

INTERVIEW WITH: Ella Wilson Adair
INTERVIEWER: Jay Haymond and Margaret Shakespeare
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SUBJECT OF INTERVIEW: Ms. Wilson's Memories of her Early Life
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JH: Remember for us your growing up years, that is the family where you grew up. And that was in Salt Lake, do I understand that correctly?

EA: That's right.

JH: Remember your father and mother and how they taught you.

EA: My father had a grocery store and he died when I was seven years old. My mother, she raised me and then she remarried and I had a very fine stepfather, Henry Jackson.

JH: Remember that address where you grew up.

EA: 121 South 8th West, across the street from the 15th Ward. My father's store was right there, across the street from the church.

JH: Were you a store keeper's daughter?

EA: Yes, I was a store keeper's daughter.

JH: And did you learn how to keep store.

EA: I learned how to work in the store and how to get put out when I got into mischief.

JH: (Laughs) Was your mother involved in the store?

EA: No. She didn't work in the store at all. She was an excellent cook and after my father died she had a job as a cook at the Forest Dale Golf Club. She did all their banquets and things like that for them. And I was there at home. I went to school, went to two elementary schools, Jackson Junior High School and then graduated from West High School.

JH: Do you remember having chores?

EA: Yes.

JH: What did you do?

EA: I used to always have to get a bucket of coal and some kindling and have them on the porch every night before I went to bed. I had to make sure that my shoes were shined every night before I went to bed because I had one pair of shoes, they were leather shoes, and we had to take care of them, make sure they were clean. And in the morning I had to make my bed before I ever left the bedroom, make sure that was done. Those were chores I had to do. I was the only child, I had two stepsisters, they were older and both married.

JH: What was used as a word of advise, let's say, for you to go to school. Why did you want to go to school?

EA: I was encouraged to go to school and I always wanted to be a teacher, that was my ambition and I made it. My parents believed in a good education- to help as I grew older and 'on my own'. They supported me in this goal.

JH: Wonderful. You went to the University of Utah? Did you have teachers up there that you remember that you looked up to?

EA: Very much, Maude May Babcock, my speech teacher. I thought a lot of her. And there was an art teacher, I can't remember her name right now. She wore beads that she got in the Orient and she was an excellent art teacher, she gave me the encouragement to go on in art. Those are two teachers that were very outstanding. Frederick J. Pack, the geology teacher, I liked him, he was a good teacher. Also, Mr. Salisbury, the art teacher.

JH: Did they have special classes on how to teach?

EA: Yes, we had to take an education class, I can't remember the number of it, it had a number. But we had to get all different kinds of methods of teaching, learn how to teach. And we had to fix up a few of our own methods and had the teacher pass on them and have the class pass on them to see if they thought they'd be effective or not. I used the art and speech projects many years as I taught.

JH: What about practice teaching?

EA: Yes, I did practice teaching.

JH: Where did you do your practice teaching?

EA: Irving Junior High School and East High School. And I was very uncomfortable at East High School.

JH: Why?

EA: Because I was just a common ordinary person from the west side of town. (Laughter) And I didn't have a different dress to wear every day. And at that time, kids that went to East High School were all doctors and lawyers and high officials in Salt Lake, lived up on the east side of town. My home was on 8th West and my father was a machinist.

JH: Do you remember the term, "East High Elites?"

EA: Oh, definitely.

JH: Did it apply to that group that you knew up there?

EA: Yes, I knew some of them.

JH: So, what did you teach up there?

EA: Physical education. And then at Irving Junior High School I taught physical education. That's what I did my student teaching in.

JH: Well, did you find their reputation as an "East High Elite" or "Elites" carried over into their physical education program?

EA: Oh, I did in a way. It was just a group, one group against the other, just like it is right now, I imagine. They did not like to participate in the activities that the entire class did. They did just what their group wanted to...and they didn't like to dress for gym.

JH: Irving Junior High School, did they have that reputation too?

EA: No. They were just common, ordinary kids, as you might say. A fun experience. I learned a lot and had their respect...Good!

JH: Just Sugarhouse kids.

EA: Sugarhouse kids is right. Good kids with no frills. No one was better than another, no prejudices. I enjoyed my time spent there. The faculty was also helpful.

JH: Tell me how you encouraged them to take physical education seriously. That was still a time when physical work was...

EA: That's right. Well, we tried to make fun of it. That was the main thing, we tried to make fun of it. And if we had a lot of fun, well then they would all participate. The main thing they liked to play was, we had this great big medicine ball, it was about as big as a number three tub. And they used to like to play and throw that over the net and back, make sure they didn't have it bounce on their head. Dodge ball was another group activity that they enjoyed.

