

ERWIN ALFRED KEEHN

I, Erwin Alfred Keehn graduated from Beaverton High School in May, 1932, a low point of the depression at that time. Our class couldn't even put out an annual — the only time that happened in our school. It was very disappointing to our class. Going to college the following year was unthinkable, since my parents barely had enough for their own subsistence. I had worked in my brother-in-law's meat market during the summer vacations while going to high school, and did learn how to cut meat and wait on customers. I was hoping to work there on graduation from high school, but my brother-in-law went out of business due to the depressed times.

I had become acquainted with a candy salesman that sold wholesale to small stores on both sides of the Columbia Gorge. He told me he knew of an older couple that owned a meat market and grocery in Stevenson, Wash., that could use a young man like me. The name of the store was States & Co., using their own name. This was rather an unusual name, I thought. They had their own slaughter house just east of town, one-half mile. They raised their own pigs, had a barn where they fattened cattle after buying them from farmers with dried up cows. These cows were bought for \$15.00 to \$20.00 each, according to the shape they were in. These cows made wonderful meat, once they were fattened with gains of 50 to 100 pounds. A gaining animal makes very good, tender meat. Mr. States really knew his business.

Downstairs in the basement of the market was a huge cooler where he cured hams and bacon which sold for 10¢ a lb. over the counter. In back of the market was a large smoke house where he smoked the hams and bacon after they were cured. He also had a rendering kettle where lard was made. It was put in five-lb. pails labeled, "States' Pure Lard".

Beef fat was also rendered and mixed with the pure lard. This was called compound shortening. Bakeries used it a lot for cooking doughnuts and baking bread, cakes, etc. The bakery across the street, called "Yeager's Bakery," used it exclusively. It was inexpensive and very good.

My good friend, the candy salesman, took me on his route and introduced me to Mr. and Mrs. States and with a short interview I was hired (*in 1932*). The salary was \$3.00 per week and my room and board. The room and board was worth far more than the salary. Mrs. States was a fantastic cook and took care of me like her own son. I eventually ended

up calling them both Mother and Dad and they called me Sonny. Along with my own parents I felt I had two sets of Mothers and Dads. It was great. Oh, yes, she also did my laundry.

Since I had just graduated from high school in May, 1932, and went to work in June, I blended right in with the Stevenson High School juniors and seniors that fall. I was 18 then and some of the seniors were pretty much the same age. They welcomed me into their social activities, dances, etc. I had a ball.

The money I was making went a long way. Movies were 10¢ for teens. A milk shake after the movies was 15¢. So taking my girlfriend to a movie and a milk shake was quite inexpensive.

I fell in love a year later with a high school senior. Her name was Thelma Clucas, a very sweet, talented girl. We planned marriage after her graduation, but she was killed in a car accident on her way to Vancouver to buy a graduation dress. I was so devastated that it took me almost a year to overcome the grieving. I dated different girls a few times, but I would always compare them to Thelma. This was wrong, I know now, but at the time I couldn't help it. It just took time.

In 1935 Bernice Selberg came to Stevenson as a new high school teacher starting that fall. In those days a new teacher was introduced to the whole town in the high school auditorium. She or he would get up on stage, introduce themselves and put on a little skit of some kind. Bernice impressed me to the point where I really wanted to meet her. Later on, possibly a year, I dated her. She was delightful and easy to be with. Our relationship grew and I knew she was the girl for me. The courtship went on for several years before I could get her to say, "Yes, she'd marry me."

In 1940, June 28th, we had a huge beautiful wedding at her family's Swedish Baptist Church in Portland. Bernice's father was one of the builders.

This coming June 28, 1992, we will celebrate our 52nd wedding anniversary. We stayed in an apartment above Ash's Store while our house was being built by Hans Skaalheim and Sons Avery and Fritz. They were close to my age.

