

Tape 2, Side 1

CH This is an interview with Governor Vic 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 2, Side 1.

In our last tape we were talking about some of your memories of high school and that period and the Depression. You were going to tell me a little bit more about high school. I guess, really, we hadn't talked about it specifically, just sort of in passing, and I was wondering what that period was like for you. I know that you were very active in football, and actually there's - you probably had a number of long-term friendships that have remained from those days.

VA Well, we certainly did that. I have two very, very close friends, closest friends, Jim Campbell and Tom Galt. They're now in the insurance business. Actually, Jim kind of took over his father's insurance business, although at that time it was a one-person office, and now it's a huge insurance company. I met them in high school, and we remained friends. As a matter of fact, our wives also were all from Washington High School, and particularly Jim and Donna, his wife, and Dolores and I double-dated. Tom had a few other dates in between but also married a girl from Washington High School.

But high school really was a really good time for me. Probably - it was the last time in which - more or less carefree, not any real responsibilities. Things were going very well for me in school. I was just, in terms of grades, an average student, but active: class president, captain of the football team and in the big clubs, the clubs that are pretty well known. You know, when I look back, those were, particularly the junior senior years, and especially the senior year - from there on, really, there was always some sense of responsibility, something, you know, that had to happen, but those were carefree days,

really carefree days, and pretty neat.

CH Did you have any subjects or areas that you particularly enjoyed while you were in school?

VA Well, I enjoyed to the extent they were relatively easy. That would be, I guess you'd call it, English or writing or something in that vein. Math was a little difficult for me. I finally got Math 1 and 2, or 100 and 101, but the minute you jumped to geometry, they left me quickly behind. I couldn't deal with that one. Beyond that was unthinkable.

CH What about any influential teachers or advisers that you had during that time that you...?

VA Oh, I remember quite a few of the teachers. Well, I remember, certainly, the English teacher. She wrote a book on the subject of punctuation, which got to be an interesting problem when I got to college because my freshman year in college I took English composition, and I'm writing these themes, I guess you'd call them, and he'd correct my punctuation. And finally I went to see him, and I said, "You correct my punctuation, but I took this from a teacher that wrote a book on the subject." He said, "Well, you're in my class now," which was an interesting observation. But he did go on to say, "Once you leave my class, you can punctuate any way you want." And he mentioned some other noted authors that just didn't use punctuation at all. "But in my class you punctuate my way." Well, I remember her, I remember the biology teachers, both of them. I wasn't particularly good at that, but I guess I remember it because they really scared me, but they scared me because I really didn't know the subject all that well. I better remember them. And, oh gosh, I remember - well, when I said geometry, I took geometry from the freshman football coach, and he was a sleepy [?] looking guy. And when I told you I had difficulty, he'd sit there with his back to the

blackboard while some student's working out a geometry problem, and I'm looking at it, he isn't, and then he'd kind of lean back on his chair and he said, "Now, what's wrong with this?" And he's not looking at it, I'm looking at it. I don't know what's wrong with it, but he does, and his back is to it. I remember him. He was a neat guy. I guess that's pretty much it. Nothing that I would say - oh, I'm sure I learned - when I say that, besides the academic, I learned things from people as time moved along, but nothing I can say I learned this from that person or this from that one. I can't really identify it that way.

CH But sports was a major activity for you, wasn't it?

VA I liked sports. I turned out for them all. I turned out for basketball - and I'll have to give you my size. I was 215 pounds in high school. So I remember turning out for basketball, and there you just sort of sat around the basketball court and the coach would try you out. Well, after the third day I figured he wasn't going to try me out, so that was the end of that.

I turned out for baseball. As a kid, before I went to high school and before I broke my leg and my arm - I broke my arm, which I had mentioned to you, but I also broke my leg. I graduated on Friday and broke my leg on Saturday. Anyway, after that I just didn't have much coordination. It was strange to me. I used to be able to hit pretty well; left fielder. Anyway, we were out there trying out for baseball, and - fielding, and the coach was hitting balls out to us, and I was doing okay in that department. Then he said, "Okay, everybody up to bat." Well, who needs a left fielder that can't bat, so that was the end of my baseball career.

I didn't think much about track. I hadn't gone to any track meets. But again, being as heavy as I was, the coach comes up and says, "Why don't you turn out for the shot put?" You know, big guys shot put. So I went to my track meet. I wasn't on the track team shot put, but I found out that track was a very

exciting sport. I thought it was just great when I finally got there and watched it. But my success - and, incidentally, I tried out for the golf team three years. Three years I was the fifth man on a four-man team. I always wanted to letter in golf, which was what they call a minor letter, but just because I turned out for it. I never did make that one, though, although I was - the captain of the team, on the last match of my senior year, he said, "Okay, you can play." So this was the first time I played, and I got all three points, which is all you can get, and I thought, Oh boy, I finally made it. But I needed three and a half points to get a letter, so I didn't make that.

