



# THE UNSETTLING STORY OF **KEN PATRICK**

**IF YOU’VE EVER BEEN TO THE NORTH RIM, YOU MAY HAVE SEEN SIGNS FOR THE KEN PATRICK TRAIL, WHICH WINDS FOR 10 MILES THROUGH AN ALPINE FOREST ALONG THE EDGE OF THE GRAND CANYON. THERE’S A REASON THE TRAIL WAS NAMED FOR HIM. IT’S A STORY WE’VE NEVER TOLD BEFORE. UNTIL NOW.**

**BY ROBERT STIEVE**



**T**omie Lee hasn’t had to write to the parole board for about four years. But she’ll do it again, if she has to. “He could probably apply for another parole hearing at any time,” she says. “If that happens, we’ll do our best to keep him in prison.” Her voice is calm. Matter-of-fact. Resigned.

The prison she refers to, the place where Tomie Lee would like to see Veronza Bowers locked up forever, is the United States Penitentiary in Atlanta, Georgia. Built in 1902, it’s the same prison that once held Al Capone and Whitey Bulger.



**LEFT:** Early in his career, Ken Patrick (foreground) worked as a dude wrangler at the Grand Canyon. “He was very charismatic, and he could really tell a story,” says Tomie Lee, his widow.  
**ABOVE:** Music was a passion for Ken Patrick, who taught himself how to play guitar while living on the North Rim.

And it’s 1,800 miles from the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, where Tomie’s husband, Kenneth C. Patrick, was buried in 1973, just a few feet from where the legendary Emery Kolb would be buried three years later.

**THE KEN PATRICK TRAIL** winds for 10 miles through an alpine forest on the North Rim of the Grand Canyon — from the North Kaibab Trailhead to Point Imperial. It’s Mother Nature’s corridor.

“In a landscape overwhelmed by the grandeur of a canyon, it’s easy to overlook a trail that transects the heart of the forested rim,” says Amy Martin, a former backcountry ranger at the park who now works as a documentary photographer. “Unlike many trails at Grand Canyon, with crowds and exposed terrain, I’ve found solitude on the Ken Patrick, looking over my shoulder through the ponderosas and New Mexico locust, feeling that the only other footsteps on the trail were those of the soft-footed mountain lion.”

Where the forest pulls back its curtain, hikers get an unobstructed view of Mount Hayden, one of the most photographed landmarks in the park and the superlative for technical rock climbers there. Beyond Mount Hayden, the panorama includes the Little Colorado River Gorge and the San Francisco Peaks near Flagstaff. As memorials go, it’s hard to imagine a more impressive tribute than a remote trail that traces one of the Seven Natural Wonders of the World. Especially if you lived your life as Ken Patrick, a man enameled with the wholesome idiosyncrasies of a park ranger.

“He loved the Grand Canyon more than anyplace on Earth,” says Tomie, whose name is pronounced like the rock opera. “To him, it was the most wonderful place in the world. No matter where we went, no matter what we did, he just loved his



time at the Canyon. Particularly the North Rim.”

It was on the South Rim, however, where the love affair began.

Ken first came to the Grand Canyon with his parents, Manfred (“Slim”) and Pansy, in the mid-1930s, when Ken was about 3 or 4. He went to school there while Slim worked as a laborer on trail construction in the Canyon. Pansy was a homemaker then. Later, she was an operator for the Trans-Canyon Telephone Line, which connected the North and South Rims in 1935 and is now listed on the National Register of Historic Places. When the trail work was finished, Slim got a job working for the railroad in Northern Arizona. However, after World War II broke out, he was transferred to Indiana, the one place that Ken never liked. That aversion, combined with his parents’ divorce and a “Go west, young man” sense of urgency, prompted Ken to run away from home at the age of 14. A year later, he made it back to his beloved Grand Canyon.

“He never talked about the journey,” Tomie says, “other than to say that he was lucky to have survived.” Although he reunited with his father on the North Rim, Slim was in no position to care for a teenage boy, so he got his son a job at a logging camp in Heber, Arizona — they lied about Ken’s age. When Ken got a little older, he returned to the North Rim, where his father was working as the winter caretaker. Among other things, Slim would send out weather reports and shovel snow off the roofs — as they are today, the North Rim facilities were shut down in the winter.

When they weren’t shoveling snow, the two Patricks played music together. Slim was a talented banjo player, and Ken, with his father’s guidance, taught himself how to play guitar. It was the beginning of a lifelong passion for music, which is the first of many proficiencies listed at the bottom of his headstone. The inscription reads: “MUSICIAN, SONG WRITER, SINGER, WOOD CARVER, PACKER, MECHANIC, HEAVY EQUIPMENT OPERATOR, ARIZONA HIGHWAY PATROLMAN, PARK RANGER, BROTHER, SON, FATHER, AND FAITHFUL LOVING HUSBAND.”