Working in States Market was very challenging. I learned a lot from Mr. States about the marketing business beyond what I had already learned in Portland. Business grew quite rapidly. We hired a high school boy to help after school and on Saturdays. Our prices were so competitive

that we drew customers from the whole county. For example: hamburger and sausage sold three lbs. for 25¢; round steak, 15¢ lb.; sirloin and T-bone steak, 25¢ lb.; beef roasts, 8¢ lb.; and short ribs, 5¢ lb. Pork cuts were equally as low. Lamb was slightly higher. Soup bones and liver were free.

Within a year or two my salary was raised to \$15.00 per week. Mr. States said since the business was doing so well, he could afford the raise. I was elated.

In late 1941, the Skamania County rationing board was formed. I was a member. Later I became chairman when Charles Sawdey resigned. We rationed tires and tubes and later sugar. I was in the town band a few years earlier. We gave concerts on the courthouse lawn close to the main street. There was a band stand that we used. I played the alto horn which I learned to play while in the Beaverton high school band. It was fun.

On September 16, 1942, I was inducted into the Army and sent to Fort Lewis for four days. Then to Camp Kearns, Salt Lake City, Utah, for basic training. On Oct. 14, 1942, I was sent to an airplane mechanics school, called Curtis-Wright Technical Institute at Glendale, California.

On March, 1943, I was assigned to a permanent base: Greenville Army Air Field, Greenville, Mississippi. This was a pilot training field for cadets. We would pre-flight the planes before take-off for any mechanical malfunction. It was our job to keep the planes in perfect mechanical condition. After about 2½ years of flight training cadets, we received our wings as airplane mechanics. This put us in quite a glamorous nitch. So when all these wounded men were coming back from the Battle of the Bulge, nurses-aides were badly needed. We were then assigned to go to Philipsburg, Pennsylvania to recruit these aides. My job, with my partner, who was a good speaker, was to show movies of the Battle of the Bulge and need for nurses aides. We had a staff car assigned to us so we could go from city to city, and one of the best places was Macy's Dept. Store in New York. We signed up a good number. We felt good about it.

On Feb. 6, 1946, I was discharged with high honors and was elated to be back home with my dear wife Bernice.

States & Co. Market was no longer a meat and grocery store, but now a drug store run by Mr. and Mrs. Cooper, druggists. It has changed hands four times since. I had planned a few weeks vacation when I got home, but Louis Joseph came up to our home and talked me into going to work for him right away. He made me such a good offer that I couldn't turn him down.

I managed the meat department for Louis Joseph for approximately 22 years. In about 1968 Carl Arnold took over, then in about 1970 Ann Jermann took over. We had freezer food lockers downstairs that I also took care of and managed. I worked long hours, six days a week, and sometimes on Sundays, to catch up on processing beef, pork, deer, etc., for customers that rented the lockers. It wasn't easy.

In 1972 I retired due to a very serious condition that required surgery. After surgery I hemorrhaged and almost lost my life. This made me decide to retire early. I was 59, going on 60 in two months. Bernice retired the same year from teaching. We worried about finances, but with Bernice's teacher's pension and my annuity insurance paying off in two months when I reached 60, made us manage OK.

The highlight of our lives was when our daughter, Bonnie, came into our lives Dec. 27, 1946. We now have two grandchildren, Angie, 17, and Matt, 22.

Our retirement has been, and still is, quite eventful. It gave me a chance to pursue my love for fishing and hunting. I took up golf at Beacon Rock, but I never became good at it. I have sort of given it up since I wrecked my ankle ten years ago.

We've had many wonderful trips. One European, one Scandinavian, one Mexican to Mazatlan and Puerto Viarta, and many small trips around the country. We now have decided to stay put and enjoy our home and surroundings.

We keep quite busy with church work and other organizations. We also plant a good sized garden each year on our lower forty, as we call it. It's only about an acre. We enjoy our many fruit trees: apples, pears, prunes, and cherries. Strawberries, raspberries, and grapes are also part of our garden.

Our lives have been quite happy and content since our retirement, and hope it will continue this way for some time to come.

(Erwin was 79 when he wrote this biography in 1992. He was born on January 16, 1913.)