

CARROLL COUNTY REMEMBERS: DEAN MINNICH

Dean Minnich

Interviewer: Tony Hooper

Date of Interview: August 29, 2007

00:00:07

Q: We're here with Dean Minnich. Dean, why don't you tell us a little bit about how you came to be here in Carroll County.

00:00:11

A: My father brought my family here right after World War II and I was about four years old and dad had worked with a fellow in the JC Penney company before he was in the Navy and when he came out of the Navy, he was mobile and the old friend had founded a little country store in Manchester on the square called Car's Department Store and bought into it and talked my dad into leaving the JC Penney company and settling down in Manchester. The attraction for dad was that he could get off the JC Penney company's management track, which required a family to move every two to four years in those days. He liked the idea of being able to settle down in one place and he thought Manchester in Carroll County would be a great place to live and raise a family.

00:01:03

Q: What do you remember most about being a four year old growing up in Manchester?

00:01:07

A: Oh boy, being the only kid in town that didn't have any relatives nearby. Everyone else seemed to be related. But my sister, who was a newborn, and I seemed to be the only kids who didn't have any cousins. Our cousins were back in Ohio or up in Pennsylvania.

00:01:25

Q: Did that make it difficult to meet people here?

00:01:28

A: No. It's funny, you know, you put your mind on playback and there are certain tapes that I can play in my head that come back. I remember walking, in those days, a four or five year old kid was allowed to run the neighborhoods and I remember walking down the alley, looking for someone to play with and seeing a little kid in shorts across a garden. People had gardens out in back of their houses and a white picket fence and a little kid in knee pants and shading his eyes from the sun and saying, "Can you come over and play?"

And I said, "I'll go ask my mom." And I ran home and I said, "A kid down the street wants me to play."

And she said, “Well go ahead.” And it was Jimmy **Zumbrum**, Champ Zumbrum’s son, Champ and Ronny Zumbrum’s brother and we became friends, four years old or so and that was the first one. And Johnny Miller and the Schafer girls, they’re just – if you were in the neighborhood, you were one of the kids. It was our gang.

00:02:29

Q: What was your first memories of the people in Manchester?

00:02:34

A: Everybody was middle class. No one was rich, no one was poor. Everyone was white. Everybody was working. Everybody seemed to be working locally, for the most part. Very few people, very few dads or moms commuted to work. My father’s best friend was the guy who ran a barbershop across the street from dad’s store. Everybody seemed to be involved with either the Lion’s Club or the Fire Company. Those two things were the center of the social structure of Manchester or the odd fellows groups, the Eastern Star. There was a Catholic church up on the hill. There was a Reform church on York Street and my parents sent me off to the Lutheran church, which was up around the corner of Church Street. But the churches, the Fire Company, the local stores, everyone interacted. It was a true community.

00:03:38

Q: Speaking of working close by, how close – you said your dad was second in command at a store.

00:03:44

A: I always thought he was the number two manager, the assistant manager, yes.

00:03:51

Q: How close was the store to where you lived?

00:03:53

A: When we first moved to town, we had, for just a few weeks we had an apartment behind what was then the post office, which was two doors south of the square on Main Street. And then we moved into an apartment right across the street, right across York Street. It was, I think, I don’t remember the – might be number three York Street. It was two bedrooms and a kitchen and a living room. And that was just a walk across the street to the store for dad. And it was handy because quite often, people would knock on the door on Sunday morning and get dad out of bed so that they could get a quart of milk. They forgot to get milk the day before.

00:04:35

Q: What do you remember most about being a four year old boy and your dad being kind of second in command?

00:04:39

A: Well, I didn't think about him being second in command. I mean, it was the store. It was our bread and butter. Dad would walk home for lunch. I had total access to my dad. That was what was important to me. Other kids might not see their parents when they went to work, but I could go over to the store and see dad anytime I wanted to. I'd stop in after school and I knew dad would be in there so it was kind of nice having, you know, the family all together in town.

00:05:07

Q: Are there interests that maybe the store provided you as a youth?

00:05:12

A: Oh, I took full advantage of the privilege of being able to go in there and read the comic books and not have to pay for them. No other kid in town could do that, but I could go and sit in the steps and read the comic books and I did. I read them all. I read **Monty Hale**, the cowboys. There was the equivalent of G.I. Joe. Marvel Comics had people like Captain Marvel. We had Wonder Woman and Plastic Man and I just – I read them all. I mean I liked Bugs Bunny. My first word for cartoons in the movie theaters was '**bunnyabbits**' because they were Bugs Bunny cartoons and I'd go along with my dad and sit through two-and-a-half hours of movies and news so I could see five minutes of a cartoon. So dad started taking me in early.

