

Ken Viles

Interview Transcript

Ken's Oral Interview

La Center Historical Museum

Clark County Stories

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Interview date and time: 7/07/18 10:00am

Interview Address: 727 E. 15TH Circle, La Center, WA

Transcriber: Sharron Sunny Cathcart February 2021

Suzi: Hello, I am Suzi Terrell, I am with the La Center Historical Museum. Today is July 7th and I am chatting today with Ken and Myrna Viles, who are going to tell us a little bit about coming to La Center and what their life has been like. Go ahead and take it over Ken.

Ken: The picture I gave you is a picture of myself and my sister and brother. That was taken somewhere around Ontario. I was born in Ontario, Oregon, 1932, September 30th. My younger brother was also born there. When we left, I was approximately four years old, my brother was one. In the winter of 36 or 37, my father on my birth certificate, my mother wrote that she was a housewife, and my father was an 'apple picker', in a little town close to Ontario, Id. It was in Orchard City. They had a lot of orchards and that's where he picked apples. Sometime in the winter months, the jobs aren't there. Too many apples. So, you had to look for other employment.

He decided he needed to go West. So, he loaded everything up. At that time, we lived in a tent. That was our house. The tent was given to him when he left the Army in WWI, it was a squad tent for several men in the army. That was all that our family had to live in. It was a good size tent. Probably 10 feet by 12 feet. My mother had a wooden trunk that was ours, and that was the main possession.

That trunk served as a container to protect things. It was our crib when we were born. It was very vital to our family. And this was 1932, at the end the Great Depression. Everyone was out of work. There was no work to be had.

Suzi: As I recall that area can get pretty cold? How did you stay warm?

Ken: One thing that I can remember about the tent, you're not supposed to touch it because it's canvas. If you touch it when it is raining the water comes through. We kept our mother busy. She said please do not touch the tent and we would, kids being kids. She always grabbed her pots and pans and would stick it under the water to catch the water because she didn't want water in the tent. In the summertime it was very hot. We used to go to the swimming pool that was nearby, we would run through these patches of grass because the sand was so hot. That's what we did all summer, we would go swimming. The first four years of life that's where we were. We migrated from Ontario in 36 or 37, the winter of that. It was a bad decision to move during the winter months. He had a 1933 Chevrolet and a trailer four foot by eight foot. And that tent and trunk is all that we owned. We left Ontario and headed west through Redmond over to Salem. And then up to Portland. During the winter months it was cold. The youngest ones got to ride in the back of the car. My three older brothers had to ride on the trailer along with the dog, all the way over.

We wound up in an area south of Gresham, Oregon. My dad found a little house there to rent. I don't know how much money he had, he must have got it picking apples earlier in the fall. He rented that house, and over there the east wind blows ferociously. And we lived in that little house for probably a month. I would guess for a month or two. I don't remember too much from when I was young back then.

When we moved to La Center there was four feet of snow on the ground. It was barely travelable on the roads. Pulling a four by eight trailer, we had to stop every once in a while, and dig the snow out from under the trailer as it would take it from the ground. Coming through La Center we went through Highland to rent a house, and going up Oakdale Hill, it has a different name I think it's called Brothers Hill, used to be called Oakdale. At the base of it was a school at one time – Oakdale school. That should be in some of the paperwork in the museum. Because we researched this early in my life when I first joined the museum.

We moved into that house and it was probably owned by Rashburn and Button. They owned most of the property around La Center and Woodland. They were the ones that had the money to buy up the property when the depression hit.

Some people remember where we lived as the Burris residence. Those are some of the people that lived there. When we moved into that house it had a little house beside it that was the original house that the people lived there when they first moved in. In the attic was a lot of corn hanging from nails that were driven to the boards. And that is how they would dry their corn for seed. And behind the house was a garden with potatoes and carrots in the ground. If it hadn't been for that we would've starved. We had no money for food. That was close to the springtime, so we planted the corn and we dug up the potatoes and carrots and we had food to live on. We went to some of the neighbors and asked for meat, most of farmers butchered their own meat. You didn't have a freezer or refrigeration back then. I forget what they call them now. They were a ventilation system that worked like a refrigerator but had no moving parts. The air would just come through the bottom go out the top and circulation kept it cool.

Myrna: I think it was called an icebox.

Ken: It was different, but ice boxes came later. We put the cellar into the ground and built a roof over the top. And then dug down in the ground 4 feet and that would keep everything cool. And that's how we kept the food. You couldn't just leave it. Some food you had to hang for a period of time to cure it. I'm not sure how many months we lived there but we did survive. And then my dad couldn't find work around here, so we moved to Chelatchie Prairie and rented another house up there. That wasn't too successful. Eventually we moved back to La Center, to the Jenny Creek area and we rented a house there probably from Button. We rented there for a month or two and then we moved. My dad went to Button and found that he had a place for sale - 40 acres. He decided to buy it. He found a job. Back then they had the WPA, and he worked on the WPA rebuilding roads and various things in the County. And then he got a job. I forget how the government worked the WPA. I know you got free food. I know that we would make T-shirts and dresses out of flour sacks, that is what we utilized. That was good. My youngest brother was born at that place, at the house. It wasn't a completed house. It was a house that was being rebuilt but never finished. My dad jumped on it because he was a carpenter and a brick layer.

Suzi: So, did your mom have a midwife? Or was there a doctor that came out there?

Ken: One of my brothers delivered the baby. When I was born in Ontario we lived in a house, and when I went to school in La Center you would introduce yourself and told where you came from and where you were born. So, the house that I lived in was white. So, I lived in a White House. I went to school and told all the

kids that I was born in the White House, they thought I was something special. I was just describing the house because it was white. But I was born in a White House. And they thought boy is he special.

Suzi: Where was your first school?

Ken: La Center. When that building opened in 1939. That is where I went to first grade. My dad helped do the brick work on that. It was all brick. And he worked there as a bricklayer, building that school. It did not open until 1939. My memory is bad, I will have to try to catch up with where I left off. I think it was 1939, and my youngest brother was born in that house. And one of my older brothers delivered him. We stored things in this hole the ground with the roof. And that is where we spent a lot of time laying in the Sun. And while my brother was being born that is where I was laying on the roof of the cellar or cold storage. Yes, I lost the name but that's where we were told to be while this was processing. My dad was never there for any of the births.

Shortly after that, a couple of years, 1941 was when the war started. I can remember standing out in front of that house. We were kind of up on a hill, the road had a lot of other houses, they all had young men. It was a great thing that I saw the young men leave the house and go to war, including two of my brothers. It was a scene that I will never forget. All of my brothers eventually went in the war, three in the second world war, four served during the war, the fifth was in an occupation troop in Japan when they surrendered. Somewhere in 1941 or 1942. I cannot remember exactly when.

My dad had become an alcoholic. And he just couldn't let go of it. My mother put up with his bad habits. While he was working, he would come home from work and he would stop at the La Center Tavern to have a beer. There were a couple of gentlemen that sat in that tavern, one was a doctor, the Spencer's owned that the tavern at that time. And two brothers ran it. Right where the Last Frontier sits. There used to be a big three-story house that sat there. They were the Spencer twins that lived there. And they ran the tavern which was right across the street. Some of the kids would go to the window of the tavern and tap on the window and buy candy, soda pop, or ice cream at the tavern. If we wanted ice cream this was the only place you could go to get ice cream. You had to tap on the window, and they could serve you outside on the sidewalk so that is what we did. Other times we would go into the general store, the Rhodes brothers had one store, at the end of the street where the gas station is now. There used to be a feed store. In one corner was a barbershop. There were two brothers in the store plus another that had the barbershop. Henry Soehl was the barber. Four bits for a

haircut. And the feed store is where you can get all the feed for your cattle and stuff like that. They were run by the Finnegan brothers. They also had a gas pump out front. And that is what La Center consisted of when I came here. Where the Last Frontier was the Spencer twins lived in a house, and right besides, that was the Sheldon garage, and then below that was the roller-skating rink that was owned by Roberta Ferguson, she was the daughter in that family. Right up from the garage, and then the doctor's office was on this street. Right off from the old Highway, the old Pacific Highway that ran all the way from Mexico to Canada. It was a long way because it didn't run straight.

