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Jacob Vandorn - interviewer
Kenneth Hughes - interviewee

ORAL HISTORY
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This is a transcript of the interview I (JV) conducted with Kenneth Hughes (KH). Kenneth's wife Jennetta (JH) was with us at the time of the interview, and added her perspective at times. Kenneth Hughes is a pastor, and lives with his wife Jennetta on Kenneth's parents homestead in Big Lake. During the interview, I found out a great deal of information about Kenneth's life and the work he does with his ministry. I was especially interested in hearing about how the Mat-Su valley has grown and changed over the span of his life. He also expressed how important family is to him, and how those values have impacted his life. I hope that this interview I conducted will be of use to someone in the future. I had a wonderful time doing this interview and highly recommend this kind of learning activity to anyone interested in the study of society.

The Interview

JV: All right, this is my interview with Kenny Hughes. What country did you, your parents or grandparents consider your homeland?

KH: Well, the United States of course. But, one of my grandfathers was a German. My great, great grandfather, I guess, came from Whales, and my dad came from Pennsylvania and my mother from Washington.

JV: Why did they come to the U.S.?

KH: I am not sure about that. It was just the thing to do I guess. Everybody was going west.

JV: O.K., and where did they initially settle?

KH: One set of my grandparents settled in Montana and the other on the West Coast.

JV: O.K.

KH: East Coast, excuse me, it was the East Coast. Pennsylvania.

JV: How would you describe the communities in which you lived with your family?

KH: In the early stages?

JV: Yes.

KH: How would I describe the communities? I was born here in Palmer. During the colonist days. There were a few people. The first year was a big tent city along the rail road track and everybody, most everybody had the same motives for being here. It was to

develop the land, and build the place...a farming community. And so being a small community, everybody knew each other and it was kind of like one big family that worked together.

JV: Hmm, do you recall a favorite place as a child or a least favorite place?

KH: You mean in the community here?

JV: Yea...or did you have, like I don't know, a spot you went to as a kid or that you hung out?

KH: Well, uh, my early, we were Palmer for two or three years and then moved to Valdez, and then back to Palmer in '45. I don't know if there was a favorite place. We built a road, from the Anchorage/ Palmer highway, up onto Lazy Mountain where we built a Children's home. And I guess my favorite place was the basketball court. I loved to play basketball at school, but I never had a lot of time for it. Because we had a farm, and in those days work came before play. So, I don't know what my favorite spot would be. I used to spend a lot of time in the woods fishing and hunting up there on Lazy Mountain and walking back into lakes and whatnot. But, I don't know that I had a favorite spot where I hung out. We had too much work to do to be hanging out!

JV: Did you play on a team for basketball for school, or just solely for fun?

KV: We had basketball teams, but a bunch of us who had chores to do everyday, could never stay for practice, so we had to develop our own intramural team, which we tried to play once a week during school hours.

JV: Did you ever have competitions?

KH: We had lots of competitions. And actually in those days Wasilla was a very small community, and they barely had enough people, enough kids for a basketball team. But, Palmer had a good basketball team, which played Anchorage. I think Anchorage was the only other high school that we ever played. It was the only other high school available to play in the early days.

JV: How many brothers and sisters did you have in your family?

KH: In my immediate family I had one sister. But being that my mom and dad built the children's home up on Lazy Mountain, I had actually about 80 kids that I lived with everyday in the same house.

JV: Do you recall a special relationship, with I guess you could say that those 80 kids you lived with were your brothers and sisters in a way. Do you recall a special relationship with one of them?

KH: Yea. I developed a relationship, of course, with most all of them. But, one fellow, one of the native boys that came from Sleetmute, out on the Kuskawim River, I had probably what you would call a special relationship in which we spent a lot of time together, worked together, run around together. We slept in the same bedroom. He probably was closer to a brother than the rest of them. His name was Wilfred Fredricks who was president of one of the Native Corporations a while back. He still lives in Anchorage, retired now.

JV: Going back, just a minute, I wanted to get this in there. How did your parents first come to Alaska?

KH: My parents came to Alaska for the sole purpose of being missionaries. They weren't affiliated with any particular denominational group. They were non-sectarian, fundamental Bible-teaching people and felt called of God to come to Alaska in missionary work. My dad built a boat in Aberdine, Washington and put a set of sails on it and an old Studebaker motor in it and they sailed to Alaska. And first stopping in Wrangel, where my sister was born that winter. Then on, up to Palmer the next year. Of course they didn't sail to Palmer. They got into Palmer by rail out of Anchorage. And they began missionary work here as well as working for the Co-op as a finish carpenter. And they came up totally on their own...just a faith ministry.

