

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center  
for  
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

University of Arkansas  
1 East Center  
Fayetteville, AR 72701  
(479) 575-6829

**Arkansas Memories**

Kenneth L. Smith  
Interviewed by Janet Parsch  
November 15, 2022  
Fayetteville, Arkansas

## Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved in the Pryor Center archives. The transcripts, audio and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <https://pryorcenter.uark.edu/>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio recordings and highlight clips, in addition to the transcripts, to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

## Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first five minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first five minutes to improve readability.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms.
- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing; and
  - annotations for clarification and identification.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

## **Citation Information**

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**Janet Parsch interviewed Kenneth L. Smith on November 15, 2022, in Fayetteville, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

Ken Smith: I'd like to provide a testimonial in favor of common sense.

Janet Parsch: Mm-kay.

KS: And—uh—I can even get down to some specifics.

JP: Mm-kay. So I'll just . . .

KS: About . . .

JP: . . . mention, Ken, first of all, that I'm Janet Parsch. I'm here interviewing Ken Smith today at the Pryor Center. It's November 15 on a Tuesday of 2022. And—um—Ken, first of all, I think wants to talk a little bit about—uh—his—his—uh—growing—um—philosophy of green burials or burials in general. And—um—we'll maybe then move on to a couple other topics related to the Buffalo River.

[00:00:53] KS: Well, Janet, I think the time has come for many people—not everybody—to consider where their final resting place might be and how that—that will come about. The—my—everyone in my family has been buried in a what I would call—on death, interred and buried in a—an established cemetery of some kind. I think we're, in many places, we're—for one thing

we're running out of space for such—such arrangements, although not everybody. I'll mention that my brother, even, married into another family, and—uh—they had already their arrangements. And his wife, I guess, was—preceded him in death, and—uh—everything was settled with her family that they had purchased or reserved a plot in a rural cemetery outside Hot Springs, Arkansas. And it was—it was established and assumed that everybody in the family would have—be placed there—uh—after they pass on. [00:02:31] I do not have family, so I—automatically I think, "Well, where—what should arrangements be made for people like me who are unattached?" Or especially with people who have, in these times—uh—move from their traditional home, maybe—there's a twelve-grave plan—plot, I've been told, for my Grandfather Smith's numerous family, and he was placed there. And maybe—uh—two or three of the children, but then at least one of 'em has, as I recall, has moved away, and they—I don't even know where they are. And the family's scattered. And then there were others—uh—a son and a daughter of the original Grandfather Smith who are, well, placed beside their mother in a cemetery at Rogers, Arkansas. And then it was the son, the gran—my grandmother, and then the daughter, my Aunt Bess, and then on the outside of those

graves—outside, I mean flanking them on—but not close to the—  
Grandmother Smith, there was this—uh—woman who was  
married to my—to my—uh—Uncle Lewis. I'm a namesake of  
that Lewis Smith. But I never met his wife. Kathryn Kumpke  
[Ken Smith edit: Kathryn Kumpe Smith] was her name. And  
somewhere along at the outs—uh—the outwash of World War I, I  
guess, my uncle Lewis married her. There were no children.  
But she was placed, and she lived beside my other family  
members outside Rogers, Arkansas, for a short time before her  
death.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:05:01] KS: But they had Kathryn. I—whom I never met, was  
there, and then Uncle Lewis, and then Grandmother Smith, and  
then my Aunt Bess. And then finally her husband Carl Manley,  
who—uh—I knew the—Aunt Bess and Uncle Doc, as we call him.  
He one—once was a dentist in the days when it was a simpler  
procedure, I guess, just drilling and filling. Anyhow, those  
people all lined up in a row by prior arrangement. They did it—I  
guess Aunt Bess got started with it, and Uncle Lewis went along  
and those arrangements are s—if there's legal land space and  
legal sanctioned, sure, they can go on. But I can see the  
opportunities will be more limited as time goes on. And I have

no—none of those family com—close family connections. I was not close enough to my brother's family, the Hall family in Hot Springs, to know, well, know them, I guess. They—casual friends, but certainly I can't go in and [*laughs*] invade their space. [00:06:44] What looks to me is more feasible, satisfying is that people realize that we are a population—there are people who are scattered to the winds. I could say that my—one of my aunts had—Bess's sister was—died of tuberculosis, I think, out in New Mexico or somewhere, where she had gone to the—try to recover in the dry climate. I don't know where she is. I never saw her or anything. And it is the—too common of an occurrence now with people who are just simply mobile, scattered, not possessing strong family ties that they—well, I don't know what happened with Aunt Gina. That she, I understand, succumbed to—went out to New Mexico, I guess, for her health, and it was—she died out there, I guess. And there are—true, there are established families that have established procedures and places and everything, so let 'em. They can do what they prefer to do. Some time maybe there will be a—diminishing opportunities, an end, even, for that sort of thing where . . .

