

Tape 3, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Victor Atiyeh at his office in downtown Portland, Oregon. The interviewer, for the Oregon Historical Society, is Clark Hansen, the date is December 1, 1992, and this is Tape 3, Side 1.

You had mentioned that you married Dolores Hewitt on July 5, 1944. Maybe you could tell me a little bit more about her background and how that developed.

VA Well, you know, when it comes to backgrounds, I told you I didn't really spot her until almost my last half year in high school. She was very popular, and she also was involved in high school government, and was also popular with the boys. Remember I told you about all these phone calls she was getting, and, by contrast from me, she claims she didn't have that many dates at all, but she was very popular. So much of what I would know about her is what I learned after we were going together and finally married. Her father - well, he was a building contractor in the thirties. Well, even earlier than that, because he went up to what we called the Mine in 1929, which is up the Santiam, and really spent practically all his life up there at the mine. It never really fully developed into a full-fledged mine, although I've been in the tunnels and I've seen all of this, and I'm sure there's some ore there. Now, whether it can be taken out and make some money, I don't know. And it's never - it's still there. But anyway, her father was doing that. She has two sisters, both of which are older than she is, one by ten years and one by twelve years older than Dolores. That's pretty much it. The sisters were raised, I think, in Florida before they moved to Portland. Dolores was born and raised in Portland. AS a matter of fact, the same doctor delivered us only nine months apart. All of this, of course, I've learned since then, since I started going with her. It's hard to - you know, it's one of these things that I really wasn't really interested in girls

until I saw her. Then my eyes started spinning.

CH Did she go on to school after graduation at all?

VA Yes. She went to Oregon, so actually we had a year together at Oregon, because I went down in '41, and then she went down - that would be in September of '41. She went down in September of '42. Then I left, and she spent another year there, so we both had two years; one year we were there together.

CH Did she have any professional or educational goals of her own?

VA Not that I know of. She fondly remembers, and did a very good job - she had a job as a high school student. They had what they called a college board at Lipman and Wolfe, and she was one that was there selling. [She] enjoyed it and did a very good job at it. She was an art major, she liked art, and that's what she did. That was her major. I mean, she actually had a major that she was interested in doing. Mine just sort of happened, but she had one that she went down for, and she's been good at it. She's kept it up over all the years. Even now, she's taking ikebana lessons. We have a pottery wheel at home, although she hasn't touched it for a great number of years. But she's always - you know, she likes taking classes of a variety kind.

CH What were her religious views, or her family's?

VA Well, I don't really know. We were married in the Episcopal church. She does mention going, not to an Episcopal church, but I'm not sure she was closely identified with the church, although I'm sure she went to other churches. But we've both been Episcopalian from the time we were married.

CH And what was the ceremony like when you got married?

VA Very small. We actually were married in the chapel of Trinity Episcopal. It was small. Obviously, there weren't many people around. There was my family, her family, not very many friends because there just really wasn't too many people around. It was interesting, at the reception there was a lady there, and after we were driving off - we have a place at Mt. Hood - for our honeymoon, and I got to talking about - I said to her, "Who was that lady?" thinking it was some friend of her family. She didn't know. She thought it was some friend of our family. Just some lady in the neighborhood that likes to go to receptions, I guess, and so she just showed up and had some cake and enjoyed the company.

CH You said you had a place up at Mt. Hood?

VA Um-hmm.

CH Was this a family place?

VA Yeah. My father bought a place just this side of Rhododendron in 1935. We still have it up there on the Zigzag River.

CH Where on the Zigzag?

VA Before you cross the bridge. Oh, what would it be, two blocks before you cross the bridge, you turn off left.

CH As you're going from Zigzag?

VA As you're going from - headed toward Government Camp. Before you cross the bridge where the Zigzag River is, before you do that, this side of it, you turn left and kind of go back a little bit.

CH And it's on the Zigzag River?

VA The Zigzag River, yeah.

CH It's a beautiful area.

VA It's very nice, very nice.

CH Was that one of the leased Forest Service homes?

VA It's on Forest Service land, right. Actually, the road, in the early days, went by our house. Then they built this now much wider road, so it was kind of a loop, and they've sort of cut out that loop. Then there was this big flood in '64, and it actually eroded part of this loop road I speak of, and they never repaired it because there was no need to repair it. So that's why we go closer to Rhododendron and turn around and come back. Not very much, a quarter mile or something like that to get to our place. It's very nice.

CH Is that the road where that - what is it, a restaurant that's up by the beginning of it?

VA Salazar? You go beyond - well, I guess Salazar would be in the west end of this loop road I'm talking about that doesn't go through, and we are on the east end of it, the same road.