JV: Do you have memories of special births, weddings or deaths and the traditions surrounding those events?

KH: Yes. Um...I thought I was going to have another sister at one time when I was about five or six years old I guess, who was stillborn. And I remember that very well. As far as deaths in those early days, I don't recall anyone in our family other than that baby who comes to mind.

JV: What do you recall as a typical day as a child?

KH: Typical day? Depending on how old I was. When I was real young a typical day was getting into lots of mischief and getting a spanking and going to bed without my supper and that was pretty much a typical day at one point. But, later on like when I was 10-11-12-13 years old, a typical day would be to get up, go to school, come home from school, do the chores, either out milking the cows or cutting wood. All of us in the children's home had to do a certain amount of chores everyday. We each one of us had to cut a certain amount of wood a day, and pack it in on our shoulder. And we burned wood at the children's home and cooked with wood and we heated our water with wood. And eventually heated water with coal and um I guess that would be just about be a typical day until the weekends. Then we worked I think four hours on a weekend and played the rest.

JV: Also, what was a typical day when you were a teen, a young adult and please include how your responsibilities shifted, you know, your responsibilities changed from the time you were a kid to when you became more of an adult.

KH: Things were a lot different then than they are now. Kids matured a lot quicker. Mainly because they had more responsibilities and had to work. And as I mentioned before to you at lunch, I was driving a school bus when I was 16 years old. We lived on the end of the route. We kept the bus at our house over night and picked up kids on the way to school. School bus drivers were able to discipline kids at that point in life, and so we grew up quick took responsibility fast and also that summer when I was 16 years old I made a transition from working at home so much into running a dozer. My dad had a International dozer, a TD18 International dozer that I operated for a living, and we did land clearing for the people in the valley and road building, excavations and so on. And then as I got to, a year after graduating high school, I took on the responsibility of a wife at 19, who was still in school. Was it two years after? I was almost 20. Then I went to work in a service station, pumping gas in Palmer. It was Kirk Sales and Service at that time. And then after about a year there I went to work in the coal mines at Sutton, up on the hill at Jonesville. I ran a dozer up there pushing over burden for Wes Edwards for a while and then I worked for Copperrude Trucking, trucking coal off the hill down to Jonesville to the grizzly. And that finished my teenage years, and then we started to raise a family.

JV: So things were a lot different back then as far as responsibility goes.

KH: Yea. I worked for the railroad for a while too. I forgot about that.

JV: Ok. So now back to your childhood years. Who was your best childhood friend and why?

KH: Oh, this fellow that I mentioned Wilfred Fredricks was probably my best childhood friend. We had a lot of things in common, did a lot of things together. Uh, just a fun guy. We never did get in any trouble together. And he finally left our home and joined the military and shipped to Japan, so our time as teenagers didn't last very long anyhow. I don't know why, he just seemed to be my type of a guy. Lot of things in common.

JV: What kinds of games or pastimes did you enjoy?

KH: I never was much for playing games. I liked to play baseball and basketball. But, pastimes I think were more playing with horses, and hunting and fishing and hiking and climbing mountains.

JV: Where did you get your schooling? Elementary up through High School?

KH: OK. Part of my elementary schooling I got in Valdez, where my Mom and Dad moved in the 40s. We had a children's home there with 90 kids. Then we moved out of there in 45, and back to Palmer. And I did my 5th 6th grade through graduating high school in Palmer in 1954.

JV: What do you remember were you expectations of life during your teen years?

KH: Well, my expectations of life? I'll tell you what they weren't. My dad was a very dedicated committed person, my dad and mother both to the ministry that they felt God wanted them to be in. And they had no income except what they trusted the Lord for, and God did supply all their needs throughout the time that they had the Children's home and even beyond, but he never had any money to spend on frivolous things, and that always bothered me because I saw times when he would give me his last 25 cents to buy pencils and papers for school and it made me kind of bitter and a little bit angry because everybody at school had money, had things and we didn't. And all of our clothing was hand me downs. We seldom ever had anything new, and so my expectation as I was growing up as a teenager, was to make money and to buy things that I wanted. And I was determined that I was not going to be in the ministry like my dad. Because he worked too hard and had too little. And I guess you become your emotional focus, because, what turned out to be is I became like my father and went into the ministry. And became a missionary with Artic Missions and then Interact Ministries and have been there ever since. And God has blessed us in marvelous ways and has supplied not only our needs but, a lot of our wants.