00:06:12

Q: What was it about the comics that peaked your interest so much?

00:06:15

A: Well, I couldn't read, but I could follow the storyline with the pictures even though my first few attempts were somewhat confusing because I had a tendency to start in the back of the comic and work toward the front. But I knew there was a story there somewhere and I was determined to find it. But I really started with stories even before I had access to the comics, my dad would get me. I can distinctly remember dad getting me out of my crib and taking me to see Pinocchio and it was just part of our life that we would go to the movies at least twice a week and when dad took vacation, we sometimes would hit three movies a day because we'd visit relatives back in the Ohio valley and there wasn't anything else for dad to do except read Mickey Spillane novels, sleep late and then go over into Wheeling, West Virginia and hit a couple of movies. So I tagged along.

00:07:09

Q: Could you talk a little bit more about your relationship with your father and just what that meant to you growing up as a boy?

00:07:15

A: Well, dad – when dad died, I said, "Dad, you showed me how to live and now you're showing me how to die." He died of cancer and I picked him up one day close to the end and he was on a walker and I parked at the curb. I had built a ramp so he could negotiate the ramp and he came out of the house on this walker, clickety-clack, and he was singing

“Blue skies smiling at me, nothing but blue skies do I see.” And I thought, “What a man is this. This is a man who taught me about life,” and that was what dad was to me. He was just happy about being alive. He took – he enjoyed life. He liked people. I’m a little bit more of a misanthrope, but dad loved people. He loved his community and he loved working with the people that he worked with. It was – he was a very simple man, a very down to earth guy with a great sense of humor and he found great pleasures in simple things.

00:08:29

Q: What about mom?

00:08:31

A: Mom was before her time in some ways. They had an old fashioned relationship. My father was a strong believer in somebody making sure that the kids were taken care of and he came out of an era when that was the mother’s job. Mom, on the other hand, had been a career woman and I think she probably wished that she could be at work when she was really home taking care of kids and she really became a different mom when she started working first for the Manchester Pharmacy and then later for Random House. And her life brightened up. She seemed to be a lot happier with herself and with her life when she went to work. Mom was extremely intelligent. She was a very bright person and she did something that I never understood. She graduated from high school and then went back for another year because she liked school so much – Martin’s Ferry, Ohio. But she liked learning. She was curious and she did a lot of reading.

00:09:39

Q: What about you with school? How was that growing up and –

00:09:41

A: I was a bad boy. I was either behind the class or out in front of the class, but I didn’t want to be where the class was. I was either bored with what they were doing. I liked to read and I could easily get out in front of the class on anything that had to do with reading. I got way behind real fast though on math and sciences. So I had mixed success in school. I couldn’t wait to get out of high school and get out into the world of work and I was determined that I would continue my education at my own time on my own terms and that’s what I did. I eventually got into journalism, partly because I had discovered that it was an ongoing, continuing education.

00:10:25

Q: So your interest was telling stories as a youth and learning, reading about stories and then you continued that?

00:10:32

A: Right. Many cultures have storytellers. Some cultures believe that they’re born storytellers. I think there might be some truth to that. I found truth in the stories, even if the stories were fiction. To this day, you know, I don’t read comic books anymore, but I read the comic pages every day and as a newspaper editor, I would often remark to my

staff that you can find more truth and accuracy on the comic pages than you can on the editorial page.

00:11:05

Q: So, when did you first get started with journalism?

00:11:10

A: I got started when I was 21, but the groundwork was laid when I was in school and broke my arm when I was in the third grade and I got into the teacher's bookshelf full of National Geographics and while the other kids were doing math ditto masters, I was reading National Geographics and traveling the world in a way and she also had a pretty good library of Viewmaster slides, which I loved. The visual, you know, I was a visual learner.

