

Lebanon Valley College®



Voices of Lebanon Valley College
150th Anniversary Oral History Project

Lebanon Valley College Archives—Vernon and Doris Bishop Library

Oral History of
Kenneth Grimm
Alumnus, Class of 1950

Date: April 10, 2014
Interviewed by Art Ford
Professor *Emeritus* of English and Alumnus, Class of 1959

Transcribed by Jananne Ferrere
Vernon and Doris Bishop Library Student Worker and Alumna, Class of 2015

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Mr. Kenneth Grimm '50—Grimm, son of legendary LVC professor Samuel “Soggy” O. Grimm '12, H'42, grew up across the street from the LVC campus. He speaks of his contacts with Valley professors and administrators. He retired from Bell Telephone in 1987.

A: OK. This is Art Ford. I'm here in the Bishop Library at Lebanon Valley College. The date is April 10, 2014 and I'm here with Ken Grimm, who is the son of Dr. Grimm, affectionately known by generation after generation of students as Soggy Grimm. And we are going to talk about some of his experiences here at Lebanon Valley College. We are going to start with a little bit of information about him. Why don't you tell me where you went to high school, for instance, and when?

K: Again, what did you ask? I'm a little hard of hearing (laughing).

A: Sure. I'm interested in where you went to high school before college.

K: Oh, Annville High School.

A: And when did you graduate from there?

K: In 1944.

A: OK. What was Annville High School like in those days? What do you remember about it?

K: Again, what did you ask?

A: What kinds of activities were you involved in in high school?

K: Oh, I was involved in a lot of sports activities, basically. In tennis, in baseball team, and the basketball team. So, I had a lot of that activity.

A: And where did you live at that time?

K: In Annville. 222 Main Street—East Main Street in Annville.

A: OK. That was sort of the family homestead for many years, wasn't it?

K: It was. I think we moved there from a home that we rented on Maple Avenue, and then we moved down to East Main Street. My father bought a home down at 222 East Main Street. And that was in the early '30s, but I can remember a lot of the activity of carrying the things out of

the old home down to the new house, and of course I remember a lot of the activities that we had to do to fix up the new house, in order to make it acceptable for our residence there.

A: What siblings do you have?

K: I'm sorry.

A: Brothers or sisters?

K: I had three brothers and as we mentioned before, we all went to Lebanon Valley College.

That was a thing that we expected because dad was a professor at Lebanon Valley College. So we went there.

A: So you started there right after high school then, I suppose?

K: Yes.

A: And that would be 1944?

K: Yes.

A: Now we will skip over the college years because we will come back to that. That's what we want to talk mostly about. What did you do after you left Lebanon Valley College?

K: I went to Penn State to get a master's degree in science.

A: Did you major in physics at Lebanon Valley?

K: Majored in physics and in electrical engineering. I took two majors.

A: After Penn State, did you continue on for more education or did you leave there for a job?

K: No, I went for a job and got additional education when I got to Bell Telephone Laboratories.

They had what they called that would introduce new employees to the business that Bell Telephone Laboratories supported, which of course was a telephone business.

A: How long were you there with them?

K: I was there for approximately 33 years. Then I stayed for another three years as a consultant for Bell.

A: So you retired in what year?

K: In—I think it was '87, 1987.

A: What have you been doing in all of those years since then?

K: Trying to enjoy retirement (laughing) and to a great extent that has been very successful. And we have enjoyed it very much.

A: And your own family then. Did you marry someone that went to Lebanon Valley also?

K: No, she was a resident of Annville and I met her through our school activities. And also through one of the societies that we had here at Lebanon Valley College. She was—happened to be involved as well. We met through that mechanism.

A: She did graduate from Lebanon Valley then?

K: No.

A: And children?

K: Children—we have four boys, just like our mother and father. They have now spread out over the countryside.

A: Let's turn our attention then to Lebanon Valley College and your recollections of what it was like. When you were growing up, of course your dad was a professor here you said. Were you on campus very much with him? Did you get to know some of the faculty; that sort of thing?

K: Very much so. Lebanon Valley College became a part of our growing up, really. It is much as dad was involved in so many things and we of course came over to the College with him on

many occasions. He would bring us over and we would be involved in some of the activities that were going on at Lebanon Valley.

