was then. We had a long hallway in the old elementary school. I remember going down to Mrs. Burkhalter's office and that's where they took us. We called that hallway "The Last Mile." If somebody got taken down there for a paddling you could hear it all over the building. When anyone got a paddling you knew exactly what was going on. Quite a few, of course more boys than girls, in fact, I don't remember a girl getting a paddling the whole time I was in school. The boys got their share of paddlings but I think it did us a lot of good, particularly. I am in favor of it, of paddlings. I know a lot of people are not in favor of paddling but I am and I think there is a place for it in school and I think it should stay.

BK: Do you remember any particular incident when you got licked?

EC: Yes, which one would you like to hear about? I got, I guess the worst paddling I got was from Mrs. Cook, Dixie Cook and she was probably my favorite teacher, too. She could paddle, I guess, harder than any man we had. She gave me a paddling, in fact, five or six boys, this particular paddling I remember, five or six of us boys got one. Somebody had emptied some rotten apples in one of the barrels outside and we found them. We started throwing them at one of the other boys and one of the teachers saw us and took us all in Mrs. Burkhalter's office and Mrs. Cook gave us all a paddling. That's probably the worst paddling I ever got because I really felt it and it hurt me pretty bad. When – I remember when Mrs. Cook would give us a paddling she would always tell our parents and she told my parents that I got a paddling that particular day and they wanted to know if she gave it to us good enough. Yes, we got a few paddlings and, of course, we had our own standbys. In the lower grades we had to stand in the corner and different things like that, or we had to stay in at recess; I've stayed in. I think I would rather get a paddling than I had to stay in at recess because, you know, everybody likes recess, or we may have to stay in after school and dust erasers or something like that. If I had a choice I would rather have gotten a paddling, except for Mrs. Cook.

BK: Were your parents strict about you keeping up with your grades?

EC: Yes, my parents didn't stay on me all the time about my grades; they were very interested in whether or not I was doing my home work, very interested in what was going on at school. My mother worked and belonged to the PTA for years and years and anytime anything was going on at school they were there and were very interested in what I was doing, and saw to it that I got an education. If I needed something that I had to have they saw to it that I got it. Like I said before, we didn't have much money but some

way or another they managed to get everything I needed because they were interested in my getting at least a high school education. I didn't lack for anything that I needed all during school.

BK: Did you participate in extracurricular activities?

EC: Yes, my favorite to do, I liked the drama, we had drama classes, I guess you would say. We put on, especially in high school a lot of plays. We always had a lot of people turn out, we had our plays in the old gym, up on the state and we always had to put a lot of chairs out on the gym floor and it was always full each time we put on a play. Of course, we had our senior play, that was the last play that you put on but probably the reason so many people turned out for something like that was the fact that there weren't a lot of TV's back then, people didn't go to the movies very much, in fact, the movie wasn't even open until the weekend, I believe, the town people enjoyed the plays we put on, I really was interested in that. Enjoyed doing it and I played a little bit of football, not too much. Wasn't ever big enough to be a good football player but I liked to do that. I liked the FFA, always had a project in FFA, always liked to go out on the field trips that we had, enjoyed doing that all during high school. I usually had a hog, or something like that to raise, just anything that was going on. Back then, it wasn't really that far back but there wasn't a lot to do and a lot of activities was what was going on at school. We just fell right in, just looking for something to do. Whatever happened to be going on we were doing it, too. A basketball game or baseball game, we were always there, really enjoyed it. I think probably the drama part of it, the plays we put on I enjoyed more than any of the other extra-curricular activities while I was in school.

BK: Did they have school vacations, like that, for Halloween?

EC: Yes, I don't remember getting off as much as you do now though for Christmas or Thanksgiving. I'm sure we did but I don't think we got off two weeks for Christmas. I may be wrong but I think we just got a week for Christmas. We didn't have spring break or anything like that. I remember starting school just around the sixth or seventh of September every year; it's a little bit different now. While I was in service I spent...just comparing different country schools, I spent some time in Europe and I mentioned this to my children a few times. Kids in Europe go to school almost the year round, they go from eight to five in some countries like France, they go on Saturday, six days a week. Almost the year round but they finish school a little early, or a little younger than we do. A lot of the schools over there, the kids have the same kind of clothes, or uniforms, or whatever you want to call it. I don't know if it's my imagination or what, but seems like they emphasize education more in the European countries than they do here. I know we stress education in America but it seems, you know, that they may stress it a little more in the European countries than they do here but they go to school almost all the time until they finish over there.