When I was in the sixth grade, I had a teacher who came up short on his lesson plans and sometimes at the end of the class, ten minutes to go, he would say, "Dean, how about telling us a story?" And he'd ask me to – he found out that – we had writing to do and he thought that I could write and he asked me to stand up and tell a story and sometimes with no more prompting than that, I could look at a pencil. I remember on one occasion picking up a – seeing a yellow pencil that had the word Ticonderoga on it and I didn't know what Ticonderoga was. I hadn't had any American history yet, but it just sounded like an Indian name to me. And so I made up a story and told a story about an Indian kid named Ticonderoga, just winging it.

And as a senior in high school, I had a teacher who was a major influence in my life, Rita Frye from the Hanover area who had raised her family and gone back to college when she was 40 and came out of college and into the classroom about a third of the way through my senior year at North Carroll and she was another one who inspired people to develop their own abilities without prejudice. She didn't worry about testing. She didn't worry about No Child Left Behind or all this other stuff that we have today. She worried about making sure that a Bill **Timberman** or a Dean Minnich or a Betty Weaver or a Donna Engle, all contemporaries of mine, would develop whatever skills and abilities they had and make the most of whatever tools they were given or had developed so far on their own. And she got me to writing and along about April, March or April of our senior year, she said, "I want you to write a piece for graduation."

Well, I was just happy to be invited to graduation. I had no intention of writing a piece or let alone giving a speech. As it turned out, I gave a speech at graduation, which was a bit of a scandal in the town I found out many years later because I wasn't a good student. I was far from being a valedictorian, but I was sharing the stage with the valedictorian giving this talk, quoting George Bernard Shaw, you know, feeling very full of myself.

Rita Frye told me that if I didn't do something with my writing, I would be wasting my life and she wrote in my yearbook something along the lines of, "To Dean, whom I see in a different light than that perceived by his classmates." My classmates thought I was pretty happy-go-lucky, but she saw someone who was a little bit more depressed than that

I guess. I don't know what she saw, but she just – she saw a serious side to me, a probing side that she thought that – she's probably disappointed in me. She's probably in heaven now looking down saying, "Dean, you didn't do what you could have done, but at least you made an effort."

00:14:51

Q: Do you still have the yearbook?

00:14:53

A: I may. As a matter of fact, I was cleaning out my office the other day and I think I did see it. You know, I forgot about it. You know, it might be in there. I'll have to get that and take a look and see if that's the one. Yeah.

00:15:03

Q: So after high school?

00:15:05

A: After high school, I completely ignored everything she said about writing because I thought that meant at least four years of college and I had no time for school anymore. I was ready to go to work. And I would pursue writing on my own and I did. I wrote fiction and I wrote short stories. I continued to write poetry and that sort of thing, but I didn't want to go learn about writing. I just wanted to write. But I got a job at the United Airlines at Friendship Airport and I did that for two or three years and got married and three months after getting married, I was 21 years old and three months and I picked up the local paper.

In those days the local paper was the Hanover Evening Sun. They had a Carroll County edition. And I don't know, I just opened it and bingo, my eye went right to the classified ads. I had never read the classified ads. It said, "Wanted, reported photographer for our Westminster bureau." And it was just a little one inch box ad. I don't know, you know, it was just – so I responded to the ad and I was given the job. I took a \$20 a week cut in pay to take this newspaper job and learned how to take pictures. Didn't know what an F-stop was. The first day they handed me a camera, _____ not taking pictures, not knowing what I was – I took every stop, every combination of time and F-stops that you could to make sure I go a picture and learned on the job. I learned journalism on the job and I did that for two-and-a-half, three years and then went into the Navy and the Navy made me a photojournalist and I spent three years in Asia as a Navy photojournalist with an admiral staff.

00:16:48

Any stories you remember covering from back then?

00:16:51

Oh boy. Yeah. The staff that I was attached to was Mr. Roberts' Navy, the supply ships, about as glamorous as a pig farm. But they were the people that went out and rode alongside, sailed alongside all the aircraft carriers, the destroyers, the occasional cruisers,

the ammunition ships, the fuel ships, the food ships. And I think the game plan was that I was supposed to go write stories about the ships and I was sent out on one trip. The second trip I was sent out to do an article for Our Navy Magazine and I wrote the story and I sent it. I gave it – by protocol, I was supposed to show it to the captain. Well, I didn't like that much. As a civilian journalist, you didn't show your story to the guy who was the subject of the story. That'd be like writing a story about the commissioners today and letting Commissioner Minnich take a look at it before you published and I thought, "Nah," but that's the way the Navy did it.