My dad and his alcoholism was bad for our family and my mother. And finally, he would stop in the tavern to have a beer. And these two gentlemen would goad him into playing cards and he would lose everything he had. He would cash his paycheck, and they would get him drinking and then he wouldn't leave because he kept thinking he could win. And at 2:00 A.M. he would leave and come home. My mother would fix dinner around five clock and he would never come home for dinner. He would sit down there at the tavern, and when he came home, he wasn't in a good mood. And they had a cook stove, and the fire went out, and when he came home all the food would be cold. And that didn't make him any happier than he was. So, then he would throw a fit. He would yell and scream. And throw food. Back then a woman was pretty much the slave to the male she was married to. It wasn't a pleasant life. But that's what she lived with till she got fed up with it, she was tired of it and decided to leave him because he wouldn't change. She called her sister in Portland, and talked us into taking us back to Parma, Idaho which was just a little way from Ontario, Oregon, which is where we came from. That's where the brothers all lived, she found out that she had to leave the state and be separated before she could get a divorce. She took all the younger kids back to Idaho for the summer. That was an education. And it was really good for us kids because we had never lived on a farm like that. Back then the farmers worked for each other, they all worked but nobody would pass any money they would exchange for work. And it was beautiful. All the women cooked food for the thrashing crew and it was a Kings table. It was delicious food. You cannot imagine. Fried chicken every day. It was beautiful neighbor helping neighbor. And that was in Idaho and Eastern Oregon. But we lived there and stayed with my uncles for the summer. We eventually came back that fall and lived in View. When we lived in Highland before, we were acquainted with an older gentleman that was single. He would bring wood to all the schools. The schools were all heated by steam. And they all had big furnaces that heated the water. He cut the wood for all of those furnaces. They had to have wood to heat all that water. So he served La Center, Richfield, Battleground, and Woodland. And he delivered cordwood. And we got to know him when we lived there, and

we got acquainted, he decided he wanted to have an affair with my mother to get to know her better. So, he invited us to move to his place. 80 acres in Highland. His name was Peter Vike. He was Norwegian. His sister was Ms. Hanto. And that's how it all came down. And we got to know them. They had a lot of boys and one girl. In 1948 we got electricity for the first time.

Suzi: That was scary for some people ... they were worried about having electricity in their house?

Ken: You had to do so much, cut poles, dig holes, and plant those poles before the electric company would come out. And that took a lot of effort. You couldn't just wish it, it was a lot of hard work. But in 1948, the same year of the big flood, the Van Port flood in Portland. And that winter, I have to get back to my pictures. That's the picture of when we got married. In 1954 and there is my school picture. If you want these, you can have them. There is my mother. And the dog. This was after she moved down to the coast. When I was gone to Korea the family moved to Long Beach. That is my father.

Suzi: He looks like a nice businessman.

Ken: He was a carpenter and a bricklayer. This was the picture taken right after they separated. He lived in Portland. You asked if we had a special teacher that is her. Her name was Ms. Buttlerack. Later on, she married a man who worked for the Department of Roads for Clark County. And his name was Skool. He was a rough character. I was so happy, she and her sister were old maids, and they didn't marry for a long time, she was my first-grade teacher. That's me and my sister. I know a lot of people in that picture. They were all in my class. Why they are there I do not know.

Suzi: Why was she your favorite teacher?

Ken: She didn't act like all the other teachers. She was like your best friend. She had something about her that attracted me. And I just idolized her. She was kind and something special.

My father was a bricklayer, and that is the entrance to Lewisville Park. He helped build that. And that's in those little pictures. I don't know if that's in the La Center Museum. It may be up in North Clark at Amboy. They have a big picture of it. This is a picture of the place in Highland where we left. Around 1947 or 48. About four feet of snow. That's my brother. That is where we lived. All that snow melted within a few days, it warmed up and that's why the flood happened. We had a silver thaw, all the ice brought down the power lines. We were in bad shape for a

while. This is a picture when Myrna and I worked to set up the table, that's a picture of the rock table at the Museum. You can have those.

Suzi: So, you helped set that up?

Ken: I built that for her. Barbara wanted it secured so that nobody could touch it. So, I put my head together and came up with that and it worked.

Suzi: I heard that before you built that the kids thought the food look so real that they tried to eat it. Some of it looks so realistic. Oh, that fudgesicle, I was tempted by that one! Those are great.

Ken: We went out and spent a lot of time talking to her. You can have all of those. We came back from Idaho and went to View. I didn't like that process because we were in another school district. And I had to go to Battleground. And when we went to Battleground, the first day there, my sister and I all had to go to Battleground. And we were informed that La Center was a lower grade school, so they had to drop us a grade. That was heartbreaking. What I could never understand was when I came back to La Center, they didn't raise me backup. Schools didn't communicate back then. How could a school decide they were a higher-grade school? That's discrimination? And that made us feel awful. We came back to La Center and finished up in La Center. My dad let the place go back and moved to Portland. It was too much ... he was out of the picture. He came out one time to visit us when we were in view. And that was the only time we ever saw him after that. He went to Portland and found a job and worked as a carpenter and a bricklayer. We lived on those 80 acres and we bought 10 head of sheep and I loved animals, I believe God created the Earth for us to live and he watches over us. And I think he prepares us for our next journey. I am a firm believer in that. Everything he put here on this earth is for a reason, and it is for our education that he did that. Our learning and all of our food comes from the earth. All governments focus on protection and mistrust of other countries. If they would work to solve that problem, instead of creating more destruction, more ways of destroying human beings, I think we would be ahead. The focus is on creating more things to annihilate the human beings. And they have to overcome that. They have damaged the earth, but God can fix it. And he does.

I can remember, we moved from Highland down to a farm just east of the Anderson farm. Do you know where that is? On Highland Road, up there where they are putting in a whole bunch of houses near the Anderson dairy. I used to say good morning to old Mr. Anderson, Kent's father. He would roll out milk cans for pickup. He had a lot of cows, and on my way to school I'd always say good

morning to Mr. Anderson. We lived in the next house up, it is gone now. Right after I got here the fire department came and burned that house down. For like a practice drill. It was known as the Bartlett property. And we purchased it from the first mayor of La Center, Rushford. And the 20 acres they bought they turned around and sold 10 of it to little Harry Hanto. Little Harry bought Peter Vike's 80 acres also. And that is why we moved down there and bought the Bartlett place, and then sold 10 more acres to the Hanto's. The road on the west side of the Bartlett property was called Bartlett Road. And that was our favorite parking road. That is where you could park at the top of the hill, and you could see a car coming from either direction before they got there, and it also had a view of the Portland lights. It probably doesn't have that anymore. That is why it was the favorite parking place for people that were my age. It was out in the country and you didn't have a lot of traffic. The Bartlett Road was the main road to Highland back then. The road that comes down by the cemetery was not there. Eventually that came through. But Bartlett Road it came down and went down to what is now 4th Street. And that's how you went to Highland. We bought the Bartlett place, in the barn was still an old buckboard, it didn't have the apparatus to hook it up to a horse, it had the wheels and the body, and a lot of other things. Had an apple cider press and an old scale, things that I remember that I treasured.

