

K. Wyman Sheppard

Jean and Bob's Father

THIRD GENERATION

"Wy"

Kenneth Wyman Sheppard

B: 7/18/1914 Grand Forks

M: 8/19/1944 Alice Bethel Paige,
Grand Forks

D: 11/26/2006, age 92 Grand
Forks



No one today knows the reason he was given the first name *Kenneth*; from his childhood the younger son of Clarence and Clara Sheppard was referred to as *Wyman* -- *Wy* for short.

Born two weeks before the outbreak of World War I in Europe, Wy enjoyed a normal childhood living on the family's home on North Fourth Street until October 1918, when at age 4 he was undoubtedly confused and not spared from the family's sorrow over the death of his older brother, Willis. The following month, the *Herald* ran

a short story that young Wy had been accidentally shot in his left hand while playing at home. The item was reprinted 50 years later in newspaper's "That Reminds Me" column recounting noteworthy or anecdotal stories from the past.

Wy began his education at the Washington School, then transferred to Belmont Element at age 9 in 1923, when the family moved to their 71 4th Avenue South home. The house was perfect for a young boy, with a large backyard that sloped down to the river bank and was only four doors from Central Park. He enjoyed accompanying his father to sporting events, Maple Lake get-aways, and outdoor outings.

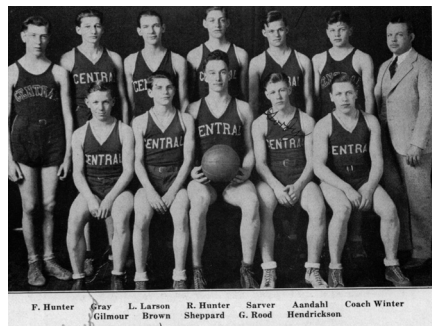


Young Wy on the shoulders of his father, Shep, and with his grandfather George Aker.

Wy attended Central High School, where he graduated in 1933 and competed on both the championship varsity football and basketball teams. He played right tackle in football and especially recalled traveling south to play in a specially arranged playoff game with Watertown High where Central's team beat the South Dakota state champions, 6-0, on a fumble. "We had a lot of good times in those days," he later recalled.

Second Basketball 1932

Add: Jr. Play Staff, Track Jr. Prom Committee



Wy's 6'4" height provided an advantage when he played on both the Central High School variety football and basketball teams in 1931.

Wy enrolled at UND for two years, where he studied botany, chemistry and biology. He was active in the ROTC (although he never served in the military) and won a medal for the outstanding sophomore in the drill team competition. At the same time, he and UND gymnast Curly Evenson developed an acrobatic and balancing exhibition and performed for pay before a variety of audiences including dinner parties, service club meetings and the midway at the Beltrami County Fair.

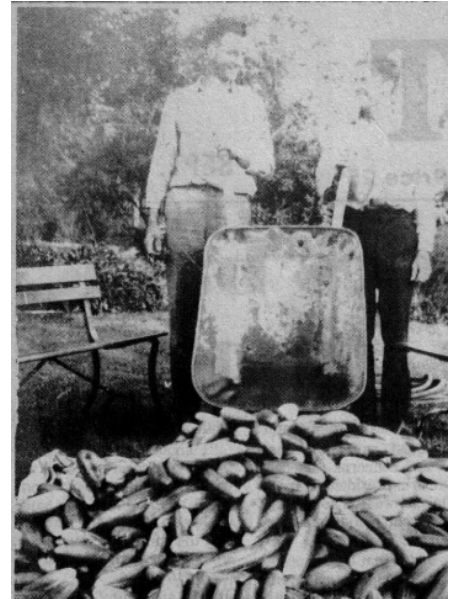


Wy as a young man

Young Vegetable and Bedding Plants Grower

As Wy retells it, when he began helping his father with the flower beds around their new home on Fourth Avenue, his father saw that Wy exhibited more than a passing fancy in plants. Shep provided special encouragement—he even built a greenhouse on the back of the garage.

“I started right in concentrating on vegetables. I raised sweet corn, cucumbers and tomatoes. Then I would walk around the neighborhood and sell them to various families. ... I remember I would often come straight home from school in the spring and work until dark in the greenhouse and/or making deliveries.” Within a few years, his dad helped him build a second greenhouse so he could try my hand at raising bedding plants – marigolds, geraniums petunias.



Wy and Jerry Zespy with cucumbers

Raised plants in wooden flats with paper liners

[Bullets indicate notes for editing only – will be removed]

- Check time period

Then, while Wy was still in high school, for several years his father rented five acres east of Memorial Park Cemetery (Shep **served** as president of the cemetery’s board) so Wy and a friend, Jerry Zespy, could raise vegetables in large quantities to sell wholesale to local grocery stores. Their largest customer required they deliver their freshly picked and washed produce at their door by 7 a.m.

