



*“I sure try not to judge others who are different or see things differently from me; along the same line, I do my best not to hate or fear something just because I don’t understand much about it.”*

The Ozark Uncle



Kenny, age five or six

## chapter 5.5

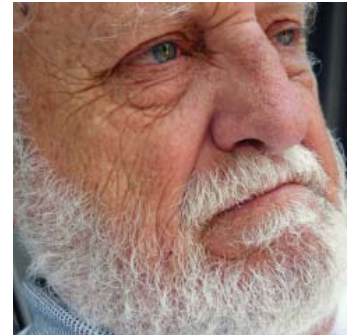
### KENNETH WAYNE BROWN

Kiree & Orville’s fifth-born (b. 1945)

*Written by Kenneth Brown*

I consider myself a historian of sorts for Douglas County, MO, my birthplace. Lots of people interested in the county’s history know me as “The Ozark Uncle,” a handle I took on about 15 years ago. Since my retirement in 2000, I have spent lots of my spare time studying and writing about the history of Douglas County, MO.

Starting about 20 years ago, I began to copy old photos using a camera stand, and then using computer scanners when they came into being. As a result, I have amassed thousands of images for southern Missouri counties and for all branches of my family including the Hartley, Brown, Gunnels, and Morris branches. I spent several years laying out and publishing the *Douglas County MO Historical Journal*. It was through that kind of volunteer work that I learned how to put together publications like this *Hartley Family Book*. In most of my historical work, I take the handle of the “Ozark Uncle” and a lot of my historical work can be found at <http://theozarkuncle.net>.



2012—me, the “Ozark Uncle” taken by my granddaughter, Skye Brown

#### **My Childhood in Douglas County**

I was born February 9, 1945, on the old Brown family farm five miles south of Ava, MO. I was the youngest of Kiree and Orville’s five children. I have no direct memories of the Brown place. The first places I remember that we lived were in Ava; my dad moved us there in 1947 because of his deteriorating health.

My memory of the very first place is a sad one. Dad had rented us a house on the south side of Ava less than a block from where Grandma Brown’s brother, Uncle Bill Morris, lived. On August 23, 1947, Uncle Bill was sitting on our front porch with

James and me playing around him when Uncle Bill fell out of the chair dead. He was 74 years old; I didn't understand death but all that commotion caused me to remember that porch and that house even though I was only two and a half years old.

In September 1947, Mom and Dad traded the Brown family farm to Willie Owen for a house located directly east of the Ava Schools. This house would remain in the family until 1978 when Mom sold it to the Ava School District and moved to Springfield. This same Ava house is the one that all my Hartley cousins and Grandma Brown's grandchildren would remember visiting.

Thirteen years separate the birth of my oldest sister, Evelyn, and me as the youngest child. Dad died of tuberculosis in 1949 when I was four; Evelyn had already married. Then Jana Lea would marry in 1951. So after I was six years old, all childhood memories of places I lived involved just Mom, Iris Ann, James and me living together. Now, I wrote the chapters in this book for Jana Lea (5.2), Iris Ann (5.3), and James (5.4). Plus I assisted Evelyn in writing her chapter (5.1). Hence, much of the 1950s information contained in those chapters really apply to me as well, and I won't try to rewrite them here.

### **Hartley Farm Memories**

In the summer of 1950 and 1951, Iris Ann, James and I stayed with Grandma Hartley on the farm while Mom went to college in Springfield. So it was a period in which I experienced the Hartley farm and farm life there. Grant Hampton, Grandma's hired hand, was always there, and I grew very fond of him. Grandma took good care of us but was a little on the strict side, and I tried to be on my best behavior. I can picture in my mind Grant always having his *Prince Albert* tobacco tin in his shirt pocket, and seeing him roll his cigarettes so adeptly.

Some of my memories of Grandma Hartley's farm were that it had no electricity, a wood cook stove, and coal oil lanterns. Nights might be disturbed by a fox trying to get in the hen house. One night, a stranger came walking up the dirt road; quickly, Grandma turned out all the lamps, told us to be absolutely quiet, and Grandma and Grant would watch to make sure the stranger kept on going.