In 1951 the school superintendent called me into the office, I was in my junior year, it was March 16. Called me into his office, which back then his office was in the back of the library. Where the library was. The back of the auditorium. He called me in and said Kenneth, you are holding back a lot of very smart young kids, and I could not understand how I was doing that? He said I think you need to do something different to let these kids expand, and it popped my bubble. I could not understand what he meant. How I was responsible for these other kids? I knew I wasn't doing good, because my father's desires, my father believe that children shouldn't be heard or seen. And only spoke when spoken to. He was the ruler of the family and we had to obey him. And I was afraid to make myself known to the teacher. So, I would hide in the back of the room and I didn't want to cause any problems. It wasn't good. I did not ever want to be recognized as causing a problem. And in doing so I created a problem for myself. So, it popped any interest I had an education. I was a very timid individual back then. I lost all desire to educate. I went to Portland and I joined the Army. I wanted to enlist in the Air Force. All my life I wanted to fly, I wanted to fly so bad. Because of everything that was happening, they wouldn't take me because I didn't have a high school education. So, the recruiting officer there said you don't have a high school education, and you can't go into the Air Force. He said how about the regular army? I had severed all my ties at school, and I knew I wasn't helping my mother. I needed to find a way to make money and help her. He said what about

the regular army and I said okay. They sent me to Ft. Lewis, I enlisted on March 16. The first three days we were in the barracks at Ft. Lewis, and every morning we would fall out, and our objective was to clean the coal off of the snow. There was snow on the ground and we had to go out with brooms and sweep the snow so that it was white instead of black. That is what we would do. We had a coal stove in the Barrack. And that is what they used for fuel it was cold. And when you use coal it would get dust all over the snow, they had to have something for us to do. And then they shipped us to California for shipment overseas. All this time I never realized that Korea was going on. It started in 1950. And that is where I was headed. And they created a training center in Hawaii. And that is where they sent me. Went down to California by train. And it was hotter than blazes. But at nighttime it got ice cold with nothing but a mattress, no pillow no blanket. And we froze to death. They put us on a troop ship and shipped as to Hawaii. And the first day out we had a storm, it was so rough, and everybody got seasick. I went to the rail and fed the fish. It took four or five days to get to Hawaii. We unloaded and life turned beautiful. It was so great. I weighed 130 pounds. And all the exercise and good food. I was solid. And I was in shape and ready to fight. And that is what they did, they shipped us straight to Korea. They gave us a 10 day leave and if you had the money you could fly home. I went up to Korea I think in August and I was assigned to the first Calvary division, Custer's old regiment. The third Battalion K company. And at that time, it was in reserve. It was not on the line, and the concussion from firing their cannons took my hearing right away. I was deafened right away. My first firefight was from that reserve position. The Chinese occupied the biggest hill, and they were on top and we were down in that valley. So, the American side decided to take that hill because they could control what we did from the top of the hill and they were bombing it every day. We were assigned seven South Koreans to string barbed wire. We spent weeks stringing barbed wire. That was my first job. And I had seven Koreans working with me. That was a process. And it was a little ignorant. One general that road in on a jeep they called him remount because that is where he would stand and inspect the troops. To have an inspection on the front lines was not the smartest thing to do. Because we had to have people up on the hills to case the area. I was one of the people that was on the lookout for aircraft, and I didn't have to stand down there and be inspected. I thought that was one of the dumb things. Eventually my company went back online and I was selected to be a guide through the minefield for all the operations going out. You had to know where to step. So, I would lead all these people. It was a scary job, they showed it to me once and I had to remember. I had to step through that minefield to go on patrol. That was 20 or 30 people. So, I did that for a time and then they decided that we need to go out in front of that line and set up the patrol base we would

have to deal with the minefield, and you would be closer to the opposing side. On the initial attack we went up the ridge of this hill and we waited for that patrol base. I slipped and I fell 15 to 20 feet, that was my first injury they packed me up and I went back to the front-line hospital. When I fell, I pinched a nerve, and one side of my body was paralyzed. There were so many people coming through that they sat me down outside the hospital, and I just lay there for hours. And when they came out to examine me my paralyzation was gone. I could use my hand and arm. And they said they didn't see any other damage nothing to hold me for, so they put me back on the front of the line. So, they put me back on the Jeep and I got right back on the front line. And that was September 29 and the minute it got dark the Chinese started sending mortar shells. They were really good with the mortar rounds, I got back into the battalion and they checked me out to make sure that I was physically able to fight. And I was told to find a hole, and somebody would check me out and I went and found a hole and the mortar rounds started coming in. So, I found a hole that had a cover over the top of the hole and it made sense that that was the best hole. And the rounds came in heavily. And more men kept coming in to replace the ones that were killed in the firefight. One guy came up and wanted to get in our hole and I said yes, and then another guy came up and got in the other hole. And when the rounds got really heavy one guy hollered and begged us to let him in to that cover hole. He was afraid of being hit by a mortar round, he started crying and begging and I couldn't turn him down. So, I put three men in a foxhole that is meant for two people, around midnight the Chinese hit. That hit was at night, and three guys in a hole with rifles and a cover. We decided one of us would be on guard I remember waking up to all the noise going off, I raised up and looked out the hole and a Chinese soldier stuck his gun to my head. A burp gun that had 72 rounds of ammunition. He grabbed my shirt, before I could even grab my rifle. He apparently was an officer and he kept hollering at me. It must have meant something important and so I repeated it because I didn't really want to die. Then he drug me out of the hole, he never took the gun away from my head I did not know what was going to happen. He took me down over the hill. The trail was lined with Chinese somewhere coming and some were going up. There were lots of people that were wounded. You could see the artillery shells coming in. And he would shove me into a rice paddy and fall on top of me and I couldn't understand that. He was saving my life. I didn't like the taste of rice patties but that is better than dying from shrapnel. I didn't understand but he protected me because I was his prisoner. We went back to their frontline, and all along the line were the Chinese with all these burp guns that wanted to kill me. And I could not understand that man. He was an officer, that may have been the key for why he was protecting his prisoner. That's one thing I could figure out. He got me back to

his frontline and they had a smart position, he put me in this hole or cave in the side of the hill, his order was that he wanted everything that I owned. He wanted me to take off all of my clothing to make sure I had no weapon, and he took all my possessions and examined them and brought them back. The army would pay me script, where can I spend it? So, I had my paycheck that was only for the military and the Chinese took half of it. I tried my best to make an allotment for my mother. I wanted to send all of that but all I could send was \$50. So here I had all of this and they took it. They didn't know if it was spendable or not. When the shells hit the ground, they made a ferocious sound. And they put me down into the center of that hole and I thought it was the end of my days. And I thought they were going to kill me. And whole bunch of Chinese soldiers circled that Crater. And I was only one in there at that time. There was another guy captured but he wasn't there yet. It was a procedure to see what I would do. All I could do was sit there. I knew that they were going kill me if I moved so I just sat there and I waited a long time. And they made me sweat. I just sat there and then I heard a command given and they all disappeared. I don't know what the command was and then an interpreter came out and he spoke English. This was a group of houses in the city. And there were two Chinese women that were interrogating me and they spoke English. And I think they were all graduates of UCLA and they could speak English just as good as I do and they interrogated me. I couldn't believe that they had women right there in the front lines. When they marched me, they had a fence and there was a animal that was drying and being cured on that fence. And I didn't recognize what it was. The next day it was October 1. And the day before had been my 19th birthday. I wasn't thinking about birthdays. They interrogated me and tried to catch me in all kinds of mistakes. I lied a lot because they had no way of checking that out. And back at that Crater right after they let me out, they came in with another prisoner. I did not know him, he was in my company but on the other side of the hill. They had a animal like an oxen similar to a water buffalo and they treat them with the highest respect. They gave them cooked food and they housed them, it is a luxury to have one that's like a new car. That is where they kept us in one of those sheds for that animal. And we slept on the straw on the floor. The next day was a special day for Koreans, October 1 is Revolution Day. A very special day and they had special food and that animal on the fence was a dog. That's the only thing that they have edible. They didn't have meat, goats or sheep, they would never eat oxen. Dogs run wild, and when the mother is having children and they take the children outside to relieve themselves, after the baby relieves themselves, they call the dog and that's what the dog eats, and then that was the process. When they had a celebration and they needed meat they would track down a dog and tied around the neck and pull it until it died, it belonged to nobody. That's

how they survived. It was pitiful. I ate it because I didn't know what it was. If I had known I would have not eaten. Dogs are one of my favorite animals.

Suzi: Did you ever find out about the other two guys they were in the foxhole?

Ken: I didn't, and it bothered me for years. I skipped something I'm trying to find my way back.

