

THE LEGACY OF MY BIG BROTHER, KEN

A Tribute to Strength, Grit, and Quiet Faith

"He reminds me of who I can be."



Not everyone is lucky enough to have a big brother.

But I am. And not just any big brother, I have Ken.

Ken was born in Gunnison, Colorado, forged from two lines of rugged, noble stock.

The Hansen Line: Grit and Ground-Smarts

On our dad's side, the lineage runs deep into the Nebraska plains, Swedish and Danish descent. Grandpa and Grandma were successful farmers who built an incredible life with little formal education but endless grit and ground-smart wisdom. When financial hardship hit, Grandpa didn't fold. He picked himself up by the boot press and moved the family to Denver, Colorado.



There, he managed a fading apartment complex and, through vision, determination, and planning for something more, built up a hotel business from the ground up. He dreamed. He planned. And he thought about legacy. But it wasn't glamorous. It was slow and hard, with plenty of setbacks. Still, he moved forward with a kind of deep, enduring resolve.

Later in life, Grandpa began driving massive semi-trucks, faithfully and almost quietly heroic. He didn't do it for show. He did it because it was the next thing that needed to be done. When Gregg and I were about twelve, we got to ride with him in one of those semis. Sitting high in the cab, taking in the world from that rumbling rig, we couldn't have been more proud. That ride wasn't just a childhood memory; it was a glimpse into the kind of man he was.

The Vouga Legacy: High Plains, High Character

On the other side, from our mother's family, came the Vouga legacy. They emigrated from Switzerland to the high plains outside of Gunnison in 1911, with vision and purpose.

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Grandpa Vouga, known to us as Popeye, originally intended to head to California to strike gold. But on his way, he stopped in the Colorado town of Doyleville to meet up with another Swiss family. Something about the high plains, over 9,000 feet up, captured his heart. So did Sophie, a bright, strong, deeply capable woman who would become his wife. He married her, brought her over, and together they built a life from nothing.

And I do mean nothing. No electricity. No running water. Dirt floors. Dirt roofs. Rugged cabins carved into the side

of nowhere just outside of Del Norte. But with sheer tenacity, they started a cattle operation and became well known and deeply respected in the area.

Those summers we spent up there are seared into my memory. Running wild under that Colorado sky, we got to spend time with Popeye, with Granny, and with our hero, Mother's brother, Ernie. He had a donkey named Meany, and he taught us everything. How to build fences. Bail hay. Tend livestock. Work with our hands. We'd jump in that old Austin-Healey or clamber into the bed of a pickup and head out for real work, not pretend play. We came back dusty, tired, and proud. And if there was ever a threat, Ken would step in. That's who he was.



Protector, Gymnast, Brother

Ken was our protector. Always. I remember once in Oakland, racially tense at the time, when Gregg was getting hassled by a group of guys. Ken didn't even blink. He stepped in with that commanding presence and those gymnast's arms and made sure the trouble stopped, right then and there. It wasn't just physical. It was moral. He had your back.

Another time, Gregg and I were about twelve, walking near Grand Lake. A punk gave us a look, one of those looks, and Ken told us to stay put. He walked back, and next thing we knew, that situation was handled. I asked him what happened. He simply said, "I didn't like the way he looked at you." That was Ken. Intuitive. Grounded. Alert. Not reactionary, but decisive.

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Ken was also a phenomenal gymnast, one of the best our high school ever produced. He blazed a trail that Gregg and I would later walk. We didn't overlap competitively, but when we joined the team, the Hansen name already meant something. And Ken welcomed us with brotherly pride, not competition. He opened the door.

I also remember a time I was dating a girl named Joan. We ended up at her mother's house. She was clearly taken with Ken, as most people were. Movie-star handsome, strong, charismatic. But when she made a play for him, Ken didn't take the bait. He told her to get lost. He was loyal. He had integrity. That moment stuck with me.

Healing, Faith, and the Ties That Deepened

As the years progressed, Ken and I grew closer. Like all families, our story included scars. Some of them came from trauma passed down. Our grandpa was a complex man. He handed both strength and wounds to our dad, who in turn, though deeply well-meaning and immensely successful as a respected veterinarian, carried some of those scars into his own parenting. At times, Ken received too much harshness and not enough validation for who he truly was.

But then Dad found faith. And with that faith came healing. Over time, things began to change. The tension in our relationships gave way to grace. Forgiveness took root. Ken, too, came to faith, and it softened his heart. His connection with Gregg and me deepened, especially with Gregg.



While Leah and I were living and serving overseas in Germany, building a life together, Ken and Gregg grew even closer. They shared something fierce and beautiful—a brotherhood forged through martial arts.

With Gregg's guidance as a third-degree black belt, Ken became an accomplished martial artist himself. Through those years, he discovered more of who he truly was. In that bond with Gregg, he found not only strength, but grounding and confidence.

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After Gregg, Even Closer



Later in life, Ken found Juliet. A radiant, kind, remarkable woman. He married her in his early fifties, and together they built a life that brought more warmth, more joy, and more of that beautiful legacy he had been building all along. Just as our grandparents had done with bare hands and brave hearts, Ken carved out a meaningful career as a landscape architect. He was deeply respected, never cut corners, always guided by a simple, powerful mantra: integrity. That's Ken. Integrity defines him.

And now, after losing Gregg, something no family should ever have to endure, Ken and I have grown even closer. He is the one I turn to when I need a word of encouragement, when I need a broader vision, when I need a reminder of who I am. Ken speaks with authority, wisdom, and compassion. He reminds me of who I can be.

And So, Ken...

Today, I watch him take care of our 92-year-old mother, the matriarch of the family, the gentle and strong heart of our story. Ken, along with our stepsister Karen, has taken on the mantle of care. He brings her to his home. He and Juliet wrap her in love, kindness, and safety. They've traveled with her, housed her, honored her. And now, as the years close in, Ken and Karen are making plans to move her up permanently.

That's just who he is. Strong. Selfless. Steady. Gritty. Tender. Integrity in motion.

He embodies the best of both the Hansen and the Vouga lines. Strength and grace. Karen. Luke. Lorraine. And above all, big brother Ken.

I think of all the seasons we've lived through. The hardships we've weathered. The childhood laughter, the pranks, the tears, the distant chapters, and the redemptive ones. I think of Ken walking with me through the valley of loss after Gregg's passing. I think of the way his voice steadies me, his presence encourages me, and his quiet strength gives me perspective. I think of the way he has loved Juliet, honored our mother, and stood by me in ways no one else could.

So yes, I'm lucky. I'm blessed. I just want the world to know about him. Because he's a great man. A great brother. A great husband. A great son.

Ken, I love you. I admire you. And I'm proud to call you my big brother.

Jeff