

Memories of Wilmot: Charles Thompson and Elizabeth Kirby

Transcript

10/28/22

Summary

In this documentary, Charles Thompson, and his sister Elizabeth (Thompson) Kirby, share their life stories and their lives living in Wilmot, New Hampshire. These interviews were recorded in 2020, on October 20 and 29, by the Wilmot Historical Society members Judy Hauck, Lindy Heim, and Fred Ögmundson, at the home of Charles and Jackie Thompson, in Wilmot, New Hampshire.

Transcript

Lindy Heim: This is the Wilmot Historical Society gathered at Chuck and Jackie Thompson's home on Cross Hill Road, on Thursday, October 29, 2020, to interview Chuck Thompson. We are going to ask Chuck to tell us about his professional life.

Chuck Thompson: Let's see, we started in 1966 graduating from UNH, I guess is a good place to start. I had a bachelor's degree in forestry, but I had also enrolled in ROTC and had been ordered to Fort Belvoir, Virginia, for entering an Officer Basic Course training. We spent a year there in Virginia. I was assigned as a commander of the student engineer company.

I went from there to Vietnam the following year and spent a year there with the 26th Engineer Battalion up in Chu Lai, which is in what they call iCorps, just south of Da Nang, in support of the Americal Division. I was a platoon leader with all the usual special leader assignments of building and blowing up roads and buildings and so forth, but also destroying tunnels, and running some small quarry, and supporting the Brigade and its transportation needs by clearing mines out of roads. So, I did that for six months and I've concluded that that's the best job in the Army. But after that in November, I became Executive Officer of the Company, and I was in charge of the supply and support of logistics that are based in Chu Lai supporting the rest of the Company up north and out west. Then in April of 1968, I became Commander of the Company, and we worked out of Camp Evans, which was north and west of Hawaii and in and around below the DMZ, supporting the First Cav Division in their operations.

I came home and in June of '68 and later that summer I was assigned to the to the 368th Engineer Battalion Reserves, which happened to be headquartered in Concord, it is now in Manchester, and I was reassigned again as a Controller again, which I enjoyed a lot. One of the jobs we had was to work on the ball field and the beach, which is now the Wilmot Community Associations, the town of Wilmot Beach, on Shindagan Road. We brought our heavy equipment out there and cleared the land and filled the land and made a beach out of it. Then we did the surveying and basic leveling and ground grading at what is now the ball field. The grade had to come down quite a bit from where the road was and so, the bulldozers and loaders and so forth and graders we had worked well with that.

I retired with 22 years of service. No regrets. Great experience. A few medals. I came home alive and with all my limbs. So that was good. I met some great people and had

some great experiences. I went to work for the Department of Transportation in 1968 as a right-of-way appraiser, trainee status, and I went off to school for two summers with the Appraisal Institute to learn the trade of appraising for right-away, which is rather complicated. We were building the turnpike system in New Hampshire and the state was buying a lot of land for right-of-way work for the highways and some secondary roads. After three years, I was hired by John Hyde of Hyde Associates as a fee appraiser and continued the same kind of work throughout New Hampshire.

He and I became partners. Then he retired and I didn't. I had a business of between seven and 10 employees. We did a variety of appraisal work all over New England. The state of Montana was a client. We did work for FDIC. Review work up and down the East Coast. The forestry background stood me very well, we did a lot of industrial forest appraisal work for pension funds that had pension funds for different retirement systems around the United States, Teachers Pension Funds, and Texas Firemen, and so forth.

Jackie and I were married in 1965, we met in college our freshman year, and we were married in '65. She stayed with her parents while I was in Vietnam, and we moved to Pembroke when I went to work for the highway department and lived there for about 30 years in two different houses. We had three girls, all of whom now are married and live elsewhere in the country. Kristen and Ryan and our oldest grandchildren live in North Carolina. Amy and her husband and Tyler live in Salt Lake City, in the ski country. And Sue lives with her two children in Suffield, Connecticut. This coronavirus thing has really kept us from seeing loved ones, it's been a chore.

In 2002 I became very ill and I had to close my business. I gave it to my employees, and they've done very well, I'm happy to say, they've thrived with it. I was able to become cured of my problem at the Cleveland Clinic and came back and continued some consulting work on my own for another two or three years.

