

## *Gathering Our Voice*

Interviewee: Kjell Bakke

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Interviewers: Amy Massey & Nancy Warner

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Nancy Warner: I'm here with Amy Massey in the Ski Hill Lodge and we're going to be interviewing Kjell Bakke. So, um we have been asking you some background questions. Would you talk about how you've lived in North Central Washington?

Kjell Bakke: Well I was born uh up near Stevens Pass up near a place called the Merritt in 1933, uh in a dirt floor, shack, and no running water, no bathrooms. That winter before my mother was there was five feet of snow. And uh my uncle and another Norwegian lived there that winter, and she had two little girls, but she had to cook for these three men, and two little girls, and was pregnant with me, and uh she was a little tiny women she's 4'11, and she was a tough little lady. I'm forgetting some things.

Amy Massey: Could you identify the names of your parents?

KB: Uh yea, my parents were Inga and Magnuss Bakke, they both came from Norway and they met back in South Dakota at the Norwegian Orphanage where my mother was working and my dad had come down there to take the job as facilities - for a building maintenance person and that's were they met. So uh my dad back in the summer went to work in the grain fields up out of North Dakota but every once in a while he would take a little time off and ride his horse down to South Dakota to visit my mother so they uh then they got married and my sister was born back there then they decided to come to North Central Washington because my dad had some schooling in forestry back in Norway and his brother Hermann he had some horticulture orchards in Norway too so they all heard about the Wenatchee Valley and decided to come out here and that was in 1930 when they came out here. They kinda stayed together. Even in Leavenworth my uncle lived upstairs in a house- it was part of the house where I live right now down there in the 413 Ski Hill Drive, so that would have been in 1934 when they moved there. And I uh grew up and went to school here in Leavenworth and graduated in 51 and went to University of Washington for five years and took civil engineering and graduated in it. I received a commission in the United States Army Reserve and spent thirty two years in the Army Reserve. When my uncle and dad moved up here, they both started getting really involved in the ski jump. They helped building the first one up here. And my uncle jumped up on the jump until he was just short of his 60th birthday.

NW: And what your uncles first name?

KB: Hermod

AM: Will you talk about how where you learned how to ski?

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KB: Uh yeah my dad when I was three years old in 1936 the lodge had just been built here and my dad was a foreman- he worked for the Forest Service but CCC Camps were operated by the military and they would run the camps and they have all the young men out there. Some of the building had the same foundation. There were footprints that some of the buildings had that were apart of that camp. When they were working on the projects, the Forest Service provided the foreman, directed the young men what to do and how to do it. So Dad was a foreman up there building the lodge. He was a very good mason so that was done in 36, so I came up here in winter and my dad brought me up here and put me on skis.

AM: Did you like skiing right away?

KB: Oh yeah

AM: How old were you?

KB: I was walking around and of course then we didn't have any packers or groomers, so if you wanted to ski down the hill you had to sidestep that area you wanted to ski on then all you had to do was a straight run down the hill and the skis we had were uh had a hole through the side of the ski, leather strap through that and you buckled it up on top then you cut up inner tubes to um and you cut a piece of inner tube about an inch long to put that part of it under the heel and overshoes which you put over your shoes and then you pull that up forward and put it under your toes in front of the leather strap and that was your ski binding. So that's what I learned to ski on that was in 1936. In 1939 I was six years old my dad built a little jump over here and so some of us boys started jumping off it and went a few feet and that was about when I started skiing.

NW: You were six then?

KB: Yeah

NW: Six

AM: Three when you first started skiing and six jumping right? Well you talked a little bit about how this ski hill got started, do want to continue talking about the development of this ski hill?

KB: Oh yeah and uh so that was in 36 when they built the lodge and they moved up here in 33 and the first thing they did was build a jumping hill there was just one jump and you went all the way down and there weren't any lights or any cable lifts and all. And uh there was a framing building down at the parking lot. The first building burnt down which they had built in 1930, burned down after one or two years. So then they put the hot dog stand on there and then of course this was built 36. So anyway when I was a young kid the ski hill and the lodge was open everyday of the week. There were concessionaires that ran the lodge usually a couple. There were some living quarters probably had a bathtub up there but they hadn't used it in fifty years.

NW: Really

KB: So anyway they would live up here but the ski hill was open everyday when we had snow and it was ski able it was open seven days a week. And what I remember from school was the kids would meet up here and we would go up from town up here and uh in 1940 they put in a rope two and lights at the same time, they lights on the side of the hill plus there are two jumps on the left hand side and they had lights up the trestle and all the way down the side of that so when we got good enough we could jump at night and the rope two we put in 1940 went up to the Basin jump which was built in 33 then we would walk across and climb the ladders up the tower and jump until the lodge closed at ten o'clock every night so I remember my mother wanted me home at nine thirty. So we would go in the lodge and have a cup of hot chocolate. We'd go down and put our skis on then we would ski all the way down to Pine Street and uh I only lived a block from there so that's how we got home.

