

Amy Keto's interview
with
Ken Williams

Me: Hello my name is Amy Keto I am interveiwing Ken Williams at his house
On December 10, 1989

Me: where were you born?

Ken: I was born at 611 East Empire Street in Ishpeming

Me: what were the names of your parents?

Ken: John and Louise

Me: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

Ken: Yes I have a brother John, a sister Gairtruce, sister G. Judace and
a sister Grace

Me: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Ken: about 4 five of us all together

Me: where did your family come from origanally?

Ken: My father came from England, my mother from _____ Norway

Me: Did you know when the first member of your family came to America?

Ken: They were 15 years old when they came, Ah my mother lets see my
mother was 16 my father 15 she was a year older than my father.

Me: How did they arrive in America?

Ken: Well that's naturally way before my time so I don't know
how they, they, they came by boats of course (laughing
after wards)

Me: who was this person? you're parents right

Ken: It was my parents?

Me: Yes

Ken: Yes.

Me: Why did they come to America and to the U.S.?

Ken: Well they came to Ah My father and mother meet in Chicago and he came Ah He used to drive a milk truck in Chicago and my mother worked for some rich people she was a maid in Ah the rich people's home.

Me: Are you married?

Ken: I'm married.

Me: How many children did you have?

Ken: I didn't have any.

Me: Where did you go to school?

Ken: I went to school at the Ah, at the Ah Deer Lake School to start with in the first grade and Ah and I went to school here after that until my mother had gotten sick. and then I was in Chicago for a while and I come back again then I ended up in Chicago up until the 7th and 8th grade.

Me: Did you graduate?

Ken: From the, From the I graduated from the 8th grade in Chicago.

Me: What was it like when you were young?

Ken: What was it like? It was, it was Ah Well we enjoyed life we had a lot of fun when we were kids. I've done a lot of skiing and one thing or another and I, I played hockey, I belonged to the Ishpeming hockey team and Ah we really had it very good young life a lot of fun.

Me: What subjects did you have or take in school?

Ken: What subjects? Well what can I say just reading, writing and arithmetic and all that goes with that. (laughing at the end)

Me: Did you have any favorite subjects?

Ken: Well I was good in Arithmetic

Me: How did you get to school each day?

Ken: How did we get to school, we walked.

Me: How far was it?

Ken: Well when we started ah about 3 miles up to the Deer Lake school house in town here ^{why it was} ~~by the~~ only about half a mile

Me: Did you or many kids finish school?

Ken: Ah, Let's see My oldest sister Grace had went, what the heck do you call that um, what buisness school ya know to Secretaryal school, My oldest sister Grace worked in a Federal Building in Chicago until she died at 50 years old when she was working there then she died of a heart attack. and Ah she was the educated one.

Me: What were the teachers like in school?

Ken: the teachers, I got along with them fine I don't know if I liked the teachers.

Me: How were kids expected to dress and behave?

Ken: How were they what?

Me: expected to dress and behave

Ken: Well them clerp, I don't know we did have any troubles dressing I guess you dress with what you had

Me: What about behavior?

Ken: They were well behaved, if they didn't they go a rule across the knuckles

Me: Did you have any humorous or interesting memories about school?

Ken: No, only just when I went to Chicago when I finished the rest of my grades in Chicago. I was ~~much~~, much better better educated than the Chicago kids, because I was at the head of the class at the time and we a better education here

Me: What responsibilities did you have around your house as a child?

Ken: Well, when we were small we had to work on the farm we had to graze potatoes, and vegetables that we needed and we sold some to help out, and we cut wood, that wood on the farm, we brought it to town, when we lived in

Ken: town in the winter ~~time~~ time, we had to cut and split it and bring it in and keep the wood boxes glowing

Me: what kind of hobbies or interests did you have as a child?

Ken: when I was a child, ski ridding and skating

Me: what did you do for sun like recreation?

Ken: well that's fun, we enjoyed nearly everything ah like they say you know we have ah, friends and we played all kinds of kid games, we did that as we were growing up

Me: How would you compare times when you grew up?

Ken: when we grew up, I think they were very good times ah of comparison of today: you have to have so much money to enjoy everything today when we were kids we made our own fun and our own ah, toys or something or another that's difference of today. So we had a very good childhood I good say that again.

Me: what was the area like when you were growing up?

Ken: well they had the up's and down's, the mining area, some times the mining was working good everything was going along fine but then when the mines were down everybody was hard up. so we were very fortunate because we had our farm we could raise our own vegetables and ah we had our own cattle, cows, horses, we had saddle horses to. and when we were growing up we had a real good life because we had saddle horses where most of the children with the envy of that to.

Me: Could you describe some interesting church functions like family gatherings or special community events.

Ken: (pausing) Well when we were at the Deer Lake school house we used to come in and stay in, we go for the school play we'd stay at, Oh what do people call it, the Laestan and they ah live right by the Deer Lake Bridge and ah or the year the Deer Lake Bridge and ah we went over for our play's that we had for our school and that's the most I can remember, we didn't have to much of that in town here.

Me: Could you describe some hunting or fishing stories?

Ken: Well we did a lot of deer hunting, I can tell you one we were, we were, we had a small camp

Ken: made for having our lunch on the other side of the Big Dead up from my came there up north and Ah I can tell you one day that we were going across and the ice wasn't thick enough and I fell through and we had ropes tied to walk on ^{really} to there there were three of us and we had a rope tied to each one so the other one's were able to pull me out and when I got up onto the, we got to the other side we were up in the woods we had to build a big fire to, to dry me off and we put a clothesline across the top and I took all my clothes off and hung up on the line to dry. we had a big fire made so had to keep turning to keep warm and after I got dried off ^{we went two} so we got two bucks that day so we had a real good ^{out} deer hunting day with everything in it (laughing afterwards)

Me: Um Did you get to travel much as a child?