A: You mean the activities in the Physics Department, or just in general on campus?

K: Just in general, the campus.

A: Can you think of any specific ones?

K: One of them—one that I don't think goes on anymore—was the May Day celebration at Lebanon Valley College. They had the May Day Dance around the May Day pole with the ribbons coming off. That was one activity that I remember a lot of. The one part of it was that they appointed a King and a Queen, but they wanted some young people who are kids, on the platform. So, where did they look for the people? The children of the faculty members. The number of times I was dressed up in all white suit with some frills on my shirt, lace—I guess you would call, which I didn't particularly enjoy as a five-year old. Particularly, when my mother said I had to keep the white suit clean (laughing), so that was always a struggle to get me up on the stage with the rest of the people with the crazy—not a dress, but a suit on.

A: What other activities do you recall from those days when you were just the kid growing up in Annville?

K: One other thing that I reflected on was some of dad's involvement was—he for some reason or another got assigned to be the—take care of the clock in the Administration Building and from time to time there would be troubles with clock that would get out and start banging all of the time, or it didn't come on when it was supposed to. So he got out a ladder and readjusted the clock, and he seemed the principle one that did that. On one of those occasions, he fell

down the ladder and one of the workers here found him lying on the floor. I think the ladder came out of the museum that we had out there on the floor.

A: Was it a science-type museum?

K: Yes.

A: Was it mostly physics?

K: No, there were a lot of animals. In fact, those animals ended up all over the College campus at times when the students got in there and would distribute them around the campus (laughing).

A: Did they do this at night time so people woke up the next morning and saw a lion or something?

K: Yes, yes. That was a trick that went on for a number of years. It lasted them until I left, as far as I know, when I left Lebanon Valley College.

A: And that was '48 when you left?

K: It was about '50.

A: Oh, '50?

K: 1950.

A: Do you remember when your father fell out of there?

K: I would say it was probably when I was partially grown and before I went to Lebanon Valley College. So, it was probably in the late '30s, 1930s.

A: Did he continue to go up and fix the clock after that?

K: Yes. He was—there was a number of occasions, when I would come home after I was through college, he would get me to go up on some of the roof on our house, and I really didn't

want to go up (laughing). He said, 'Well, if you don't go up then I will go up' and I didn't want to see him go up on the roof of the house. So I went up.

A: When you were a student at the College, did you live in a dormitory or did you live at home?

K: No, I lived at home.

A: At home, OK. Well, you were practically on campus because you were so close.

K: Yes.

A: So you were involved with a number of activities at the College as well?

K: Yes.

A: What were some of your favorite things to do there?

K: That's a little more difficult for me to pick out, but...

A: You said you were involved with sports in high school. Were you involved with any sports at the College?

K: No. I didn't get in any specific—oh, yes! I was on the tennis team.

A: Did they have a pretty good team?

K: Not exceptional, but we got some wins (laughing). We played Moravian, and a number of smaller—Albright; some of the smaller colleges in the area.

A: Anything else? Any other activities, clubs?

K: We were—I was invited to join the (long pause) let's see... I'm trying to remember now—oh, it was called, at the time, the (long pause)

A: Was it a social organization? Like Kalo or Philo?

K: It was the—neither of those—supposedly one of the first fraternities that came on campus.

A: One of the firsts was The Knights of The Valley.

K: That's it! That's right.

A: That was pretty new then probably when you joined it.

K: Yes, it was only about a year or two old at that time.

A: What kind of organization was it? Fraternities weren't allowed on campus...

K: Right.

A: How did they do that?

K: They got permission from the College to operate. We generally held meetings in the dormitory—

A: In Kreider Hall; the men's dormitory?

K: Yes.

A: Were you down in the basement of that?

K: We had some of our meetings down in the basement rooms. We didn't have our own room. There were only 20 at the most, so we didn't require a large room.

A: Was it with only 20—of course more men than that on campus, was it difficult to get into this organization?

K: I think a lot of people felt it was, yes.

A: Did you go in as a freshman?

K: Pardon?

A: Did you go in as a freshman? A first year?

K: No, it was I think as a sophomore. It took a little while to get known on the campus and I think that was one of the reasons it took a while.