We built our house here in Wilmot 2004, it was completed in 2004, and moved here at that time. Also, that year I was asked to join another lawyer from Concord in a teaching assignment in Vologda, Russia. We went over there for 10 days speaking to municipal employees about various things that happened in democracy. It was about 100 people in the class.

Back here in civilian life, I was active with the town of Pembroke with the Building Committee and some other things. We moved to Wilmot, and I became the Selectman for four years and then Moderator for 11. And I was on the Building Committee for the Hyde Garage and do some other things. I was active in church up at Saint Andrews in New London, active for the Forest Society, and I've been on the Land Protection Committee for about 25 years. Singing in the Kearsarge Chorale and the Plymouth Summer Music Festival up at Plymouth State College.

We came back here because even though we lived in Pembroke, I kept a strong interest in Wilmot. We were never that far away. My parents lived here on Cross Hill Road at the family farm, and I came back often. After my father died, I visited with my mother quite a bit and took care of some things for her. So, there was always an attraction to come

back here and as a child, the land just became part of me. My wife asked me if I ever got lost when I was out in the woods and I thought about it and I said, *no I never did*. It's just, I always knew where I was or where things were and so forth.

I'm glad that the entire family, my sister's children, and our children, and she and I, agreed on putting a conservation easement on the property, on the 200 acres, so that will not be developed, and it will remain as it has been since our great, great grandfather bought it in 1800. So, it's sort of a legacy for our family, but also, for the town.

It's a nice road coming up on Cross Hill Road in the fall. It's like driving up through a golden tunnel with all the maple trees and the leaves over the top. So, it's been wonderful to come back to do that.

Lindy: Liz, would you please review for us the kinds of things you've done in adult life, briefly telling us when and where and what.

Liz Kirby: It's been a very interesting ride. I graduated from Andover High School in 1958. Most of the kids from Wilmot went to Andover for high school. I originally wanted to be a flight attendant—stewardess in those days, but you could not be taller than five foot six and you had to be a nurse. I had gotten to be five-foot-seven, so therefore I decided to become a nurse anyhow. I was accepted at Boston University School of Nursing. I attended there for two years. I found that I am not really totally prepared for large university life. I met a sailor in Boston, who was aboard *Old Ironsides*, and decided that I needed to go and see the world. So, we got married in July of 1960.

I never did get to see all of the world, but I saw a little bit more. He went aboard a ship, and I came back here to stay with my parents for a while. I had my son in New London Hospital, delivered by Dr. Bill Clough, who also delivered me, and then I moved to Ohio, where my husband's family was. His name was Bill Hamilton. I spent some time visiting them there and then moved to Lakehurst, New Jersey, where he was in school to become a weatherman. From Lakehurst, New Jersey, we moved to Brunswick, Maine, where my daughter was born, and I worked as a nurse's aide in a hospital up there. I [also] worked as a salesgirl in a bakery in Lakehurst, New Jersey.

We got transferred from Brunswick, Maine, to Norfolk, Virginia, where we spent two years then went to Washington, DC, where we spent two more years. In Washington we got orders to go to Albany, Georgia.

A year or so later, I met a policeman in Albany, Georgia, (where that marriage ended) and we got married. He was not satisfied with his law enforcement situation in Albany, Georgia, so he applied to Florida Highway Patrol, and we moved to Miami. While I was in Georgia I went back to school and finished my nurses training and worked as a nurse at a hospital in Georgia. As soon as I got to Miami, Florida, I went to work at South Miami Hospital in the operating room. I dearly loved surgery and orthopedic surgery was my forte; nuts and bolts and hammers and screws and nails are my thing. I really enjoyed it.

Eventually I got into administration there working in inventory and found that the politics of working in a small space like that was just more than I could handle. I left nursing and decided to try to do what I wanted to do since I was five years old, in West Andover, visiting my grandmother Whittimore over there. The milk trucks went up and down Route 4, from Northern New Hampshire to Boston, hauling milk. I always wanted to get on one of those trucks and go. So, when I decided that I just had to get out of nursing to save my sanity, I decided to become a truck driver.