CH What happened as soon as you got married, then? Where did you - you went up there for your honeymoon.

VA One week, came back and went to work. And it was also interesting - of course, there was nothing - there wasn't much you could give a married couple. There really wasn't much, for this was during the war. I still kid my wife about it. We had - actually, it wasn't new. It was an old toaster, one of these

toasters where the element would be inside, and you'd lean this toast in. I tell you, she's burned more toast, burned more of it, because you have to watch it, you know, and then you flip it and it would come back again. I still kid her about that. Fixing breakfast, you're burning toast. So there wasn't much in the way of gifts that we could get, which wasn't really - you know, that wasn't really important. That was just a sign of the time. But anyway, we just came home. We had one week up at Mt. Hood, came back, and continued working.

That same year, another friend of mine had suggested that maybe we ought to - we were Boy Scouts together and enjoyed it, and he said, "Why don't you be scoutmaster, and I'll be your assistant?" I said, "Okay." We called at headquarters and said we wanted to be a scoutmaster. I look back on it, you know, particularly today when they're worried about who the leaders are, they must have said, Who's this crazy guy volunteering to be a scoutmaster? It turns out my friend went to school, went back to school. He eventually ended up - he went to Korea, stayed in the reserves, I think he got up to major or something in the reserves, and he became a teacher and a principal in the Portland Public Schools. Paul Smith. But anyway, I was a scoutmaster for three years before I finally found an assistant. Irvington School, Troop 85. I was scoutmaster for five years.

CH But you had been a Boy Scout when you were younger.

VA Yeah, and Sea Scout. I enjoyed the sea scouting, experience because the Boy Scout was about two and a half or three years, and we had four different scoutmasters. Actually, the troop finally faded away, although it was reinstated, and there is a Troop 6 now, which is the troop I was in at Holladay School. That had been a very, very crackerjack troop, but it was disintegrating when I joined. But I joined the Sea Scouts, the Sea Scout ship Columbia. That was well run, and I enjoyed it and had a good time. Our meeting place was the Battleship Oregon. I

really lament the wastefulness of scrapping that ship in the fervor of World War II. I think today what a marvelous attraction that would be. Well anyway, that's where we had our meetings, Sea Scout meetings, and I enjoyed that immensely.

Well, anyway, we got married. Even before I had my own son - Tom was born three years later. I was a scoutmaster before I even had any children. I had volunteered before we got married, because I - you know, we were going together, but we weren't married. Then we found an apartment below Sylvan, but they gave me Troop 85. So for five years I'm going from west of Sylvan to Irvington School for my troop meetings.

CH But your first home that you both lived in lived in, Dolores and you both lived, was in West Sylvan?

VA That was an apartment.

CH Off of Canyon Road?

VA Right off of Canyon Road. It's still there. We lived there for three years, and then we finally - Tom was born. We'd been off and on looking for a house but never really found anything. Then Tom was born. This is the very early stage of the Rh blood factor, in which the mother's blood and father's blood wasn't working in terms of the baby, and they'd just begun to discover it. So Tom was born, and he had this, and he had to stay in the hospital I think a week after Dolores came home, and in those days mothers stayed a long time, not like today. So now we knew we really had to go find a house. We had this friend of ours that had been showing us houses, and he said, he wanted to show us a tract home, you know, where they built it by - we don't want that. We want to - so he drove us around and drove us around, and we didn't see anything, and so then we finally dropped him off and we started driving around. So we drive in to what's now Broadmoor. It was Broadmoor then, but of course now it's fully

developed. We saw this house, and we called him up. "Hey, we see this house down here." He said, "I've been trying to get you down there all day long." By that time the real estate office had been closed, he didn't know if it had been sold, and, to make a long story short, we did buy the house, and we've been living in Broadmoor ever since, although we moved fourteen years later to another house, where we are now. We've been living there ever since, except for eight years down in Salem.

CH Was that in Raleigh Hills?

VA That's right, Raleigh Hills. If you're familiar with the area, it's actually directly north of the Raleigh Hills Fred Meyer, right across the street north. That's Broadmoor.

CH On the other side of the Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway from Fred Meyer.

VA No. It's the Beaverton-Hillsdale Highway on the south side, and Canyon Road actually on the north side. Actually, Broadmoor stops before you get to Canyon Road. There's Raleigh Hills School in there, there used to be a golf course, although I never saw it as a golf course.

CH Eighty-seventh, or somewhere around in there, isn't it?

VA Seventy-eighth. It's roughly between 78th and 75th, although it goes a little further west than 78th.

CH There's a little park next to the school, isn't there?