[00:08:30] JP: Where are your mother and your father buried?

KS: Pardon?

JP: Where are your mother and your father buried?

KS: That is another instance of this scattering situation. Well, my father died of a heart attack and—suddenly in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. There was no provision, at that time, for cremation or anything or transportation. He died with only about sixty miles north of the family plot down in Warren, Arkansas. I have never been to that plot. When I—time that he died, I was in school. I came down on an overnight bus trip, and within, I guess, fifteen hours of his fatal attack, he was—I was in Pine Bluff. But badly needing sleep or—it was an all-night bus trip with transfers from Fayetteville to Pine Bluff, Arkansas. And while I was catching up on sleep, my mother and my brother made the arrangements, I guess. [00:09:47] Incidentally, later on it developed that when he was in a barber shop, maybe, in Pine Bluff, some—one of his friends in the barber shop said that all my father preferred was to be—this was maybe half jokingly, but he just was to be in a—buried in a cotton sack, meaning the kind that was dragged along by people picking cotton, and that was his idea of sufficient and proper. Well, it was not much above that level because it was sudden, and they, I guess my mother particularly, was concerned about finances and experience with

unexpected experience—expenses, so that she—I guess they found a what I would call an economy coffin, burial box, which we did see like a day or two later. Well, even next day it was—there he—at the funeral home we saw him for the last time. And of course, the undertaker had done what he needed to do. And it was, in those days, it was acceptable that there would be some sort of a—I don't know what they call it. I—make the deceased look peaceful and undamaged, if possible. Well, he had a hear—fatal heart attack. He was not in a traumatic accident of some kind. [00:11:55] But he—there—we saw him that one time at the funeral home, and then the next day, I guess it was, he was—had been carried in that coffin out to the cemetery in Pine Bluff. It was—we didn't expect to stay there. We were living in—my mother—my parents were living in a rented house at that point in Pine Bluff, not expecting to live in that community even if my father had lived. It was—in other words, the situation was sort of unstable and regarded as temporary in any case. He'd taken employment there when other things had not worked out for steady, well, good pay—well-paying employment. We have lived in Pine—in Hot Springs for twenty more—twenty or more years but had no arrangements for last rites or anything like that. So that what

happened was that he was lowered in that box, which was economy and temporary, in a sense that—the other members of the family didn't expect to be there in Pine Bluff. I never did know whether that was just one vacant space in a part of the cemetery that had already practically filled up. But . . .

[00:13:46] JP: So is your father still buried in Pine Bluff? Or was he moved?

KS: Oh, certainly it is. He—that—he was not moved. We could've—I suppose a burial could've taken place down in Warren, Arkansas, where there was, I guess, a twelve-grave plot that had been purchased by Grandfather Smith, I guess. Never visited that place. That—all those burials took place before I ever had any knowledge about who was there or what. They—and so . . .

JP: And so your mother—is your mother buried in Pine Bluff or Fayetteville?

KS: Well, my mother died here in Fayetteville after being in nursing homes for about, oh goodness, fifteen or twenty years. We—she was first in a nursing home in Hot Springs after she retired from teaching. She had been teaching in—substitute teaching in various places after Father died, and then North Little Rock and then finally in Hot Springs, I guess, but anyhow, no, she moved. She'd retired and moved to Hot Springs, back where she had

spent more time. And when she died, there was cremation available, and her ashes came to me. Well, she actually died up here in Fayetteville. And so that her ashes—the—cremation was available. There was no one close enough to gather around and—for a funeral or anything like that. It was simply that the cremation was the simple, sensible outcome. And certainly we had stories—we had ideas of how she had contributed to the family welfare, I guess you would say. She was—grew up in New York, and she had a teaching certificate, I guess you could say, of four years of college up there. And then she sort of—in the end, she was, up till the point of retirement, she was simply a—always taking care of herself financially because my father had been in a, well, in a situation where, in the end, he was essentially employed only part time by employers in Pine Bluff with whom he had common cause and sympathy. And then he went . . .