After the interrogation and the bad food, they took us to the back of the hillside where they were and to a schoolhouse and there were other prisoners there. And there were five pilots and little airplanes that were flying low. And a lot of them prisoners had serious wounds. There was one pilot, and they kept the Chinese from having movable artillery pieces. If they spotted it, they would blow it up. Whole bunch of pilots and prisoners from the other area, I think that they had 21. And he took us back to the opposite side of the hill and we started building bunkers for them. And after I was captured, I started to try to eat their food, I couldn't eat it I had diarrhea. Went from 182 pounds down to 90 pounds in just over two months. I didn't know that that could happen. I had dysentery and that's when your body starts to consume itself from the inside. I lost a lot of weight and I couldn't work anymore. And when you have that problem, you would have to go to the restroom 20 and 30 times the night. We all slept in one bunker, 27 of us and if you turned over everybody had to turn over. They would feed you once a day, you got soy milk in the morning, that was good but the smell of the rice I just couldn't eat. I tried eating rice and I couldn't keep anything down and that's when I lost all the weight. Going to the bathroom 20 times a night was also the same during the day it was an experience. I had to go to the bathroom during the day and it was during that process and a P 51 spotted the reflection of the sun in the windshield that was right over me. They went right over my position and blew them up. And when those guns went off, I thought I was dead. I could've reached out and touched them. I thought for sure I was a dead person. I put up with that process for over two months. And they finally took us back to that schoolhouse and I didn't know what was going on. There were lots of rumors that you had to deal with. It was really early in the morning and they told us that they were going march us back to the prison camp, and that's what happened. We had six or seven guards and one interpreter. And right off the bat there was a hill and it took us all morning to get to the top of that hill. And there was a Korean soldier that was all dressed up in his uniform and he took his gloves and slapped every man going up the hill, a Chinese guard spotted him and killed him. Being a prisoner must've been something special to the guards, they took him down to the other side and shot him. Trying to understand human nature. I was trying to figure out what happened why would you do that? I

couldn't figure that one out. We got the top of the hill and we rested. We were all undernourished. It was hard to keep up. But I didn't want to give them a reason to kill me. If you couldn't go, they would shoot you, we got to the top of the hill and rested and they reversed action going downhill, when five of us just fell and rolled and they thought we were trying to escape, and they were firing at us. I finally stopped at the brush line. All those times it was bad. They got us back to the camp, I don't know how many days we were on the trail we stopped at little Korean houses. We were taken to the headquarters and interrogated. And we were given instructions of what we were required to do. When we were assigned to accompany a platoon and squad. They took me down to where the British were being held. They had a hospital set up in one of the Korean houses. And they started feeding me boiled chicken blood. In that house was a whole bunch of people and it was referred to as the "Sure to Die Ward". And they fed me chicken blood twice a day. But in some cases, it felt like it made it worse. I spent days and days on that Ward. And I saw a lot of people die. A lot of them were healthier than I was, and I didn't know you could just give up. They would just give up and die. There was one special person that I was beside that was an artist. They would burn charcoal in the stove on the back of the truck, and then they would pipe it to the engine, and they burn that to run their trucks. Didn't climb a hill very good but on level ground it worked amazing. This artist got his hands on a lot of charcoal. I remembered the night before he died it was right around Thanksgiving and he drew a Thanksgiving dinner on this mud wall that was so realistic. I would've tried to eat it. I have never seen anybody do art as good as he did. All Korean houses are mud walls. It was the most beautiful thing I've seen in my life. And the next day he died, he was healthier than I was. But he gave up. We were not getting any good news, and I never knew why so many, they would pack out three or four every morning. And it was -40 and the ground was solid ice. And the Chinese crew would dig a hole and bury the guys in plots that were two feet deep. It was a very sad thing.

Suzi: How did you keep your sanity?

Ken: I was focused on living and I didn't want to give up. And then a memory popped in my head. When we were in Ontario my mom used to tell me these things that she thought I needed to know. They didn't have doctors and hospitals. She said one way to stop diarrhea was to chew on charcoal. And I remembered that. And it stopped the dysentery immediately. I chewed on a piece of charcoal and something in charcoal stops the stomach problems. And my body would accept the charcoal. And here I had remembered something that my mother told me. And all the things they were doing didn't stop it. The Chinese when they kill a chicken the only throwaway a few things, the beak, and the feet and the toenails

of course, everything else they kept. They keep all the intestines and all the blood, I guess they got rid of the feathers. I remembered what my mother told me, I had thoughts of my mother and they retained in my head. And I started gaining a little bit of weight. And I got out of the hospital and I was elected the squad leader and that was not a good thing. I had no choice I was appointed. They had rules and regulations and as long as you obey the rules and regulations you were treated normally. But if you got to be appointed the squad leader you were responsible for all of your squad members. And if you or they violated anything you had to answer. I had 12 guys in my squad. And I spent hours and hours at the headquarters. They would come and get me when I had brainwashing sessions. They sent a guard down and I was to give a squad leader report. I almost gave up from some of that. I couldn't come up with any more excuses. Then the interrogation got really stupid, and they asked stupid questions. They knew it and you knew it, it was hard. I had my mother's will of resistance. And I just kept hanging in there. I was not going to give up. They kept up and finally some of the sessions, generals would come and inspect the camp and they would want a speech when it was -40, they would haul all the men out to an open field and make you listen to their speech that was last for hours, because they would give it in Chinese and then the interpreter would repeat in English and it would last about an hour. So that was two hours standing there on the frozen ground. And our feet would freeze. There was nothing you could do about it. It was you that or be shot.

Suzi: What was the purpose of the speech?

Ken: It was their way of telling you what was coming and what had to be. Tell you the things you are required to do. And there would be a lot of bad things with a few good things. They wanted to continue brainwashing but in different ways. So, they tried to do it with food. One time they said they were to bring us all this canned food for us to eat rather than the skimpy rations, we got a cup of milk in the morning and a cup of rice and a side dish which was turnips, dried fish, and that is what we ate day in and day out. So, we really couldn't gain any weight. When they would cook the rice, they would burn at the bottom of the pot and that was burnt rice at the bottom, and it was good. Roasted rice. If you get your hands on some of that, it was good. That is pretty much when all my headaches started. Being a squad leader or a platoon leader, you were in their eyes responsible for all the members of your squad. And I had to go down to headquarters frequently to respond to charges that one of the men had violated. When we would walk along these routes, the marijuana would grow while. And a lot of Americans didn't know or understand marijuana. And this a squad of Puerto Ricans knew what it was. And they immediately taught us. So, everybody

gathered the leaves of the marijuana and we would bring it home and put it in the attic. And once the Chinese discover this, they raided every squad, cut a hole in the attics ceiling paper and confiscated all of the marijuana. And if they found the guilty ones you would get in trouble. They didn't know who was guilty, so they didn't punish anyone individually unless they found somebody doing that. So, after that you had to really watch what you are going to do, or you could get yourself in a lot of trouble. We were issued rations monthly. We got a tablespoon of sugar and a package of tobacco. And that's all that I could think of. Sugar was the main thing everyone traded for the sugar. Some people wound up with a lot of sugar, and they would make steamed bread and it was baked in a steam oven, the heat from the fire heated the water, it was totally different than our baked bread. It was similar to bread, that was another commodity. It was hard to keep food to trade, but sugar, bread, and tobacco we could trade, a tablespoon of sugar is not much. You had to ration yourself to use it. The Chinese would have a celebration when they were getting something good done. And they would bring canned pork and it was a small can, but each man had a can of that pork. And that was delicious compared to dried fish and turnips that we normally had. Some of these turnips were four or five feet long and they tasted like wood more than a vegetable. When they would have brainwashing sessions that lasted for months I would be woken up in the middle of the night and was requested to go to headquarters and they would question you on your life and home and then they would compare what they could do and make you think that their way was better. They wanted to convince you that their way of life was better. And that went on for months and months. Sometimes it was five and six sessions all night long. And then you are expected to continue your normal practice in the daytime. And you had to report if anybody was sick. Life went on. I do not know why when the peace talks succeeded to stop fighting, I cannot remember the process of traveling from the camp, I can't remember. They loaded us on trains and took us south. I do not remember the train journey. But it took place. I remember crossing the line and over the bridge, we got to the other side and we are given the opportunity to have showers and get rid of our Chinese uniforms. The Chinese did the same, they started stripping the clothes often throwing it over the bridge. It was seven Chinese to one American. That was the rate of change. There were a lot more Chinese prisoners of war than Americans. After the general command welcomed us home, we were put on helicopters and flown to another camp to spend some time before we were shipped home. It all took place in seven days. Got to San Francisco and I got to meet my family and come home. The lowest point, before the exchange I had a relapse, and I came down with a severe case of hepatitis. And I woke up in the hospital. I don't remember the sickness or anything. I spent several days there and I got out, and then after that

was some of the lowest points in my memory of everything. I pretty much had given up. Everything I heard was not good. I had a lot of problems, and everything was down, and I pretty much given up and I was ready to leave. One time the person to deliver the mail opened the door and told me I had a letter. That letter sparked the life back in me. And gave me the desire to live. And it was amazing.