JV: In what ways were dating and courtship similar to dating and courtship of your own children.

KH: Similar? Um...well dating and courtship when I was young was more of a struggle by far. Our dating was normally done through our church groups. Where we would go together as groups. And it wasn't until I was actually out of high school I guess that and had a vehicle that I really dated as an individual with an individual and I don't know. Let's see the similarities. I guess some of the similarities is that I lived a long ways from town and had to drive quite a ways to pick up my date. And most all of my family were girls. My kids were girls, only one boy. And so their boyfriends had to drive a long ways. To pick up my kids out in Big Lake. I think one of the similarities is that my parents, being Christians, had very high standards for who I should date and who I shouldn't. And uh were very concerned that I didn't get too involved with the wrong person at an early age. And my wife and I shared the same concerns with our kids and set standards for them to live by. I guess those are some of the similarities. My parents wanted to see and know and for me to bring my girlfriends home and that was one thing we required of our kids that if they were going to be dating somebody, we wanted to know who they were and know them personally to see if we approved of them dating that individual. Some we did some we didn't. So those are some similarities. I can't think of any others.

JV: Who did you admire and respect while growing up and why?

KH: Well, I admired my Dad and respected him very much because of his honesty his commitments to God. He didn't have a lot of time for me, which kind of developed a little bit of animosity, because at a young age I didn't really understand. He had so many children to take care of, that I was just one of them. And even though I was his own blood child, he still couldn't spend a lot of time with me, or much more time with me as anybody else. That would have caused a problem with the rest of the kids. But I always

admired him for his drive, his strong work ethics, his wisdom, his commitment to the Lord, I guess I said that, his commitment to other people. And one of the things that has always been a very cherished remembrance of him. He gave me two things to think about that have really challenged me and have done a lot for developing my life or my life style I guess I should say. He said, "If you want to invest in anything, invest in people, because they are the only thing that really last. Relationships are really the most important things in life." And then he gave me another piece of advice which was very wise, he said, "To always keep short accounts with everybody. Open communication so that misunderstandings are taken care of immediately, before they get all blown out of proportion." So I guess I have to say that I admired my father more than anybody else. There were other people that I admired. One of them was our mission director, who was also in Alaska doing missionary work and became a pastor of a church in Anchorage. His name was John Gillespie. If I ever wanted a second mother, his wife would have been it. I admired the both of them, but actually my admiration for them was exactly the same as my admiration for my father, the same kind of commitment.

JV: During your childhood years, what type of communication did you guys have? Did you have radio, and TV and telephone and all that kind of stuff?

KH: Uh we didn't have telephones at that time. We had no TV we had no recorders and boom boxes. And when I was a young fellow, our radios were free-standing radios on the floor, big box, free standing radios. I wasn't really all that interested in music, I was totally uninterested in the news and so radio never became an obsession with me. But, actually we didn't have many types of communication then except by mail. By letter. Then in my early days it was all by Alaska steamship which took a week or so to get state side and we did have the use of telegrams. We were able to send telegrams all over the country for a very nominal fee. We had a telephone in town and we could go to town and make a call.

JV: What were the expectations regarding attending school?

KH: I think society's expectations were varied. Because it was still fairly popular for people to have strong work ethics and do anything they felt they were gifted at without going to school. College in those days was not as expensive as compared to today. So, it wasn't that people couldn't go to college but not near the percentage of people went to college in those days as they do now. And I was totally uninterested in going to college because I was gifted in areas where I knew I could make a good living. Those expectations of no school kind of went by the wayside as I start getting my focus on life together and realizing that God wanted me in a ministry, and so I took my family in 1959, I took them all to Alberta Canada where I went to Bible school for four years to get Biblical training along with college courses. And uh graduated out of there in '63. And then I felt called to go into the flying ministry as well which entailed another two years of training in Tacoma in a tech school where I got a air frame and power plant license to maintain airplanes. And my dad had taught me to fly and so I didn't get any real formal training in flying except to get a commercial and instrument rating and stuff like that.

JV: What do you remember most about the school you attended? Your favorite subjects? Least favorite subjects?

KH: Well, my favorite subjects were Math and Science and Biology. And I enjoyed Geography. My worst subjects that I hated were English and History. And so consequently, did real well in the ones that I enjoyed, and barely scraped by in the ones that I didn't.

