

Keith W. Emmert, Marion County

Interviewee: Keith W. Emmert

Interviewer: Robin Martin

Date of Interview: November 29, 2007

Location of Interview: Pella, IA

Cassette

Biographical Data Form

Oral History Release

Transcript

Keith Emmert was born in the back room of a farmhouse - with no plumbing or electricity - near Kilduff, Iowa in 1922. With a passion for flight, he earned his pilot's license at Central College and put his skill to use for two or three years as a B52 flight instructor in the U.S. Army. After the war, he taught in the U.S. Air Force and decided to finish his education. Keith graduated from Central College with a degree in education and got a teaching job in Pella.

When Keith was 28 years old he contracted polio. It was the fall of 1950. Keith and his wife had three young children. "I thought that I had the flu," said Keith. "Then, I found out my leg was getting very weak. I almost fell down. Then, I could not go to the bathroom." The local doctor made arrangements for him to seek treatment in Iowa City. Keith arrived in Iowa City in the dark of night and remembered sitting in a quiet room waiting for his spinal tap procedure. "It turned out that I did have polio," said Keith. "I hurt. I had a lot of pain with my polio and my muscles began to give out. They would have to come and roll me over on my side and put a pillow behind me and then roll me over the other way."

In 1952, when Keith went to Warm Springs, Georgia for two weeks of therapy and rehabilitation, he learned that he was fortunate to be able to walk a little. There were many others in worse condition. The staff at Warm Springs fitted Keith for a full leg brace. "They gave me exercises to do. They gave me two corsets to wear because my stomach muscles were worn out." Today, Keith lives in Pella and is happily retired from a teaching career spanning 35 years. He still wears the brace he got in Warm Springs in 1952.