Suzi: Did you ever tell her about getting that letter when you got home?

Ken: I get choked up when I remember it. She knows. I don't know where to go from here.

Suzi: You said you were released, and you headed to San Francisco?

Ken: I came home and drove all the way back from San Francisco I stopped and visited my brother. While I was gone my family moved from La Center to Long Beach. Sometime in 1952 and I was unaware of that. I was sad because I liked La Center and I liked the countryside, I liked the area. I had to accept that that's where they were living. So, I returned to Long Beach and spent some time there. I wanted to travel and see my other friends. Myrna and I got together and went to Portland. She was a telephone operator in downtown Portland. When I came home, I couldn't drive, fast things disturbed me quite a lot. It just bothered me because everything went by so fast. It took me quite a while to learn to drive. My mind would not let me handle it. Things moved really slow over there, the fastest thing they had was an Oxen.

Suzi: Did Myrna have her driver's license, could she drive?

Ken: She did not have her driver's license. We worked on that. I bought a 1949 Ford truck, and we started going places together. And we went to visit some of her relations in the Tri-Cities. In Spokane. A lot of her relations live there. We were on our way to Spokane and I said why don't you drive. Pulled over and let her drive. Later on, we went down into the valley, we were involved in a train and car accident. I was coming home from my brother's place in Scappoose at night. And it was dark. And it was just coming down like a waterfall. Coming down those back roads I stopped at a light, the light changed and I started up. I did not see the train. I do not know why I didn't see the train. They were pushing cars into a warehouse but there was no railroad crossing and no lights. They should've had personnel with a lantern. I didn't see the train and there was nobody there. And when you hit a train they do not stop immediately. So, they tried to stay on the tracks. I think that was the 1966 Chevy, and the dashboard

turns and there was no shoulder straps. So, when we hit the train Myrna's head hit the corner of that and she broke her jaw, her teeth and her nose. I could hear her screaming. The hood came through the wind shield and came right at the nose and it knocked me completely out. And I was out for three days. Even though I was out I could hear her screaming I didn't know what to do. We had three of our children with us, our oldest was at home. We all wound up in the hospital. It was a horrible night. October 29, 1969. It was a horrible experience. A lot of the legal things took place after that, it was orchestrated by the railroad. Went to my nephew and asked for a lawyer's name who was working for the railroad. They were working for the railroad. \$10,000, and they took half of it. It was a sad experience. I didn't have any experience. I didn't know what to do. She was in the emergency room for a whole month. You could see it in her nose, eyes, mouth. It was sad, and we had to communicate this way. She doesn't remember this. It was definitely a change. All you can do is adjust and go on. The glass embeds itself and you don't know it. So, you have to take it out and it's a large process. It is painful. I was working and I couldn't go anywhere. The interns put a cap on there, they request me to allow them to pay the medical. They needed my permission. If you don't have the money you need the permission. When I did that, they worked for an insurance family, they wanted her out of there so that it has to pay me money and they said do not let her get sick. That was a horrible feeling of responsibility. I don't think I slept, I had to make sure she didn't get sick. We survived. I did the best that I can do. A lot of things were not the same. Then we did that till I was a school board president for a year and did scouts and all that stuff. And the young boys would get themselves in trouble and had to answer for that. That's the best part of life when you're raising kids, there's a lot of rewards.

Suzi: You got very involved in the community, getting involved in the Grange and the Museum?

Ken: I have some more pictures there. When we decided to move back to La Center, there was too many people, we wanted quiet and free time, so we came to look to see if there were any houses. We found one, but it had a creek running underneath it. They didn't think anything about it, but I didn't think I wanted a creek under my house. When we came up here this was the last house for sale. We looked at it and saw it and loved it. It has water underneath, this hillside has a lot of springs, and the trees draw the water to the surface. You don't need any electricity or anything else to draw that water to the surface, the springs are there and a lot of them dry up. They dig down when they put a house in, and those spring pockets take a while to dry. So, there's water that accumulates in the wet season, they said they have a drain there and I don't think there is a problem.

When we moved out here, we saw what we could get involved in and one of the first things was the Lions. We've been in the Lions for 15 years. And the Lions met at the La Center Grange. So, I got involved in acquainted with the La Center Grange people. In the process of that I was doing a lot of things with the Alliance group. And I decided to get involved with the La Center Grange. It's one of the oldest Grange's in the state of Washington. I had an opportunity of reading five or six of the secretarial books that were written by the first mayors' wife of La Center. I learned a lot of things that took place. I didn't know what a Grange was. It was developed by a politician in Washington, D.C. A senator, congressman or something. They started the Grange. It is a spinoff of the Masons organization. They both had some weird procedures. The one that I never understand, if they had a member that they disliked they would remove them by playing a game with marbles, they would put the marbles in the box and divide them and shake the box and if a black marble goes to the other side that person would be removed without any questions or anything, and to me that's weird. That's one of the processes that they used to discriminate. That's what it is. I liked a lot of other things that the Grange did. One of the amazing ventures was to go to a state Grange convention it was right near the border of Canada. And one of the projects that they were showing off was how they used manure to produce gas that would run a generator to produce electricity and it was amazing and guess what the gas company is doing today? They're asking everyone to join and donate to help that expand. That Dairy had 220 cows and they would pipe that manure to where the farmhouse was and where that generator ran that produced all their electricity. And then they had even more that they would put into the opportunity. It's amazing what they can come up with. The Grange had a weird procedure, and it was different, but it was learning things and associating with other people in the area, we got to know a lot of people. I have some pictures here of some of the Grange members. This was the last master, so we called him. That is one of all of us at a Christmas party. This is some of the last things that we would do. And this is the Grange. There was different position, there was a master and other officers. And I was just under the master, and I had a job to take care of. And Don had been the master for 12 years.