A: In the organization, what did you do?

K: You know, I'm not sure what all of the activities were. We tried to help out with—I'm not sure what areas we provided (unintelligible). I don't remember what those were.

A: What were your meetings like? What did you do there?

K: You know, I'm not sure that I remember. I remember more about the initiation than what we did at meetings. At that time, this particular group got away from the paddling and the painting, and all of those activities that went on in the early years. This was of course when I came back from the service. One of the initiations were you had to go out to the cemetery and get some names off the cemetery and you had to do it at night time. One of the chores they gave me was to make my way over to the girls' college over near Allentown, and I couldn't use any—have anybody drive me. I had to get a note from one of the girls in the school to bring back.

A: So did you hitch-hike over?

K: Yes.

A: Was that Cedar Crest College?

K: Yes.

A: Let's shift a bit to the academic side of things. You said that you were a double major in physics and engineering?

K: Electrical engineering.

A: What faculty members do you remember from those days? Obviously, you took courses from your father. What was he like as a teacher?

K: I thought that he was a little demanding on me.

A: You more than the other students?

K: I thought so (laughing). He had a tendency to make me respond more than the others, but the other students thought I was getting a soft touch.

A: I bet you didn't get a soft touch, did you?

K: (Laughing) No, I did not.

A: What was he like as a teacher then, was he primarily a lecture, or was there a lot of discussion in class?

K: No, he wanted to demonstrate some of the principles that he was trying to get over. He would try to recreate them as much as he could, which brought more involved with that. So he was more demonstrating than—but he was also telling you the principles you should know about.

A: So there was a lab that went along with his courses?

K: Yes.

A: And is that where he could demonstrate what he was talking about?

K: He would always bring to lecture a demonstration of the principle that he was trying to get across.

A: Where did he get the demonstrations? Where did he get the material?

K: Those came to us through the years. He had collected them and used them over and over again. They were used through the years.

A: What about other courses that you took? Did you have any other courses that you liked?

K: The mathematics was of course essential of what I wanted to get into, so I took a liking to the mathematics.

A: Do you remember who the teacher was?

K: Sometimes there was a teacher, sometimes it was another teacher. I don't remember off-hand who the others were, to tell you the truth.

A: So you had to take other courses too, outside of the sciences?

K: Yes.

A: History, English, and so on.

K: Yes.

A: Do you remember any of those teachers?

K: Well, history of course was done by Dr.—oh, he was—one of his sons was a good friend of mine—David—

A: Wallace?

K: No... Oh, Wallace! Yes, sorry, I misunderstood you. David Wallace was one of my friends and he was the son of Dr. Wallace.

A: Did you have Dr. Wallace for a class?

K: Yes.

A: Do you remember anything about that class? Was it a course that you liked? Probably a literature course, wasn't it?

K: I don't really remember.

A: OK. I'm interested in your reaction to what has happened to the College over the years, since you were attached to it so early, and you've been back since then. Every once in a while you see some changes. What are the biggest changes you noticed when you come back on campus?

K: Well, since I was the last one, I didn't get back on campus much when I came back. Most of the people I associated with were gone. I remember Fred Sample, he was one of The Knights of The Valley, and he—

A: You're remembering him when he was a student?

K: As a student, yes.

A: Because he was president.

K: I knew he was a good football player; he was a good safety. And we had in The Knights of The Valley, we had some of the key players. Some of the linemen were in the society.

A: So a lot of football players were there as Knights of The Valley?

K: Generally, I felt like they were probably invited because they were some leaders in the sports arena, so they got that kind of attention. You wonder how people were invited into Knights of The Valley.

A: Was that a kind of elite organization?

K: Yes. It was interpreted as a unique organization on the campus. And I wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing but I decided I would join them.

A: One question that I like to ask people toward the end of the interview, and this would be a little bit different for you, as a son of a faculty member, as well as a student of the College. The question is a general question. What does Lebanon Valley College mean to you? Do you think back over your days here and what kind of impact it might have had on your later life? What are your thoughts about that?