“Packer,” as in mule packer, was one of his first real jobs at the Grand Canyon. After being hired by Fred Harvey to work in the mule barn on the South Rim, where he shoveled manure, groomed the animals, and cleaned and cared for the stable gear, Ken was promoted to work on the mule trains that hauled supplies to Phantom Ranch. It wasn’t long before he was promoted again. This time to dude wrangler. Turns out, he was a natural at guiding people into the Canyon. “He could really tell a story,” Tomie says with a laugh, presumably hearing her husband’s voice in her head. “And he liked people. He really liked and enjoyed people. Ken was very charismatic.” To wit: He met his first wife, Shirley, when she was a tourist on one of his trips. Tomie was his second wife.

In addition to romance, he also found salvation on the trail. *Damn near died!* That’s how you’d tell it around a campfire. It was a routine pack trip into the Canyon. A trip that had been made thousands of times by hundreds of wranglers. The norm changed when one of the mules at the back of the pack got spooked and went over the edge. That’s where Ken was. Because the pack mules were roped together, when one went, they all started to go — Ken was hanging in the balance. Fortunately, the wrangler at the front raced back, cut the ropes



and saved the day. They lost a mule or two, but it could have been much worse. As for Ken, he just dusted himself off and got back in the saddle. He had a job to do.

**“LIKE HIS FATHER,”** Tomie says, “there was nothing Ken couldn’t do — or couldn’t convince people he could do.” Thus began a period of transition, from the United States Air Force, where he enlisted, to the National Park Service to the U.S. Geological Survey to the Arizona Department of Public Safety. It was during his time as a highway patrolman that he met Tomie. “He was 33 and I was 22,” she says. “At the time, I didn’t even know the difference between the Park Service and the Forest Service. He set me straight.”

Although the jobs changed, Ken’s passion for the Canyon was unwavering, and he explored it every chance he got. At one point, he was among a team of climbers who attempted an ascent of Mount Hayden — the same landmark that steals the show along the Ken Patrick Trail. Not a lot is known about their climb. There’s just a footnote. And if it weren’t for serendipity, even that wouldn’t exist.

The note was discovered on November 18, 2001, when a group of local climbers, including a ranger named Greg Moore, were making their own attempt of Mount Hayden. Around 10 a.m., one of the climbers found an old metal film canister at the base of the peak. Inside the can was a pencil stub and

a fragile note written on a yellowed piece of paper. It reads: “October 3, 1963; Sunday 10:25 a.m./ 5:00 p.m.; First Attempt; Bill Hoy, Leader; Ken Patrick, on Rope; Jim Fain, Ground Man (Observer); 3/4 way to top.”

There are a few technical routes leading to the summit of Mount Hayden, with difficulty ratings of 5.7 to 5.10d. Pegasus, on the east side, is the most difficult route. Fifty years ago, on October 1, 1969, Rick Petrillo and Bob Siegler became the first climbers to reach the summit. Based on the note in the canister, Ken and his colleagues never made it to the top, but that wouldn’t have bothered the young adventurer. He would have been happy just being outside — inside the Grand Canyon. There was nowhere else he’d rather be.

But blazing trails in the backcountry didn’t pay the bills, which is why Ken applied for the job at the Department of Public Safety. Good pay. Good benefits. A good night’s sleep. He might have done a full tour at DPS if he hadn’t been haunted by the past. According to Tomie, her husband was sitting in his car one night, doing paperwork, when he felt severe pain and became disoriented. When it happened again a few nights later, he reported the incident to his superiors and was sent to Barrow Neurological Institute in Phoenix, where doctors traced the symptoms to an injury he’d sustained while fighting a fire on Saddle Mountain in the 1950s. Ken was working a bulldozer, one without a cage, when a piece of a tree broke off and landed

Mount Hayden, which can be seen from the Ken Patrick Trail, is one of the most photographed landmarks in the Grand Canyon. In 1963, Ken Patrick was among a group of men who tried to make history by being the first to summit the peak. *Jack Dykinga*

on his head. In the parlance of wildland firefighters, that’s called a “widow maker,” but Ken beat the odds — his son, Kenny, still has his father’s dented helmet.

Eventually, the team at Barrow cleared Ken for duty. However, the authorities at DPS weren’t comfortable having him out in the field. So, Ken had to choose between a desk job or moving on. It was an easy choice. He formed a band and hit the road.

The Kensmen, as they were known, traveled for more than three years to places like Reno, Las Vegas and Lake Tahoe. They were also invited to perform at the Grand Ole Opry in Nashville. That was a proud moment, but it wasn’t Ken’s only musical claim to fame. Earlier, he’d written and recorded a rockabilly record called *Night Train*. In the December 1961 issue of *Billboard*, it was included in a “review of new singles.”

