

KENNETH LEBER, JR. – SARASOTA, FL

Kenneth writes that: "My wife and I were both blessed to reach our 85th birthdays in 2007. I was born in Richmond in 1922 and began working in the Richmond reperfector office in 1940 and worked there for sixteen years. I have many fond memories of the great W. U. family. That is where I met my wife, Mabel. I was employed in the Testing & Regulating Department as a maintenance supervisor and she was a switching clerk in the Reperfector Center.

"We were married on V-E Day, May 8, 1945, and will celebrate our 63rd wedding anniversary this year. (The church was filled for a special V-E Day services immediately before our wedding, and more than a thousand church members stayed for our wedding ceremony.) During the war years, I worked for four years as Late Night traffic manager, working 7-days a week without a vacation or day off for sickness. This, despite working with the windows closed and covered with blackout shades. There was no air-conditioning in those days, and in the summer temperatures reached well over 100 degrees in the reperfector aisles.

"We left Richmond in 1956 when I was selected to work on the WU Plan-55 System. Our participation in the Plan-55 project for five years took us around the country from New York to Andrews AFB for 2 years, then a couple of years in Chattanooga, TN, and various Air Force sites where we installed, tested and maintained the Plan-55 Systems. Following installation and cutover of the Hickam AFB site in Hawaii in 1959, I remained as site manager for two years until I was reassigned to the AUTODIN project in 1961.

"More than a decade was spend in the AUTODIN program, first at Norton AFB in San Bernardino, CA and eventually retiring in 1974 from GCS in Washington, DC after 33 years of service.

"I spent the next 30 years as a civilian Communications Manager with the U. S. Navy in Washington, DC, retiring a second time in 2004.

"We finally retired to Sarasota, FL where our son, Kenneth III, lives with his wife, Kevan and their two children, Casandra and Michael. Ken and Kevan both graduated from Florida State University with PhD degrees in marine biology. They are now executive managers at Mote Marine Laboratory in Sarasota, specializing in Aquaculture and fish stock enhancement.

"Our youngest son, Philip, after getting his law degree and working with several organizations in urban planning, decided to become a missionary. He and his wife, Jennifer, and two children, David and Owen, have spent the last 10 years as missionaries in Kampala, Uganda, Africa."

(Editor's Note: Thanks for writing, Kenneth and best wishes for many years of happy and healthy retirement after a total 63 years of work.)

BEN BOWLEN – KNOXVILLE, TN

Ben reported getting an interesting call a short while ago. When he said "hello," a lady said, "Is this the Western Union office?" He said "No", but stayed on line, thinking it was probably someone playing a prank. However, very seriously she said, "This telephone number is listed for Western Union in Maryville; my son has a boot on his car in Dallas and if I don't wire him the money they will tow the car and it will cost a lot more to get it out of impound." This sounded like some of the comments Ben remembered hearing years ago. He told her he once worked for Western Union but as far as he knew they did not have any offices any more, but knew that Kroger sent money via Western Union.

She said to wait a minute as her daughter just told her she was looking under the web site westernunionalumni.com and that Ben was the only one with a Maryville address. She thanked Ben for advising her about Kroger's. She said that she had been looking on the Internet. The only number in the local directory was an 800 number. It was an interesting call and brought back old memories. Ben lives in Knoxville now, but was in Maryville when he listed his name and address on the Internet under WU alumni.

Ben says: "Remember the days before Mastercard, Visa, ATM's, ComData, etc.? If you were out of town and broke, Western Union was the only game in town. If you were looking for the office and did not see a directional sign, almost anyone could direct you. And unless we were on the scene of some special event, the first thing a reporter looked for after writing his story was a Western Union office."

(Editor's Note: See the story under Western Union Today. It sounds like Western Union does have to do some serious marketing to get the word out.)