

Interviewer: Alright what was your father's occupation during the great depression?

Knight: My father was a farmer and he was a farmer all of his life. Well at one time he went away to work but he came back to the farm and was a good farmer. WE never had to move we never had to buy a lot of food because we raised most of it.

Interviewer: How many brothers and sisters if any did you have?

Knight: I had three sisters and two brothers.

Interviewer: Okay were you the oldest or?

Knight: I was third in order and I decided that was not a good place to be but I couldn't do anything about it.

Interviewer: Was anyone in your family long term unemployed? Like did your were your brothers or sisters much older than you?

Knight: I had a sister and a brother older than I was but at the time during the war we're still on

Interviewer: Or the great depression.

Knight: Right well my I was born in 29 December of 29 and then a brother was born in 32 and my sister in 34. Well anyway there were two years between most children in big families and so I never remember them being unemployed when they were of age to work.

Interviewer: Were they mostly farm hands with your dad?

Knight: My well they farmed as long as they were at home but then my oldest brother was a locomotive engineer and a landscaper all at the same time. We were workaholics in other words idleness was very much like sinfulness.

Interviewer: I understand that.

Knight: And my other brother was a realtor.

Interviewer: Okay did your family get any help from any of the new deal programs?

Knight: Not that I know of.

Interviewer: Because I know there was the Rural Electricity Administration and I don't know the affects the TVA had on your home or area.

Knight: I'm glad you asked that question because I was 18 years old before we got electricity or running water.

Interviewer: Okay so the Rural Electricity Administration didn't make it out there?

Knight: Well the little story with that I'll quickly mention. I went with the school teacher who was hired in the summertime to get people signed up for electricity and many of them would not sign up because they were afraid of it first of all that was the reason they gave. And secondly they were afraid they couldn't pay for it because in the rural areas you didn't have a check coming in every week or every month. Your money came in when the crop came in or your truck patch of vegetables came in.

Interviewer: So a monthly payment would have not have been really would not cooperate with the life style.

Knight: And they were being very frugal and it was very sensible that they considered it in this way. But we grew up without running water. We drew our water from one of two cisterns we watered our stock livestock from ponds or the creak. And of course we raised much of our food our vegetables and then we raised pigs and sheep and cattle and I'm trying to think of anything else that we did. But mainly our crops for money so to speak we that horrible crop of tobacco every year that I hated and corn, peanuts we raised. And the truck patches were valuable in that you would have a truck patch of vegetables coming at one time and then one a little later and a little later so you had not only food to eat but food to can from the garden. And the truck patch was just a seasonal garden so to speak.

Interviewer: Did you hear much about what was going on in Europe before Pearl Harbor happened? Did you have like a radio or anything?

Knight: We had a battery radio one of the first in the neighborhood and we did hear that. To us though the location didn't mean as much as to maybe older people because we had not come to that in school yet.

Interviewer: The concept of where Europe was was just so far away.

Knight: Right I didn't know then that I would be traveling all over a great deal of Europe which I have done.

Interviewer: Did you your older brother did he ever serve?

Knight: Yes he served in the Korean War.

Interviewer: The Korean War okay.

Knight: The next one did not he was not of the age to be involved.

Interviewer: Okay did anything change for your family after Pearl Harbor?

Knight: Well pretty much the things that like rationing and of course that meant less gasoline for the truck you know and the sugar affected us somewhat because my mother was an excellent cook. And so she prepared great meals so we had good nutrition in the home we always had plenty to eat and we had our own milk we had cows and we had horses for framing and we also had horses for riding.

Interviewer: Okay were you allotted more rations because your dad was a farmer?

Knight: I think it was the number in the family that affected the rationing somewhat.

Interviewer: Okay did you recall if there was a black market for scarce goods like say gasoline that some people went around the system?

Knight: I sort of doubt that. Now it may be that people who got more than they wanted may have shared with other people but I don't think that falls into black marketing.

Interviewer: Okay and did you participate in scrap drives or collection of materials like iron or aluminum?

Knight: I think so I mean I remember some of this being handled at the store too where my uncle which he ran and where I worked.

Interviewer: Did you work a lot at your uncle's store?

Knight: Yes

Interviewer: Do he pay you or was it just a family?

Knight: It was just a family affair and because I liked it and they taught me a lot about finance actually when you stop and think about it. I learned about first making change and in the evening how we did our end of the day summaries and it was interesting how even though he had a fine desk he kept his money the main part of it in a book. And it was it had he had a code for it and the word in the code spelled nightingale I remember. Not the usual thing you know for bookkeeping but he would have lots and lots of money in the book. He was a very prominent business man. He studies law on his own and a self-educated man.

Interviewer: Okay when you look back at the war years despite the sacrifices do you how do you remember that time period?