NW: Nice so how did you see with a full moon? I could see how it would be okay.

KB: Usually it seems like we had a lot more clear nights and of course the reflection if it was cloudy we would get a lot of reflection even if there were orchards down there we would kind of squat down on our skis and coast down and we knew enough to squat down on our skis so we wouldn't get hit in the face by a limb in the orchard.

NW: Sounds like good leg muscles too.

KB: Oh yeah

NW: Laughter

KB: Oh yeah

AM: Can you talk about the land- has it always been Forest Service, is there anything about the permitting or any issues about that?

KB: No this permit was granted to the Leavenworth Sports Club when it was formed back in around 1930 they got there permit, it's been updated just every ten years, so there's a permit area and it's outlined on a map and tied in to the section line markers and where we can occupy. So uh yeah it's been under permit from the Forest Service since 1930.

AM: Has there ever been any discussion about it becoming private land or the club buying it?

KB: No I don't think, there have been thoughts I've heard rumors about people talking about it but I don't see that happening at all. Most ski areas are National Forest land. In 1906 the National Forests were dedicated and that's when they were Congress passed law where they took those lands and they were just made into National Forests. So it's been in the Forest Service since

1906. This is the first ski area in North Central Washington, probably one of the early ones in the state.

AM: Wilfred Woods was talking about skis trains that would come over to Leavenworth, could you talk a little about that?

KB: Yeah, the skis trains would use to come over sometimes if they had enough interest normally the train would leave Seattle at a certain time, Everett this time, gets into Leavenworth at noon, leaves there at five o'clock, and all that. The entry to the tournament was one dollar or fifty cents.

NW: So that era of people coming on the train how long did that last?

KB: Even when the train moved and went up the Chumstick there were still lines that came into Leavenworth they just didn't go up Tumwater Canyon they went up Chumstick but the trains would come into Leavenworth and then there was uh switch track that they'd pull in towards Tumwater Canyon and backed up to uh they'd hookup from the cars first but the engine would back up, the engines would back out then come hook back on the train again and pull on out by the depot and back over Stevens Pass.

NW: Wow that sounds fun, like a fun excursion.

KB: Yeah there's some advertising that somebody drew up some comedy strips to generate interest.

NW: I bet it was fun.

KB: Yeah

AM: Is there anything to know about the name of the Leavenworth Ski Hill?

KB: Well the idea of just like the lodge here, it was a Leavenworth Recreation area back in the fifty's we wanted to rebuild the big hill and office in Portland gave them \$12,000 to help rebuild that. Recreation money and that's where it had to come out off. We have to pay some of our profit that we earn to keep operating up here it's a nonprofit organization.

AM: What was it used for during the non ski season?

KB: I can be used by anybody because it's public land they finally decided it was under permit. There wasn't anywhere that events took place.

NW: This lodge was only used during the ski season then?

KB: Uh huh

NW: Oh okay

KB: Except the Forest Service they can have a get together and call and see if it's being used, so they use it for functions or training sessions.

AM: Can you say anything about the funding for the different ropes twos and the different equipments?

KB: Yeah all that is the responsibility for the Sportsman Club to maintain it and also to maintain the building. Anything we do has to be approved by the Forest Service. There's a lot of use up here in the summer people up here and there dogs, hiking and flower looking and all the time up here every day of the year somebody's up here doing something.

AM: Is there anything you can tell us about this location? Why it was chosen?

KB: Well it's about the only area where you can have a slope for a ski jump, you have to have a steep hill to land on and it was close to town.

AM: And how about for the lodge where the lodge was situated? It's obviously a beautiful view.

KB: Yeah I think that was considered in.

NW: Could you talk a little bit about what happened up here particularly your role in it- what you saw and experienced when you were a young man?

KB: Yeah while that any organization there was always a board of directors managing and uh the permit from the Forest Service outlines a responsibility that we have to maintain it if we didn't maintain it then somebody else would probably come in and take over or somebody will volunteer. There were four or five years when it didn't open the ski area didn't uh there was low snow and didn't have enough snow they didn't even open for one day.

AM: Do you remember those might have been?

KB: I can't remember.

AM: Wow

NW: So was it mostly managed by volunteers?

KB: Still is.

NW: Ok and so somebody was watching each lift on both ends, helping people get on it, and shoveling snow?

KB: Well we have a volunteer to do that and we pay a few of them and we have ski patrol and we pay the ski patrol. We have about twenty people working up here on different shifts so were open now like uh Saturday, Sunday, and holiday, Wednesday afternoon through the evening and Friday evening and the afternoon when school gets out.

AM: I have a question about when the rope tows were put in. Were there fundraising activities?

