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Jerry Day

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Mary Grace Detmer
Kenyon College

Hannah Klubeck
Kenyon College

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KENYON COLLEGE
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Stories of Knox County

Jerry Day
Interviewed by
Mary Grace Detmer and Hannah Klubeck
On
February 20, 2017

Kenyon College

Oral History Project
Stories of Knox County

Interviewee: Jerry Day

Interviewer: Mary Grace Detmer and Hannah Klubeck

February 20, 2017

Mary Grace Detmer: This is Mary Grace Detmer and Hannah Klubeck with the Stories of Knox County Project interviewing *Jerry Day* on his experiences with life in Knox County. Today's date is *February 20th 2017* and we are speaking in Fredericktown. Thank you for your willingness to participate. Could you please state your full name and birthdate?

Jerry Day: Jerry Day. August 29th, 1952.

MGD: How long have you lived in Fredericktown?

JD: I moved here in 1976

MGD: What brought you here?

JD: Well, I met a girl. That's what brought me here. Not gonna lie to you. (laughter). In 1972 I started working in a factory, it was a bus factory, like the city busses. So I started there in '72 and in 1975 I joined the Knox County sheriff's office as an auxiliary deputy. You guys know what an auxiliary deputy is? It's a part time position, basically you go out and you ride with the officers and work the ballgames and things like that. So that was 1975. 1976 I met a girl up here and moved up here. So '75, '76 and part of '77 Fredericktown only had a part time police department. You have to understand back then Fredericktown you would have a police department, then you wouldn't have a police department. So basically the mayor and the council are the people that decide whether you have a police department or not so back in the sixties, up until the seventies, so I've been told, as I wasn't around, they'd have the police department for two three years then there would be a problem and they'd do away with their police department. With the strike of a pencil the council says we don't want a police department anymore. So its history. Then they would contract with the sheriff's office so in those two years, '76 and '77, in that area, I worked part time with the sheriff's office here. I worked in Loudonville in the day time and here (Fredericktown) at nights.

MGD: Have you left Fredericktown since you came?

JD: No. I started on the police department February 3rd, 1979. Way before you guys were born (Laughter).

MGD: How do you interact with your community beyond your work, even though your work is so directly involved with the community?

JD: Heres what I do, the mayor's position, it's not a full time position. So what I do in my spare time, I work on a farm. I retired in 2014 and jokingly said to this farmer, if you ever need help, call me... Well I'm not gonna say that ever again (laughter) cause he says, "ya I need help!" I've known this farmer for thirty years. I grew up on a farm. I enjoy farming.

MGD: What do you do on this farm?

JD: The farm up here strictly grain. Corn, beans. I'm originally from West Virginia. So I moved up here in '72.

MGD: What are some of your hobbies?

JD: My wife's not gonna hear this is she? (laughter). No, what I love to do, I love to hunt. I hunt deer, groundhogs. My goal? I wanna do it and I'm gonna do it hopefully before I die. I want to shoot a bear. I've seen them, I've hunted them, but I've never killed them.

MGD: Where is the best place?

JD: We'll probably go to West Virginia. That's the closest for a black bear.

MGD: But normally you hunt here?

JD: I hunt here and West Virginia both. I've got relatives in West Virginia that have a farm and during the summer months I try from April from September to spend a week back there every month. Making hay, building fence. Things like that. Down there they have livestock. Up here, I like the grain better, it doesn't smell as bad (laughter).

MGD: Going back to your childhood, what were some of the childhood values instilled in you growing up?

JD: Um, growing up it was to respect others. You know, respect others.

MGD: Do you have any family heirlooms?

JD: I don't have any, we have some but I don't have any. I came from a large family, there's ten of us, and I'm the youngest of ten.

MGD: Does your family get together often? Holidays?

JD: Um, two brothers and my parents are gone. I see them quite often yes. I have a brother and a sister up here and the rest of them are in West Virginia.