Knight: I remember it more from just the things that we've talked about the rationing mainly the people being away from home. And we didn't have anybody in that war in the early 40s close to is in our family and just the one neighbor and that was very close. And I don't think it really registered with us the tremendous amount of people as much in the beginning it was hard for us to conceive of the loss of soldiers at that time. But I do remember the fear after our neighbor was killed because he was a close family person and not in our family but he was nearby. And after he was gone it seemed to really register with us that yes people are taken away from us in this ordeal.

Interviewer: Because there was a lot of I guess generally excitement that it was time to go serve the country and I guess the death registers the realities of that service.

Knight: I remember thinking that the sight of the uniforms when they would be in the Nashville Tennessean my daddy always had the Nashville Tennessean. He might not have had a lot of money he always had enough but he always thought it was important to have that paper. And when he came in that was one of the first things he did was read the paper and he would come in at noontime when he was working in the fields and it was very important for him to keep up with what was going on. So I think that helped us to realize as we got older you know and as the war went on and in future wars how awful war can be.

Interviewer: Did your family generally support FDR and the way he handled foreign affairs and domestic affairs?

Knight: I think so I never heard anything that would be contrary to that because they felt like that he was a good president I'm not sure they knew he was a person with disability. I don't ever remember that being mentioned.

Interviewer: Okay did you all listen because I know throughout the war he did a lot of radio addresses nightly addresses?

Knight: Yes but not only listened to it but our neighbors as I mentioned you know would come from around in the neighborhood would come and listen with us. Some of them were sharecroppers and some of them were just good friends and they came and wanted to share in the listening of this important information.

Interviewer: Do you have a memorable one that sticks out an address that he made that may?

Knight: Well of course he was the special one at the time so I can't recall another one until later on. I know we always listened closely to each one but I remember Truman President Truman was always another one you could tell we were democrats and we have remained democrats except for my brother who's in real estate. But he also thinks that's his more important than his God. I say that carefully but and I do think he is changing that because my sister and both are really working on this you know we don't want him to think that money is all important.

Interviewer: The end to all.

Knight: But the reason I think he is coming around he has told her that he's not afraid to die that he'll be okay.

Interviewer: Well I like to ask a little bit about your political life and how you got selected for the constitutional convention in 1977.

Knight: Seventy six we were elected. Well you know the year before the legislature did to have the convention and it was to be limited and there were 13 articles in it and they all seemed to have meaning. They were in the newspaper and I pick up the paper one day and I read where these three people were running and it occurred to me there were three men and no women. And justice had been a word that is very high in my list of concerns all my life because I saw such a lack of it. And my grandmother first introduced me to the lack of justice she also was the first one to introduce me before I was 10 about how hard women fought for the right to vote. She was born in 1856 people had begun working for the right to vote since 1848 I speak of the suffrage act that's why I know more about it then the average person. And I think that all of this helped me to understand how important it was to be involved and then when I saw what was happening in our world. Our world that is supposed to be for men and women, boys and girls I thought but it's not like that. And so I listened to my Mamie Mack who is right here in this picture the one with the white hair I listened to her tell me these stories and I let her sleep in my bedroom and it was sort of a payback. I would let her for her stories I shared my bedroom and she really gave me a lesson in history even though she was a little girl she remembered the effects of the Civil War. And some of the things that actually went on because she was a perceptive little lady. She learned that even though they told her she couldn't speak in church she did she did what people did

back there they what is the word it's leaving me right now like they go up and down the aisles and I can't believe I'm forgetting this.

Interviewer: The ushers?

Knight: Shouting she shouted and the first time I heard her it was really frightening because I didn't know what it was all about. But she knew it was wrong not to be able to serve her God like the men did when she was a woman up in years. And so anyway she used to say to me and she'd say it often I would wonder why she would say now stand tall and feel as good as the best. That was really important stand tall and feel as good as the best her words just sort of ring out. Well when I picked up the paper and I saw these three names of these three men I knew all of them one of them was later to be a judge he's a judge here now Wayne Shelton I knew Wayne. Another was the husband of one of our school teachers and he was a retired county agent and the other one was the father of a friend of mine Sid Davis and he had a business similar to either an antique store or junk store. And I thought well there are three men but no women and they'll be doing things that affect the lives of men, women, boys, and girls. So I went right down after reading the paper and got my paper work done and I ran.

Interviewer: Where did you have to go to get your paper work?

Knight: I went to the election commission to get that done. And it was one of the most important things I've done because it caused me to look in great depths at what's going on what's right and what's wrong and what needs to be done and what isn't being done and the good things that are being done.

Interviewer: Those decisions have lasted since then so what you guys did was a permanent fix for Tennesseans.

Knight: Right and see the 13 things were rather interesting how they were selected. One well two of the ones might shock you. This was 1976 in the Tennessee State Constitution in 1976 there were two that said this, blacks and whites cannot go to school together, blacks and whites cannot get married. Now how racist can you be? Well then others there were others that were not quite as significant but it was called they thought they were pulling this over it was called mainly to get six percent interest ceiling out of the constitution.