Anyway, football, really, when I finally boiled it down, was the game I was - I played fullback in freshman football - which I did, incidentally, in my sophomore year because, as I told you, I had broken my leg and I really wasn't ready to play ball by the time I entered Washington High School - and then moved up to the varsity as a fullback. But particularly my junior year, now, I was second-string to the fullback, but he turned out to be all star, all city, and most valuable player in the city. Bob Cook, ^{Kout} his name was. He's an architect here in town, and I didn't get much playing time behind a guy like that. I was kicking extra points and kickoffs, but you can't get many minutes doing that, particularly - we didn't score that much. Anyway, right near - we had two games to play, and our guards were all beat up, they really were, and the coach came to me and he said, "Do you want to play guard?" I said, "I want to play football." Well, from that point on, I was a left guard, and I really enjoyed it. I got enough minutes for my letter my junior and senior year, but I stayed as guard, and I really liked that. I really enjoyed it.

CH And, of course, later on, then, you almost ended up on the Green Bay Packers.

VA Yeah. That was great, that was really great. You know, to be fair, I'm fair enough to realize that was in the forties, they

were having trouble, of course, getting young men to play football during the war. I don't care how it came. Anyway, I got a telegram from Curly Lambeau for me to consider playing football, and then I got a contract. This was all from the Green Bay Packers. I got letters from the New York Giants and Chicago and Cincinnati, but I got the contract from the Green Bay Packers. Well, that was the year my father died. He died in July, and - he didn't really want me to go. I wanted to go badly, but, anyway, I didn't, so I've got a great souvenir, and the Packers are my team, and someday they'll be back.

CH Well, anything else from high school that you recall with great fondness or significance?

VA Well, I made a lot of friends, a lot of friends. We just had our fiftieth reunion, and it was great seeing all of the guys and the women, although I wasn't much of a dater. I really wasn't. I was just having a good time with my friends, went out with, oh, I suppose, all together, before I met Dolores, three or four girls from freshman on through high school. But just enjoyed that part of it. I remember very vividly when I first really noticed Dolores. This was my last half year in school, and - or coming into my last half year of school. Then, one day this girl comes out of the door, and I said, Gee whiz, where did she come from? Pretty girl. And it turns out she'd been there for three years already. Then I found out her name, and then I found out she was going with somebody, so I thought, well, that takes care of that. Then I read in our school paper she's not going with that person anymore. Well, okay. But I was a very bashful kind of guy. But somebody said - there were high school sororities, and they'd have dances around Christmastime. So they say, "I'll get you an invitation. You call Dolores." This is an interesting - I'm really getting to something interesting, here. And I didn't usually do anything like that. "Well, you call her." So I'm going through - her name was Hewitt [sp?]. I'm

going through the phone book and trying to figure out where she might be living, and I ran into this one; well, it's got to be this one. So I called. A man answered; I asked for Dolores. He said, "There's nobody here by that name," and hung up. But I sort of hung on. I called another one or two. I said, It's got to be this other one. So I called again. Anyway, we hooked up and I got a date, and that was the beginning of it. It turns out later that her father was just tired of all these phone calls at dinnertime. He was just kind of testy, so when my phone call came in, he was just testy and said, "Nobody here by that name." That's what the story was.

CH Almost decided the fate of history there.

VA It came awful close to not being. Anyway, from there, of course, we were going together all that time, and finally, in 1944, we got married. I remember those days. They were really, as I told you before, carefree, and school came, you know, easy. I didn't really lean too hard on it.

Oh, I should mention another teacher I really enjoyed. That was our French teacher. Just a delightful woman. We called her Mademoiselle. That was how we addressed her. Delightful woman. She tried very hard to get me to learn French, and I did pretty well, but nothing really great. I enjoyed it, but nothing really great.

No, I can't think of too many other things that relate to school. Just a - it was a good time. We were living at Seventh and Holladay, so we walked to school. I just drove by a high school the other day - oh, where we were we? Oh, down in Eugene. You know, they've got this huge parking lot for automobiles. We didn't even think about things like that in those days. No such thing as a big parking lot for automobiles, you know. You got there by public transit, not a school bus, or you walked or rode the bike or whatever, but that's the way you got to school. I'd walk by Benson High School on my way to Washington High School.