MGD: Since your time here in Fredericktown, how has Knox County changed and how did these changes come about?

JD: Well. I've almost made a complete circle here. Let me explain this to you. When I started here, in '79, that municipal building across the street, the back room was one room about the size

of this room. That room consisted of the police department. We had three guys. There were three of us. So that was our office. Then I went from there to here (the room we were talking in). There were two offices here. So I was here for I don't know how many years. Then, this is before your time, Dana, a big fire south of town here, Dana Corporation, it burnt. They gave us the land and part of the buildings. Well the buildings we converted into the police department. So I went from there to here to there and now I'm back to here. One more move and they're gonna run me out (laughter).

MGD: When you first came here, versus now, how have occupations changed?

JD: Out along thirteen we had a factory called Word Craft. Since I've been here they're gone, Kokosing bought it and Kokosing is using that now. In that same area we had another factory called Amesco. They did computer panels and things like that, and that factory has since stopped. And, we had another small factory, family owned, on one of our side streets here. They made lamps, and they've closed. We had Dana, Dana burnt but they relocated west of town, but they're basically in town. So then we had another unique Metals, out there next to Kokosing. That's come in since I have been here. We've lost a couple and we've gained a couple. When I retire, they gave me a little plaque and a resolution that says, "thank goodness he's gone" and all that stuff you know (laughter), but it said on there during the time I've been here we went from three officers to four officers, one car to three cars and all that. I looked at that, and it said I had done this stuff and I said, "No... that's not right" and they looked at me and said, "What do you mean that's not right?" And I said, "It's not I." I don't believe in I. It can't be me. Council is the one that gives me the money and supports what I want to do. They give me the money to build the building or remodel the building, so how can it be I? It's got to be a joint effort. We all have to work together. One person can't do it. I tell everybody, "The only time that I use I is if... I oversee the village administrator and the police chief... now if I tell them to do something and it's wrong, then it's I. The buck stops here. It's I." But other than that, you gotta work together, and same way with council now. We gotta work together. I'm finding out that you can get a lot more done if you communicate with each other. When you get people going out saying I'll do this you do that, it's no good. It's a team effort. It's a team effort. You gotta work together. Everybody says "Look what you did!" No. It's what we did. As a team. But if it don't go right, then it's I. I get the blame for it! (laughter). I can put up with that, it doesn't bother me.

MGD: Is there an image that comes to mind when you hear the phrase Knox County?

JD: Fredericktown. Let me tell you, you see a lot of towns where your police department and other people, you constantly see they're feuding. I'll tell you, I was sheriff for thirty-five years, thirty years as chief. I can honestly tell you that I got along good with all the council members, and I got along good with all the mayors because they were my boss. I'm not their boss. After I retired, and you may not believe this, but I like joking with people, I do (laughter). I like to walk downtown and see people, sometimes I know them sometimes I don't. But hey, if they want to

talk, I'll talk. I don't care. After I retired, I thought, I miss the interaction with the people, that's why I decided to get back into it again (and run for mayor).

MGD: Does Kenyon College figure into your perception of Knox County? If so, how?

JD: I used to work Kenyon college. Kenyon used to have dances all the time. I worked it as a deputy. Spatial detail down there. Well, it would be nothing unusual to get two trash cans full of alcohol. They would come in and we loved it, and we knew this was gonna happen. You'd see them come in with these big hats on you know, and we'd say, "what you got in that hat?" They'd say nothing. Raise it up and they got a big six-pack falling out (laughter). It was a nice college. I've attended some spatial things they've put on and I enjoyed it. I like Kenyon.

MGD: How long did you work at Kenyon?

JD: From '75 to '79 off and on we'd work Kenyon. They had a big fire down at Kenyon, the old Mill burnt down, I was down there the night the old Mill burnt down

MGD: What do you remember from that night?

JD: I remember I was riding with a sergeant at the sheriff's office, it was his last night, he was retiring. So we pulled in into the sheriff's office, and they said Kenyon's got a big fire so we went out and got in the car and we drove down.