VA There's a park and a swimming pool and tennis court down there. Well, that's only a block and a half from my house, or two blocks at the most, where I live today.

CH I have a house just - on 87th, just a short ways from there.

VA Well, then you know roughly where we are. And Raleigh School is right there. The school is above the park, and, then, down below is the park.

CH A very nice neighborhood.

VA Very nice. It's very nice. I like the street we're on. Actually, it's called Fairmoor Street, but it's only about maybe a block and a half long - it's not two blocks long - and that's all there is of Fairmoor. It's cut off between Seventy-fifth and Seventy-eighth, so anybody that's on that street really isn't going somewhere else. So it's just a nice street to be on. I like it.

CH But now you live up in the West Hills on the...

VA I still live in Broadmoor. I was right very close to the Bertha-Beaverton Highway, the first house, and in those days Bertha-Beaverton was two lane, mostly residential, and across the road was a dairy farm. That's where Fred Meyer's is today. But little by little it developed, and, then, Fred Meyer built there, and, then, they widened it and the traffic got more, but you didn't really notice it. But we had been looking for a larger house because we had Tom and Suzanne, and as they grew bigger, the house got smaller. So we finally found this house where we moved to fourteen years later, which is about four or five blocks north of our first house, and moved there. I remember the first night I noticed something was different, then I realized we could no longer hear the street traffic. You know, you got kind of used to it. Hey, it's quiet! That was our reaction.

CH So you had two children, then, and you were involved in the Boy Scouts, and you said also earlier that you were involved with



the Trinity Episcopal Church.

VA Yes.

CH And what were you doing with the church?

VA We got married in the Trinity Church. We became involved in what is known as St. Barnabus, and that was at its very beginning. Actually, Dolores started taking Tom to St. Barnabus, and that was in the American Legion Hall in Multnomah. That's where they held the services. They'd kid about counting the offering on the poker table at the end of services. Then they built what is called the parish hall, and that's where we conducted the church services. We put the chairs up and put them down and up and down, you know, because it's used for everything. At that point I began getting active, and then we decided to build a church. I was young at the time, but I was chair of the fund drive, and I was a member of the vestry, a senior warden, which is selected by the - by Father Grafe [sp?]. He was there for many years. The junior warden was selected by the vestry, and the senior warden was selected by the minister. So I was very active in the church.

CH And Dolores, what was she active in?

VA She was active in the church itself. She was very active in the women's group. They had a Christmas fair, making things and selling them.

CH Was it the Women's Council, or was this something different?

VA It was the women's committee or - I'm not quite sure what they called it. Actually, they were really great, because while we, as men, were talking in grand scale and not doing very much, they were just doing nickel-and-diming, but they paved the lot

and - they'd raise money and do things. We'd just talk about big money and never really do anything. The ladies just quietly went on their way and had these Christmas fairs, and they'd raise a little money to do this, that, and a few things to fix up the church, and they did it.

CH And she was also involved with the Portland Art Museum, wasn't she?

VA She was chairman of the women's committee at the Art Museum, and, of course, being chairman of that, she was on their art board, Art Museum board, and so she was - she's been very active, also, in a volunteer way.

CH At this point, where was the business at? How had it evolved by the late forties, early fifties?

VA Well, for its history, until we as - well, we began in the business - I can't really remember, but we were early high school or something like that, very early high school. It was Oriental rugs. We had one carpet line, a very expensive carpet line, the most expensive, and that was it. To kind of put this in a capsule, when my brothers and I took over, we added carpeting, so it became a major element in the income of the business, and that's the way it is today, carpet and Oriental rugs. In 1948, my brothers are both out of college. They went back after the war and finished their college. They're both back in the business, and we decided to build a cleaning plant. We bought some property on Southeast Division and built the cleaning plant. Up to that point in time, cleaning and repairing was - if we broke even, we were happy. It was strictly a service, strictly a service for our customers. It was not a profit-making thing. When we built the cleaning plant, it was, it was a business, and we've done extremely well over there ever since. That worked out very well. So my brothers and I were in business together all

those years. Richard and I were downtown at retail, Ed was at the cleaning plant. Richard was involved with the carpet, my job was the Oriental rugs, Edward was the cleaning plant. That was sort of the rough breakdown, and we just went lickety-split at it and kept it going. Now it's ninety-two years old, it will be ninety-three next year, 1900 to whatever year we happen to be in.

CH Well, when I read an article about your taking over the business after your father's death, it referred to your going in to salvage the family business, and I was just wondering, had it gone through difficult times?