Interviewer: I saw that where the interest ceiling was instituted.

Knight: Yeah that's why it was called. Now then some other people I guess who were pushing for that thought well we better have some other things there to you know cover it up. There is a lot of coving up and we had some we had 38 attorneys, not this is significant, 38 attorneys out of 99 delegates 99 delegates across the state of Tennessee. And 13 women and so we were we were outnumbered but we were heard which was important we made sure we were because almost everybody who was elected was pretty vocal. They tried but they didn't intimidate me I have this saying and I make it very clear when somebody talks down to me, please don't talk down to me because only God sits up that high. You might want to use that sometime it works it gets them back on their level. But anyway we would put up with things that would have to be brought to their attention like I know Bernie Bernstein from Knoxville one day I was reading a Wall Street Journal I believe because maybe I had time to do that. And Bernie said oh you're reading the Wall Street Journal I said yes Bernie people besides attorneys read the Wall Street Journal. And we had a choice of committees up to a point but sometimes you had to make it a little clearer for them that this is the committee I would like you know.

Interviewer: Were you placed on committees or did you get to select?

Knight: They did some placing but we could ask for.

Interviewer: Which ones did you ask for?

Knight: I had local government.

Interviewer: Okay

Knight: And then I turned around and ran for local government when I got home. But then we had the judicial article complete up for review. That's the only one that failed.

Interviewer: That was the one where they wanted to change how justices were appointed?

Knight: And terms of office.

Interviewer: They adjusted the governor's terms and the sheriff's terms as well.

Knight: Unlimited for sheriffs.

Interviewer: I read where they called that the Fate Thomas amendment because he was about to term limit out and he really pushed for that in Davidson County.

Knight: Yeah he got out numbered in a few instances after that I know. He was very vocal there were several people who came there as one of the 99 who thought you know they would run the whole show it seemed they were convinced by the rest of us that there were more of us there.

Interviewer: I read where he was I guess basically labeled as a political boss. Was he viewed that way at that time as the man?

Knight: I think so and he threw these barbeque gatherings you know so that he could garner support.

Interviewer: Yes

Knight: And even back then they were doing what I saw lots of in the legislature you know where the wine and the food was made plentiful.

Interviewer: The wastefulness.

Knight: But the wine and the food was to get your support.

Interviewer: Yes

Knight: But they didn't really convince us. The one thing that later on in the house that I got changed that I want to tell you about because it has continued through today. When I went in a meeting the first time and they called the roll and they called John Jones they would call representative Jones

representative so and so and Lady Doer and Lady so and so and I listened to it until it got to me and I said Mr. Speaker I've been a lady long before I was a lady long before I came here so I didn't have to be elected a lady. Just call me representative like you call these men representative. And it's still going on.

Interviewer: That is because that's a slight against you because you were a woman and elected into.

Knight: It was a put down you know.

Interviewer: Yes

Knight: See I want something better for your little girl when she grows up.

Interviewer: Yes

Knight: I want something better for my daughter and it had been better.

Interviewer: As the first elected woman from to state legislature from Montgomery County area did you feel added pressure to I don't know when you were doing your job did you have that in mind that you were paving the way for future women?

Knight: I tried to make that well known because I would have both young men and women come to visit and to page for me. I had boys and girls there the same day to page and I had a lot of them.

Interviewer: Okay was there anything I was trying to dealing with women's issues and women's rights was there anything you had to encounter in the Tennessee legislature that sticks out in your mind?

Knight: When I made that statement first of all that I didn't want to be called Lady Knight in fact I wasn't going to put up with it.

Interviewer: Yes

Knight: I really wasn't. When I said that it was later that day a woman named Shirley Doer who had served in the convention and had also run for the house said I don't care what they call me that's not important to me. And I thought you spineless women. She turned out to be I think a good house member but she smoked herself to death she just died. And I saw it happening I watched these people smoke and I think how can you be so stupid you know.

Interviewer: Yes we have educated since the 30s and 40s and.

Knight: Now if it were my grandfather you know I would understand why he smoked he didn't know any better. But today you know for somebody to be smoking today, you don't' smoke do you?

Interviewer: No I don't.

Knight: I would say it anyway today you have to be really stupid you don't value life at all of your smoking today.

Interviewer: Paying for cancer.

Knight: Right and you know if they've read they would know the words of C. Edward Cooper who was one of the greatest of surgeon generals who said nicotine is a dangerous habit forming drug it picks you up it lets you down it sends you back for more. It is so well said.

Interviewer: That is true. Well Mrs. Knight I think that is all I have for you today.

Knight: Well I'm really glad you came I felt like this would be something that I would enjoy and hopefully that will help in some way.

Tape ended