MGD: What do you think the people who haven't had a connection with Kenyon's perception of Kenyon is?

JD: You know I get around. I don't wanna say this, oh I'll say it anyways. I've never heard anyone say anything negative about Kenyon. I really haven't.

MGD: Now we're going to move onto your police chief job. What was it like to be a part of the police force?

JD: I enjoyed it. Really did.

MGD: What was your favorite part of the job?

JD: Going out, talking to people. My favorite job is to watch for Kenyon students coming up the four lane (laughter).

MGD: What was the relationship between the relationship between the police force and Fredericktown?

JD: We had a fire here one time. I can remember this lady, older lady, good friend of mine, her house was on fire upstairs. I said, "you gotta get out!" She said, "I'm not leaving. You take my TV first." So I took the TV out and then she followed me out there. She was not gonna leave her TV in there. I like small town, you can come in here, you've got work in the office to do. You

come in, you do your work, then you can go back out on the road, drive around, give some autographs out if you want to (laughter).

MGD: What was the most recurring crime in Fredericktown?

JD: The most reoccurring is domestics. Domestic violence. You keep going back and back, you feel bad for the people. I'll tell you, one thing that really upsets me is when you have kids involved. I went on a call one night and this guy had a handicap child. He was making some smart remarks about him and that was the only time in my life I just wanted to get him and lock him up, but he wouldn't do anything. That really rubs me the wrong way. I have a handicap child and it's close to my heart. That's close to my heart and I don't like it.

MGD: Would you expand a little bit on your family here in Fredericktown?

JD: I have a wife and two kids. The lady I met in '76 is not the same one today (laughter). Not the same one. My step son is thirty-seven and step daughter is thirty-five. (shows photo of grandchildren.) They're five, seven, sixteen months, and a month old. Needless to say (busy house). I got along good with the town. I wouldn't have been here all those years if it was a constant battering back and forth. I don't have a contract here, if I don't like it I can leave. I got along good with the mayor and the council and if it hadn't of been for that I wouldn't have stayed thirty-five years.

MGD: Do you think that life is more peaceful in a rural town or cities?

JD: Years ago, rural life was more peaceful, but now we're getting more and more, some of the things that big cities are getting, we're just not getting as many. You're talking drugs, it's here. If anyone tells you they don't have it, that's not the case. We just indicted two here for trafficking heroin. That's something else I enjoyed, I enjoyed working drug cases. I worked with the attorney general a couple of times and one time we got twenty some... I love that. Those dummies out there saying, "They're not gonna catch me!" We have it all on tape, what they're saying, I love that. You go to arrest them and get to say, "I'm the dummy you were talking about, remember?"

MGD: What do you think about the treatment of police in the United States as a whole?

JD: I think some places they're getting carried away, I admit it. Prime example, Cleveland, why would would shoot, now tell me I might be wrong, there were one hundred shots at a guy trying to outrun them. There were seventy or one hundred shots. Why. Why would you shoot that many times. That just doesn't make sense. But on some of the other stories, I think you're only getting the one side of it, you're not gettin the whole story of what happened. The news is not gonna play both sides of it. I shouldn't say they're not, but I found out a lot of times there's three sides [to a story]. Your side, their side, and what happened. You go to domestics and its, "He hit me." "No he hit me!" And it's who hit who, you know. When I first started, it was hard to arrest someone for domestic violence, now if you don't arrest someone for domestic violence, you better have

good document for why you didn't arrest someone. "Was there a mark on her?" I would say there's no marks. It's a fine line, it's a fine line. If there's marks that's one section of law. If someone says, "I'm gonna kick your south side" and you feel that person is gonna do it, that's another section. You know, you have to try to figure out who is the aggressor and sometimes it's hard to do.

HK: When were you elected mayor?

JD: I took office in January of 2016. I was elected in '15. It's a four year term. They sentenced me to four years (laughter).