“I liked all of his songs,” Tomie says. “He had a beautiful voice ... a good Irish voice.” Nevertheless, the music business didn’t come with any guarantees. So, once again, Ken went back to a steady job. This time with the National Park Service, where he worked as a ranger at Organ Pipe Cactus National Monument in Southern Arizona. A few years later, he was transferred to



“I’VE NOT READ ANY OF THE NEWSPAPER ARTICLES. AND I DIDN’T WATCH ANY OF THE NEWS REPORTS DEALING WITH KEN’S MURDER. I’M NOT SURE HOW MUCH OF THE INFORMATION BEING REPORTED WAS TRUTH, CONJECTURE OR RUMOR.”

— TOMIE LEE

Point Reyes National Seashore in Northern California.

Like the North Rim of the Grand Canyon, Point Reyes is protected by the National Park Service. It’s a gorgeous park that encompasses more than 70,000 acres of grasslands, brushy hillsides, forested ridges and shoreline along the Pacific coast north of San Francisco. The diverse habitat is home to nearly 40 species of mammals, including California sea lions, northern elephant seals, tule elk, black bears and black-tailed deer. Although he was an experienced hunter and an avid outdoorsman, it was the deer in the park that triggered a series of events that would end with the murder of Ken Patrick — the first ranger in the 57-year history of the National Park Service to be killed in the line of duty.

**IN THE SUMMER OF 1973**, the United States was in the middle of a meat shortage. Many remember the long lines at gas stations in the early ’70s, but T-bones and sirloins were in short supply, too. According to the Consumer Price Index: “Meat prices began to advance sharply at the wholesale level in late 1972 as supplies, already under pressure from strong demand, were further reduced by severe weather conditions that curtailed livestock marketings.”

The shortage affected consumers and retailers alike, including Albert Randazzo, who was the co-owner of Victoria Supermarket on Ninth Avenue at West 44th Street in Manhattan. “It’s not so much that beef is expensive,” he told *The New York Times*. “It’s that you can’t buy it, even if you have the money.”

It was against that backdrop that poaching became a growing concern at Point Reyes — hunting is illegal in most national parks. The uneasiness escalated to full-blown tragedy on August 5, 1973.

At 5:30 a.m. that day, Ken Patrick left his home to make a tour of the park in search of illegal hunters. He was patrolling by himself, but he wasn’t scheduled to be. A young man who wanted to become a ranger was planning to do a ride-along, but the young man got sick and canceled. So Ken went out alone. He was driving an official Park Service vehicle — a Jeep with an arrowhead logo on the door and a light bar on the roof. It was a foggy morning on the slopes of Mount Vision. Almost 50 years later, Tomie recalls the events as if they happened five days ago.

“Ken was driving up Mount Vision Road when he noticed a brand-new Pontiac headed the other way,” she says. “He probably thought they were lost — that happened a lot on Mount Vision Road — so he turned around to see if they needed any help. When Ken got to the car, Veronza Bowers was in the passenger seat and Jonathan Shohar was behind the wheel. According to the testimony, Bowers told Shohar to get out and approach Ken, which he did — he handed over his driver’s license.

“Something didn’t seem right to Ken, so he took the driver’s license and told Shohar to stand in front of the vehicle. The driver’s window was down, so Ken looked in and saw Bowers in the passenger seat. Alan Veale was in the back seat. In his

testimony, Veale said that Ken was just talking to them when he noticed that they’d spread a jacket over what turned out to be a crossbow, which they’d brought along for poaching deer. Ken asked Bowers to move the jacket. That’s when Bowers pulled out a 9 mm and shot Ken in the chest.”

According to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals: Bowers shot Ranger Patrick in the chest after Ranger Patrick stopped their car to investigate. Bowers jumped out of the car and shot Ranger Patrick a second time, hitting him in the left wrist. Ranger Patrick then staggered down the road and fell into the bushes. The driver brought the car alongside the dying ranger; Bowers attempted to shoot him a third time, in the chest, but his gun misfired. Bowers then attempted a fourth shot but missed.

“As the car left the scene of the shooting,” court records show, “Bowers asked one of the other men if he had seen the ranger twitch when [Bowers] shot him as he was lying on the ground.”

Meanwhile, back at the Park Service house where the Patrick family was living, Tomie knew that something was wrong. Her husband, who had the reliability of an Eagle Scout and the punctuality of the Centovalli Express, was late for breakfast. She’d made pancakes for their three sons — ages 12, 5 and 20 months — and was planning on mixing a fresh batch for her husband when he got home. Pancakes were his favorite meal. She tried to contact him on the Park Service radio they kept in their home. But there was no reply. “I knew then that something very, very bad had happened,” she says.