JP: So you were . . .

KS: . . . and there was that chance of taking care of the disposal of—post mortem, and it wound up that it was a graveside service in a cemetery at Pine Bluff. And we simply—there were a few friends from his employer there in Pine Bluff and my brother and myself and my mother. And I don't recall anyone else. But it

was—I guess you could say just quickly organized around the necessity of whatever it was, final service or rite. There was a minister from the local Presbyterian church. This was at Mother's request. She was not a church member but thought she'd heard this minister and thought that there should be appropriate saying at the whatever the observation was.

[00:18:22] JP: So early in your life, actually, you were exposed to natural burials or minimal preparation for burial. Is that correct?

KS: Well, the family members were—at least with my father, who died in 1955, there was some of the normal cosmetic procedure, I guess, so they—he died of a heart attack, and so there wasn't any trauma there of—that was disfiguring, I guess. But what I've learned since in a couple of cases, couple of deaths here in Fayetteville, that it seems more appropriate, in my view at least, to—if someone has died—one was by suicide—that it was better for that person to be remembered as a what I'll call a whole, *W-H-O-L-E*, a whole individual who even was enjoying life at some point. And this woman here in Fayetteville, who happened to live next door to me here in Fayetteville—this is twenty years ago, I guess. There was, I guess—I don't know what the arrangement was, but the remains were placed in a cemetery in Little Rock where she came from. She was a very un person—

unhappy person and took her own life. [00:20:20] But what happened was that there was this memorial service, which happened to be up on the hill at—in a meeting room later on, not immediately after death, but with some chance for people, for her friends, near and far if possible, to gather there and remember her. And she had several little dogs, puppy dogs, I call 'em, that she loved and left behind her. And even—and so she—there was a picture of her with the pups. And it was better than to have—be staring at somebody lying in a coffin, maybe propped up as they have in some cases here in Arkansas so that every—it looks more—the deceased looks more as if he or she is asleep. It doesn't work at—and at least my brother's case, when he died, it was possible for my sister-in-law to have a large portrait of him. And there was a memorial service, not immediately, in the funeral home or something like that. I don't recall how it worked out. But I do remember that there was a picture, a good portrait picture that had been made maybe past middle age, but some time before he passed on. We were able in that—his case to have conversations with him up close to the end, but we knew the end was at hand. And so that it came to me that the best thing I can see is that if a family, close relatives, already have a viable plan for post mortem attention

to whoever is imminently available, or—should I say that? That person at the end of life—yes, if the family has already made arrangements. And with my brother, it was—there was cremation, I think, in his place, which is just simply becoming much more available and acceptable, I think, that—if the deceased is agreeable to that, and those who are not going to object, maybe, that cremation can take place. [00:23:33] And in my brother's case, it—well, with me or with my brother, I—it wound up that I was doing the arrangements there and all the arrangements were here in Fayetteville. Earlier they—he had been in Hot Springs as an invalid or—my brother had been in Hot Springs and—as an invalid or bedridden there. And I remember we did transfer my brother, or rather my—well, it was when my brother's wife was able to help transfer him up here. There was an extended period of invalidism, I guess, with my brother [*coughs*] so that [*clears throat*]*—it came because we were in two separate places, and my brother's first problem, first confinement as a bedridden patient was when they were in Hot Springs. And we were involved in finding a nursing home for him, my brother, there. And it—we found there were several nursing homes in and around Hot Springs. There was one that was more—better than others. And then, little later on, it was*

just simply my turn to take over responsibility so that my brother and his wife could have their lives to live, too, and without having to be constantly on call for his—for my brother's—I'm getting my people mixed up. I think it was my mother who was in Hot Springs. Toward the end we moved him up—her—to Fayetteville, and I took oh—charge of all the arrangements from there on, including the arrangement for cremation at the end and . . .

[00:26:11] JP: So I think, Ken, with your [*coughs*]*—*with your interest in the environment and conservation, I think that this whole—your whole approach to cremation maybe ties in with your whole philosophy of the environment and protecting environment, is that correct?