I went to truck driving school in Miami with seven young guys, and I learned to drive a big truck. They didn't cut me any slack. I always had trouble backing up, but I generally was able to get by enough to get my license. I went to work first hauling milk in Florida from the farms in Central Florida down to the processing plants in the Miami-Fort Lauderdale area. In this time frame I found that husband, the cop, and I were no longer happy together, so we separated, got a divorce, and in 1985 I really wanted to go and see the country. I teamed up with a driver who had his own truck, by the name of Ray Kirby, and we started driving cross country. We worked for general freight companies for a short time, went back and hauled milk a little while, went back out on the road hauling explosives for the government for a company out of South Point, Ohio. We did leave for about two years and worked for a company out of Knoxville, Tennessee hauling radioactive waste. That was not really a comfortable job. We went back to hauling explosives and did that until about five years ago.

In 1999, I started coming back here in the summertime, to work as a nurse at New London Hospital, and I got back into the operating room, and I thoroughly enjoyed it as always. So, I did summer times as a nurse and winter times a truck driver. And then about five years ago, with aging and changes in the trucking industry, it was time to leave it. And so, we came up here and moved up here permanently.

I have continued with some of my nursing jobs. I've worked for Home Care and Visiting Nurses. I've worked in a couple of long-term care facilities over the years, and I've done some private duty of various sorts. I still do that. I still miss truck driving. I miss over the road, but I don't miss the hassles of it, but I'm very happy to be back here. I saw many beautiful places as I traveled, I've been in all 48 states Canada and Mexico, but the roots were always right here in Wilmot.

Lindy: Chuck it was fun hearing that you had this strong desire come back to Wilmot for the last half of your life and Liz, you were gone a long time and what drew you back to Wilmot?

Liz: Some of those same reasons that my brother did. I was noticing that he followed very much in family tradition, followed his own his own path. But family tradition included the fact that our great grandfather was a selectman and a moderator of Wilmot, our grandfather was a moderator of Wilmot, our great-grandmother was representative to the state legislature in 1925. So, there was always a lot of civic involvement in our history. We read our grandfather's diaries and he apparently had a beautiful singing voice, he mentioned he was singing at funerals, and our grandmother Thompson was apparently a pianist, we've seen her notes and some of her music books and so forth.

So, I think we inherited a lot of these things that made us what we are today. I believe that my chemistry is attached to this land. My eyes want to see mountains and trees, need to see them, are fulfilled when I do see them, and are a part of them. I think the best smell in the world is underneath a pine tree on a very, very hot summer day, when the sun just draws out the fragrance of the pine needles, the taste of sap right after it comes out of a maple tree before it's boiled in the syrup, but then the syrup is actually...

Chuck: And our sugar house down here.

Liz: And he has also continued with family tradition and that he has built a sugar house. All of the ancestors had a sugar house. There was one down in the woods further down. As kids we spent many hours hauling sap in buckets by hand from a tree to the arch to the boiler. And he has improved it with modern conveniences and now has the tubing and makes some excellent syrup, I'll watch for that every year.

So, all of these different aspects of our being, I think drew us back, and drew me back. I've been in all 48 states, Mexico, and Canada. I've seen a sunrise in the rear-view mirror going across New Mexico, it's absolutely beautiful. The sun sets over the mountains over the Rockies. I've seen some absolutely tremendously beautiful things and some very hard things. Some hard weather. Hurricanes. Results of tornadoes. The whole gamut of what's available in the rest of our country. But this is where home is and I think that it's these things that make it home. So that's why I'm here.

Lindy: On behalf of the Wilmot Historical Society, I would like to thank you Liz and Chuck for sharing your life stories with us over these past few days. We have enjoyed ourselves immensely. Judy Hauck has been our videographer. Fred Ögmundson has come occasionally and been part of the interviewing process. Catherine Stearns, our Vice President at the [Wilmot] Historical Society, is also an amateur Wilmot Historian and myself, Lindy Heim, was sometimes of the interview process, all had a wonderful time hearing your stories. Thank you so much.

Liz and Chuck: Thank you.

Chuck: Thank you very much.

CREDITS

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Videographer: Judy Hauck

A Special Thank You to: Catherine Stearns, Wilmot Historical Society Vice President

Photo Contributions

Wilmot Historical Society

Liz Kirby
Charles Thompson

Americal Division Colors Ceremony, Chu Lai, 27 October 1967

Chu Lai The old Americal Division colors are dipped in salute as the national anthem is played at the division colors ceremony.

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