JV: OK, You've answered this question in some of your other ones, but did you attend high school, college, or receive any type of schooling after elementary school?

KH: Yes, I went to Palmer High School, and graduated there. And then I went to Prairie Bible Institute for four years and graduated there. And then I went to Clover Park Tech in Tacoma for two years and graduated there.

JV: What was your first job you held? How old were you and how much money did you make?

KH: My first job that I ever had was when I was about 7 years old and I worked for the city of Valdez raking rocks off the airport for a dollar a day plus two bottles of pop. And just about everybody in our town, all the young kids in town did that during the summer time. And of course that was lots of money to us. And to give you an idea of how much money that was to us, the first bike that I bought with my own money was \$7. A used bike, but a good bike. And then of course being raised on a farm, I started raising some chickens and calves and made a little bit of money that way until well, every fall, when I first got into High School, we did several things. I drove school bus, I harvested potatoes. We worked hard every fall, we got a couple weeks off of school every fall. And harvest potatoes for people, making real good money. And in the summer time, the year I was 16, I started running a dozer, building roads and excavating and clearing land for the farmers and whatnot. I guess those were the first jobs I had.

JV: Did you enjoy working around farms when you were a kid?

KH: Yea, I did. I liked animals. And you know cows tie you down and I never did like that. You were always tied to the cows you could never leave them. You had to be there in the morning and the night all the time. Um, but I enjoyed that. I enjoyed running heavy equipment probably a whole lot more, and I did that for quite a few years.

JV: Did you ever wish that you had grown up in a big city?

KH: No. I had no use for the cities whatsoever. I was a country boy. And I still have no use for cities.

JV: Good Answer! Ha Ha! Um describe your work career. Which job was most satisfying and least satisfying and why?

KH: Oh Boy, I've had so many different varied types of work. Well, sure. Um. I enjoyed working with heavy equipment, and as I got into the building trade, I really enjoyed different types of building construction, and all of them had their benefits and I can't think of a real downside of that kind of work except in the winter time when running dozers shoving overburden in a coal mine at 30 below and 30 knots of wind was not fun. Pretty hard to keep warm. But, the most exciting work that I've ever done, which has given me gratification as far as joy and contentment and a real satisfying experience is what I've been doing since 1966 and that is working with people in ministry, presenting the gospel to them and seeing lives changed and transformed by God's message, and there has been nothing that has given me more satisfaction than that. That has been my ultimate work.

JV: Great! When did you decide to get married? When were you married? What do you remember of that special day? And were there any special traditions?

KH: Ha! When did I decide to get married? I decided to get married when I was probably 12 years old. But, I had to grow up a little. But, something I always prayed for was that I would live long enough to have a wife and a family. I was a family type of a person and I love people and kids. And, actually, I never was real serious about getting married until I was probably 17 or 18. My wife was my girlfriend for a short time when she was in the 4th grade and I was in the 6th grade in Palmer. But we never really started a serious relationship until she was a freshman in High School, which would have been '52. And then I left in '54 to go to the University of Washington. And uh, I left the University within a few weeks because I didn't like it, I didn't like their policies at all. And I moved to Seattle Pacific which was a much better school for what I wanted and ended up coming home early and marrying my wife, because it was just too difficult to stay away. As far as what I remember, about that situation, I remember many times of driving down to her home on the Springer System, in my little open cab jeep, in terrible snow storms and I always felt it was worth all the struggles getting there and back. And we finally set a date to get married. We got married the day after Christmas in 1955. We had a huge wedding. And have lived happily ever since.

JV: That sounds very nice! Where did you guys live? Describe your home.

KH: We started out with a very meager home. Neither one of us had any money. She had more money than I did! She had a little bit of money in the bank. But, my dad bought an acre of ground on the Springer system and gave it to me for a wedding present. To try to make a home in a hurry, I bought a trailer house. And I borrowed \$400 dollars from my wife and built a full length lean to on the side of it. And uh on this piece of property we had a well drilled. And we were pretty poor in those days and we cooked on top of a ...to start with. We had no electricity to start with. And we cooked on top of a gas lamp on a little grill that I had put on top of it. Remember that? And then forty days after we got married, that place burned down. We had a little basement in it and uh we don't know to this day exactly what happened. But, I was working at the service station when I learned that my house was on fire and I didn't get there in time to really save anything. So, we had a chance to get rid of all of our belongings, all of our wedding presents, some that

hadn't been opened yet and uh start all over brand new again after forty days. And uh...what was the question again?