Across the road to the east of Grandma's farm house, a little perpetual stream ran out of Grandma's spring. The cold water always had tadpoles and frogs in it to play with. We would use the gravel to make dams and have lots of fun there. I could go on and on about my memories of Grandma's farm.

### **My Memories of Living in Ava**

I would not take anything for my experiences in the small town of Ava where I lived permanently from June 1953 until June

### **Kenneth's Life in a Nutshell**

- Born outside of Ava, MO in 1945.
- Attended Douglas County MO schools until spring 1957.
- Graduated from Wichita South High School in 1962.
- Married Joy Neal in June 1965.
- Children:
  - Kelly
  - Dennis
- Graduated from Wichita State University in 1966.
- Moved to Springfield MO in 1968 where I continue to live now almost 50 years later.



1954 -- James (left) and me in the front yard of the Ava house. Behind us was the school cafeteria and behind that (notice the tall light pole) was the school football field.



1957-58—me on the Enterprise School 8th grade basketball team.



At the house we rented on Seneca St. in Wichita just south of Seneca Square Shopping Center in 1960-62.

1957. My friends and I had the run of the town, and we probably traveled over every street, road and alley, either on foot or on our bicycles. A lot of what I observed was good, but I heard about and observed a lot of bad. I heard and witnessed lots of biases, and I saw how people could treat each other badly. At that time in the 1950s, Catholics were considered to be as bad as Communists, and (by city ordinance) no black person could spend the night in the town. Once when the carnival came to town, a rumor spread that it included a black man, and all us boys ran down there to see him.

In November, 1952, Grandma Hartley sold the farm at Williams Hollow out west of town and bought her house in Ava. At that time, one could sit on her porch and still see farmers come to town in their wagons pulled by teams of horses or mules. While our Ava house was across the street that ran on the east side of the schools, Grandma Hartley's house was across the street on the west side of the school. All the school buildings, football field and playground were on the city block between our two houses.

With my older sisters (first Jana Lea and then Iris) being involved as cheerleaders or band twirlers, brother James and I got to attend a lot of football and basketball games at an early age—I fell in love with all the excitement surrounding those games, and that has pretty well carried on for the rest of my life. *{Ed. Note: In their respective chapters, several of Uncle Lawrence's kids remember coming to Kenneth's house either in Ava or Wichita and often playing baseball or basketball. Kenneth's favorite sport was basketball, and he always tried as best he could to nail up a hoop at just about every place his mom lived}.*

### **My Wichita Years**

I always felt that moving to Wichita at the age of 12 was probably good for me because (right or wrong) I had become so class conscious back in Ava, and I was also starting to have problems with my self-image. For example, the merchants' kids had great parties, and I was never invited. Perhaps related to my self-consciousness, sometime during the seventh grade, I had started to stutter.

While the speech problem didn't stop me, it certainly did slow me down both then and for the rest of my teenage years. It greatly influenced my choice of school activities (for example, I stayed out of debate, speech and drama or any activities where I might have to speak publicly). In fact, my decision to become an accountant was an attempt to pursue a career where I thought speaking would not be required.

### **High School and College in Wichita**

Even though my brother, James, was two years older than I, we ended up in the same grade. James had been held back one



year, and I was pushed into school a year early. So in 1958, the two of us graduated together from the eighth grade at Enterprise School on South Seneca in Wichita. It was the one place I was able to play on a school basketball team (a dream of mine).

The first half of our ninth grade was at Derby High School and the second half at Truesdell Intermediate High School in south Wichita. (Note: I was all set to go out for freshman basketball at Derby; but one Saturday, my cousin, Raymond Hartley, James and I were playing tackle football on Raymond's side yard in Haysville; I took an awkward spill and got a really bad sprain of an elbow.) Before it could get well, it was too late to play in Derby, or at Truesdell for that matter.