KS: Well, certainly I see that scattering of ashes is preferable to having a cemetery lined with tombstones or any other head—and I'm not going to be dogmatic or adamant that the previous arrangements are—should be just simply abandoned at any cost because there are many people—my brother, for example, I guess, had been with my sister-in-law. I guess it was simply that there was an agreement within the family and they—my brother and his wife and her family were close. They were in Hot Springs, so that it went that way. I had no strong

connection with 'em. They were good people. I saw them once in a while. My brother's in-laws, I guess you would say. But then I was thinking, too, of the long run and seeing aerial photos of old cemeteries that—well, there was a huge one, and my grandparents, Quaker grandparents, I think were e—maybe buried right across the avenue in a smaller cemetery reserved principally for the—what are they called? The Friends, which were Quakers. And so I saw these things, and there right across the Friends—from the highway from the Friends cemetery is this huge, 100-acre plot. Maybe 200. It's hard to see. It's an aerial view, just crowded, filled up with gravestones. There may be a few of ancestors there on my—the other side, my mother's family. I don't know. But certainly, there it is. The only thing that I can say about that huge cemetery is that they—it was only about less than two miles from where the fanatic's planes hit the towers and—plane site.

JP: In New York City. Yes. Yes.

KS: And that . . .

[00:29:27] JP: Ken, could I interrupt? You were talking before about your father having had work in Pine Bluff, and you and your mother and brother were living there at the time. I'm wondering if you could elaborate a little bit about your father

and his work with the forests and the engineer that he was and how that influenced you.

KS: Well, my father, as I think about it, followed his ideals or instincts or happenstance so that in the end he—I think he was happier down there in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, within sixty miles of where he'd grown up as a kid in a familiar environment. Southern fried, I would call, in a sense, as a joke, I guess. But they were good people. And so that he was there troubleshooting on problems, canoni—mechanical problems related to cotton-picking machineries that—after World War II, the Rust cotton picker took hold, and one of the main spots for getting it built was—as a piece of agricultural equipment was Pine Bluff, Arkansas, in a foun—outfit that had formerly been only—well, the founder built it—had it—Ben Pearson Incorporated—making bows and arrows. Well, my father had nothing to do with the bows and arrows, but they—there was a man who was a partner, I guess, of Pearson. Moved in from Oklahoma, I guess, and he was the one who pushed the cotton picker production, and that's where my father, after a few rough years economically, was able to go over there to Pine Bluff and be a sort of a troubleshooter and mechanical design for that Rust cotton picker. [00:32:07] The—I get to talking about this, and

think that my father was in a more familiar environment there at Pine Bluff than anywhere in his adult life, perhaps, because after he—well, it was one of these—he—numerous Arkansas bunches of kids, I'll call 'em, who was scattered all over the map, where—so that I have a couple of these people. The ones who didn't die young and get buried in the family plot in Warren, Arkansas, which I've never seen, they were scattered around. There were two of 'em, I think, that died in New Mexico. Tuberculosis. And so that was a fact in those times.

JP: Your . . .

KS: That . . .

[00:33:13] JP: Your father was involved with forestry equipment at one point in his career, wasn't he?

KS: He was—he wanted to be. But as—they—well, they had bounced from place to place. Up to New York City where he met my mother through a blind date and . . .

JP: What was he doing in New York City?

KS: How is that?

JP: What was he doing in New York City?

KS: Well, at that point, I think he was—he was not highly educated, but literate and was working for a publication on—reporting on construction projects or something like that. I never did find out

exactly. And then he met my mother through a blind date. Friend of his was dating a friend of hers, what it amounted to. [00:34:28] We—these things—I will bring back the idea that people are so mobile nowadays that there's no telling where they will wind up. I have a friend—heard about him recently, very recently. He had several sisters. Another one of these big families, a farm family, and several sisters. And I gather from what I hear now that he's lost touch with all of them, that they were not compatible, not congenial. I think maybe thirty years ago, some of them were, but times change, and families simply scatter in terms of geography, their interests, their employment, and everything else. That's certainly—I guess—and my brother's grandchildren are—well, I know of them because many of them are down in southern Arkansas. But I don't have constant contact with 'em and probably know—they may find out that when I pass on, that they get a message or something that old Uncle Ken has gone on and that there will be—and maybe not a formal memorial service or anything like that, but he was interested in building trail in the woods, and they—maybe the ashes will be scattered at some general area along that trail. That sort of thing, to me at least, in my situation, and for quite a few other people, seems appropriate.