So I did that and he changed it and he butchered it. Man, it was really amateurish when he got finished with it and I howled about it. I wasn't a very good sailor. I wasn't disciplined. I wasn't very military. I was the same rebel I was in high school. But my complaints got back to the Chief of Staff and they pulled me from the Philippines all the way back to Japan to make sure that I wasn't raising trouble with somebody back here in the states. And after – but I really wasn't trouble. I just – they were afraid I was talking – the worst thing that you can do if you're an enlisted man is to write to your senator. They thought I was going to write to my senator because some politician back here had sent a letter of recommendation that I be given a – you know, billed as a journalist in the Navy and, you know, I used that. I put it in my file and said, "Any help I can get," you know, continuing education really in the Navy. Good experience with them.

But I built on that and when I went out into the fleet after that, I would ride ships for 30 days at a time and instead of doing stories about the captains and the officers, I would seek out the grunts, the guys that were running the winches on the steam engines, the petty officers, the deck hands, the people chipping paint, the engine room guys, the radiomen, the cooks. And I would seek out those who came from medium to small towns and small markets, knowing that if I wrote a story and sent the story and pictures back to a paper the size of say, the Carroll County Times, it might get some good play. And because there was some turnover in our office, they really didn't have a commissioned officer in charge of our staff and because there was another petty officer and myself who were experienced, they let us pretty much run that public affairs office. And we were sending these things.

This is all new. Nobody had ever done this before. We were sending these stories. We were bypassing fleet hometown news center and the Navy protocol altogether and sending them directly back to the newspapers and we were doing radio interviews as well on these small town radio stations back in the states and they were getting play everywhere. We were getting full page pictures spreads and stories.

And the Navy hierarchy found out about this and instead of being happy that they were getting this kind of play, somebody was worried about losing their rice bowl at Fleet Hometown News Center in Great Lakes, Illinois, and they sent a letter of reprimand and the chief of staff for the admiral was upset because, you know, his attention had been called to something that was out of order. In the meantime though, I had done a story like that on our admiral and I had sent it to the Kansas City Star and the admiral got a front page story and a picture on the Kansas City Star just about the time somebody at

Fleet Hometown News Center was telling us how wrong we were to do this. So it balanced out. And we continued to do the press releases that way and it was interesting to me to see as an editor eventually when I came back here, that I was getting stories like this from fleet journalists all over the world sent directly back to the Carroll County Times about a local Carroll County resident.

00:21:37

Q: So what places were you able to see being a member of the Navy?

00:21:41

A: The ship was home ported in **Sassabo**, Japan, but we spent probably 60 percent of our time in **Subic** Bay in the Philippines because that was the jumping off place for the war in Vietnam. We also spend three months or so and then we moved to another port. But we were off Vietnam. We would spend several months in a port town in the southwestern tip of Taiwan called **Cowshung**. We also spent several months at a time about once a year perhaps in **Yukuska**, Japan. But since we were home ported in Sassabo, Japan, I eventually arranged it to do my entire Navy hitch with that staff so that I wouldn't be shipped back to the states and be on an aircraft carrier. It was just a more stable life.

I was a newlywed. I brought my wife over after I'd been there a year. She lived in the Japanese community out in the civilian community. We had a house we rented and she was able to get a job as a teacher in the Navy school on the base and it was a great couple of years. But it was those years when the country was going through a major transformation, 1966, '67, '68. I mean, we had leaders being assassinated, we had civil rights marches, we had cities being burned down, we had sexual revolution, we had flower children, we had drugs. I mean when I went into the Navy, the United States had no drug problem. When I left – when I grew up in Manchester, we didn't have a drug problem in America. When I left Westminster, I lived in Westminster for two or three years. Nobody took drugs. I mean drugs just weren't a problem. Alcohol was a bit of a problem, but not like it is even that today. I came back to a drug culture, which is really an amazing thing to me.

00:23:50

Q: What was it like being over in the Vietnam area during what would start to be a pretty significant –

00:23:58

A: It was a job to do and I saw it from the perspective of the men and women who were doing a job. I got to interview Navy nurses on the sanctuary and repose. I saw in the paper just recently where the sanctuary had been sold and it's probably going to be scrapped, but spent time on that ship talking to the nurses and the doctors and the medics who took care of wounded soldiers and marines. I mean, I watched them bring helicopter loads in. I rode in helicopters landing on the **helodecks** and did stories on the people that worked on those people and that was as close to the war as I got. I mean I got shot at a couple time, but I mean I wasn't in the war. I wasn't in the war.