In 1959, when James and I were to begin the tenth grade, a new high school (Wichita South) was finished near where we lived in south Wichita. We enrolled at South High there and graduated three years later—1962.

Regarding college, it seems I attended about as many places as I did during my elementary and high school years. My freshman year (1962-63) was at Friends University in Wichita (paid mostly by scholarships) followed by Emporia State University (1963-64) and then Wichita State University (1964-1966).

The move from Emporia State back to Wichita was strictly a financial decision. I could live at home; and in 1964, the University of Wichita became Wichita State University. The state funding caused its tuition to become really reasonable. I graduated from WSU with an accounting degree in 1966 and no school debt either.

### Meeting My Wife, Joy

Back in Emporia, in the fall of 1963, I met my future wife, Joy Neal, in the William Allen White Library. It was fall semester finals time, and I was supposed to be in the library studying but really I was there to meet girls. I strolled into the library's large study room, surveyed it, and decided to go sit close to the prettiest girl I saw—it was Joy Neal of Kansas City, KS.

I struck up a conversation (oh yes, I kind of matured a bit at Emporia and my stuttering stopped), and we dated off and on over the next year. We were married on June 5, 1965, at the Argentine Church of Christ in Kansas City, KS. I remember so well that my cousin, Sue (Luttrell) Masters, and her husband, Larry, drove up to Kansas City from Wichita. They said they got there too late, so they stayed outside and “decorated” my 1959 Chevy Impala.

After we married, Joy and I set up housekeeping in a little



Above, a “staged photo”. Me on a Sunday afternoon in the summer of 1964 in downtown Wichita. Just left my job as a bellhop and accepted a job as “office boy” for a CPA firm. Jana Lea, always my advocate, had me dress up for this. Her children are off to the left in the photo.



Joy Neal of Kansas City, and me outside her dorm at Emporia State (KS) University—Spring 1964.



June 5, 1965, Kansas City, KS. Joy and I were getting married in a church to the left, and cousin, Sue (Luttrell) and her husband, Larry were outside “improving the looks” of my car.



May 2014—Ken & Joy at a family reunion in southwestern Arkansas near Camden for the Adams branch of her family

apartment off of Central Street east of downtown Wichita. I had a job as an intern with the CPA firm of Elmer Fox and Company. Joy got a job at Derby Refining but continued her education at Wichita State University that fall. Soon, however, Joy became pregnant, and our first son, Kelly, was born on May 24, 1966, at St. Francis Hospital in Wichita.

Not long before Kelly’s birth, my brother, James, was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer. He would die on September 20, 1966, in the old Wichita Osteopathic Hospital. Mom decided to have James’s funeral services and burial back in Ava. Being back in the Ozarks made Mom and me to want to return; in addition, Joy never really bonded with Wichita. So on January 1, 1968, Joy and I moved to Springfield, MO, where I had a job waiting with a CPA firm, and Joy was able to continue her education at what is now Missouri State University. (Mom moved back to Ava not long afterward.)

I passed my CPA exam in 1970 and almost immediately left public accounting for a job at Missouri State University as its “Chief Accountant.” I went on to spent 18 years on the administration in various capacities. Then I took a two-year educational leave to get my Ph.D at the University of Arkansas. (Note: during the second year at Arkansas, I stayed with Aunt Levon (Hartley) Elenbarger at their place southeast of Springdale.) After graduation, I returned to MSU as a faculty member and retired in 2000 as a Professor Emeritus of Accounting with a total of 30 years of service.

Joy and I waited twelve years after our first son was born to have a second one. Dennis was born on July 13, 1978, in Springfield. At the time, we had a house on National Avenue just to the south of the MSU campus. In 1981, Joy started work at the University and was on the staff until 2007 at which time she retired.

We have now lived in Springfield for almost 47 years. For the past 16 years, we have lived in a house in southeast Springfield not far from the intersection of U.S. Highway 65 and Sunshine Street.