And then if they want to have a—an observat—a service of—or a recognition of some kind, well, we will have such an area down on the trail, maybe, where—or close to the trail where we gathering. It might even be a campground on the Buffalo where we can sit and talk about that crazy person who was working on the trail and is now gone up the trail into the sky or something like that. [00:37:13] I never—I think another thing is that, yes, the values of the Christian or Christianity are still with us, or should be. A lot of the formal observance may be totally irrelevant, uninteresting to so many, especially in the younger generation. It doesn't mean that they have abandoned the values, and they should not abandon those things, and they should not have knowledge of their what I'll term cultural religious background, whatever. But they are—simply the times are changing so rapidly that—well, I will they—say some of that started maybe more than a hundred years ago. Think of this: That they—people in Hot Springs, Arkansas, or any smaller town in Arkansas, they're not holding dances in the church budget—basement, are they, for the young people? Well, my mother remembered in New York City that there was no other place, really, appropriate place for young people, teenagers, to meet. She said there was a Northern Baptist Church that I guess she

attended that was—well, there were teenagers. They had somewhere to go, so they arranged to have teenagers for dancing. I don't know whether it was, you know, at a distance, at arms outstretched or whether it was hugging closely, but there were dancing in the church basement in a Baptist, Northern Baptist church, she said. I guess she attended there. [00:39:31] She was there growing up in New York City in a area just north of Manhattan Island, the old, historic center of New York City and—in a neighborhood called Harlem just north of Central Park there in Manhattan Island. It—a lot of these things are unthinkable, maybe, in Southern Arkansas, but oth—things—people adapt. There was no other place, apparently, other than maybe a half-block ball field where the kids could go play baseball or basketball or something there in Harlem, and I'm sure they're doing that right now. But in that time, nearly a hundred years ago, they—the leaders of the community simply adapted to reality, and they need to have a place for teenagers to become acquainted no—and—within the overall oversight of the church. As I recall she attended a Baptist church there, but there were—here—well, we get off into a side—my grandfather, her father, was—well, my—what it amounted to was a—was there in that neighborhood in a very small, rural house, later—in

later years, and that—there was nowhere else to go, really, at least in the eyes of the church. Later on she went on to college and she—her mother was a Quaker, Society of Friends, or however they labeled it. But so she was—I imagine she got a Quaker scholarship named for Lucretia Mott, who was a leader in women's rights, I guess, in the nineteenth century. [00:41:59] But that later—her mother took sick with contra—with cancer, and so she had to get back to the house and help care for Grandmother Gibbs and—her mother. In other words, people adapt, and they're—at least in many places if they can, they will adapt. And so that we—it is not that she—that Northern Baptist church. And I think she attended Sunday school or whatever because that was the nearest thing to—geographically.

[00:42:49] JP: So your father was from Warren, Arkansas, and he met your mother, who was from New York City. Is that right?

KS: That is right. And that was because . . .

JP: So there was some . . .

KS: . . . my father was out of a large family, and early on in his teens, he was, I guess, following one of his sisters over into Greenville, Mississippi, somewhere over there. It was a hundred—seventy-five or a hundred miles east of Warren, Arkansas, and he met these two young men who were

adventurers. And in the end, he was walking in Mexico and western Canada with him. That was my yen for travel to those parts of the world. Not Mexico. I never did care for that. But the—Western Canada. [00:43:58] What happened there was that you have another social thing there that is happening in those times was that people were scattering all over the place, and the two friends of my father, who became very close friends, they—Charlie and Lloyd is what I knew—and some often—"Charlie and Lloyd were doing this" or "Charlie and Lloyd were doin' that." And he was tagging along with 'em at their invitation and per—possibly had they—well, I'm sure—he was employed after he moved west to California. He was supervising house construction or whatever it was out in Los Angeles, which was a growth industry, I'm sure, building Los Angeles. And but Charlie and Lloyd there were talking about end times for those people. And Charlie and Lloyd were adventurers. And apparently—well, my father was, too, and when World War I came along, he signed up in the Coast Artillery, as it turned out. And was along the Gulf Coast in a couple of stations. But that was 1914 when the thing was started, but they—the United States didn't get in touch with it until 1918 or [19]17. By that time he saw nothing happening, and the family back in Warren,

Arkansas, needed him, so he was call—able to resign that post in the Coast Artillery and get back to Warren. And those things—it was an unsettled time—early twentieth century, of course. And far less stable in many ways in terms of, at least, migration and living place.

