

Great Thanksgiving Listen

Gabby Thorburn Interviews Grandfather Ted Hunt

Where did you grow up and what was your childhood like?

I grew up in Midland, South Dakota. It was a small town, with about 300 people at the time. A farm and ranch community. In the summers, I would spend a week with one uncle and aunt or another, out on the farms, and learning what was going on with taking care of cows and family and as I got older, I got to help out with some of the farming and, growing up in town I got to sometimes go work with my dad. I worked at a grocery store, delivering groceries, when I was 14. Then I got my first driver's license. Pretty much just having fun and playing baseball in the summer and then when school was in, going to school and playing the school sports.

What jobs did you have when you were a teenager?

My first job was working for my uncle in the grocery store, stocking shelves, and when I got my driver's license I was able to deliver groceries to some of the elderly citizens who would order groceries over the telephone. I would box them up and take them and deliver the groceries to whoever had ordered them. That was my first job, paying job. In the summer sometimes after a hailstorm storm, my dad and my brothers, we would re-shingle houses, after the hailstorm beat the shingles up. And that was something I did when I was in high school, every once in awhile. Another summer when I was still in highschool, I worked for a guy mowing hay. The next summer I worked, I guess it was the summer before I was out of high school, I worked for another man moving and raking hay. He'd bale it, and I'd get up at 6:00 and head down to his place for breakfast. We'd go out to work and mow and rake until late in the afternoon when it started to get cool and wet and we couldn't really mow anymore. So then we'd quit and go to town and have supper and pool around with my friends.

What did you do with the money you earned?

I didn't make much at the time. When I did have money saved up, well, I had a camera, and I bought some supplies so I could take black and white pictures and then I would develop and print my own pictures. And that was that and I bought a couple of guitars with some of the money that I made.

Of all the jobs you have had, which has been your favorite?

Probably the last main job that I had and that was working in the accounting office. Doing accounting for different businesses, that's what I enjoyed the most.

How long did you work as an accountant?

I did that for 30 years.

Are there any other memories that stand out from your childhood?

Snowstorms. It would snow so much at great grandma's house on the hill. It would get so deep that we would climb out the window upstairs and walk off the roof and the snow was drifted that high. Until we shoveled the snow away, the drift was big and long and came clear up to the top of the roof. On the living room, the front room of the house. I remember with my friends, the snow must have been 4 or five feet deep and it was packed hard and we would tunnel in it, underneath all the snow, kind of like a maze. Kind of silly if you think about it, but all the snow storms and blizzards that we had. One time a blizzard was coming and we let school out, and the school was right on the hill just east of our house. Anyway the neighbor girl who was in high school and her brother and sister, me and some of my brothers, we would all get together with a rope and the older girl led us from the school to the house. The distance was only about a block but it was all we could do just to get that far. I think we spent two or three days in the house, while the blizzard was raging out of the house. You couldn't go out, and we just stayed in the house and played games, there was no tv back then. And that was something different.

Who is one of the most important people in your life?

Probably my dad. Great Grandpa. He came up to South Dakota from Nebraska when he was 14 years old. His mom and dad had died. And he and Jerry Hunt's dad, they were brothers, both came up to South Dakota. And my dad, he had only an 8th grade education, and he worked all kinds of things, he built windmills or wind chargers. And he ended up buying a hardware/grocery store, and he had that for a while until he sold that to my uncle. And then he carpentered for the rest of his life until he got sick and in his life, he was able to do all that with only an 8th grade education. He did quite amazing things considering not going to high school or college. So I would say he's probably the most influential, he taught me a lot. You know, carpentry skills I still have and use. He's probably the most important person in my life. Your other great grandpa, I don't think he had any college, but just the way he lived his life and how he treated me he was probably the second most influential person to me.

What motivated you to join the Navy?

I'd been out of high school almost two years, and I was going to go to college but I didn't feel like I was ready for college then and my brother Jerry, a year younger than me, he had joined the Navy. The draft was being instituted and that's where all the men had to sign up, come their

18th birthday. It was kind of a lottery. A lot of guys were getting drafted into the army, but my brother joined the Navy so I thought, that sounded good to me. So I decided to do the same thing, and I spent four years in the Navy then.