It was a job and I was covering the stories. I was covering people. I wasn't really covering the war. I was covering what the people in the war did and it was a lot like – it would be a lot like some of the camera work that was done in the old TV series Mash where you would have like almost like a roving camera just walking through the ER and people would be talking and just showing people what's going on.

00:25:14

Q: So is that something that you prefer in that line of work is more telling stories about the people involved and not so much the war itself?

00:25:23

A: Yeah, I think the truths about who we are and where we're going and why we do things and our history is found in the stories of the individuals, the people who are doing the work and carrying out other people's orders, caught up in decisions not of their own making. Those people are honest about what they're doing. The people who are making the decisions have a perspective. They have an angle. The toughest transition I've had to make as a commission is that I still think like a journalist. I still think like a news man and I have trouble with the idea of not being taken at my word, but then I stop and think and, well how many people in positions of responsibility can you take their words at face value because we get so much spin. There's so much public relations and in truth, I was a public information specialist in the Navy and in the eyes of some, my job was to make the Navy look good.

That's why I got my old butt hauled all the way back from the Philippines to Japan because I rebelled at that concept that, you know, I was telling a story about that ship for Our Navy Magazine. I wasn't trying to make the captain look good. The captain changed it so it made him look good and I complained about that. So there I am, you know, I'm in Dutch, but I just think that the stories about what goes on in a community, whether it's a community of military people, a community of farmers, which is what Manchester was when I was a kid. Oh, these things taken in total is how we know who we are.

00:27:22

Q: Could you tell us a little bit about how you met your wife? I know you said you got married at an earlier age, how you met and how it was for her kind of going along with the ride with you.

00:27:36

A: I moved out of the house into an apartment in Baltimore for about a year when I worked for United Airlines. But I'd come home back to Manchester because all my social contacts were there. I was still a young man. I was too young to drink and I wasn't inclined anyway. So it wasn't like I was out running around looking for bars and that sort of thing. So I'd come home and spend the weekend with my family and with my high school friends and go to the teen center and dance and drink Cokes and maybe snag a date. you know? And Jack Harmon who lived across the street from me, grew up across the street in Manchester, came to me one night and said, "Let's go to the carnival

in Westminster.” So we came to the carnival and Jack saw a bunch of girls and he knew a couple of them. I didn’t know any of them, but he said, “Let’s go talk to Brenda and I know those girls. Let’s go talk to them.” And we went over and talked to those girls and my wife was in that group and I just thought she was cuter than a bunny rabbit. She just – she was a Debbie Reynolds type of girl and I just, right then and there, I knew that’s the gal I wanted to get to know better.

00:28:57

Q: Do you know what she thought of you?

00:29:00

A: Not really. I guess, you know, she apparently thought I was all right because when I asked her for a date she went out with me and after that, neither one of us went out with anybody else.

00:28:12

Q: Tell us what it meant to you having your wife with you when you were overseas.

00:29:18

A: It means more to me now even than it did then. It was important to me then, but when I look back on it now from the perspective of years, I realize what a courageous thing it was for her to do. When I met that young lady at the carnival grounds, she was 17 years old and had been out of high school for two weeks and she had committed to going to and finishing college first in her family to get a college education. It was very important to her parents and it was very important to her. And we dated for a year. The game plan was to date for four years and then get married. Then it was for two years and then it was for one year and we were married, it was on my 21st birthday and she was 18. She was 18.

So I worked for a couple of years then I go into the Navy and she worked for her first year, ____ first six months as a school teacher in Manchester. She put aside every dollar that she could save to pay for an airline ticket to bring me home for Christmas, the Christmas of 1966 and it had to be a round trip ticket. And I came home for Christmas and went back and while I was home on Christmas leave, I found out that I was going to be reassigned after a year over there to an aircraft carrier out of California and I would be right back over in Vietnam ten months out of the year. That was depressing.

And when I went back to Japan, I found out that the personnel officer liked me and he said, “Well, why don’t you just,” he said, “We can arrange it so you do your whole tour of duty on staff and that means that six months out of the year, it won’t be six contiguous months, but six months out of the year, you’ll be with your wife. You could bring her over here. She can join you.” Didn’t know how to do that. It wasn’t totally kosher because I didn’t – I was a very junior enlisted man at the time and didn’t – they wouldn’t pay for her transportation.