Margaret was also Grange member. She had a big heart for the museums. She also was in the Grange and I asked Margaret one day can you help us improve the Grange and she said what you need? And I said the windows were the original windows. And I wanted to save them. And when they got ready to donate money for that, one of the family members, Margaret's brother-in-law Bill said he could donate. I said how much are you putting in? He said \$5000. Wait now \$500. He had a milk can at home where he put all his change, he took it down to the bank and cashed it in. That was a lot of coin and I went down and matched it and that

was a start. And I asked Margaret if she could help. She wanted to know what to do, and I said all the different things. She went home and talked to Bob and Derek. The Grange had a couple of problems. Both sides when they poured the concrete, had people that were really not experienced. But they did the best they could. On the inside some of the forms gave way and the walls wound up getting slicker than normal. The walls were not sealed, and water seeped through both walls. That was one thing that we wanted to fix. The windows were the other one. The building needed more attention and we just couldn't come up with enough money. So, Margaret got Bob to talk to Derek and he said go ahead. So, they went down both sides and dug a trench, Margaret complained there was only one restroom downstairs with a very narrow step to go down to the kitchen it was a dreary process to get to the bathroom and so Margaret asked if they could put a bathroom upstairs and they did. They came in with a big machine and they cut the front of the building off, picked it up and moved it and set it against the museum. They propped it up against their wall they dug out the rest of it and poured new concrete, new steps and redid the whole thing. They extended it six feet further to the street and took the front and put it back on. And then they put the bridge for the parking lot to the building. We put in \$30,000. And another family did \$130,000. I put in a new heat pump that was \$8000. It's in the Grange minutes that the Grange would pay me back for that \$8000. Then when Don got bad and couldn't run for the Grange master anymore, we had to have another election. I was thinking of it but then I couldn't come up with someone who would be the secretary. Margaret did not want to be that. So, I couldn't come up with anyone else. So, I got out of the election and it went to Margaret and Ms. Smith, she was in real estate. These are two of them. Of the other members. That was the husband of the first one that I met when I first started joining the Grange. Her husband was in charge of it. He wasn't the master. Don was the master. And Ms. Smith was renting from them, and then she put her in charge of the building. She came down. Myrna and I had open microphone there every Friday, the first Friday of the month. We would have an open mic session and people played country-western music, they would come in and play until 10:00 and they didn't charge. They would do it free. And we would produce snacks and we wanted the community to come and enjoy music. And we did that for six years. And then Smith took over and apparently Dick wanted control. So, he had her change all of the locks so I could not get in. So, one night on a Friday night she had a locksmith come in and change all the locks. I have \$1000 worth of personal items that were locked up down there. I got a lot of stuff out before that night when she informed me, I was not welcome anymore. That is what happened. I should've gotten a lawyer. He had \$130,000 invested, all that he wanted to control, and I can't understand that. But to lock somebody out, that's what real estate people do.

That's how they control things, if you don't pay rent, they lock you out. It was shocking. It is the oldest Grange in the state, they downplay it by saying acting not the oldest acting Grange. But they are the oldest building. La Center opened the Grange and there were two other Granges over in Woodland. And when La Center opened it closed both of those because people lived closer to La Center. They both closed down. La Center was a very active Grange during the 30s and 40s. That's when all the people here in La Center were members. It was designed to help farmers, that's what it was all about. They did have some weird things like the marbles. They did have that equipment and I was able to say that books went back into the 1800s. And when they took control of the building that's the first thing, they took out of there were those books. I had it all organized. I had put in new windows and siding on the backside was rough siding and they had a big sign on the east side facing the highway. Big letter saying La Center Grange and when they were open. I redid a whole bunch of stuff. I think I paid \$6000 for a home designer to evaluate prints for redoing the building. And we had two different phases and I paid that all up in front. I still have the prints. I wish I could go to the state Grange, they own it. And they have control of it. Smith still has the keys. Everything we used to have there, the Lions meeting, we had the kitchen totally redone. I put my stove down there and we went to buy us a new one. A lot of new stuff. But I can't use any of it. The Grange needs a better place to meet and have function. The Museum could really use it. That was my target, that's what I was going to do. If Margaret had lived a few years longer we could've done it. That is what I wanted to happen. I believe that the museum had some of their first meetings there.

Suzi: How did you get involved with the museum?

Ken: I'm one of the founding members. When Margaret decided to have a museum, we had our meetings and decided we were going to do it. And Margaret was determined, and she was a forceful woman. I was 100% for it. I was already with the North Clark Museum. That's where we had our 50th wedding anniversary. We got married in Stephenson back in the 50s, you could get your license go across the street to a justice of the peace and get married. And that is what we did. At that time in our life, we didn't want a big fancy wedding. We went up there and got married. The kids used to say when are you going to get married? We were legally married. So, on our 50th we went up to North Clark and got married and had a reception and rode home in a limousine. My nephew married us. He was studying to become a minister. He came up and married us. And we had fun. Coming up in January it'll be 65. I'm not sure where I left off. We both grew up here in La Center.

Myrna: I grew up in Amboy, but that's close by Green Mountain. Up on the ridge from the hydroelectric plant. They supplanted the taxes to that school.

Ken: These are a couple of old pictures. This was the old hotel and there is the skating rink. The people that opened the North Clark Museum were her parents. Frank and Roberta. Roberta grew up in La Center. But that's too bad that that went away. Bob is a museum member he has a trailer of old antiques and he has brought it to the museum a couple of times. He does that, he was over the hill. Someday if you can get the museum members to authorize a picnic. He has an ideal situation. He has 80 acres on the north end of it it's like a park. He had a logging outfit that he owned. And he owns 80 acres down there. He just lost his wife last year. He lives over the hill. So if anybody wants to go see him, he has a family reunion there. It is a beautiful place.

Suzi: Sounds like a nice idea.

Ken: When they built the Lewisville Park it was created by the WPA. It was the workforce that did improvements in the county and state they had all these logs, and signs like Clark County Park. My dad did some of the work on that. His picture is on it. I could come up with a picture for you.

Suzi: You have seen a lot of changes in this little town.

Ken: All the roads outside the city were gravel. My brother had a 1945 Harley-Davidson motorcycle. It had a big seat on it and to make it a double seat the driver had to sit on an extra pillow. The seat was not for two people. One year we decided that we wanted to make some money we would paint mailboxes. So, the motorcycle had saddlebags. We went to the hardware store and bought paint and brushes. Back then there was no spray paint. It was all in a can that you had to brush on. So, we got on our motorcycle and filled it up with what we needed and hauled off to the different county roads and began painting and we painted quite a few. But there were mishaps, gravel roads and motorcycles do not mix. So, we had a lot of accidents. Nothing serious. Minor ones. We painted a lot of mailboxes and made some spending money.

We both lived fairly close in Highland. And we used to go on these expeditions. All the land up there was stump land. There were a large amount of trees that had been logged off and there was nothing but stumps that they used for grazing cattle. Everyone has cattle grazing. We could come up with a lot of different scenarios playing in the stumps. I had my father's rifle from World War I. It was a lever action single strut you put in the shell and pull it back and then fire it. We

didn't have any bullets, but you could stick a match head behind the trigger and make it pop. And we would go out and create different projects, always had to have it his way. He was only child in the family and that's how he got it his way. You cannot change that. I always would give in and let him have it his way. If he was a Lone Ranger, I had to be Tonto. He got his tractor and trailer and came over to my place and we had all these things planned out we got all the permission we needed down the road we went. We wanted to go right down to where the creek was. We did and it started get dark. We set up camp and all night long there was nothing but hearing noises. I grabbed the flashlight and was shining it around. The next morning, we got up and all around by the were creek bear, cougar, and coyote tracks. We survived in the wild without firing a shot. We were pretty brave satisfied characters. It was rough but we survived. And that's the thing to do when your kids. We used to climb to the top of the fir tree you could slide down the tree and never get hurt. It is like floating. It's the best feeling I ever had. And I did it often. The some of the experiences of trying to fly, we had a big garage that was pretty high. Maybe 15 feet high I found a ladder to reach up there and I found a great big umbrella. Have you ever tried that? I put a bunch of hay down there because I knew was going to be hard. I jumped off and the umbrella did its normal thing. I greased the poles and then I got an old tire and slid down that ladder. You don't get down all the way you run down the side. So, I gave up on that. I just kept on insisting. Everything we got was from the earth. We didn't have to go to the store and buy stuff. Everything was there you just had to plant seeds. When calves were born, and they were told they wanted to get rid of them, if they couldn't sell them and so they would give to various people to raise and have your own meat. If you wanted to have your own stuff you had to buy them. But you could talk to a dairy guy and get a free bull calf. And raise them for beef. So that is what we did. With children you would always make a pet out of them. And then when it comes time to slaughter them it breaks your heart. Many many times we would go through that process. We would all have calves that we favored. And a lot of times they were taken away before they were weaned and you had to feed them. You really had to take care of them that was a requirement of my parents. Very sad time when it came to butcher your baby. She had the same problem with pigs. In school we had future farmers of America. They used to be a restaurant with cabins along the old Pacific Highway. When they opened that up there was a connection from Mexico to Canada. And they had a restaurant and a service station and there were a few of those. They would rent cabins, and when we had the winter of 47 and 48, they would have a silver thaw where the ice formed on the trees and it melted and created the 1948 flood. A lot of it got so big that it took the trees and broke them off. And that is what happened in Summit Grove. It dropped every tree there. The future farmers of

America teacher decided that he would get acquainted with the FAA classes to help them restore this area with all that brush. We would clear and clean it and that's what I did in my younger years. There used to be a big fishpond and a lot of people would stop and there before dinner and when they redid it they took that down. That's some of the old things. It's a beautiful place. Growing up in La Center was challenging. I like old things I used to go swimming in the Lewis river. There was an old couple that lived by the river and their name was Brown. And you did most of your swimming in their front yard, they enjoyed watching people swim. Those were the good old days.

