



King Park History

With his wife Velma by his side, Lester King fulfilled a boyhood dream that has delighted children within the south county for more than 50 years. Even today, the King's contributions to the quality of life for residents of Elk Grove and surrounding communities can be seen at their Franklin skating rink in girlish giggles and miles of smiles.

The tale of the Kings and King's Skate Country started in the Mid-West more than 90 years ago. Lester Miles King was born the youngest of 3 boys, to Alonzo Stanton King and Ella May Miles King in Oklahoma's Indian Territory on September 2, 1908. His was a farming family, growing wheat and other crops. For a brief period, however, during Lester's childhood, the family owned a hotel and permitted children to skate along the floors of the basement. Lester's wife, Velma, believes that the image of happy children whizzing by on their skates stuck with Lester through most of his life and prompted his desire to build a skate facility.

During Lester's sophomore year in high school, the family moved to Topeka, Kansas and took up residence at a farm adjacent to the Bailey's. Velma B. King was born on September 24, 1909 the oldest of 3 girls born to Elzie and Katie Bailey. The family lived on their farm in Topeka, Kansas where they grew corn, wheat and hay and raised livestock including cows, sheep, chicken and geese. Velma helped her father tend the farm despite her mother's objections that it was not the kind of activity befitting a girl. According to Velma, "I could milk cows a lot better than I could play the piano."

The Baileys met the Kings shortly after their arrival in Topeka. Lester and his mother traveled to the Bailey farm to see about buying some milk from the Bailey's dairy operation. Lester and Velma met during this visit and began dating while attending Seaman High School. Lester graduated high school in 1927 and attended Strickler's Business College in Topeka. A year later, Velma graduated and attended Capital City Commercial College. Lester found work in banking and bookkeeping in Topeka after college. It was around this time, however, that the Great Depression hit and altered the way of life for the entire country.

At age 22, Lester followed his brother out to Los Angeles to find work. He landed a job at U.S. Motors where he coordinated the shipping of auto parts and sorted mail. Back in Kansas, Velma went to work at Fidelity State Savings Bank. Lester returned to Topeka in October 1931 for a brief visit - long enough to collect his family, and propose to and marry his sweetheart, Velma. The couple moved to Los Angeles shortly thereafter.

A large-scale earthquake rocked the Los Angeles area around 1933 and, in its wake, economic aftershocks followed. Lester lost his job at U.S. Motors. The newlyweds viewed the layoff as an opportunity to join their family members working crops in Northern California. They moved to the tiny Delta town of Thornton. Their work required travel up and down the valley following the latest harvest. The 2 had numerous jobs in the ag industry managing crops including asparagus, peaches, cherries, apricots, pears, and others. They were devoted employees to 1 grower in particular, Mr. Brown - working for him for nearly 30 years.

In 1939, the Kings became parents to the first of their 2 children, their daughter Darlene. In 1941, they relocated their family to the small town of Franklin where they built the home that Velma still lives in today. Their son Dan was born in 1943.

Working in agriculture was a seasonal business and it left the winter months fairly free. Around 1947, Lester bought land from Otto Hansen to build his skate rink. He opened the rink with Velma's support in December of 1948 and maintained seasonal operations (October through May) for many years. When open, the rink attracted children from Elk Grove, Galt, Hood, Franklin, and other towns along the river. For the Kings, winter meant work at the rink and spring and summer was reserved for work in the packing houses. This was the way of life was for the King family for many, many years.

On April 12, 1964, after a full day of work at the skate rink, Lester suffered a massive heart failure and passed away. His death left Velma and their son Dan to manage the skate rink. The mother and son team converted rink operations to a year-round schedule, and in 1972, with his mother's support, Dan opened a second Kings Skate Country in Sacramento off Bradshaw Road.

According to Velma, Lester believed that "if you keep kids busy, they won't get into trouble." "He wanted all kids to be happy and have a good time." The contributions of the King family greatly expanded the recreational opportunities for children when the first rink opened in 1948. Its operation continues to create fun and lasting memories for many local visitors.

The information within this document was created at the time of park dedication and may not be current.