She worked the next six months for her own plane ticket to fly to Japan so she could come join me. And she's, what, 21 years old by then and had never been any farther – well, we went to San Francisco on our honeymoon, but that was quite an undertaking for such a young woman to fly halfway round the world knowing that she was going to be on her own, living in town, not in the protection of a Navy base, but living in the Japanese economy for six months out of the year, totally on her own with no friends or relatives, not knowing anyone, but she came over there. So it means more to me now than it did then and it was important to me then. So –

00:32:19

Q: So you're done with the Navy. Then what?

00:32:22

A: Couldn't wait to come back and get – and dive right back into my newspaper job and I got my same job back at the Hanover Sun. I asked for \$125 a week and they said right away, you know, "Absolutely." And I thought, "Oh, I didn't ask for enough money." But I came back to Westminster and I guess within a year, I think I might have been – within a year I think I was the editor of the Carroll County section of the paper.

00:32:52

Q: So you spent how many years doing that?

00:32:55

A: Well, let's see. That would have been about 1970. Seventy was the year we bought our house. I was the editor of the local paper for a couple of years and then my wife was pregnant with our second child and because she was pregnant with our second child, our game plan was for her to stay home with the kids until they got into kindergarten, but she wanted to go back and teach.

In the meantime, I needed more money than I could make in a local business, so I went to Baltimore to the News American and worked in the office down there. I was a – I wanted a job as a columnist because I started writing a column and I liked that. I like the people stories that you can do with columns. But because of my management experience, they put me on the desk, various desks and wound up being the state editor. And I was down there through the middle-seventies. Freelanced for awhile, worked for a consultative writing company doing stories and videos. Produced a movie for the State Department of Education called A Place to Stand about programs, early – some of the earliest programs that they had for students with handicaps. That's what they called them in those days.

And came back to the Hanover Sun in 1978 again as the editor and then as the bureau chief. I tried to get out of the newspaper business because it's a burnout occupation. I was talked into taking the managing editor's job in Hanover. Went up there and was managing editor over the total paper, Pennsylvania and Maryland for a few years. I left after the – the Thomson newspapers owned the Hanover Sun and there was never enough money, never enough commitment to the operation and then they fired the publisher

within a year of his retirement and that offended my sense of justice so I quit. I didn't quit on the spot, but I started looking for something else. About the time that that happened, I was offered a job with the Carroll County Times operation down here at Westminster and always thought I'd like to work for the Times.

I had, you know, maybe a thought in my mind I'd like to be the editor of the Times. It would be my hometown newspaper and I thought I had the credentials to do it. I thought I knew the community. Didn't know that I was too old by then, but I joined the Times. I started in the commercial printing – I was the commercial printing manager. I took the job under protest because I said, "I'm not qualified to do this," but it was \$10,000 more than I was making in the editorial department so I took it. Failed miserably at that. Wound up back in the editorial department, thankfully, and continued to write a column and was editorial page editor when I retired in '95.

00:36:13

Q: Talk a little bit about your family. When did you and your wife –

00:36:17

A: We were married in '63. She finished college, I went into the Navy, we came back out of the Navy, came back here and after eight years of marriage or so, we decided it was time to start a family. Our first son was born in '71. The second son was born in '73. They both attended local schools. One is now a special investigator in the claims division of State Farm and the other one is an architect in Frederick. They each have two children. We have four grandchildren ranging in age from five plus, she just started kindergarten this year, down to fourteen months, fifteen months.

00:37:11

Q: Having such a great relationship with your father, what did it mean to you to have two boys of your own?

00:37:17

A: I didn't want to mess it up. I don't think you ever – I'm not sure you can feel comfortable with how good a father you are, but I had a pretty good role model in terms of understanding that it's possible to have unconditional love and I think you really don't understand unconditional love until you have children. You can have a loving relationship with your spouse and you can love your parents, but unconditional love for a child is a whole different experience. And at the same time, understand that they need you more than they think they do and even if it means getting in their way, you have to make sure that you fulfill your obligation to them. I was probably a bit of a lecturer when they were in their teens. I would get on their case and one of them would look at the other and they'd say, "This is number 432." And then it would sort of break up the ice a little bit.

