

Get to know Ken Pelton

Ken Pelton and his wife, Norma, share a family tradition of helping others.

For more than thirty years, Ken has served as a trustee of the Etna Baptist Church and as a church deacon, and he's been involved with everything from the pastoral search committee to church suppers. About twenty years ago, Ken and Norma also took charge of the weekly maintenance at the Etna Church.

Ken grew up in Etna and attended the two-room schoolhouse, where Etna's post office is now located. Ken and Norma were married at the Etna Church in 1965, while Ken was serving in the Navy. They are parents of four children, one of whom died in infancy, and have five grandchildren, and a great-grandson

Many people know Ken from his music. He sings in the choir, plays in the church gospel group, and plays bass guitar with the Mill Band. We talked with Ken to get to know him better. Here's an edited version of the conversation:

What's one thing about you that most people don't know?

When people come by and see my paintings they say, "I didn't know you were an artist!" Growing up, I used to draw horses in school all the time. It's a God given talent that runs through my family. After high school, I went to New Hampshire Tech in Manchester and graduated as a commercial artist. Later, when I was working at the Valley News, I took more art classes and really got into it. Now every day in the colder seasons I sit at my easel and paint with oils. Just oils though – acrylics dry too fast.

And in the warm weather?

Norma and I have huge flower gardens behind our house – so that keeps me busy.

You served in the Navy after college?

I worked for Dartmouth Printing for one year, 1963-64. Then the draft board in Lebanon told me I'd soon be drafted into the Army. But I wanted to go into the Navy instead. So I went to see the Navy Recruiter, and he said, "Sit right down here, and we'll talk about it." I ended up serving from 1964 -1968. I spent two and a half years in the Navy ceremonial guard in Washington D.C. It was the middle of the Vietnam War. There were three platoons of us, and some of us did three or four funerals every day in Arlington Cemetery. I can't remember any day when we didn't go out at least once.

How do you get through so many funerals?

Well, you harden up to it. The ceremonial guard also performed for visiting foreign dignitaries, like Charles de Gaulle. Once, the Michael Douglas Show called up and asked

for a Navy drill team. We didn't have a drill team, but we put one together for the show, and they flew us up to Boston to perform.

What did you do after serving in the ceremonial guard?

They sent me down to Charleston SC to serve on the USS Howard W. Gilmore. I worked in the print shop on board. Norma and I were married then, and our first child, Craig, was born in South Carolina. But he died of spinal meningitis as a baby. We were in South Carolina, a thousand miles away, and we had to make preparations. We came home to New Hampshire for the service. I finished in the Navy on May 10, 1968, and I came home to a job working for the Valley News in advertising. Apart from five years selling cars, I worked for the Valley News until I retired.

Have you been involved with the church throughout your life?

My dad was a church trustee at Etna Baptist, and my mother helped out too, so I grew up in the church. But I drifted away as a teenager, like a lot of people do. I was baptized later, in the 1960's, as an adult.

What is one thing that you think our church does well?

Our church is such a friendly church. It doesn't make any difference who you are – we all get along. And if there is something to be done, it gets done now. It's just a very nice working atmosphere and it keeps going that way.

What do we need to improve on?

Not much that I can think of. We take care of things as they come along, we have a great pastor, and everybody works together. We should have more suppers and get the community together more, though. We want to start more cookouts and band nights -- and we're working on it with the Outreach Committee.

What's the biggest impact the church has had on your life?

The biggest impact was when our son passed away. It happened and we had to move on, but it showed me the importance of God and religion, and we had to rely on our faith. That was my awakening. Norma bought me this cross then that I wear all the time now, no matter what.

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