

Mel Cowherd—05/06/2010

--arrived as a young child in CV in 1936 from Westmoreland, KS—father a friend of Bill McClendon (father of Etta Belle Rose) who convinced them to come here when the Dust Bowl destroyed the farm where they were share cropping—sold all they could not carry and drove here—shipped one box & put another on the car= entirety of possessions on arrival—lived ~3 months in CV hotel @ Broadway & G then moved to rental house—Dad only knew farming so did odd jobs on farms—at Methodist Church met wealthy with odd jobs on farms—did EARTHQUAKE RETROFIT ON F STREET GRAMMAR SCHOOL—became hod carrier for plasterer—only 8<sup>th</sup> grade education, but hired immediately by Rohr & spent rest of career there, ending up in charge of 5 others

--Watch Factory run by Bill McClendon

--SD County Insectory: 511 G Street—raised lady bugs for lemon grove—managed by Mr. Benny—Mel as a boy lived next door—helped by placing potato buds in pots and harvesting lady bugs which grew on the sprouts into empty pill capsules for release in fields when bugs migrated from potatoes to the walls

--5<sup>th</sup> & Parkway: Mrs. Arnold had barn U cow—wanted to sell 4 lots for \$1,000 each—Mel a young husband wanted to buy one but did not have \$1,000. His father met over coffee with owner & bought all 4 lots for \$2,000 (that's how we did things then—how we got jobs done)—Mel bought one for \$500 from Dad—got a tractor and moved chicken house to his lot to become car garage

\*\*\*\*--1930's Junior High Class movie—made by Mel & classmates in Mr. Cotton's class—5<sup>th</sup> and G—Mel has copy he is willing to share

--Layout of early CV: in mile squares—required farming the land and building a substantial house on it—CV became a bedroom community for the rich from SD County

--Rohr causes large increase in inhabitants in CV: During WWII, Rohr teamed up with Boing to produce parts & hired many ( including Mel's father)—Not enough housing, so Fed gov'n't builds 2 housing communities ( Mel and parents lived in one unit) 1) From H to I between 4<sup>th</sup> and Broadway 2) Where Jr High is now -CV under 5,000 inhabitants when Rohr moves here after working out of his garage Rohr = world wide in Europe—told recently to remove buildings near the waterfront because they are on CV city land that was lent to them during WWII crisis in a verbal agreement until no longer needed—founder of Rohr (Fred??) and Boing were good buddies—Rohr's top employee # = ~ 7,000

\*\*\*Mel has book of history of Rohr

Mel has motor box from Rohr used to ship parts to Boing—bought for \$5 after the war

--after WWII and fewer Rohr employees, many move back “home” but slowly return and keep CV expanding

Farming: Hugh Burns worked in lemon packing plant @ 3<sup>rd</sup> & K—still lives here, living with Anne Nagae

Japanese farmer Jack Yamagata farmed here after move from Idaho

Farming stopped when land became too expensive and was sold off for housing (Mrs. Arnold's lemon orchard sold off and made into apartment housing)

Mel's jobs: —for CV Lumber Company after WWII—then in insurance for Dwight Gold Agency @ 283 G Street

WWII: Mel turned 18 in October & enlisted in Navy—Lila Williams his draft board head—went to LA with friend & chose Navy—to Farragut, ID for training, then Treasure Island—to New Guinea trying to catch up with ship to Puerto Rico, Iwo Jima—Okinawa where mission = “picket line” to stop Japanese last stand—his ship out on fuel run hit by 3 kamikazis & sunk—Mel rescued in life raft but many not—remembers Capt. Giving his life jacket to man w/out-telling him he saw an island he could swim to ( no island there)—30-day leave to Terminal Island—went to CV on Thursday p.m. to marry—Methodist minister agrees—asks his officer for leave to marry but turned down as “too young”—goes anyway on weekend pass but license bureau closed—future brother-in-law a Rotary friend of recorder, who opened office specially for their license—married Sunday -went to hotel in Long Beach but it was full, so to another—back to base on Monday—working in dining hall & asked to open window, elbow through window with cut deep enough for stitches—taken off ship & put on shore leave—recuperates and about to rejoin ship when Japanese surrender—remembers losing around 80 friends on the ship's sinking

YMCA—Mel long-time member of the board—loyal because in Junior high, Y took boys like him from poor families to activities like football games in LA—showed them a bigger world than they knew and inspired them to achieve—YMCA now largest child care provider in USA—also helps struggling parents with expenses, education, etc.—community gave YMCA building on 4<sup>th</sup> after offering smaller site—Mel negotiated with mayor for bigger space

Philosophy from years here: Back in the day, most agreements were gentlemen's agreements between trusted friends based on conversations over coffee & mutual desire for civic improvement