Looking back on that morning, Pansy Greer, Ken’s mother, says it was the worst day of her life: “It was awful. Just awful.”

How could it be otherwise? It’s every parent’s worst nightmare. The only silver lining, if there is such a thing, is that a suspect was in custody.

Because of some textbook detective work, the FBI and the Marin County Sheriff’s Office eventually matched four crossbow arrows, called “bolts,” with those at a home in Mill Valley, California — the arrows were 17.5 inches in length, and orange in color with silver and green crests. Among the suspects arrested at the house were Bowers and Shohar. Veale, who would later make a deal and sign a confession identifying Bowers as the triggerman, was already in custody for a bank robbery in Berkeley.

Subsequently, charges were filed, the case went to court, and on April 26, 1974, Veronza Leon Curtis Bowers Jr., 28, was convicted of killing Ken Patrick. He was sentenced to life in prison — Shohar would get 10 years. According to news reports at the time, Judge Leo Brewster allowed Bowers to read a 20-minute prepared statement from the witness chair. In that time, Bowers attacked the “capitalistic system, the white ruling class and the justice system.” When Bowers was finished, the judge said: “If I had any discretion, a life sentence would be little enough for this cold-blooded murder.”

Despite his conviction, Bowers has always maintained his innocence and contends that he was targeted for prosecution based on his affiliation with the Black Panthers, the politi-



cal organization founded in 1966 by Huey Newton and Bobby Seale. In that context, Bowers sometimes refers to himself as a “political prisoner.”

For Tomie, the worst of the suffering is behind her. “I can talk about it now,” she says. “There really isn’t any ‘closure,’ but time does help heal the worst of the emotional pain. And knowing that the man responsible is in prison helps, too. I don’t hate Bowers, but I do believe in justice for Ken and our family. Especially for our children.”

**THE KENNETH C. PATRICK VISITOR CENTER** is located off of Sir Francis Drake Boulevard in Point Reyes National Seashore. The wooden building, which gets hammered by gusting winds and icy salt water, has the weathered look of a Hemingway character. Distinctive and resilient, it sits on the edge of a beautiful sandy beach that overlooks a bay to the east. Eight hundred miles beyond the bay, the center’s namesake is buried in a small cemetery at another national park.

The funeral for Ken Patrick was held on Thursday, August 9, 1973, at the Pioneer Cemetery, which is on the List of Classified Historic Structures in Grand Canyon National Park. In addition to Emery Kolb and his wife, Blanche, other notable Canyon figures who are buried there include John Hance, Ralph Cameron, Pete Berry, Gunnar Widforss and Eddie McKee.

Tomie can’t remember much about that day, but NPS Director Ronald H. Walker and his wife were there. And, simultaneously, more than 200 of Ken’s friends jammed into St. Columba’s Episcopal Church in Inverness, California, which is a 10-minute drive from where the murder occurred. Additionally, all across the country, every flag in the national park system, including the 50 flags surrounding the Washington Monument, were ordered to half-staff.

In the years that followed the funeral, Ken’s mother, who

On August 9, 1973, Ken Patrick was buried in the Pioneer Cemetery, which is on the List of Classified Historic Structures in Grand Canyon National Park. Other notable Canyon figures who are buried there include John Hance, Emery Kolb and Gunnar Widforss. *John Burcham*

later moved to Flagstaff, would often make the two-hour drive to visit her son’s grave. “After Ken was killed ... oh, for two or three years, I went to the cemetery every week,” says Pansy Greer, who is 102 and lives on her own in Payson, Arizona.

“It was Ken’s choice to be buried in the Pioneer Cemetery,” Tomie says. “That was one of the really interesting things about Ken ... it was really weird. We hadn’t been married very long when he said: ‘If anything ever happens to me, I want to be buried at the Grand Canyon. In the cemetery on the South Rim.’”

“That’s where his heart was,” Tomie says. “That’s where it always was.”

**EPILOGUE:** In 1976, in the wake of Ken Patrick’s murder, Congress passed legislation known as the “General Authorities Act,” which clearly established the power of the secretary of the interior to designate certain employees to “maintain law and order and to protect persons and property within the areas of the National Park system.” For the first time, certain park employees (rangers, in particular) were authorized to carry firearms, make arrests, serve warrants and conduct investigations. Meanwhile, Tomie Lee, who became a ranger herself and eventually served as the superintendent of Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve, remarried in 1981. “I truly felt that I would be disappointing Ken if I didn’t start appreciating every day and stop wallowing in self-pity,” she says. “I felt I could face God easier than I could face Ken if I wasted my life or raised my sons differently than we would have together.” Tomie is now retired and living in Arizona. [ah](#)