00:38:26

Q: You shared a love of movies with your father and were able to go out with him and share in that. What did you get to share with your children as they were growing up?

00:38:38

A: Well because for awhile I freelanced, and in fact, I took two stabs at it when they were still very little I did it and then I did it later, trying to get out of the newspaper business, the pressure cooker, the artificial deadlines and the artificial, you know, ceilings on what you could spend to do the job right, the lack of freedom. And when I was freelancing, I'd take them with me. Some of my kids' best memories are traipsing along with me when I was doing a story, a feature story on somebody.

I remember doing – my kids remember going along as I did a story on a guy who restored antique cars. My wife remembers the time I took my son, Brian, into a bar and put him on a barstool with some Cheetos and a Coke while I did a story on an 83-year-old pool shark. That's a bit of a irreverent term for John Valentine Amos Koontz who was one of our local characters. He was a poet and very colorful character and I did a story on him. But I had to go – there was a bar up in Mount Pleasant and I went in there and found him and played a game of pool with him and interviewed him at the same time and got a hold of some of his poetry and did a story about him. But I took Brian with me and Brian was maybe three, four. Brian sat at the bar and had a Coke and some Cheetos while I did the story on this guy.

Being at home, making sure that – I mean even when I was the general manager of Maryland Carroll County operation, I made sure that I had time to work with their baseball teams. I was a coach, you know, of their team. Scouts, I was involved in scouts. I was a den mother when they were in cub scouts or at least one of them – when one of them was in cub scouts. So I tried to stay involved. I wanted to be available to them. I wanted to be around. I didn't want to be on the road. I didn't want to have a job where I was commuting all the time, spending two or three hours, you know. I was willing to work for less money and be handy to my kids, which was important to me when I was a kid. I remember the day I broke my arm, my dad came up and got me from school and took me to the doctor. So that was important to me.

00:41:14

Q: When did you start writing novels?

00:41:18

A: I started writing novels before I got my first newspaper job. I didn't publish anything. I was really doing more short stories, but I took a stab at it and I never finished one, but I started and finished a novel while I was in the Navy and it was really bad. And it was so bad that I did not submit it to anybody. And – but then part of the dissatisfaction I think with the newspaper business was that there was no time for writing, you know, news all day or editing news all day because I spent most of my time in the newspaper business in management. It was just too draining to do any serious writing and I wanted to get out so that I could write. I wanted to freelance. I wanted to spend a portion of every day writing novels or short stories or whatever and then a portion of the day making some money to support family or help support family.

Pat was teaching. Quite frankly, she was the number one breadwinner for, you know, various points in our life. There were many times when she was making more money than I was and we made the decision very early on to have her benefits be our family benefits as far as insurance and that sort of thing is concerned.

I seriously sat down – that’s why I walked away from the newspaper business in 1995 is because it was time. It was time for me to write that novel or not. And I did. I wrote two that year. Neither one of them were great novels. The first one I wrote was my favorite. It was called Angel Summer.

It was about growing up in small towns in places like Carroll County. It was a coming of age story, but I wanted to incorporate into that one story all of the experiences that people who grew up in towns and counties like Carroll County in the ‘50s could relate to, the supermarkets or the grocery stores leaving Main Street and going to the edge of town and becoming things they called supermarkets because they were three times the size of the stores that were on Main Street. All these selections of food. Bypasses around towns, four lane highways to the city, commuters, people driving to the city for jobs instead of working in town, housewives going to work, leaving home to go get a job. The changes in education, racial awareness, all of these things, I wanted to try to incorporate it into one community, one summer in the life of an 11-year-old boy, the awakening of the hormones in an 11-year-old kid, you know, the realization that as one kid said when I was growing up, that was the summer I found out that girls weren’t just soft boys. You know, all of those experiences that are rather universal, I wanted to see if I could somehow weave them all together in a story and I was satisfied with having done that. Now technically, it’s slow in places. It’s slow getting started. It’s not a great novel, but it was a very satisfying thing for me to do.

00:45:03

Q: How’d you get involved in politics?

00:45:06

A: Outrage. I was still writing a column. In fact, even when I left the newspaper, I continued to write three columns a week for at least a year, I think a year-and-a-half for the Carroll County Times and three columns a week’s a pretty heavy load. But a kid who could stand up and tell a story about the pencil based in the name on a pencil could do three columns a week.