JV: It was where did you live and describe your home.

KH: Oh yea. Anyway it was a very meager home. We moved there we moved from there that winter into an apartment in Palmer and lived in an apartment for what Mom about six or eight months? And uh then that summer, that coming summer I dug a basement and we built a concrete basement which we lived in for that next year planning to build a house on top and then it was the next year that we... we left and went to Canada to go to school and so we sold the place to get money to go to school on. So that was our that was our first home. And then two years after that we built a place in Big Lake. It was a very humble dwelling. It was a military quansit hut on my Dad's homestead. But we just needed a summer home at the time until we finished school. And then when we finished school in 1966 we went to Grayling out on the Yukon River, where we had a nice framed home and we built a church right next to it. And then we began our Big Lake home in 1970. Where we still live.

JH: It was our twenty-second move in sixteen years when we moved into our home in Big Lake.

JV: And that's where you guys are today still?

JH: Yes.

KH: Twenty second move?

JH: Yes.

KH: Wow. That wasn't fun for my wife, moving all over. It was fun, finally when she settled down. Had her own little place. It wasn't a little place, a big place.

JV: So would say that there was a reason why you guys moved around so much?

KH: Well, we were chasing around going to school. Riding back and forth to Canada each year. I'd come home and run a dozer during the summer and make enough money to put us through school the next winter. We'd make all these moves, you know we counted all these moves back and forth to Canada.

JH: And from one apartment to another.

KH: Yea.

JV: Um...what things did you carry over from your childhood in bringing up your own children?

KH: Oh...a lot of things. A deep commitment to the Lord, strong work ethics. I tried to develop responsibility with my kids at an early age. What Mom?

JV: We had very strong family ties.

KH: Oh yea. We had very, very strong family ties. And even today we try to eat together, the whole family tries to eat together once a month. Uh excuse me...once a week. So every week our whole family gets together and eats together which has kept us very strong and very close and um and that has been a wonder thing...a real blessing and there is about 30 of us now in our family. Um...what else can I think?

JV: What types of community activities did you participate in? Church organizations etc?

KH: When I was young? After I was married before or what?

JV: Let's go with after you were married since we're kind of going that way now.

KH: Ok. Just a quick run down. Before we were married we had what we called a...well we went to church in the United Protestant Church in Palmer. And we had a fairly strong youth group there...what was it called?

JH: We called it Young Life.

KH: Young Life...yea. And that is where Jeanetta and I really got going together again, was out of that group...yea. And then after that...after we got married, we always had an active part in any church that we were in. In teaching Sunday school, in adults in teaching kids, leading the songs. Actually, being kind of a part time pastor. We actually started a church in our house in Big Lake, then when we moved into Wasilla here and built this church here, um, I headed up the building program in the Wasilla Bible Church, and built the original church, with all volunteer help. And um we both taught Sunday School, and she taught Bible Studies, during the week, still does. And we've always been active in our church, wherever we have been, taking some kind of a part in it.

JV: What was it like...shortly after you got married just back then? As far as the placement of the towns and roads and things?

KH: OK. Well, there were very... and this is even up until we got married. Um...there were certain amount of road improvement even by the time we got married, but as we grew up, there were few roads. There was a dirt road between Palmer and Wasilla that was very crooked, very hilly and in the springtime got so muddy you couldn't travel it. Her dad in those days, had the mail route. And in the wintertime he had his track vehicle often because of the snow, and not getting plowed and the drifts and whatnot. And um there was a railroad between Anchorage and Seward and Anchorage and Fairbanks. And to get from Palmer to Big Lake you rode the train to Houston, and then walked on a cat trail from Houston to Big Lake, because there was no road. And um let's see...Anchorage in the early days when we were here, there was no road to Anchorage.

Actually, there was a road from Palmer to the Knik River, and then there was a road from the other side of the Knik River to Anchorage. In my real young years here. Until they finally got the bridge across. So, what people would do is they would go down to the railroad track, to the railroad trestle, and they would walk across the railroad trestle to the other side, to get to the road and go to Anchorage. But that road even was very poor. It was gravel and really hilly and took a long time a getting there, but then they finally got the old Knik River bridge built and then we had transportation back and forth. But, most everybody went on the train. You could go to Palmer or go to Anchorage and back to Palmer on the train in those early days.

JV: OK, now back to where we were with the community activities. What did you find most rewarding or satisfying about church, community and social activities?