Ken: Well, as far as Chicago back and fourth from Chicago everytime and as going through here we went up through an ~~at~~ Copper Harbor ^{Sault}, when we were kids they, our friends had a ~~Franklin~~ car and my dad had a Franklin car and we drove all the way up, we had to stay at Houghton, the park over night we slept on benches (laughing) or one thing another and then the next day when we got up there it was only a two wheel trail all the way up, and they, from, from Houghton up, up to the Copper Harbor so that's way back (laughing again) that's the farthest we went for rides here

Me: Did you travel much as an adult?

Ken: Well, I traveled ah mostly through the U.P., Copper Harbor, Sault Ste. Marie, and ah, in, in that area you know. The whole U.P.

Me: what was Christmas like when you were a child.

Ken: Christmas?, Well I guess ~~it~~ it's like every other child, we had, had Ah a wonderful time, our family was very good. Our family used to

Ken: (continuing) get together. and we'd get up so early in the morning to see my brother and me we were so close in age you know and we ah wake up making all kinds of noises when we get mouth organs and different things for presents so we'd wake the hole family up ~~by~~ before breakfast. (laughing afterwards)

Me: Um, Did you have a job before you came an Adult?

Ken: Well, ~~when~~ when, D, D worked, ah worked here first in the summer time. when I wasn't in school I worked in a section and ah we worked for 10 hours ~~per~~ ^{per} a day. and then that's the first one and then finally when I went down, I went down to Chicago and I was 16 I got a job in the Wisconsin Steel Mill for, for about a year and a half and I saved all my money to get started in life and then when I came back from there my family was there and ah so we all decided we didn't like Chicago we came back up here so we still had our ~~farm~~ farm and our home here and then all we went into business so we went into the feed business first and my father and I were partners and Ah I was 18 years old when it started in the feed business with my father in 1919 the Stock Market Crash and the feed business grew to be a big business at that time because every body was raising cows and chickens or something to, to feed themselves ya know and Ah we delivered all over Marquette County and, and that we went into the coal business and as the feed business died the farmers were gradually ~~dying~~ dying out and the feed business had died with it and the coal business grew to be a big business so then, then, as the feed business died out the farmers had ~~got farming~~ of course, so then I bought out my father's share of the business then ~~we~~ went into the oil business so with the coal business and oil business ~~the stock business~~ ~~the stock business~~ business died out now he ~~feel's~~ ^{very fortunate} until the coal I had the peak of all these ~~kinds of~~ ^{kinds of} businesses were good what's funny is that they die out, and ah then I had bought, before then I had bought a Michigan Crane and a Front End Loader I had, a crane and ah I ~~dough~~ dug basements, basements on the old Negahee Highway, I dug basement after basement for all them new houses as the new houses were ~~are~~ ^{were} coming in, as they were coming in and Ah so we, we kept busy with that and as the grew

(continuing)

Ken: Well, we had a good oil business until finally when Ah, just before retiring, that was natural gas was taking over and that was dying down so then I retired and that was when I was 62 years old and that was the end of my business career.

Me: How did people react to the Stock Market Crash of 1929?

Ken: Well here they were terrible, ah, ah, I had lost some of the money I had put in to ah, the North Beaved Country Stock right at the time, the money I had come back from Chicago and I ah as it was going down I got scared and I sold it but when everyone else was hanging on to it, I thought it was coming back and they just, just lost almost all their money it was so bad that I was fortunate, very, very fortunate so that, that's what I had when I got into business you know.

Me: How was your family affected by the Depression, like loss of jobs and money?

Ken: Well my family was most all married off except they all had a, they all had a hard time, I remember ~~both husband and wife were~~ both husband and wife were out of work and they all had a hard going like everybody else the only thing that saved us was ~~when~~ when the Depression came the business that we were in it was one business that everyone needed. Beef cattle and ah everybody was farming so that all turned out to be a life saver for that business at that time.

Me: How did your family make ends meet during the Depression?

Ken: Well, we made it, we got by, I don't remember what or if we had any real hardship we were fortunate, very fortunate.

Me: What was your opinion of Franklin Roosevelt?

Ken: Well, I'm a Republican, and I don't ah, ah, we thought a lot of him, he done a lot of good, but, he's ah, there was a lot of things too that we didn't quite agree with but he was a good man.

Me: Did you or your friends or relatives work on a government program, like a Civilian Conservation Corps?

Ken: No, not that I know of, I can't think of anything I worked on special.

Me: How did living through the Depression change your life?

Ken: Well, you learned to be conservative, you ah, being conservative is Ah, to make damn sure you ah put some money away so you don't spend it all.

Me: What has made this area special to you?

Ken: To me? This area has been real good to me in my business that I'm very fortunate and Ah, it ended up successful instead of going the other way.

Mei: What was the most memorable event in your life?

Ken: The most memorable? Let's see marrying my good wife

Mei: Why

Ken: Because she's a wonderful woman I was very fortunate to have her with me all these years

Mei: What event had the greatest impact on your life?

Ken: Well, the busiest time of my life would be Ah, a small business we were going good feed, coal and oil they were all going good at one time and I was so busy that I didn't have ~~time~~ time for anything else, I was worried day and night. That was the biggest event, ah, ah, event, Ah, Ah, (laughing) to keep everything going.

Me: What was the most rewarding part of your life? (a career)

Ken: Most rewarding? Well, I don't know what to say, gee, P, P when we bought our home and Ah, fixed up our new home here, this isn't a new house just we bought it and we've done a lot of work on it