Suzi: How many bridges?

Ken: It's only been changed once. The bridge before that, it went straight across over where Tom's house is. There was an Indian family that was living in a house right where that property is. Down below not on the hillside. And the road turned, up near that curves. We used to ride a Greyhound bus. It would go by here. That's how we did all of our traveling was by Greyhound. Those bus drivers would hit those curves fast and every time that curve would do it. It was different. I had that motorcycle and a bad experience on that bridge going across. I had my brother on my back behind me. The motorcycle carburetor, you would turn the knob, the wire for the carburetor broke halfway across the bridge and it caused the carburetor to go wide open. I don't know how fast I was going but it went wide open, and I couldn't figure out how to stop it. So, I reached down to pull the spark plugs and I got shocked. With the amount of electricity, I couldn't get the wires off, I knew the curve was coming up and I knew that's where we were going to end up. What did I do? I lost it. I know I did something. At the last second and it slowed down. I thought for sure my brother and I were going to be dead on that curve. At the speed that I was going. I just had no control over it. I lost it ... it was so simple.

Suzi: I bet your brother was scared?

Ken: He didn't know any of that took place it's probably a blessing. He got mad because when I stopped on the other side I had to stop and release al that feeling I had to get stopped. He enjoyed every second. It was overwhelming. I always remember that. That's a weird one. I know I reached down and grabbed the spark plug and I got shocked. An angel must've told me what to do. I did it and it saved me. That was a bad experience. And all this time I never had a license. I didn't have a license until I came home from Korea. I drove my mother to Vancouver in a truck. My stepfather had a half ton truck. And that was the only vehicle we had. I used to drive her where the old Pacific Highway crosses the

interstate, where the old Pacific Highway crosses and it goes to Salmon Creek. I know the complete route of the old Pacific Highway is completely gone. Those were the days. The hill was called Oakdale Hill it's called Brothers Hill now. We got halfway up that and there was a spring on the side of hill, and everyone would stop to get water. When you needed to put water in the car. There was a bucket there and you would dip it in. You don't see those anymore.

Suzi: Were all your children raised here?

Ken: All of our kids were raised in Vancouver. They all went to Vancouver schools. Our daughter was the last in the downtown building. There was a three-story building now they've moved all those schools out. Dan was at Hudson Bay. We all lived in the valley. And I worked at Boeing for most of the time that I was there. That was a good experience. Came home from Korea and was unemployed for one year. They had 26 for 26. >> \$26 for 26 weeks of unemployment. So, I was unemployed for a whole year. The year of 1954. I found a job in 1955. Manufacturing in Portland. They moved it all back east and they were doing parts for Boeing. That's what we were doing, and I went work there I worked three months and got laid off and then I went back. I was therefore 39 years. I didn't get to fly my airplane, but I got to make a lot of them. First commercial aircraft that Boeing built was a 707 that I worked on. My mind doesn't want to work. You would sit between the pilot and the copilot. I would build the stand with the pilot and copilot. >> It's in a separate container. I built the 707, 727, 737, 747, 757, 767 and 777. The triple seven. A lot of airplanes and the B-52. That was way back after the 707. So that's a special award for when I retired. I had 39 years and 10 months. That is what it was, when you belonged to a union, the company will not take any time on strike for that. You don't get credit for that. They take that away from you. I didn't think I had spent that much time on strike. I worked for iron manufacturing and they move the building to Gresham, then they got bought out by another company back east. The second company that bought them out was Radiation International. They sound fancy. They were always making Boeing parts. So, Boeing wanted to build a 747 but they had to come up with the big machine. They would go and bid on those jobs that Boeing wanted to build, and they wanted to make the 747 main landing out of titanium. It weighed 1600 pounds, 800 pounds each. And bolted together it weighed 1600 pounds. You have to know how to machine it because it does burn. Titanium will burn up. So, you had to watch it. It was 20 feet long, and when they came in, they would weigh 3200 pounds and you would machine and down to 800 pounds. But you had to have a monster machine to do that. So, they went and bought these machines from Great Britain. They had them shipped over and installed in a new building in Gresham. And then once I got it up and was running the parts machine, they

put the place up for sale and Boeing had to buy it because they had too much invested. That's how they got Boeing to buy. And when they bought it, they gave everyone seniority from the first day. That was fabulous. All the time I had with the others they gave me time at Boeing for. I think Boeing is fabulous. And then after I retired, they came up with another money package for people that retired early. I automatically fit that because I had already done it. It was during that time period that they sent me a letter saying that they want to give me all this money and it blew my mind and I said I have to check this out. What are they after? There was a lot of bad things that happened. I was running a machine, a big drill press and I was drilling the rudder pedal arms. They were on me to maintain a certain finish on the metal. They had a lot of rejects. And I was trying to accommodate them. I was in the middle of a cut. I had a drill press with a big handle. And I had a reamer that was about halfway up, it was clear through that part and the chip wound around the reamer and I had to hold the handle down with this hand and I had a hook device and I would reach in and grab the chip. The turning of the reamer unhooked that chip, and I could not get it pulled off without a tool there is a smooth shaft, if we brought that up it would hook it up through the metal and scar the metal. I knew it was a smooth shaft, I reached in with my fingers and I grabbed that chip and pulled it out. And then I had my fingers feeling the reamer turning, and this supervisor said stop that job and go on and do another job and the instructions were so complicated that I couldn't understand it. He walked away and the minute he walked away I couldn't relate to what he said, and I wanted to find out what I had missed. I let go with one hand and I still had one hand on the blade and it just took my finger right off. That hung over me for all those years. I let a few people know about it and they were management and that's a no-no. You are not supposed to interrupt an operator in process until he's finished his process. I never did complain or sue, but I could've. They treated me special because they knew I could've sued. All those years. I haven't done anything to the company, but a lot of people knew that I was holding it over their head. I never threatened them with it or nothing. I knew that it was wrong, and I let quite a few of them know that it was. And once they found out they treated me special. Up until then I was downplayed. Some organizations like the Masons if you know about them. In the workplace they control the flow because of their membership. They want their people to achieve before others and I could not gain momentum into anything they always kept me down, they wanted me to do what they wanted, not what I wanted to do. And that was hard once I was out, I was relieved because one of those people was a supervisor. One kid told me that I should leave and not be beholden. And I said I don't think that is true, I don't think that's what's going on. I had to prove it to myself and I said I'm going to go up north tomorrow to get some more work on

that beam. And install more brackets he said you want to go with me, the process of going up north, you had to go through the front office to get their approval and they had to sign up and fill out all this paperwork. And I didn't. I wanted to see if they would fire me. I just showed up the next morning ready to go. The supervisor said where you going, and I said I'm going up north. He asked if I had filled out the paperwork and got permission I said no and I told him why and he said okay, when I came back it was a whole different story. He tried to get me, he wanted to nail me, but it didn't happen because the general manager new and he wanted to see if I would retaliate if they fired me. He was the one who presented me with this award. He was a Canadian. And had good operations with everybody there was one guy from Montana who didn't like how I operated I'm not sure if he was a Mason, but he had one of his fellow people slice my tires. Both rear tires in my car. They saw people with advantages, and they don't like it. And they would do nasty things. I got those two tires and bought a brand-new one and they sliced it. I called the cops on the second one and he said do you think you know who did it, and I said yes but I can't prove it. And he said if you can't prove it, you can give me the guy's name that did it I will go and talk to him and let him know that we know it is him. I said that I'd like to see that happen. It was just a guess and I was right. The cop said we can't control your parking lot. Wherever you go in life, anything you do you have people who don't like you. You have to work with it, enjoy the ones who like you that's all you can do.