VA Oh no - well, it had. I really wouldn't - somebody may have used that term. I wouldn't use that term. It was a business, it was there, it was well respected, highly regarded. It was tough, certainly during the Depression very tough, competition very keen, but - no, I wasn't a savior of the business. Actually, as a young man, I - well, I'm only twenty-one when my dad died, and here I am now in charge of these fellows that have been around for thirty, forty years, you know, and these are old-timers. I can relate to that. Some young punk now is going to tell me what to do. There my mind said, Now, okay, keep your mouth shut and your eyes open. Because we had learned what I call downstairs very well. We had learned about repairing, about sizing rugs, about washing rugs, because we spent, up to that point, most of our life down there. We were only recently coming upstairs to help salesmen. All of a sudden now I've got the management of the whole company. I had never talked to my dad about that. I know about the cleaning. So I keep my eyes open. It was not pleasant. Salesmen would argue about whose customer it is, because they got commission, and they'd come and say, My customer, and he'd say, My customer, and I'm supposed to decide whose customer it is. These weren't particularly pleasant times, but I just kind of keep my mouth shut and my eyes open, and it worked out.

CH What's involved in running a carpet and rug business?

VA Oh, basically, really, understanding what you think your customers would like. When you buy Oriental rugs, you go there and you buy what you think you can sell. But you have to have some sensitivity as to what you think the customers would like. You make mistakes and lose some rugs. We always say there's somebody for a rug. It may take you a while to sell one, but there's somebody there for the rug or a carpet. You've got to know the colors and the styles, because what you don't want is a whole lot of inventory left over that people don't buy. Now, there's always going to be some, but obviously you can't have too much of it. So really, in a small business, it's a very intimate thing. You just have to be sensitive to what the market is like and what your customers would like. And there are changes in their mood and ideas and styles and colors. For the longest time - and you wouldn't believe it now if you watch clothing - of course, now it's been for many years, but for the longest time decorators would say you cannot put blue and green together. And I'd say, "What do you mean, you can't put blue and green together? They've been doing it for ages in Oriental rugs." But, you know, interior decorators are experts. Now you see blue and green all the time, but then you couldn't do it. So those are how those things change. But in running it, you know, you obviously have to make sure you follow up on your customers, that you treat them right, that - if you've got a prospect, you work the prospect. It's constant. And you try to discover prospects and who they might be. You've got to worry about your advertising and make sure you're doing it right, and there's a whole lot of things that are very hard to explain, but any small businessman can do it. When I say small businessman, we do everything. In the large companies they have departments that do these things. In a small business, the small businessperson does everything, including, as I would tell you, sweeping the sidewalk, keeping the store clean. I swept the sidewalks, well, till I was elected

governor. Now, I'm not a kid anymore, but that was just something you did. Or sweep the floor every morning, clean up the place. That's just something you did.

CH Did you enjoy the business?

VA Well, yeah. I enjoyed being governor more. I think I yearned for the freedom to make my own decisions. I always thought that - that's where my dad and I would argue, and we did argue. I'd say, "Well, this is a better way to do this." And my dad, in those days - you know, in the old country, there's only one way to do things, and that was your father's way. So we'd argue. I don't think he really believed I was ever going to be in the rug business. Ed and Rich, yes, but I don't think he ever thought I was really going to be in the rug business. Well, working with your brothers you still don't have the autonomy. We'd argue from time to time. There were things that I thought could be done better. It didn't work out that way. So when you ask me about enjoying it, I was able to make enough and raise a family, we did okay, but I really enjoyed being governor because I was making the decisions, and I was fully responsible for those decisions, and I liked that. So before I left being governor I told my brothers I wasn't coming back. I liked that autonomy, and I was just going to do something on my own. When you ask the question, to the extent that it was satisfactory and I was able to raise my family and pay the mortgage and do all those things, to that extent, yeah. And I enjoyed the business, the business part of business. I enjoyed selling a product that I knew was good. I knew it was good value, I knew it was good quality. You know, when a customer would decide to take something, buy something, I knew that they were going to like it, and that's very pleasant to do. I'm working with a great piece of art with Oriental rugs, so that was very satisfying. But I did like the autonomy. I like just doing it myself.

CH Who were your closest professional associates at the time?

VA Well, we really didn't have those things. We were competitors, so I wouldn't call any of my competitors associates. We tried to organize a - I guess you'd call it a local Oriental rug association, but, you know, we were friendly, but we didn't really have anybody in the rug business at all that - we all knew each other, we were all friendly, but I don't think we were necessarily wanting to go to school with each other.

CH Were there other businessmen that you spent a lot of time with while you were in the business?

VA Well, not particularly. I obviously got to know - because I was involved with scouting, I met a lot of people, I was involved in the Portland Executive Association...

[End of Tape 3, Side 1]