[00:46:20] JP: So what took your father to New York? How come your father was in New York?

KS: Oh, gosh. Well, that happened at the latter part of World War I. He had bounced up to—I know Ohio, Youngstown, Ohio—he found employment up there as a draughtsman or something. He had skills of that sort. And then for some reason, he went on to New York. I have pictures, or did have pictures of my—couple of my—I think my Grandmother Smith, maybe, my father's sister, others. Well, they wound up in New Yor—New Jersey. Jersey City. I remember pictures of them. Early camera snapshots. And he was with 'em for a while, and then this mutual—this guy who had—was dating—dating a friend of my gran—my mother's. There was a double-date arrangement where my father was invited to date the other girl. Well, she became my grandmother. And I think part of the attraction there was that her father—her mother was settled and eventually died of cancer, I guess it was, but my Grandfather Gibbs was middle

age, really, when he married my grandmother. And there is another ex— idea of American instability. He had started out born in—well, his early childhood was in Canterbury, England, of all places. His father was one of these preachers in a Protestant sect of Methodists or something like that. I never have figured out. [00:48:49] But there he, in his earliest years—here is where my claim to history can be, that my own grandfather was—he was—his sisters, who were numerous. That was the style in those days, many kids. And there he was placed in whatever passed for diapers in those days and was crawling around on the warm stone floor of Canterbury Cathedral. [*JP laughs*] And that is where I speculate that my own grandfather—well, wet the floor of Canterbury Cathedral. [*Laughter*] And maybe we better leave it at that. He was, in childhood, was brought to America. The family was scattering. Big family, and one of my grandfather's sisters, I guess, had come with her—his parents or her parents. It's all—they were numerous and fluid and mobile, and they—generally moving west. And so . . .

JP: So is—it's . . .

KS: . . . as a child my Grandfather Gibbs was—crossed the Atlantic, and they landed in New York, the principal port, but many of

them went up into Canada and . . .

[00:50:30] JP: So is this the grandfather who was involved with the railroad?

KS: My grandfather—well, he came from that line of preachers, which gave him expertise, I guess, to go back to the Bible and note that in the various versions—*[laughs]* little King Jame—King John and so forth, there were—for—it was a disconnected effort to try to spread Christianity, Christian ethics, and to a large extent that was—it became the different world for Christians. And but with all of these things like holding dances in the church basement in a Northern Baptist church, there was this scattering. And people do that.

[00:51:40] JP: So Ken, you have talked—you've mentioned the Gibbs as family, as ancestors. You've told me about a family member Gibbs who worked on the Continental Railroad.

KS: Well, that was my own grandfather.

JP: Okay.

KS: Born in the 1840s. There were, I th—there was one—he'd come to America with other for—family members, and he—at one point he was working on a farm up in rural New York State, I think. There was a letter that survived there. But he was normal red-blooded American boy—or English boy who was come to

America, and there was that shifting from Ontario, Canada, into New York State, and I think there was a marriage there. And there was nothing sinful about it or anything, it just happened that he was married once and—to a young woman who died. And I think there was a—I'll have to get back to that. There was a pregnancy there that—apparently one of these poorly trained doctors—well, the—it may have represented—been involved in the reath of—death of a—that first wife. I think there was a second wife, then, that—and this is where they—she divorced, supposedly a friend of my grandfather or something. But there was evidence, maybe, that the friend was still having a close relationship with that other woman. With that woman. There were all these stories that are—what it amounts to is that one of the great progre—evidences of progress and modern society is that we can for one—it all relates to childbirth and that sort of thing. [00:54:29] I—that—there are ways of avoiding pregnancy if cho—if somebody so chooses. That is in the news right now. Of course, there're people who are saying that they are not doing the right thing by doing of—using contraceptives or whatever they're doing. But anyhow, my grandfather, I guess—there was one woman who he supposedly divorced because he'd married a woman who had been married to a

friend of his or something, and that first marriage to the friend had not—wasn't entirely dissolved. Interesting. I know there was some guy in—living in Spokane, Washington, who still sent pictures to my mother, I think, and she didn't know him at all, but there was . . .

JP: So you . . .

KS: . . . some connection he . . .

[00:55:43] JP: You have a picture of the Golden Spike being put in on the railroad.