Suzi: When you retired was that a huge adjustment?

Ken: It was a very difficult adjustment. It was for Myrna too. She cooked and took care of the kids and I wanted to relieve some of her jobs. You should've seen the reaction that I got. You take my job away for me?? It was the hardest thing I ever did in my life, I had to have something to do. It took me five years before I stopped waking up at 5:00 in the morning I could not stop. I loved my job and they made me the lead man of the assembly department. I enjoyed that. Almost as good as flying. It was very satisfying. The things that I built I know are flying and that was very satisfying. It was a shock, it was hard. She didn't want to give up any of her jobs. And I needed something to do. I did a lot of other things. She was not willing. I said you need to retire just like I did, she did not want to give up nothing. Anytime I tried to do something, sneak around to do it she come around and really criticize.

Suzi: Ken, I don't want my phone to freeze up. We need to wrap it up. If there are some final things that you want to say. We could do that now.

Ken: When I first moved out here in 2000, I went downtown and swept Main Street. It was filthy. And nobody knows it. But just with the regular broom. I would sweep the sidewalk and street and I kept it up. Nobody ever saw me. La Center was a lot different than the people running it now. They didn't have a process going on. I used to walk up by the park every morning. Used to do a lot of walking. I found a mitt with a kids name on it. And a policeman that was active was just one man. He was parked by the park watching traffic. I walked up to him and said hey I found this baseball mitt. We got acquainted with the chief of police. Only man on the police force. The telephone company used to be in the big building behind City Hall. That's where we would pay our bill. It was a different thing. It was the restaurant combination, you could rent movies, the post office was empty. The tavern, when we were kids back in the 30s and 40s. That's where we had to go and tap on the window of the tavern to get ice cream. They were brothers, the Spencer brothers owned it. The big house it used to be where the Last Frontier sits. That three-story big house. The Spencer twins lived there. There used to be a drugstore on the other side of the street from where the grocery store is and it is gone. The old feed store where the gas pumps were where the little general was used to be a big feed store and a barbershop. That's where I get my haircut for .50 cents. You could get feed for your cattle there. The church was right across the street. And I went there every Sunday. I would deliver papers downtown for quite a few years. On Sunday, my brother had to help me. I lived out past the Anderson farm and I would borrow the family Chevrolet, I think it was a 1939 to take the Sunday paper around. And I would turn around where the old hospital used to be. Where the Chevron is now and I would drive up into the driveway to turn around and I would back out and put it to gear and I let out the clutch, this time I did it at the wrong time and I snapped the axle right at the wheel. That was a bad time for a Sunday morning. We did all those crazy things, delivering papers, you knew everybody that lived in town. So, I delivered the Oregonian. I'm very partial to the old town. I saw so many of its good days. So many of the people are gone. You miss all of them. Things change, you don't know why they have to go but nothing stays the same. Time marches on. I've always loved this part of the country. And it was life.

Suzi: I really appreciate you taking all this time to tell me about your experience and life. I have been fascinated.

Ken: I have a big spot in my heart for museums. You have to protect and pass on what is happening in your life. That is what life is all about. Enjoying people and what God has created. It's a beautiful place. And I think we should have more time to understand and enjoy what we have been given. Free of charge. You used to be able to have free water, now we have to pay for it. We used to have trees

that would pump that water. But then we cut the trees down. And the water quit pouring. It is hard to give up. It's progress but is it better? Everything costs more. But that's what it's all about. For government to survive you have to pay government for those things that used to be free. We still live off the land, but it is overseen by man. I don't think that man can improve it. The basic things they can change what they think needs changing that is it really necessary like all the insecticides that come to do one thing and they do something else. My heart feels for the honeybees right now. Because certain insecticides destroy what they require. Clover has an ingredient that they need. But there are insecticides that kill Clover because you don't like Clover growing in your yard. And that's what they need. They need that ingredient in the clover flower. All those things are sad to me. I am 100% for museums and the people that work in there and do all those things that need to be done in museums. I wish I could still be as active as I used to. Maybe I will.

Suzi: You've done a lot for the museum in the past and we are grateful for that. You need to come back and enjoy some of the new things.

Ken: I haven't been there in a long time.

Suzi: We will be open tomorrow. I'm going to go ahead and sign off thank you Ken so much. For all of your time. I really appreciate all of this.

Ken: We appreciate what you do.



February 25th Phone Question & Answer Interview

How do you feel about the Korean War now 70yrs later –

It was "Stupid" ... all it was about was killing human beings. It wasn't right!

How did you feel about the Olympic style games were played –

They were great! The best things that happened. It was the POWs who came up with having them. Each camp had their own teams in basketball, football and soccer. They were great because it meant POWs went from camp to camp and got to talk with each other and see what theirs was like.

Chinese had a lenient policy and let you know right up front that they weren't going to work you to death, even though they worked us very hard.

A lot of them were of the communist party, but there were old timers who had been with Chiang Kai-shek, who oversaw operations. They didn't like the communist ideas but had to go along with it.

The United Nations were threatening China about allowing the Red Cross into the camps. So, one holiday, maybe Christmas they gave each of us a can of pork along with rice wine. That only happened once in 2 years.

Then they started their brain washing system of standing us out in 40 below weather on frozen ground. We did this in double time since their Commander spoke Chinese then we got to hear it again as it was interrupted. Came thing in the summertime in the hot sun.

I was squad leader, so I was responsible for anything that went wrong. If anyone in my camp did something wrong, then I got bad mouthed to the Officer and I had to write a confession along with what my punishment would be. I didn't have a choice, so I was forced to spend many, many, many hours writing them. I was very happy when they stopped trying to brain wash us that communist ways were better.

Have you connected to other POWs –

My wife saw an article about a reunion of Korean Vets in Portland and encouraged me to go. I didn't think I'd see anyone I knew, but when I opened the door – the first person I saw was from my camp! In talking to other POWs that were there, well ... they knew exactly what it was like and understood.

Over the years I join the organization and went to all the states conventions. I was the Portland/Vancouver Commander for 8yrs. Then I join the National Ex-POWs became their Director of Oregon, Washington, Idaho, Montana and Alaska.

I needed to travel and visit each Chapter but I was still working so couldn't do as much as was needed. But I went back east and to New Mexico, so I travel quite a bit. Most of the men were WWII veterans, who didn't like talking about their memories.

Each state was run independently ... Portland's organization doesn't respect or have good relationship with Vets, so it is not a good state.

Have you ever gotten in touch with Chinese or Korean's before Bing contacted us –

No. The POWs didn't have much respect for the opposite side. I don't feel badly about the Chinese "people" just their government. During WWII they were allies.

How do you feel about our relationship now –

Everything we buy has a Chinese label! I respect them. All human beings are equal. I've never got too social with Chinese people before, but I feel equal to them and I respect them as much as myself.

I'm kind of excited about getting my ID back. I'd be very happy to meet them. I always had an idea that I'd like to meet person who captured me. He protected me ... how could I hate someone who protected me and didn't treat me harshly all the way back to his line.

It would be nice to meet him ... it's not possible to meet the person, but the son. I would very much enjoy meeting both men when COVID goes away.

Maybe it can happen ... at least the dialog is open.

I had a full life, heard lots of stories, wish my experiences were happier, but I am very fortunate to have come out as well as I did. When I first came home, I had PTSD with nasty memories at night that took a while to get over with. It was only with the help of my wife that I did. Haha ... I used to wake up in the night to tell her she needed to be camouflaged so she wouldn't be seen by airplanes!

She's the reason I came out of it. Thank god for that.