What was your daily life like in the Navy?

Oh we would get up in the morning for quarters, everyone was accounted for. We would maybe do calisthenics for a while and then just find out what was going on for the day. Then I went to some schools to start with, to become knowledgeable in electricity. I was in interior communications and that was my job there. Then we worked on alarm systems and telephones which we had on the ships.

Would you have joined again if you went back in time?

I think so, I think it was good. It got me out of the small town and out to see the world and I spent four years in the Navy and in San Diego mostly, but we went out to sea too. We went to Japan and the Philippines, Hong Kong and with stops at Hawaii.

Did you make new friends during your time in the Navy?

I had lots of friends, all the guys you work with in the shop, or on the ship and in the schools you were going to. You had to depend on each other, that's true with most military. So you have a lot of good friends.

What was my mom like growing up?

She was a good student. She liked to study, she was very competitive with friends that she had, they were good students so they were always competing against each other. She always had lots of friends. Your Uncle Erik said one time that your mom might have had different best friends, who was the friend of the month? Because she did have so many good friends.

What have you accomplished so far that makes you the most proud?

I suppose raising my family and grandma and I being married for 50 years. And raising Derek, your mom, and Erik. All three were children that we were and always will be proud of and they all are successful, and raising their family, Erik doesn't have a family, but he has always been willing to help out.

Would you have done anything differently the second time around?

No, I don't think so. As you're growing up and things are changing around you, you kind of do what works at the time. So not really, I started out to be a high school teacher, and I taught for

four years, and I enjoyed that. But still I enjoyed accounting work, to me that was more satisfying, so I ended up doing that for thirty years.

Of your 17 siblings, did you have one you were closest to?

I suppose Uncle Jerry and I were probably closest at the time, as far as boys are concerned. And then your aunt Christine and Aunt Teresa were the two oldest girls. And when I was in college, Christine and I, and Jerry, we all started at the same time, and Teresa started the next year. At one period of time, grandma and me lived just across the street, and they would come babysit when I was working nights and came home in the morning. They might come over and babysit Derek while I was at school and grandma was sleeping. We liked to cook macaroni and spaghetti in one pot, so we had a good time when we were all in Spearfish and going to college. We got real close to Christine and Teresa that way.

How has your life been different from what you imagined as a kid?

I think getting away from the small town and living in bigger communities. Your mom got interested in Foreign language, and she went to France to do student exchange in college, at a university in France. So grandma and I took Derek and Erik to Europe! We traveled around Europe some, with your mom, and your dad. We had quite a group when we were there. Just being able to travel around the world, both in the Navy and with family. Your uncle Garland and Aunt Kate, the two of them and grandma and I went to Europe two or three years later. Doing all of those things, especially when you come from a small town in Western South Dakota, and you end up traveling, lots of things I've been able to enjoy.

What is one thing you still want to accomplish in the future?

I want to take grandma to Hawaii. I've been but she never has. We want to enjoy traveling, there's still a lot of the United States we'd like to see, and parts of Canada, while we are still able to travel. We want to go to Alaska, we'll probably take a cruise up there. And we'd like to go back to Norway again, and see things we didn't see before. There's still relatives down there, this one couple that came over here first in 1985, to South Dakota. We stayed with them and your mom did too, in 1995. Both sides of grandma's families came from Norway. And on my mom's side, her parents both came from Norway. We were at the farm where they came from. On my dad's side of the family, his mom came from Germany. There was Irish and German and English.

What is one thing you want me to accomplish in the future?

I want you to continue to be a good student, and have lots of friends. It depends on what you like to do, college, and the job you'd like to work at, I'd like you to be able to go to college and gain the knowledge to be successful and do what you enjoy doing and would be happy doing.

Something fulfilling for you to do. I think that's the secret, if you are doing something you enjoy, it's work but it doesn't feel like work.