I went to a zoning meeting. Carroll County had gone through a planning and zoning experience. Community meetings where people came in and said, you know, “This is what we’d like to see Carroll County be 20, 30 years down the road.” And that was in 1998 I think and I had had experience with certain individuals in politics just prior to that as news director and as a columnist and I saw that there was what appeared to me to be a subversion to the processes taking place in the name of partisan politics and I guess I had been naive all those years. I didn’t think that boss politics, you know, that kind of influence on local politics could exist in Carroll County, but it had. I’m sure. I know it did. I found out since then that it had, I just hadn’t paid attention. But I was offended by

what was going on and I came home from a meeting in the county office building, a public hearing and I said to Pat, my wife, I said, “If I was a fool, I’d run for office,” or something to that effect. “I’m so upset with what I see.”

She says, “Well why don’t you?”

So I did.

00:47:04

Q: And that first office you ran for was?

00:47:06

A: County commissioner.

00:47:08

Q: And you’ve been doing it for how long now?

00:47:09

A: Well, that was 2001. The election was in 2002 I think it was.

00:47:16

Q: So how’s the support been from your family as far as you being –

00:47:18

A: Oh, family’s been very supportive. Pat’s been great. My kids, my friends have been very supportive.

00:47:27

Q: And the community at large?

00:47:29

A: The community at large has been largely supportive. I knew as an editor that there’s a big difference between what is real and what is perceived as reality by the population. People really don’t quite understand what’s going on. We call it apathy sometimes. We call it – sometimes we call it ignorance. Sometimes we just call it plain old hardheadedness. Sometimes we call it simplistic – well, you know, all kinds of names.

As long as things are going well for people, they’re fine. When things get a little complicated, they don’t trust any of our institutions anymore. They don’t trust politicians. They don’t trust the church. They don’t trust lawyers. They don’t trust the cops. They don’t trust big business. They don’t even trust the press anymore and that’s something that’s happened to American institutions. I’ve seen an erosion in it, I think, in my lifetime and it’s somewhat disconcerting sometimes. If we don’t have any faith in any of these things, then how do we – you know, what’s the foundation for our society? Is it – I hope it’s not the internet. I hope it isn’t blog sites. I hope it isn’t tabloids. I hope

it isn't American Idol. But apparently, that's, you know, we're an entertainment culture now.

00:49:05

Q: Looking back at your life, what would you say has been the most satisfying thing throughout, you know, whether it was growing up as a child or serving in the military or coming back as a journalist or getting into politics or raising a family? What has been the most satisfying for Dean Minnich?

00:49:23

A: The most satisfying thing for me has been the relationship with my wife and with the few close relationships that I call friends. I've got lots of acquaintances. My definition of friendship is pretty strict. I don't have a lot of friends, but my relationship with those friends that I do have is important to me and I'm satisfied that – I'm glad that I've been able to live a life now, and I'm 65 now, pretty much on my terms. I mean if they want to sing a song at my funeral, they can get Sinatra's My Way. I haven't had to sell out. I haven't had to compromise my ethics or my integrity in order to achieve what little I have achieved.

I made the remark just a day or so ago in the presence of a staffer that I was somewhat disappointed in how little I seem to be able to really get done as a commissioner and the individual who's been around awhile said, "Boy, do you have a different perspective than the rest of us in the building." He says, "Some of the things that we've been able to get done in the last few years are remarkable." He said, "The public doesn't really understand it because a lot of it's just, you know, just basically **scutwork**." But the specific example he used was the flood plain ordinance for an example. "Until you guys came along, and it wasn't just me, but it was Perry Jones and Julia Gouge and I working together. "Developers were allowing people, encouraging people to build houses in the flood plains, houses and business in flood plains in the name of property rights. And you fixed that so that at least if somebody wanted to build a house in a flood plain, there would be some understanding of the consequences." So, little things like that are satisfying, you know, that you've had a positive influence.

00:51:39

Q: When everything's all said and done, how would you like to most be remembered?

00:51:44

A: How would I like to be remembered? With a smile. I don't worry too much about that. I don't worry about how I'm going to be remembered because I know that it's – people are busy living their life today and thinking about tomorrow and the few people who will remember me who matter will remember me as I really am and not as some public persona. So I'll be happy with that memory.

00:52:20

Q: Dean Minnich, commissioner of Carroll County, thank you very much for your time.

00:52:23

A: Thank you.

[End of Audio]