### **What Happened to the Kids?**

**Kelly Wayne Brown** attended schools in Springfield, and he graduated from Springfield Parkview High School in 1984. At an early age, Kelly showed a talent for music and had started piano lessons at the age of four. His dream was to go to the Berklee College of Music in Boston, MA, and he graduated from there Magna Cum Laude in 1988 before returning to Springfield. While playing with one of his many groups one night in Springfield, he met Susan Vydra, a vivacious little girl who was an art-

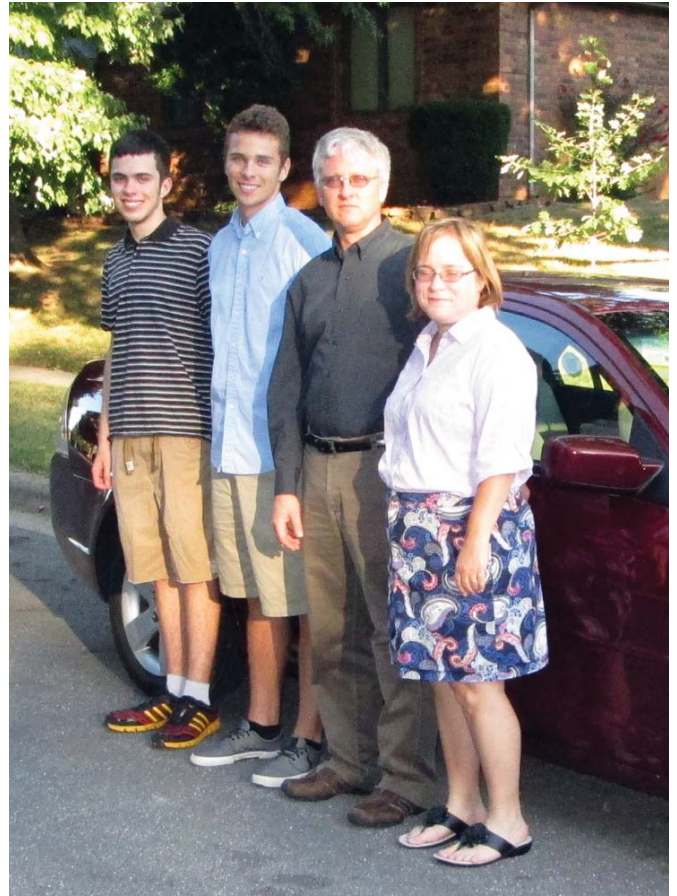


At right, 2014—Kelly's Family  
L-R: James, Louis, Kelly & Susan

ist. They married on January 2, 1992.

For over 25 years, Kelly has been playing keyboards singly and with various groups and all types of music. For the past five years, he has played keyboards for the Ozark Mountain Daredevils, a nationally known band from the 1970s and 1980s. Susan teaches art at Springfield Central High School. She graduated from the Art Institute of Chicago in 1991. Since then she has obtained two Master's degrees, one in education and one in studio art.

Kelly and Susan have two sons. James was born September 26, 1996, and is a senior at Springfield Central High School in its college-level International Baccalaureate program. He also sings in Central's choir. Louis was born March 6, 1996, and is a junior at Springfield Glendale High School where he is active in soccer and debate. He was selected to attend the Missouri Scholars Academy at the University of Missouri in Columbia this past summer.



**Dennis Patrick Brown** attended Springfield Parkview High School and Ozarks Technical College. Even as a child, Dennis showed an aptitude for computers on the old Commodore 64, and had an online newsletter while attending elementary school at MSU's Greenwood Laboratory School. He has since then kept abreast of emerging technologies including 3D printing, and several has earned technical certifications.

In 2002, Dennis married Cameo McNeley, and they had two golden-haired daughters, Ora Anouk Brown, born March 24, 2004, and Skye Kiree Brown, born February 25, 2009. Dennis and Cameo divorced in 2006 but had Skye together in 2009.

Dennis has his own computer services company here in Springfield called Direct Virtual Solutions that he operates out of his home on the west side of Springfield.

At right, 2014—Dennis, with his daughters, Ora (left) and Skye.