K: For me, the central part of my growing up, I feel that my ability to get experience at Lebanon Valley College certainly helped me in my future activities. The camaraderie of the campus

activity basically helped me—one of the really interesting series that—or events—was at the world’s end [World War II]. We got this heavy influx of the people coming back from World War II and I was one of them that came back later on, and the question was how would this group intermix with the other members on the campus; the ones that were younger and hadn’t gone through maybe the kinds of experiences that the veterans did. I was interested to see how well we would get along, and particularly since I had gone through the paddling before going into the service, I didn’t particularly enjoy that, but I thought you needed to go through to understand how to deal with things like that. When we came back, it was interesting to see how the older ones that came back from the service, how they would react to those kinds of activities on campus. And although there was a cutback on the amount of paddling that went on, I think that during that phase, there were people that didn’t want to go through that. But nothing really bad happened; it seemed to go through an agreement. ‘OK, you don’t want to go through this;’ there were no real fights.

A: That’s interesting.

K: I think it was a needed experience for me to go through.

A: Let’s back up a bit. You said you graduated in ’44. Were you drafted into the Army after you graduated?

K: No, it was—I was 4-F. So I went to Lebanon Valley for a few years, but I kept going in and volunteering to go. But because of my eye-sight, they wouldn’t take me. But by the time they were going to invade Japan, they had to build up, so they went further down into the barrel. So they finally accepted me.

A: What year was it that they accepted you—that you went into the Army?

K: I guess that was about '45. Pretty close to the end of the war.

A: Pretty close to V-J day. So were you one of the soldiers that had invaded Japan—were you one of them slated to go along on the invasion?

K: No because I had physics, they wanted to train me. I didn't have any electrical engineering at that point, but I had about four semesters I think. They wanted to put me into Electronic Technician training classes. So, I went into their Navy's Electronic Technician, called an ETM. So, I finished that—

A: When did you get out of the Army then?

K: In '46.

A: In '46. So after the war was over then that was when—

K: So that was one thing; they didn't see it coming. I think that was one thing General Marshall was very good about. He knew that he needed to keep people in some kind of activity before they were released. That's why they waited until '46. They knew it was going to help the Europeans get over all of the damage and give them aid.

A: That was the Marshall Plan.

K: Yes. And I think that was a smart idea.

A: That proved to be a very smart idea.

K: It did.

A: So you never got out of this country then?

K: No, I never was out of the country.

A: When you came back from the Army then, had you already graduated from Lebanon Valley or did you have to take more courses here?

K: I had to take more courses here.

A: That's why you graduated in about 1950, you said?

K: Yes.

A: Somewhere around there.

K: Yes. So I got another two years, I think, here when I came back.

A: Do you have any other further thoughts before we end this? Anything that I didn't ask you or that you hoped I would ask you? Thoughts that came to mind while you were answering other questions? Final thoughts? This is your opportunity to take to the future. What would you want people to know about Lebanon Valley College 200 years from now?

K: Well, I just feel that the experience at Lebanon Valley College really sent me off on a good track and I give them credit for doing that for me. The other aspect of it is that Lebanon Valley College treated my father very well, too. He, of course himself and his wife, my mother, was involved in a lot of the auxiliaries and so forth. She was the one that donated me to fill in on the May Day celebrations (laughing). They were involved with this, even though they were given some other opportunities, they would rather stay at Lebanon Valley College.

A: He started here pretty young. He had just graduated and stayed as a faculty member. That was in 1912, or something like that.

K: Yes, 1912. I think he started as an aide to the principal. They lived in South Hall. Does South Hall still exist?

A: No.

K: No, OK. But they lived in South Hall while he was ending his ed. degree. He got his degree from—but he was acting aide and lived in South Hall as a monitor, or whatever you called them.

I don't know if he was principal of the Lebanon Valley Academy or not, but he was here and my oldest brother was born in South Hall.

A: Was that Sam Jr.?

K: No, that was Henry.

A: Oh, Henry.

K: Henry was the oldest. And Henry went on to the University of Pennsylvania and got his degree—

A: Was South Hall the building that the Annville Academy was in originally?

K: Yes.

A: And that's gone now.

K: Oh, it is? The whole thing is gone now? I didn't get to go by it.

A: Well, you will have to take a look at that.

K: Yes.

A: I think we will end it at that point. A lot of good information, thank you very much.

K: Well, I wish I could have done a better job—

A: You did a great job, thank you.