KS: Well, that was my grandfather, and the story goes was that in—probably after one of those earlier marriages, he had—became a wanderer, and he went west. And the story is that he would—this is recorded, more or less, by a cousin of my mother's who was the family historian at that time that Dr. Gibbs told him that years before, he had—he and a friend were hunting and come south and wound up encountering the construction of the Union-Pacific Railroad. Well, I guess the hunting wasn't so good, and they offered him a job in the supply room or whatever it was there. He was literate, for one thing, and that was not the case in every pla—and he probably convinced 'em. And he was honest. He was honest and able to write, so he got a job there. And then when they bumped noses with the Southern Pacific or

Western Pacific or whatever it was, he was one of the—standing on the Union Pacific engine there, and later on somebody in New York with the railroad recognized the name Samuel T. Gibbs, or Samuel E. Gibbs, I guess it was, and got in touch with him fifty years later and said, "Are you the man who was recorded as being at the driving of the Golden Spike?" And, "Yes. I'm the one." Well, that led to another little sideline for my Grandfather Gibbs. He could assemble sort of a lantern slideshow about the West that he had encountered fifty years earlier. [00:58:00] They—there was that early marriage that apparently wound up with a child dying in childbirth—her baby—the mother, also. I haven't figured it all out, but then there was another one where—ended in a divorce, supposedly, because the first husband hadn't quite entirely become unmarried from [*laughs*] the first—his wife. The—some of those things—I would count it as progress if they could prove that the guy was—had nothing to do with that infidelity or whatever it was and—because there are ways of doing that, and there are also ways of controlling the number of children, which is especially controversial because a lot of people think it's a li—well, sinful. Those things—I would count progress as a reliable means of controlling contraception as a—as progress. Also as a reliable way of at the—at birth—

having a safe birth instead of having a—having it—somebody making a terrible mistake and killing the infant and the mother both 'cause that apparently happened in my family. And I think it did maybe once on my father's side, I don't know. A lot of these things have happened nearly a hundred years ago. But we simply have to go on and adopt—dapt and be aware of the mistakes of the past and try to keep on goin', doing the right thing. And that—some of this thing of course and there—about the whole business of having children or preventing having children. I have to say that. Later in life—I was blissfully ignorant of all this sort of thing. It was—for one thing, I was very young and interested in other things. [01:01:11] But that a—later in life, my mother said that—she was living in New York City, which is far removed from rural Arkansas where my father came from and where he had eight or nine brothers or sisters, who some of 'em lived and a couple of 'em—my Aunt Bess in Rogers, Arkansas, was one of the best friends I ever had. But they were, I'll say, they were unable to control their own lives. And my mother, in New York City, after she married my father, I guess she was talking to her college friends, perhaps, I don't know, but the awareness there of how to avoid unwanted pregnancy was—well, a lot of it was simply forbidden by law,

supposedly. The Comstock Act or whatever it was prevented the transmission by postal mail of anything that had to do—anything with pregnancy, I guess. And but somehow in the center of activity for progress, if you call it desirable change. I think it is—was desirable that there was this woman who was a public health nurse in New York City. She was called back to—well, what it wound up was a birth that the woman herself had tried to prevent by what they call—you know, describe—uses coat hangers, which was a terrible way to think of that. But she had—that woman had no economic base for having children, more than maybe one, maybe two. [01:03:56] But she kept having 'em. And that—so that they—this woman—what is her name? She was a public health nurse. And really, she was the one who was so dismayed by what she saw and ways of woman wanting—having too many children and having tragic circumstances trying to prevent others. And late in life my mother told me that it was known, at least—I think it was a little later in time after this zealot Comstock had his way of messing things up, I would call it, preventing even the transmission by mail of any interested on contraception. But she somehow found out, I don't from friends or where. It was a vastly different intelligencia, I guess, that you would see in New York City than

what you might find is totally lacking in Southern Arkansas where my mother—my grandmother had nine children. Half of them died early on. I don't know what happened there.