KB: Back then even with one dollar charging for a person to come in here to watch the tournament, we got some funding from the Forest Service cause they had a pretty good recreation funds back then now they don't fund anything. That was the first year of that rope tow in 1940. We had to earn enough money to maintain those and there were a lot of volunteers in the winter time it took a lot of people to put on the tournament or when we had a winter of no snow each man had a apple box and they'd haul snow up to the dip and they'd dump the snow and shovel it. A couple hundred men worked up here for a week and they had a chute that would come all the way down to the dip to put an empty apple box in it, it would go down the chute and they would fill it up again. That went on day after day after day just to hold the tournament.

AM: Is that when they let kids out of school to help?

KB: No. Well the orchardists and the loggers didn't have much to do in the winter time so they would just come up here and help.

AM: What was the early equipment like?

KB: They just had a hole cut in here and this thing went through that hole and before the metal bindings came all you had was this leather strap and you put it through this hole and you put your foot under this strap. If you tried to turn your hill would drop off the ski cause you couldn't turn the front of your ski. So everything went straight.

AM: At that time was there a little hill?

KB: The rope tow was up on the west side.

AM: Do you remember when they put in the little hill?

KB: Probably in the late 40's.

NW: The design of the ski and the groves on the bottom and that tip.

KB: Yeah as you can see this is just one piece of board. They cut it and they pressure steamed it

and they did more then one pair. They were pretty good to ski in until these came along and you had an overshoe and no boot and they were very thin. The tip was made out of pine wood also. It wasn't the best they were kind of brittle.

NW: For jumping skis they had more grooves on the bottom.

KB: They had four grooves.

NW: Wow.

AM: What was your typical ski outfit from the 30's and 40's?

KB: The ski pants were just baggy. You'd have flappy clothes. Most of the pants were gabardine but some were wool. And most people would wear a regular shirt and the sweater of some kind. And we had parkas but you wanted to try to make yourself slim when you were jumping. But it was cold and so you wanted to bundle up. Kids would come up here and they got these big baggy clothes on and they can't hardly move and they want to learn how to jump.

NW: What kind of accidents were there here and how did you handle liability in the early days or even patrol and first aid?

KB: Well they had a ski patrol and a toboggan. There were more injuries back there then before. Everything was loose there was loose snow. You have to pack up and memorize the course if you are ever going to race. So there were so many tragedies. You had to be a big skier to be on it.

KB: Most of us in high school had to run all four events. When we went to a competition somewhere I had my skis and boots, my jumping skis and my cross country skis and boots. You always had to take extra skis to because a lot of them would break.

AM: What were the four events?

KB: Yeah it usually went like this - you would have a downhill in the morning on Saturday and in the afternoon you would have a cross country race. And then Sunday morning you would have the slalom and Sunday afternoon the jumping.

KB: It seemed like we would get a snow storm then it would be clear nice weather, now the weather seems so different it seemed to be more consistent back then. We started skiing early December or Thanksgiving.

NW: Every season they had to pack some new snow was it that way?

KB: Well they probably weren't open during the week.

AM: The ski season would start by Thanksgiving.

KB: Sometimes but the first weekend in February that finished the skiing for the year because all the people tramped that hill so. The jumping hills can still be used but they were just packed full with footprints. So none of us would feel up to taking a shovel and feeling all of those holes because whatever you did with your skis is what you skied on. So no groomers.

NW: So you didn't have a groomer here until after World War Two?

KB: Yeah even then, the cross country races we would of course you didn't have skating until what fifteen or twenty years ago.

NW: It didn't seem that long, I would say fifteen.

KB: Yeah

NW: Yeah the tracks throughout the tree, some people would you haven't had cross country here very long. We use to have our own separate group for cross country.

AM: Way back then was there anyway like people from your family would try to predict the snow?

KB: No I don't think anybody I don't remember recalling anything about that except for Farmers Almanac.

AM: Um how about around this area the vegetation, the flowers, and wildlife- You have anything to add about how that was back in the 30's, 40's?

KB: You know the flowers are already abundant up here. As kids we would wander up here all over and pick flowers. By the time we got done messin around they were all wilted.

AM: Any stories about wildlife coming through here?

KB: One thing I remember jumping up here on the hill and the slope opened up earlier and there would be big bucks and you'd see deer out there on that hillside when we were jumping.

AM: How about avalanches?

KB: Not here, nothing up here no. Well there were always the ones in the canyons. Those avalanches would come down and you could see them like now.

NW: Grooming and trimming trees and brush from the slopes in the summertime and fall to get ready for the ski season, did the club do that or did the forest service help?



KB: No we had to do all that.

NW: Okay

KB: Yeah

NW: And then you would use the wood that you cut for firewood or ?

KB: Yeah they would burn wood in that furnace downstairs if there wasn't enough coal. There would be piles and piles of it.