It was - you know, I'm not going to say several miles through the snow, but it was still a fair piece. I suppose - gosh, I never thought about in terms of distance - maybe a mile or so, maybe a little further. I don't know. We'd have to walk from Seventh and Holladay down to Twelfth and Stark. It could be a mile or something like that. Anyway, those were good times.

CH Were there any experiences at that point in your life that had a major impact on your life or the way you looked at things?

VA I try to think back, and you begin to wonder why certain things - I do remember some things, and, then, after thinking of that, I said, Now, why did I have that reaction, and I can't explain it. For example, I was reading in the book where the blacks in the South were uneducated, and my reaction was, well, why shouldn't they be uneducated? You don't allow them really to go to a good school. That was my reaction. I don't know why. I mean, I had no relationship with a - of course, I have to tell you that in Holladay School and in Washington High School we were a whole mix of people. At Holladay School we had Japanese, most of which, of course, were interned during the war, their parents and some of the kids. We went to school with them. A lot of Italians there, we were Syrian, a lot of blacks. It was just a good mix of people. But I never thought of it in the context of what I just - the story I told you. We're just all going to school together, we're all friends from playing ball together or going to school together. There was just nothing unusual about it. That probably - that did have some effect on my later life, that is, in terms of thinking of people being very comfortable. Some people have to force themselves to not discriminate. To me, it was no forcing. I mean, these were just people I grew up with. I mean, we were all on the same level. But I remember that, I remember that in high school. I said, Now, why did I think about that? I didn't have anything that led up to that.

CH It was natural for you to think that blacks might not be educated?

VA Well, I just knew that they weren't getting a good education down South. How I learned that, I don't know. So, then, they were beginning to blame them for being uneducated, in this book, and my reaction was, well, you just don't give them a good education. What do you expect? Then I said, Now, why did I think about that? I don't know the answer to it. So there was shaping, but I have to tell you that lightning didn't strike. I can't tell you at this moment something happened.

CH Well, you know, sometimes events have a way of sticking in people's minds, and, you know, for someone in your age group that was coming to age in that period in the forties, a lot of people remember, for instance, exactly what happened the moment that they heard about Pearl Harbor, for instance.

VA Yeah, I do.

CH What happened?

VA I was down in Eugene at the fraternity house. I can even remember what the weather was like, and it was sunny, on a December day in Eugene, Oregon. This was in the morning. We were listening to the radio. We always turned the radio on, and all this music coming out. Incidentally, music you could understand. You could understand the words, you know. Glenn Miller and all - God, this music today, I just don't - but anyway, all of a sudden they interrupted and mentioned that Pearl Harbor had been bombed. So that would have had to have been - well, it would be, what, eleven - what's the time difference? Two hours, a two hour difference. I didn't think about the time, I just know it was in the morning and I knew it was a sunny Sunday morning, and I remember that, just very well, extremely

well.

CH What was your first thought? I mean, what - how did that affect you?

VA I can't say. I was just - I had a great deal of anger. We knew then, of course, that we were going to be involved at some point, and I don't think any of us were worried about the fact that we were going to be involved. The war had been moving along over in Europe, Hitler was doing his thing. We'd been fully aware of what was going on over there. Again, that was remote. That was somewhere else in the world. But nonetheless, things were going on over there. Being our age, you know, we thought, well, if anything happens, we're involved, and now it really happened. Of course, we had to go wake up guys. A lot of fellows were sleeping in and - because this was big news. But I do recall that.

CH It seemed a lot closer to home at that point, then?

VA I hadn't much thought about that part - oh, you mean about the war?

CH Yeah, with the bombing of Pearl Harbor.

VA No, I guess we hadn't quite - I couldn't put it in quite those terms. It's just we knew we were going to be involved some way at some time. Then we got word that - early the following year, which was '42 - later, I guess, in '42. Anyway, they came on the campus, and they had this what they called enlisted reserve corps, and if we volunteered to sign up, then we'd be able to stay in school till June. I had an ankle infection, cyst, whatever, or something. We think it came from the broken leg, and I really began to play ball, and I remember it used to hurt me a little bit. Anyway, I knew it was there, through high

school and in college. I thought, well, I better get - I'm going to go in the service - because I enlisted along with a whole bunch of folks, including my brothers - I'd better get this thing fixed. So it was actually a year later, December of '42, I went to the hospital, and Dr. Chuinard operated on me, and bone graft, and - well, with the military being what they are, we got our notice calling us out in March. Well, I had a cast almost to my hip, and - I remember, incidentally, that time. When the day came and everybody was leaving - and they all left at one time, really cleaned out the campus. It was really something. The train pulled into Eugene, everybody got on except me, and it just cleaned out the campus. So what we thought would happen that December in 1941, you know, eventually came true. Everybody - most everybody left.