HK: Do you plan on running again?

JD: I'm not gonna say I'm not gonna run again. It depends on my wife, if she'll let me retire. She's still working, and as long as she's working I'll probably run again.

HK: What does she do?

JD: She's a nurse at KCH.

HK: What made you decide to run for mayor?

JD: I got tired of sitting around the house. I missed the people, I missed the interaction with the people.

HK: Would you say there's a close relationship with government and people here?

JD: Yeah I think they're pretty close. Usually at our council meetings we don't have eight or ten people knocking on our door and escorting them out of the meetings. Looking back to my years in high school, my goal was to get out of high school and work in a factory. I had no intentions of going into law enforcement. None. I was always into trouble (laughter). Nah, I wasn't in trouble. But really, that never crossed my mind until I got out and worked in a factory and seen that the sheriff's office had this program that you could work part time and you wore the same uniform as a regular guy did. I thought, that looks pretty nice I think I'm gonna try it out. So that happened and the bus factory that I was working at was getting a little bit shaky and the mayor of this town he says, "why don't you come and work for me." I thought I don't know, but I came here and said, "If I last 30 days it's gonna be good." Didn't know it would be thirty-five years (laughter).

HK: Could you share a description of a typical day of work here?

JD: A typical day is, I don't have any hours, any set hours. I get to the office around 10 and hang around until two or three in the afternoon. Sometimes people want to stop in and I'm here. I'm here for the people, as long as it's not after ten or before six in the morning (laughter). I'm here for the people, if I have to meet with them late at night, I don't care. Like I say, these people around town are my bosses, it's not the people sitting around the table. I work for the people.

They're the only ones that can run me out of town. I enjoy it. Let me back up... It should be mandatory in school, typing. Today, I am in trouble, hunting and pecking. I'm up to four fingers now (laughter). When I was in school I was in FFA (Future Farmers of America) and I slacked off. I admit it. We studied parliamentary procedure, and I thought, I'm gonna work in a factory, I don't need parliamentary procedure, but I passed it. Now, I come to the meetings, the mayor runs the meetings, and we go through parliamentary procedure at the meetings. I think, "man, if I paid a little more attention in school, it would have been alright" (laughter). I did not go to college. You ain't gonna believe this but when I joined the sheriff's office you didn't have to have any school. From the day you started for one year you had to start your school, so yeah. He'd swear you in and he'd give you your badge and you'd go out and ride with him. You had to buy your uniforms.

HK: How has your position of mayor changed your views of the community?

JD: I honestly don't think it's changed, I still get out and walk downtown and talk to the people just like I normally would if I was on the police department. Only thing is I don't miss handling the calls or going out handling an accident. I do like going out and writing some autographs (laughter).

HK: What is the greatest problem facing your community and the greater Knox County?

JD: The greatest thing is money. We have probably, we've been told this several times, we have the highest water rates in the county. You're saying why, I can tell. A few years ago, EPA came in here and said you will do this because your sewer plant is not matching up to our standards, so you will build this. So we had to say, "But how will we pay for it?" They (the EPA) said "That's your problem." So we had to build a sewer plant. Naturally your water bill and your sewer bill pay for your sewer and your water so you have to raise those rates up to generate enough money to keep those two departments going. Well we had to raise the water rates up because I forget how many millions of dollars it cost us. Were paying like somewhere around six hundred thousand a year for the sewer plant, then we got a water tower we built, I forget how many thousands of dollars it costs us a year for that. Then we got streets, then we got our police department. The police department is over three hundred thousand to operate, or close to four probably. You add all that up, and paving, street paving. We're hoping, we're trying to get a grant, we would like to improve main street. Put new sidewalks, I'd love to see little lights up. I'd love to see that. I don't know if I'll be able to see that or not. We would like to improve it. I lived here all this time, I have no intentions of moving. I would love to see it.

HK: How are you working to address these issues?

