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Keith Ostling



I am privileged to sit down with Keith Ostling. Keith is a Buena Vista, Colorado, author of many western novels. Keith, share some of your background.

Keith: My wife and I were raised in Denver, lived in Dallas for 18 years and spent 6 years in Colorado Springs. The truth of the matter is we simply got fed up with the city. So we decided we wanted a small town so we started looking in Colorado and even some in Wyoming and Utah. We liked Buena Vista the best and, as they say, "The rest is history." I grew up in the

era of Roy Rogers and Gene Autry. I went to the movie theatre without missing a single Saturday. Roy has always been my hero. My older brother is a fanatic about Roy Rogers. He knows all of Roy's songs. So, we have always been fans of the good old fashioned "Cowboy Hero." There are not antiheroes in the books I write. There are bad guys that are easy to tell and the good guys are like "Chancy Flint." Chancy doesn't take himself too seriously, he doesn't always win. He got the crap kicked out of him a couple of times, but in the long run he comes out on top.

He's sincere, honest as the day is long, even though he lost his parents when he was thirteen, ten years later he still thinks of what Ma & Pa would want him to do in a certain circumstance. He is respectful and believes in doing the right thing.

Marv: When did you start writing?

Keith: I started writing when we lived in Dallas. My son & I built a model railroad layout in one of our bedrooms. So I started making up stories about this little town that was on the train board. I thought what we were doing was "Kinda cute," so I'll just type this up, three or four pages, and put this up on the wall so we can see the history of this town. Next thing I knew, I had expanded that and pretty soon it became a novel. I had, for years, written policy and procedure manuals. I was in data processing so I wrote data processing documentation and all kinds of technical things. I always thought, "Some day I'll try my hand at a novel." So I blew up this little train story into my first novel called, "First Lady From Nowhere." Nowhere being a gold mining camp between Pitkin and Tin Cup, Colorado. The guy that found the gold there was often asked, "Where'd you find your gold?" His answer was, "Nowhere." The First Lady From Nowhere was a madam...came up from Denver. She is kinda the classic, "Good hearted whore." She did a lot of charitable things. She was a good person.

Marv: Apparently this was the case with many.

Keith: So, that's how it all started. The second book that I wrote was the "Trail To The Palisades."

Marv: Before we go further, could you give me a little idea about your thought process before you begin a book? Perhaps you begin and let it flow!

Keith: It's not terribly scientific. All the English classes I've every taken, emphasized, outline and then write. I don't do that. I struggle until I get a rough idea.

Marv: How do these ideas come to you?

Keith: I don't know, I really don't know.

Marv: Any of them at night?

Keith: Oh yes. Many of them...in fact most of them come at night...from my subconscious. When I go to sleep at night, I will often think about the next book and where ever I am in the process with that book. I will wake the next morning with a potential direction. Sometimes it's pretty good, sometimes...that's where the ideas come from. Then I develop the character. How would this character react in a given situation? That's the stimuli.

Marv: Keith, is any of this autobiographical?

Keith: No...no. I've never known a hooker and I've never been a cowboy.

Marv: There are these values that you talked about, that I assume, flow through your novels.

Keith: Those are more autobiographical, I guess. The values that Chancy Flint has are the values that I have. "Be kind to calves and women, in that order."

Marv: Did you grow up around agriculture?

Keith: I grew up in Denver, went to work in the Bank when I was 16 and was in that business for 35 years. I wanted to be a cowboy. I worked on a "Dude Ranch," in my 15th summer, for about 6 weeks and that's the only brush with cowboying, I've had.

Marv: I think that working with cattle can get in your blood.

Keith: I think so too. I think I would have been a good cowboy.

Marv: I'm sure you would have.

Keith: Cowboy technique and cowboy information that I write about, is a result of extensive research. The process of writing a book happens over a long period of time. Even now, I make changes to books I have written some time ago. Since all my books are on computer, this isn't an issue. If I had 5000 books sitting in my garage...for sale, I couldn't change 'em.

Keith: I've just written the, "Lake County Wars." None of the research materials I read told the whole story. So, I have finally pieced together, what I think actually happen. So, this novel is one coherent story, with real names, real places, real dates, newspaper quotes and things like that. Then I went back and put Chancy Flint moving through this history. The Chancy Flint books are told in the first person. So Chancy tells the story. He has some "run-ins" with some of the historical people.

Marv: How long does it take you to write a book?

Keith: That one took a long time because of all the research. Some of the older books probably took a year to write. "I have a hard time knowing when a book is finished."

Marv: Your hero continues, as well.

Keith: My plan for the next book is to do another in the Dan Curie series. There is a space of about 5 years between the first two books in this series so he could do something during this time or prior to the first book in the series.

Marv: When do you do your writing? You own and operate "The Paradise" restaurant, so when do you find the time?

Keith: I write at 5 o'clock in the morning, 12 o'clock at night and sometimes here. The only marketing that I do is these "teaser excerpts" from my books that are shown in our restaurant menus. People come in, order their lunch and read an excerpt. I'll go by and ask them how they liked it and that's how I sell my books.

Marv: Where are you headed with all this?

Keith: I don't know. I didn't write books to be published. I wrote them for myself...an escape from day to day life. Sometimes I'll tell my wife, "I'm going in my office and go to Texas now." I think it makes sense to try and get them published but the thing for me to do is to have them published on the internet. They'll get it on Amazon; they'll get it on Barnes & Noble, etc.

Marv: Keith, as we bring this to a close, talk a little about the West. You're perspective of the West. What are those things that are still endearing to you and what concerns you?

Keith: The values put forth by Roy Rogers and Gene Autry; taking responsibility for life, and not only your own life, but for someone else, being there to help people when they're down, always standing up for what's right and fighting against evil. Those are the kinds of things that make me fond of the ways of the old West. I've read several times where people would feed their enemies. If you asked for a meal you got it. No questions. You don't leave a man in the wilderness without a horse. Those values appeal to me...honesty and forthrightness. My characters have those attributes. I worry an awful lot about today's America: The corporate nonsense that is going on, recipients of the "Big Bale Out," spending money on executives that got their companies in trouble, to me that is unconscionable. The greed. Politicians, "I wouldn't give you a buck for the whole bunch of 'em," there is no honesty, there is not near enough concern for those they're representing.

Marv: What do feel some of the myths of the West were?

Keith: It wasn't as violent as we have been led to believe. I think the "fast draw" artist is largely an invention of Hollywood. It stands to reason that in a land where guns were carried for a reason, guns were tools like a shovel or a pitchfork. Some men would be better than using guns than others. The fast drawers didn't exist. I

do think the vast majority of the people that came west were courageous, honest and hard working people.

Marv: What was the role that women played in the west?

Keith: Women in the west were strong. They weren't silly little things that would faint at the drop of a hat. They had to be strong. Augusta Tabor is perhaps one of the best examples. She stood by H.A.W. Tabor for years when he was not making any money at all. Many of these women walked from the east to the west. Don't tell me they weren't tough.

Marv: What final words do you have?

Keith: I wish we could go back to the morals and the standards that people had in those days. Unfortunately, I don't see that happening.

Marv: It had to be an exciting time.

Keith: I wish I would have lived back then. I wish I could have been a cowboy.