KH: Most rewarding? Um...not sure how to answer that. First of all, I guess I should say that one of my main focuses has been um to become what God wants me to be. And in order for me to grow spiritually and to know what God wanted, I had to study God's Word, coupled with prayer and fellowship with Christians. And so in my activities in church, I got all of that. I was able to fellowship with Christians, which helped my spiritual growth. I got Bible reading, Bible training in church and understanding which helped my spiritual growth. And then we spent time in prayer, which was communicating with our God, which um, every Sunday that we went to church was just another little boost in the arm, and another little push in the direction that we knew God wanted us to go. Um, our youth groups of course were fun, we had quite a few activities with our youth groups, and got to know all the kids really well through that. And the neat thing about the youth groups was that we associated with kids with most kids that were already Christian, and some of course that weren't. But it gave you a better clientele to pick your mate from and I think that is really important that we tried to keep our kids in Christian groups because we want them to have a life that would be pleasing to the Lord and choose a mate who already knows Him. How else to answer that, I don't know.

JV: What sort of activities did you participate in after your children left home and what have you found most rewarding in those?

KH: Well, these would be activities besides our main work I suppose? Huh? Um...I suppose probably the most rewarding thing that I have done since my children left home, even before, is um, it had to be related to our flying ministry with the Native gospel teams all over Alaska. And um, it always has amazed me to see God at work, building his church, through his people. And through the Native people to their own. I probably had more joy and reward out of seeing Native people ministering to their own people, and people who were just really steeped in superstition and sin come to know Christ and just have a total transformation of life and see them finally have real joy and especially a real hope that kept them going even through turbulous times. And um, but other than that, my activities have been work related. You know, I haven't had a lot of time for doing things just to have fun. But, one thing that I have had a lot of fun doing, is our work up in the Skwentna area has entailed building another home up there. And um which has entailed lots and lots of snow machining, back and forth with our family, hauling loads of material

up and going back and forth just for weekends with the kids. This is after they have been grown up and having their own families. And I don't know I suppose one of the other activities that brings me a lot of joy is just once a week with my whole family together. It's just a marvelous thing and it is the grace of God that has allowed that to happen. It is hard to find a family that stays all in one spot, you know, so you can enjoy all the kids and all the grandkids at the same time. That has been a real blessing in our lives.

JV: Um...you said that you didn't have a lot of time to do other things besides work when you were doing your flying ministry because it was really busy. Right?

KH: Yea.

JV: Um...maybe you could just describe an average day, during that time when you were doing your flying ministries.

KH: OK. Um, when we were in Grayling on the Yukon River, I flew everyday as an air taxi to support myself as well as be a pastor at the church. A day during that time would be taking the Native people from one village to another, or making medical runs to the hospital in Bethel or flying public health service from one village to the other doing their thing, it was just being a piece of transportation for all the communities as well as all the public entities, you know in government. And then um when we got rid of that, when we finally had enough support from people in churches to sustain us and we started flying regularly for our mission, um, our flying would include. And this all depended on the time of year. In the summer time we would do a lot of work flying Bible campers. Picking up campers in villages and taking them to our Bible camps. Flying counselors to and from the camp, flying in all their supplies, groceries and whatnot, which consumed a considerable amount of time. And then I was transportation support for all of our missionaries. And I may leave here and um go down as far as Cold Bay on the peninsula taking groceries, supplies, building materials, people, summer workers, gospel teams, DVBS (daily vacation Bible school) kids or whatever, or I may fly as far north as above Kotzebue, hitting villages all along the way, recruiting students to come to our Bible school or high school in those days too, from the different villages and spending time in villages getting to know people. And then as I said before, I guess the thrill of my life, was taking Native believers who had come to know the Lord through our mission work, back into the villages in gospel team ministries and hearing and seeing them share their testimonies of how they had come to know the Lord, and what God means to them, and how He's changed their lives. And that was just kind of a pattern of our life for many, many, years. Except for construction, I built houses in our villages for our missionaries to live in. And that consumed quite a bit of time during the summer months. Um...that wasn't every month by any means. It was off and on. And then village maintenance, same thing, going places to maintain the places and whatnot.

JV: What major events do you recall having had a tremendous influence on your life, such as the Great Depression or World Wars or other things?