BK: Do you think you got a good education at this school?

EC: Yes, one thing I might mention right here, when I was going to school, reading writing and arithmetic was stressed, I think, more than it is right now. I may be really

wrong there by saying that but I believe the basics were emphasized more when I was going to school. I realize there is a lot more to do and a lot more to study now than then but the fact that we got those three things better when I was going to school. We got reading, writing, and arithmetic better. The reason I say that is the fact that I am working young men now that can't read or write all that good, whether it is their own fault or the school, I really don't know but I believe it was stressed more in my days, the three "R's", as they say.

BK: Do you think that since they have computers now and new types of mathematics that you would rather be going to school today instead of when you did?

EC: I don't know and that's probably why it was easier for me than it is for today's students. When you stop and consider the fact that there is so much more to learn now, such as computers, gosh, when I was going to school there wasn't any such thing as space travel. You can just look at the time I've been out of school, the things that have happened, you know, men going to the moon, we've had President's assassinated, leader's in our country are assassinated, we've fought another unpopular war, the computer has become of age and that's another source of learning. I believe the students today have a lot more to learn, you have to learn a lot more today to compete in the world, it is a highly technical world today and if you don't get it in high school it is really rough. If you don't get it in elementary and high school, college is almost impossible, I would think, and if you don't have the college now it will be real hard to get one of today's type jobs, in a highly technical society today. That makes it hard on today's students, you have to study harder, work harder, it's just rougher, I believe. Probably we had it easier in my time.

BK: Looking back at school – you said there weren't very many people at school; do you still have a lot of friends?

EC: Yes, probably we were more like family than anything, you know, fellow students. My class that I went on through school with is still communicating with each other, which I doubt happens very much in today's school. We meet sometime, periodically we meet and talk and we communicate with each other, so we are more like a family. Another thing that just crossed my mind, and it makes it harder in today's school and it is the fact that you have drugs and that sort of thing in every school, I imagine. You have to watch out for that. I think society is more permissive now, what I mean by that, a lot of things "Go" now that didn't go in my time. You know a lot of things are permitted that were not permitted in my time and you know those are the things you have to cope with now. You have to decide, or I think you have a tougher time now deciding what's really wrong and what is really right than you did in my time. It was fairly simple in my time to know what was right and what was wrong, it was black and white. I don't really think it is black and white any more, there is too much to it now. I feel like it makes it rough, especially on students your age coming up and there is something you will really have to look at and really figure out for yourself, you know, as you mature and grow older and mature in your schooling, what is good and what is not good. It is going to be rough, I think, rougher than it was back in the '40's and '50's.

BK: Were schools as racial as they are now?

EC: No, I don't even think we knew what the word meant. Of course, we didn't have black people in our school, we didn't go to the black schools and the blacks didn't go to our school, but we didn't really think about it either. That's just the way it was, we had Mexican kids in our school but I don't think we knew what the word "race" meant. We all lived together and worked together and we didn't think about it that much. It just wasn't a problem. If we had tried integration back then it might have become a problem, like it did when it finally did happen. But I don't really think it was ever a real problem in Diboll, in schools in Diboll. I think we are smarter here, but it never really seemed to be a big problem here at all. It was something that we never did think about, never bothered us.

BK: Looking back, when you were in school, did you think that you were really learning anything and that you would benefit from the things you were learning?

EC: I didn't see how English was ever going to help me get a job. I didn't like English very much in my grammar school years but a teacher came after I got in high school, Mrs. McCormick, and she was rough and she made us learn it and, after I got where I could learn what it was all about, I enjoyed it and it turned out that English was one of my best subjects when I got out of high school. I think that's probably the key to every subject today, if you enjoy it, you know, you can learn, but how are you going to enjoy it? That is the question, you have to motivate yourself in some way to be interested in the subject and enjoy the subject. If you enjoy it I think you will make better grades. One of the things I think you have to do is to convince yourself that it is important, even if English didn't seem important you have to convince yourself that it is important and every subject is important, spelling is important, arithmetic, whatever it is, history. You might wonder how in the world is remember Hoover was President and what years he was President going to help me in a job somewhere, but it's part of it. It all contributes to the final outcome of how your life is going to be when you get out of school, how you are going to advance in life and I believe it is all important, the whole curriculum in school is important.