Recognizing his passion, Wy transferred from UND to the University of Wisconsin-Madison for a year to pursue formal horticultural training. He then went to Iowa State where two years later he received his degree in horticulture (with a specialization in vegetable growing) in 1938. Prior to his graduation, he captured sweepstakes honors at the annual student horticulture competition where he took top honors for his exhibits of Irish potatoes, as well as Jonathan and Grimes Golden apples.

Although both Cornell and Iowa State recruited him as a graduate teaching assistant so he could pursue a master’s degree, Wy wanted to return home to resume growing and selling vegetables and bedding plants.

His father had already eyed on a site across from the sugar beet plant in East Grand Forks for a possible nursery and commercial landscape business. The property Shep soon purchased included the original Sullivan Farm homestead with a large house, a bunkhouse, a machine



A tomato crate label advertising Wy's Tomatoes circa 1940s

Shed and other small buildings. Wy used his considerable carpentry skills to repurpose them to be more suitable for his business and to construct four houses for family and workers.

During the period 1938-1941, there was no widely known nursery in either Grand Forks or East Grand Forks, although several families grew vegetables in varying quantities. "I gambled that I would not be too far off the mark going ahead and starting out with [both] bedding plants and the vegetables I had most of my experience with as a youth. I did and it worked out fine," he remembers

By the beginning of World War II, he was annually raising 10 acres of onions, 5-6 acres of corn, and 2-3 acres of tomatoes. He then increased that that volume considerably to meet the wartime need for vegetables. He also taught a course on home gardening at Central High School as part of the Greater Grand Forks Victory Garden program.

Early Family Life

When Wy returned from Iowa State he initially lived with his parents; no details are known about his life as a single young man. However, he would soon begin dating the girl from high school he would marry in 1944, Alice Paige. When the couple first lived in a duplex on North 4th Street, their upstairs neighbors were Bob and Jean Kiesau, who in 1940 had opened a wholesale auto parts store that became Home of Economy.

Eventually the young couple occupied the largest of the four



Wy and Alice in a dress Alice later explained was supplied by the photographer for the photo.

houses they would refurbish on the grounds of Wy's Gardens, where they lived until 1955 when they purchased an 1890s-vintage Victorian in Grand Forks at 612 South 5th Street.

The couple's first child, Jean, was born in 1948. Their move to town was prompted in part by a frenzied year of transporting her to and from school and to play with the children of friends. Jean's brother, Bob, also had been born in 1952; the growing family required more space,

Wy enjoyed fatherhood, but spent long hours building his business during those years. The kids fondly remember

Bob: Wy gave him his first pocket knife – always carries today – showed him how to sharpen it. (Other lessons!)

Bob: Wy generous to people in need who came around looking for work or money. . Gave modest amount of money to one fellow every summer for several – but gave Bob money beyond taking to Millers or while out on landscape crew.

Jean: gift for design, able to envision a yard—drew layouts using colored pencils, etc.

Really enjoyed short phone interviews with KNOX radio to promote particular items that were in over-supply. In summers, Jean often suggested items to discuss.

Bob Everything at gardens he built, except for large 30x100 Lord and Burnum wooden with redwood bars and 16x18" class. Built greenhouse of pipe from steam locomotive.

Art Voss, artist, drew caricature with (masonry, not gardening) trowel in hand. Can we locate?



The family's house at 612 South 5th Street, 1955-1988.



Wy with Baby Bob their house at the gardens ca 1953 and reading to Bob and Jean in their new house.

As a couple, Wy and Alice loved ballroom dancing and were members of the Forty-Niners, a dance club that held events at the Grand Forks Country Club. They even performed in the High Fever Follies, a fundraiser for Deaconess Hospital, a predecessor to Altru.

As kids, Bob and Jean sat at top of the stairs, watched in mirror as parents' friends gathered in living room prior to 49er dance parties.



Wy and Alice in their formal attire as they departed for a Forty-Niners events, and learning a routine in Herald publicity story about the upcoming hospital event in 1968.

They also were avid bridge players and were members of an eight-couples bridge club that continued to meet well into the 1980s.

- Verify number. More about bridge club?



Wy and Alice at home ca 1955

Wy's Gardens 1945-1985

Following World War II, Wy stepped up his focus on landscaping (and started a tree and shrub nursery) with the post-war explosion in home building and commercial construction. He recalled that the investment of \$100 in trees, shrubs and labor in a front yard could help move an otherwise slow-moving home. Commercial properties he landscaped

included local motels, banks, restaurants and government facilities. In East Grand Forks he planted several hundred of the trees now on the city's berms. At the time, Olson's Garden Center, which specialized in growing plants from seed, was the only competitor.



Among ways he promoted his business, Wy served as a judge in a local flower and plants shows, which generated newspaper coverage in newspapers such as this photo in the Cavalier Chronicle in 1954. He also was a member of the Junior Chamber of Commerce and Masonic Lodge.