CH How did it feel being left behind?

VA It wasn't very pleasant; it wasn't very pleasant. Then I began to get my orders from Salt Lake City, the Ninth Army Corps. That's what I'm dealing with. I would go up to the induction center, which was the old Elks building right in back of the Governor Hotel, and so they'd give me a physical, and then they'd send the report back to Utah. And the report, well, wait and go have another physical. I think I did that three times. So the third time they checked me and said, yeah, fine, okay, go home and wait for your orders. By this time my brothers are in, my friends Jim and Tom, my fraternity brother, everybody was there, gone, but me. So one day in the mail, I can remember - you talk about remembering, you go the mailbox and here's this thing from Ninth Army Corps. Wonderful. Open it up, it's a discharge. Oh, now, that I didn't feel very happy about. I really was very disappointed. So I called the draft board, and I said, "Draft me." So the following week I'm back in the same place. I know these guys by now. They all know me, I know them. They said, "Well, we're not even going to run you through." "What do you

mean?" I was really quite put out. I said, "Wait a minute. I can type, I can do something." "No, we're not going to run you through." So then I went down to the merchant marines. "What's your status." I said, "4-F." "No, we don't want you." You know, when the merchant marines don't want you, now you really are in bad shape. So I was really disappointed. I remember getting letters from my brothers because they'd been in basic and all, and they said, "Well, you're lucky." But, of course, I didn't think I was lucky. So that was really very disappointing. And then, you know, walking around where there's no young people my age, and I'm walking, I'm a perfectly healthy-looking 215 pound guy, you know - no, I shouldn't say that. I lost weight. I was playing football about 205 when I was in college. So it was - you know, you're kind of embarrassed. You can't explain to everybody what you're doing.

CH Did people question your...?

VA No, but you had this self-consciousness that you can't avoid. It was a curious period of time.

CH You had mentioned a few minutes ago that in high school you were president of your class. Was that the first time you ran for office?

VA Yeah.

CH What was that experience like?

VA Well, it was kind of neat. I had been - see, we only had a president of a senior class. I think today they have presidents of all classes, but we just had senior-class presidents in those days. And incidentally, as I mentioned before, those were half years. My class was the class of June of '41. Then, there was a class of January of '42 and a class of June of '42. So I'm

president of the class of June of '41. Anyway, previously we had, I don't recall, a junior dance or something, and I was chairman of that thing, and - you know, I was active in school, active in clubs and participating. So I ran for class president, and I won. It felt pretty good.

I'll tell you another story, though. They had what they called an activity cup that one boy and one girl in the graduating class - and that one, I guess you'd be the outstanding boy or girl - so there were two of us, it was down to two in terms of boys. The other one has remained my friend, and we're good buddies ever since - well, then and since. But anyway, down to the two of us. So, then, I got the word - we were waiting around after school; they were going to make a decision - that they'd selected me. Oh, I was excited. So I call home. My dad was home and answered the phone. "Dad." "What?" I said, "I won the activity cup." And he said, "Oh, that's nice." Now, my reaction, instead of being angry or something like that, I thought, well, you know, maybe he is right that this isn't the whole world. You know, he put it in the right perspective right at the very beginning. And again, you wonder why - you know, some people would get angry, or your father doesn't understand, all that other jazz I hear about today, but that wasn't my reaction. My reaction was, well, I thought it was a pretty big deal, but, you know, it's nice, but this isn't one of the major events in the history of the world. So he put it in the right perspective, and that was my reaction. So I learned something.

CH Were you involved in music or anything like that?

VA Uh-uh.

CH What about any religious activities?

VA No. I went to church, but actually not a great deal through high school. I actually didn't get really, thoroughly involved

in church until after I was married, and then we had my son Tom and, then, later on Suzanne, and I was very active in the church; very active in the church.

CH You've already mentioned a little bit about the University of Oregon, but why did you decide to go to the U of O?

VA Now, that's interesting, too, because today it's so tough for kids to get into school, and you have to have these huge GPAs to get in. In those days, you didn't. They were glad to have somebody come to college. I visited Oregon State - I had been invited to go play ball at Willamette University - and visited Corvallis, Oregon State University, and visited the University of Oregon. Now, I'm not sure I necessarily want this to appear in history, but it's going to anyway. I thought that the streets were narrow and the campus was too crowded, so I opted for Eugene because it seemed to be more...

[End of Tape 2, Side 1]