KH: Well, one of the first major events in my life was when I was in Valdez in 1944, during the war. We had a village or we had a town of five hundred people total. And um, during that year the military moved five hundred black soldiers into the village, or into Valdez. And um, it just overwhelmed everybody. And I've got to be real careful about what I say about that whole thing because most of the guys were black and I don't want to cast a bad impression, but we had our hands really full during that time. We had to put extra locks on our doors, we had to barricade our windows some of them because of the soldiers at night trying to break into our houses. And everybody was scared to death half the time. My dad was responsible for our children's home there where he installed telephones between the buildings so that the people on duty could call us at anytime and we'd get calls about every night during the night that somebody was on the roof trying to break into one of the girls dorms, coming through the window. The military actually gave my dad permission to shoot anybody on sight that was trying to break into the building, which wouldn't happen today. Finally, it got so bad that they had to establish MP's around our buildings all night long every night because of the influx of soldiers. And that whole memory is very vivid. There was a lot of drinking amongst the soldiers a lot of fighting and I would remember standing outdoors in snow at night under the streetlight, which were just little canapé reflectors with a big bulb in it. And watching downtown and hearing, "crack!" and some MP would hit one of the soldiers over the head with a Billy club, and then load him in a vehicle and take him back to their tent. And that was all a scary time for me.

JH: Those that were supposed to protect Valdez, they had to be protected from.

KH: Yea. That's about what happened.

JH: Which isn't a very pretty war story.

KH: No.

JV: No, but its reality.

KH: Yes, it is reality. And those are days that none of us that were there will ever forget. For instance, we had our own house in Valdez there, adjacent to the Children's home building. And we had a teenaged girl staying with us, named Elinor Stamp and my dad had made her, her own little room with a window in it. And one evening she just screamed....and my dad came running in there. And she hadn't pulled her blind down and she was getting undressed and there was a great big black guy standing in front of her window looking at her like that. Scared her to death! But, those kind of things you never get over when you are a kid. It just seemed like you were under attack all the time and under siege. But, I guess there was a lot of things that I remember very vividly, but when I was about eight years old, I told you I used to get a spanking about every day for being in mischief. My mom and dad were very conservative Christians and they were very strict on what I could do and what I couldn't do on Sundays. One day I wanted to go down and go on a boat with a friend of ours who was a commercial fisherman, he had a commercial fishing boat. And I knew that if I asked my mom if I could go down there

and fish, that she would tell me no. So it was wintertime, and I had all my clothes on, I was eight years old. And I walked down to the dock and got down on this fishing boat. You know it was a big cabin cruiser type thing fishing boat. But, anyway, the guy that was a friend of mine was down in the cabin, it was nice and hot down there. But, anyway, just to show you how full of mischief I was all the time. I went down in the cabin and visited with the guy. And there were a couple other kids there from our children's home. Down there and the guy had always told us, "Don't ever take the skiff off the boat." They had a skiff on there that they used for setting nets and stuff you know. And so I was out fishing herring, I was snagging herring on the side of his boat. And there was a little rail going around the boat like that and I was standing on that rail with my heels with my back up against the boat and I was snagging these herring. And I got a little bit too exuberant I guess, and I backed up and hit the boat and it threw me off balance and I went in the water. And I didn't know how to swim and I had way too much clothes on any how. And I made a big splash, but the guy, the fisherman down in the boat, in the hold of the boat, thought I had taken the skiff off. Even though he told me that I shouldn't have. Because that is the way us kids work. So he never thought anything about it. So I was up there bobbing up and down, trying to hold my breath every time I went down. I paddled like mad when I come up, and swallowing a lot of water, I finally made it back to the boat, and hung on to a little builds pipe coming out. And still they didn't know I was in the water. There was ice all over in the water. Cough. Somebody up in the dock had seen it, running down and hollered at the guys. They come out and pulled me out. Well the reason I remember that so traumatically is because I just about drown, and when I got home, and the guy in the boat was kind enough to take all my clothes off, and ring 'em all out, and dry 'em out, and put me in a sleeping bag 'til I got warmed up. But then when I walked home my mom wanted to know where I was. And so I had to tell her what had happened. And um, and that was the night that instead of getting a spanking for it, she let me know the seriousness of what I had done, and how I could have lost my life, and it was that night that I committed my life to the Lord. When I was eight years old. Cuz I know that it was a miracle that I ever survived it. And uh, I don't know what the next thing in my growing up life would have been. Oh.. probably a, probably another commitment that I made to the lord. When I was twelve years old, I um, I.. a contracted TB of the spine. And uh, it had uh, eaten three of my vertebrae's, the front of them, three of my vertebrae's out and big chunks out. And I had to be put in an orthopedic hospital in Seattle. That was 1948, '47, yah 1947 that was. And, uh, my dad and mom didn't know what to do, because they had this children's home that they were responsible for, and they didn't want to leave me down there, and they didn't, and uh, they wanted to stay but couldn't stay 'cuse of the kids, and so uh, they, um. The prognosis was, well of course the X-rays showed that I had TB, and that my vertebrae's had all been eroded like that down the lower part of my back. And at that time, they had some of the leading doctors in the world, leading bone specialists in the world down there in the orthopedic hospital in Seattle. There prognosis was that I would be in the hospital from 1 - 3 years, and uh, and be on a frame that was arched like this, and all it was is pipe rails like that with canvas between bent like that, and I was on my back with my head down here, and my feet down here, with traction on my feet, and it was so miserable. And it just hurt my dad and my mom to ever see my like that, you know. So I couldn't ever get up, go to the bathroom. I had to eat upside down and everything else. Anyway they decided that they