JD: We have an association called Fredericktown Community Development Foundation. It consists of businesses and we meet once a month. Our president, which is one of our council members, he got a hold of somebody and got a grant for I think somewhere around ten, twelve thousand dollars. We contacted Ohio State, I guess we should have contacted Kenyon, to look at

Main Street and give us some ideas for how we can improve the outside. We found this out years ago. You don't wanna get somebody from out of town come in here and walk in a business and say, "You should be doing this, you should be doing this." Oh, that will never fly. We got this, I think it cost us about twelve thousand dollars, they come in and done a survey and gave us some ideas, some things. You live here and it's things you don't think about. Some of the things were our signs, we're not consistent with our signs. It's a minor thing, just little things like that, just to give us some ideas. We're trying to get some money, a grant, to do some work downtown. Maybe sidewalks, new trees down through town. I'd love to see that. I'll tell you something else I love Fredericktown for. You may hear some people, "Well I'm not gonna do this, I'm not gonna do that." Well let me tell you something, something happens, they're all together. You see that bandstand over there? That bandstand was built at no charge to the town. It was donated. People donated it. People donated their time, put money in for the material, to help us build that bandstand. Another prime example of how, even though they might not get along sometimes, they work together if something happens, you know where our library is located? That was built, and the community donated the labor. We started over there one day and there was nothing but the concrete. I think over one hundred people showed up to donate their time, the wives and the other people brought in all the food to pay those guys. Our field house, the football field house, same way. It was people. They payed it off early, they had one big fire there one night, burnt the papers. It was good. I can say people they work together here, they stick together. When you can get people in a small community to work together, that tells you a lot.

HK: What is your favorite duty as mayor of the town?

JD: Sitting back talking to you guys (laughter). The favorite part as mayor I suppose is just dealing with the people. I like being there sometimes when people come in and pay their water bill. People will come in and pay their water bill and I'll joke with them and talk to them and they'll walk out and I'll say, "Who was that, I don't know who that was," doesn't make any difference. I don't care. I just like to mingle with the people. But my favorite part of mayor, I don't know I haven't found it yet. There are many things that I enjoy.

HK: Does your job allow you to maintain a good life/work balance?

JD: Yes. You think, small town, people are gonna be calling you at home complaining, they don't. Even when I was chief. People say I thought about calling you but I didn't have your phone number. I would say, "Look it up in the book. My numbers in the book." If people wanted me, I have no problem with that. Now if they call and got a little belligerent, they're gonna be talking to the receiver (laughter). But no, I can honestly say that I never hung up on anybody and as the mayor now I've gotten some calls and they've been very polite. One guys he had sewer problems and it's been our fault and he has called me and we worked it out and I don't have any problem with anybody. I don't. I will say at some meetings sometimes I don't always agree, and that's normal. If everybody agrees all the time then something's wrong here. I just want everybody to speak their own piece. If you're against something don't pass it now and then

tomorrow come back and say, "Man I shouldn't have voted, I had a notion to vote no." Well then vote no. This is real hard, and I've been doing a good job I think, I've got to remember things that happen in that office stays in that office. It's not a personal thing. Basically if they don't agree with me I've got to find some way that I can convince them (laughter). If I say, "I think we need to buy a new truck" and they say, "No, I don't think we need a new truck," well let me explain to you why I think we do. We did that last year, piece of equipment we wanted to buy, and it was pretty expensive and I said I think we ought to buy it. People said, "welllll I don't think we should." So what I did is I got some of the members out and talked and showed them what we could do with this piece of equipment cleaning storm sewers and stuff like that. And after they'd seen it operate...

HK: Have you learned anything through the process of being mayor?

JD: Yes. Do this one time and one time only (laughter). No, it's not like this was all new to me. I knew what it was going into it. If someone didn't have the experience with council all those years, it would have been hard. But the people that's on there now, all of them except one were on there when I was police chief. I got along good with them then, so when I got elected mayor there was no problem. So that helped.

CRO: Thank you so much, what a wonderful story.