Wy also launched the sale of indoor house plants with stands he built, installed and serviced in retail stores, beginning with the Newberry's Five and Dime. He eventually expanded the effort to far-flung small grocery stores in the region. The business lasted for about eight years, but more importantly helped spread the word about Wy's Gardens and its location.

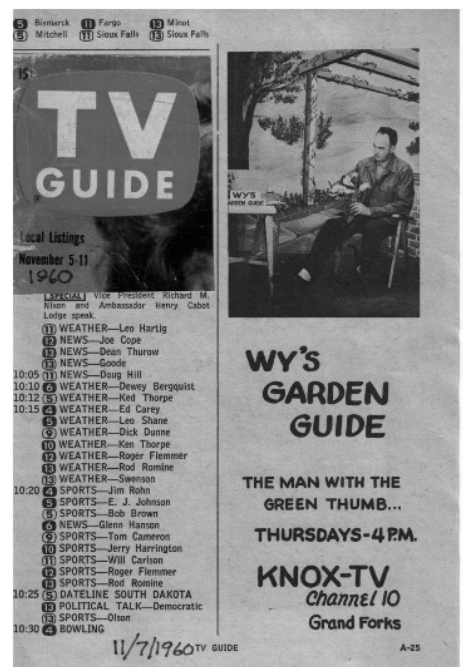
Wy was always handy and could build or fix anything – to such an extreme that might have spent more time focuses on growing and selling. A short item in the *Herald* in 1949 explained that the “East Grand Forks farmer and vegetable grower had built a small rotary snowplow for use on his

light farm tractor. Sheppard and his assistants had experienced difficulty keeping the drives open around the farmstead and the highway clear.”

The *Herald* further explained, “With the rotary, the job can be done more easily and quicker. One of the advantages is that it throws the snow, allowing the wind to catch and scatter it away from the road, thus reducing the height of the embankments on the side of the drives.” In 1999, the item was reprinted in the *Herald's* That Reminds Me column 50 Years ago as an anecdote from the past

- Cite: Marilyn Hagerty 01111999

In the late 1950s he began to promote the business on TV. For



Promotional ad for Wy's Garden Guide in TV in November 1960

several years KNOX-TV (Channel 10) had no offerings after the 10 p.m. newscast, so Wy worked up his own show, “Wy’s Garden Guide,” on which he offered gardening and law-care tips and answered questions from viewers. At first he went to local businesses and collected his own sponsors. Later, when a network show replaced him at 10:15 p.m., station officials recognized the show’s popularity and offered him a time slot weekdays at 4 p.m. and solicited sponsors themselves.



A color sales brochure produced later in the late 1960s.

The 1960s and 1970s was a period of steady growth as the business expanded and staff was added. During summers, both daughter Jean and son Bob worked at the gardens, where they both developed their green thumbs. Both began by helping Wy collect boxes from stores that could be used to pack up customer purchases. Discarded houseplants were also prized finds if they could be rejuvenated and sold.

Jean occasionally worked in the sales room during summers and recalls being sent out to plant petunias and other bedding plants for customers – the beginning of her lifelong passion for gardening. Bob took on increased responsibility in the green house, and would become involved in growing operations after he completed his schooling.

During the 1970s and 1980s Wy’s maintained a loyal following. In the early morning of August 31, 1977, a memorable family event took place

- Jean: Watering plants?
- Other Bob photos in green in Bob’s section
- Bob: review time frame:

as newspaper reporters and photographers joined the family and friends in one of the green houses to witness the blooming of a cerus cacti, a plant native only in Brazil and Mexico. The plant's delicate strongly perfumed flower would only open for a short time during the night. A photo of the dramatic bloom nearly filled the front page of the *Herald* the following day.

Need to add detail

Tragedy struck in 1979, when a fire broke out during the night at the Gardens, destroying

A changing operating environment made it increasingly difficult to compete in the late 1970s and early 1980s. New competitors included new nurseries and greenhouses on the south side of Grand Forks, mass merchandisers who began stocking seasonal bedding plants, and out-of-town wholesale operators who set up temporary seasonal locations in the spring. By the time Wy reached age 71 in 1985, he decided to retire and sell the gardens. Troy Green operated it until the 1997 flood, when the business closed to make way for a new dike.

Herald photo feature story 1977



- Any idea on date?



Wy in one of the ____ greenhouses at Wy's Gardens ca 1970

- This closing section will go here or in following section about Alice. Will attempt to balance amount of space between the two.

Topics to be included:

- Continued to grow trees, plants
- Woodworking
- New homes at 85 and 1400 including landscaping
- Years in Hemet
- Move to Parkwood

The Sheppards' Later Years

During his retirement over the next 20 years, Wy maintained his interest in