[01:05:36] Interestingly, my grandmother lived to be in her mid-eighties, but she wasn't going to—well, nobody was asking her about her experiences. But my mother said early—late in life that there was a place down in New York City where you could go and have a pregnancy terminated. Early, very early—it was before, I guess, viability or whatever, which is—suggests that—apparently she did go down there. Because my brother was a small child, and she—there was no income, probably to speak of. The Depression was coming on. My father was employed in—early in the marriage, and somewhere along the line that thing disintegrated. In other words, it was my personal belief that people need to know, first of all, the choices, the alternatives. And fortunately in the case of pregnancy, there is enough knowledge so that a pregnancy could be terminated so early on—and I guess my mother said it was done very early. There was nothing more than—that would be identifiable as a fetus. But there was—it was necessary for the—felt it was necessary that that pregnancy, the evidence of it, needed to be stopped. Little later on, this—there was one more pregnancy

after my brother's in 1925 I think is—when he was born in 1933. It was in the Depression but they—I guess there was hope that they would survive economically, and my brother was certainly healthy enough and so that—one more evidence was—well, there was a termination of—no termination of that pregnancy, which was—she said you could go down and there was this—I don't know how they got this. They—probably Margaret Singer's influence spread the word, at least in New York City, that there are certain few ethical, safely operated doctors who could safely proceed, which was nothing but—more than—we're getting into the details, but it was dilation and not curette—I don't know. I don't know all of this. It did not in—I think it was more than once, as mother said late in life, when she went down to this—she described as a Jewish doctor. Somehow these—the Jewish people—perhaps—they did things that were certainly not acceptable at all to a large segment of Christian society or anybody else's society. But they—well, in at least two cases, as I recall, she had to go down. [01:09:41] I wonder now whether my father was even aware because he was—he might have been employed somewhere else, and she said simply that she was going downtown for—on an errand. Well, it turned out to be that—at least two cases, I think. She had a way of describing

every time that, I think, that he hung his trousers on the bedpost that [*laughter*] that there was something that could happen. In one case happened only that it was this pregnancy that happened only months before they—I guess Dr. Gibbs had finally died or was at the point of death. And that went out to—that one—that came to term, and by that time my father had—Dr. Gibbs had died—inherited a few thousand dollars, I guess, from mother or resulted in an inheritance, and they bought a—in the Depression bought a like-new used Ford truck, state bought a truck. And there at 8 West 128th Street, my father started loading that truck. And my mother, I guess, was obviously in a family way and maybe—I don't know how it went, but they knocked—about nineteen eight—November nineteen—1933 my father was a—and my young brother, eight years old, and a driver that they hired who had experience with driving that sort of a truck—it was nothing but a state-body truck, but they had stacked it with as much as they could of the family possessions from 8 West 128th Street, Harlem neighborhood, New York City, and headed south to Arkansas. [01:12:14] My father had never been down there, but there was some family exposure to Hot Springs, Arkansas, I guess, and they chose that. Possibly because they—it wasn't as far as the Pacific Northwest where my

father thought maybe he could be involved in the timber industry somehow. And that was a long way to go, and the timber—whole timber business in the Depression was pretty shaky, I guess you would say, that it . . .

JP: So I . . .

KS: . . . residential construction everything had fallen way off.

[01:12:55] JP: So I wonder if we might suspend right here and pick this up another time to hear about how your family ended up back in Arkansas, okay? 'Cause I think we've . . .

KS: Well, there is not much to say except I think that they looked—I found that there were old travel photos from Washington state, Seattle area especially, that they had accumulated via, you know, free literature and thought about moving up there, but they never did because they came down to Arkansas. And I think part of it was that there was a territory down here in the Mid-South that could use, profitably, aluminum foil as reflective insulation. And my father was aware of things back in New York and was actually in touch with those people, Aluminum Company of America or whatever it was. And so that he was able to get a territory in the Mid-South for installing aluminum foil insulation. And for a few years, he was doing that, not terribly profitably, perhaps, but he was insulating hot water tanks of one kind

another and even a few houses. And so that was what they expected to find in Arkansas, and it was not so darn far as Seattle or Washington. And I guess they realized that when my parents or—well, at first my father who came down in the fall and follow—with that truck—my—he, the hired driver, and my brother, a young eight-year-old sitting between the driver and my father, came down to Hot Springs, Arkansas. And that's where they set up housekeeping in time for my mother to come down, and I was born in Hot Springs.

JP: Kay.

KS: And . . .

[01:15:26] JP: So, Ken, I think that this is a good stopping point for today, and let's pick this up another time, okay? Because I think that the staff—they need to be able to cut [*KS laughs*] this off for right now . . .

KS: Quit work.

JP: [*Laughter*] Yeah. Everyone has worked real hard today. So okay? We'll pick this up . . .

KS: That's . . .

JP: . . . another time.

KS: Well, that's the long story, but they were here.

[End of interview 01:15:55]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]