

## Dancing Dairyman

John Ramsay has a more diverse portfolio than most can say; from being an educator, to a dairy farmer, to a dance teacher. His story began back in the 30's. during the Great Depression, when his father worked as a steelworker.

"We lived in town, in a small little duplex, and we only saw dad on weekends," Ramsay said. "He was a great father, but he had to work hard. I remember him coming home with a hat on, and the hat was scorched, because he worked in the open heart of a furnace. And I was born in 1930, so the Depression had hit, and times were hard. My dad helped to organize the workers to try to get better working conditions, and they went on strike, so I remember the soup lines, the strike, the mounted police, and for a few times we were kept home from school because it was too dangerous, since dad was one of the leaders of the strike. He became the first president of the local steelworkers union. And I remember as a young kid going down the union hall and sending out mailings, announcing they're having a meeting or something like that. So that's what turned me to agriculture. Too much strife and danger in industrial society."

Growing up, Ramsay lived in a shotgun house, which was a very narrow house in a row of other shotgun houses.

"Eugene Grace was the president of Bethlehem Steel. And he lived in a palatial house- it's now a hospital. Huge grounds, all fenced, he had sentries with guns patrolling his place, because he was a wealthy man. And the workers, we lived in this shotgun house, you go in the front door, you're in the living room, then you're in the dining room, and the kitchen was in the back of it. So there's two rooms upstairs, two bedrooms, one for my parents, and the other for four kids. The three boys slept in one bed. And we'd fight about who was going to sleep on the outside. Because you know, there might be wolves or something. (laughs) Three boys in one bed and my sister in the other bed. They were tough times, and dad--that was before the days of Social Security, before the days of health insurance, and he helped get all of those things established."

Ramsay's life experiences show that people don't always know what they want to do right off the bat.

"I've been in education all my life but I'm an old man so I've had a lot of different experiences," Ramsay said. "I taught college when I first got out of college. Then I went up and started my own dairy farm. ... I was dairying because I needed to make some money while I was getting started, then I went back and got my PhD, that took seven years, then I became the director of a school ... a folk school ... then I went to Berea College. I was in charge of the dance program. That's about as different as you get, a dancing dairyman."

Ramsay's varied interests tie together when he explains why he became a conscientious objector to the Korean War.

"I was in college when the United States entered the Korean War," Ramsay said. "And it just seemed wrong to me, to try to solve our problems with war. And so I wrestled with that in college, but when you were in college back then you were exempt from the draft. They did have the draft back then. So, especially I talked about with one of my buddies, my roommate for awhile, and he felt that we had to fight the Communists, and that's what we were doing in Korea. That was his obligation. But I felt that there had to be better ways, like providing milk for people."

When Ramsay graduated from college, he decided to become an agricultural missionary and go to Africa and provide milk for people. However, Uncle Sam wanted him to join the Army, so it was an eight-year ordeal with him attempting to attain conscientious objector status, with all the draft procedures and appeals.

"We had a law that said if you has religious objections to serving in the military you could be exempt," Ramsay said. "But my local draft board would not recognize that, they thought I was trying to dodge the draft. So I went on for eight years, so I was a conscientious objector. And that was difficult. Because I was arrested, and went through courts, all of the procedures. It was a long ordeal, it took me a while to get over that and to feel comfortable with my decision. And I was sick with society, because most young men went to the Army, to fulfill their obligation that way. I was willing to fulfill my obligation in some non-violent way, but I wasn't going to carry a gun and shoot someone. Must be a better way of solving our problems. You can kill me, you can shoot me, but I'm not going to shoot somebody."

Clearly, Ramsay is passionate about peaceful solutions to problems.

"I don't have the world all figured out, like I say, I'm open-minded," Ramsay said. "There may be all sorts of solutions, and I might be wrong in my solutions. But I was led to bring people together in dancing. Enjoying each other's company. Because once you dance with somebody, you're not as likely to want to shoot them."

-By Issac Braeske