would pray, and ask all these Christian friends to pray, that God would make it possible for them to go back to Alaska somehow, or somebody to take their place up there, or to heal me so I could go home. Well, after about a month of this, um, they took me every few days for exercise, for X-rays. Every week, I guess it was, for X-rays, and uh, I took penicillin shots every day, and uh, all of the sudden, the doctor realized that all my bones were filling back in. And uh, they didn't want to believe it. And so... they told my mom and dad, that my bones were filling back in for some reason that they couldn't explain. So, they would have to conclude, I didn't have TB, I had something else, when all of them new I had TB. Really God had answered prayer of all the people they asked to pray for me, and their prayer. And in two months, I was out of the hospital with just a back brace to hold myself up. And uh, I went back home. And uh, that was a miraculous thing of the Lord. And the thing that happened down there during that time was when they had the big Seattle earthquake that killed so many people and knocked all the buildings down, and all, some of the brick school houses fell in on the kids and what not, and I will never forget them rushing little kids in the hospital in big pools of blood, coming in there, being all beat up from that earthquake. But that uh, that particular time, a, I had made a commitment to the Lord that, a, superseded my commitment to myself about never being a minister, and uh, if You get me out of here, I'll do anything you want. And uh, and I have kept that commitment.

JV: Um, we were having lunch earlier today in the Mead's coffee house. I was wondering if you could maybe tell me a little bit about that place, if you remember where it used to be?

KH: Oh, that building there?

JV: Yeah.

KH: Yeah, that used to be the Tealand store in Wasilla, the only store in Wasilla. And uh, the Tealand, a the Tealand people, the man and his wife, were just great folks. Everybody just loved them. And uh, they, they were really servants of the community. And uh... it was just the only store that you could buy anything... in Wasilla, in my early days. And right next to it was a hotel, I forget the name of the hotel, but anyway um, that's um, that's where everybody came to get their groceries, their hardware, a what ever they needed. That was just a big, um, community store. It was located right where... a, is that a Mapco station there? Or...

JH: Williams maybe???

KH: You know the one...

JV: I think it's the Tesoro is the one right on the corner there.

KH: Right on the corner of the intersection, were you go across to Knik Rd.

JV: Um hum.

KH: Up this way, yah maybe it's the Tesoro station, anyway that's were it was, right in that corner there, a facing the west, or facing the street that we come up toward the post office. And uh, it's kind of nice that they saved that building, and moved it over there. That was one of the original buildings back here. Every one in the area bought their groceries there, and their hardware.

JV: Well for the last question of this interview, um. If you could leave a message, what message um, would you leave with your great great great grandchildren?

KH: What would I leave as a message? Well, I probably would leave the same message to them... that my dad inscribed in my heart. And that would be to, to um. Not become focused on things of the world, and invest your life in people, and keep short accounts, and keep your commitments to your God. I think that would be the messages I would leave 'em. That's the message I have tried to leave my kids. And, you have to do that, no by words, but by example to make it stick. My wife use to tell me that, she is more interested in actions than she is in words. And there is a lot of truth to that.

JV: Well, I guess that concludes our interview. Thanks a whole lot for your time and this might really be useful to somebody someday.

KH: Well, I hope that we have done a meager job anyhow. We got some of the things down that you wanted. And Thank You.

JV: All right, Thank You.

JV: This interview with Jacob Vandorn as the interviewer, and Kenneth Hughes as the interviewee, took place on Tuesday, November 13, in the Year 2001