BK: Looking back when you were in school, what do you think an event, or a person, like subject, what do you think you want to remember the most?

EC: Oh, probably our senior trip. No, I think the, as far as the teacher I will remember the most, there are a couple of them but probably the one I enjoyed most is Mrs. Cook, she just had a way of motivating you and not with a paddle but she had a way of motivating you, would just make you want to learn and make you want to work. I think the part I miss most about school is not the different subjects, not the different curriculum and stuff, but I think the part I miss most is the fellowship that I had with fellow students. It's something you only do one time during your life and after it is over with you think about it quite often, you know, why in the world didn't I do something different, or I could have done better in this, so I think the fellowship with the student is something you

will never forget and you wish you had done some things different as far as your fellow students are concerned. I think the whole school experience is something you think about and I think you should live it to the fullest, when you have an assignment do it to the best of your ability. If it's a sporting event, do it to the best of your ability because somewhere way down the road, when you get up in the 40's and 50's you will look back on that particular event and say "Boy, I wished I had done better." I think the whole school experience, in a nutshell, is an event in your life that you will always remember.

BK: I think it is neat that what we are studying in history right now is what happened when you were in school, like the Korean War and stuff like that, what was that like when you were in school, experiencing a war?

EC: The Korean War is about the only one I remember real well, I can remember some of World War II. I really didn't know how serious it was. I remember the Korean War real well, and I remember knowing how serious it was. I couldn't figure out why we were, it didn't make a whole lot of sense, why we were over there in a little bitty country losing young boys, for seemingly no reason. It was years later before I realized that what we were doing in fighting a little country like that. Of course, it was the fact that we fight communism somewhere else rather than in our own country. But, at the time I don't think I realized, it didn't make a whole lot of sense to me, of course, I was out of school when the Vietnam situation started. In fact, I was in the service when that was going on, fortunately I never did have to go to Vietnam. Of course, this is not getting into politics or anything like that, but that particular war didn't make a whole lot of sense. I don't think any war makes a lot of sense, as far as that goes. Because, getting back to school, you work a lot of your life in school to learn and you don't want to go to another country and fight a war, you want to take what you learn and supply it to something else, rather than a war. You want to take it and use it on a job or something like that. Yes, I remember the Korean and some of World War II wars but the only thing I remember about those, it didn't make a whole lot of sense to me of what was going on.

BK: When you were in school what was your main goal? When you graduated from school do you think that is the end of your schooling or learning?

EC: Yes, I thought it was when I graduated in 1954, that was a long time ago, wasn't it? Yes, I thought that was the end of school that I would have to get and I went into the service, basic training was sort of like school, a little more scary. Then, after I finished basic training they sent me to school, a three-month school, learned a job that they had decided I was going to do when I was in basic training. Finished that school and they sent me to a permanent station and my particular career in the service was communications and I stayed in communications ten years, or stayed in the service ten years, in communications all that time and I never stopped going to school. Every time they would improve some of the communications equipment they would send us to school to learn how to do it. When I got out of the service and had a few odd jobs, when to work doing the particular job I am doing now here in Diboll, water superintendent and I'm still going to school. I go to A & M for what we call "short school" once a year. We had A & M come to our city three or four times a year and put on another "short school" that lasts a

week at a time. We learn more about the job that we are doing so, you know, I don't think there is any job now that you don't keep refreshing yourself, learning, and I think the twelve years that you go to public school are real important because, if you don't get your English and you don't get your spelling and math, it is going to make those schools that you are going to have to go to afterwards, really tough whether it is computers, or missiles or something like that. In service you have to have those basic subjects, and I think that you ought to get them now because it will make it so much easier when you get out and get that good job. I don't think you ever quit going to school or you don't quit learning even after high school, it just goes on and on. So get it now, make it easier for the future.

BK: Thank you, Earl, for taking your time to do this interview with me.

END OF INTERVIEW