JH: It's a little heavier than a volleyball.

EA: Oh, that's for sure. They liked that. And we liked to play different kinds of round games and floor games. They liked volleyball. At that time girls' basketball wasn't quite as popular as it is now and we had just two courts to play in. And so it wasn't as much fun. You only had half a court to play in. The spirit of competition was fun at Irving. Everyone participated and there were no favorites or prejudices.

JH: Did you feel, when you graduated from the university, did you feel prepared to teach?

EA: Well yes, I did. I felt I was prepared except for one thing. When I graduated it was during the Depression and jobs were few and far between. And I registered with Mrs. Jorgensen's Teacher's Agency. And the first job I got was out at Fort Duchesne, the Alterra High School. And I had to teach everything, the other teachers didn't teach. Other words, I taught phys ed, speech, English and art. And I had the school play to take care of and all the girls' activities. But I really enjoyed working with the Indians and teaching Home Economics.

JH: You enjoyed teaching the Indians?

EA: Yes, it was a lot of fun, teaching them. Made a lot of friends that were Indians. I learned a lot from them; patience and also a lot of crafts.

JH: Tell me about teaching art to the Ouray Indians.

EA: Oh, they just loved it. They just loved it. They gave me a lot of good ideas. I had to teach Home Economics and the only Home Economics I'd had was when I was in high school. So I went back to summer school that year and got my vocational degree. Or certificate in Home Economics so I could teach it, and I taught Home Economics for 39 years. They loved to make designs with beads and threads. Also to cook pie and puddings. They especially liked cream pie and jam. They also knew how to use nuts. They loved nuts of all kinds.

JH: Well, how long did you stay out at Duchesne?

EA: Fort Duchesne? Just one year. And they were building the school at the time we were there, they were still building the school. And we only taught school seven months and the government paid half of our salary and Duchesne District still owed two months...but that was not to worry about. We had a good school year. Reed Morrill was the principal and there were five other teachers- four of us hired at the Fort in the hotel.

JH: It's going to take you a while to get it. (Laughs)

EA: They just didn't have any money. So we taught school for seven months and that was all. And so I transferred to another district. Came down here to Garfield County.

JH: Okay, let's stop at that point and...

MS: This is Margaret Shakespeare, I'm the second interviewer. And I have some more

questions to ask Ella Adair. She mentioned that she had just been transferred. I want to know where she went, if she can remember the year, and what she did what she came here in this area.

EA: (Laughs) What I did? I came down here in the fall in 1935 to teach in the high school, it was a two-room high school with two teachers. And we had quite a time. I came down into town and they took me over to the place to live and the person I was going to live with was out...it was the bishop and they were gone, so they took me to the next door neighbors to live. She didn't want any such-and-such school teachers living with her again. But I ended up living with her for three years. Very nice people, Mrs. Ahlstrom. And there were two Ms. Wilsons came to town and I was Ms. Wilson number two because Ms. Wilson number one came to the other house first and so I had to be the other. And there was only four houses in the town that had bathrooms. And so they let the school teachers live in two of the houses that had bathrooms. And at Mrs. Ahlstrom's, they had to keep their little coal oil stove going in there all the time because it was at the north of the house so it kept freezing up. The other Miss Wilson taught third and fourth grades.

MS: Where was this school located?

EA: Right where the old one burned down, on the corner up there, where the park is right now.

MS: Tropic town park?

EA: (Yes.) It takes in all of the property that the school building was on.

MS: How many students did you have? And what grades were they?

EA: Well in the high school we had nine, ten, eleven and twelve. They were upstairs, on the top floor. Bottom floor had first through seventh grade. Mr. Bigler and I taught upstairs. We had two rooms up there. And then there was a little cubby hole he had for an office. And we taught physical education over in the town hall that was adjacent to the school building and that's where all the activity... Oral Christensen was the principal of the elementary school and he also taught seventh grade, he was the coach for the boys. There was approximately forty to fifty in the high school.

MS: Did you have a principal for the high school, too?

EA: Mr. Bigler.

MS: Did you coach any girls teams?

EA: Oh yes, I nearly got run out of town by one of the ladies because (laughter)of the same thing as they have right now with the coaches. I had a girls team and I never let one girl play and her mother was going to have me arrested and fired because I didn't let her girl play basketball. We used to go to Escalante to play and we took the old road out through Pine Lake. Got up on top of the road one winter when it was snowing, we all had to get off the bus and push it around that big hairpin turn up there because they wouldn't let anybody ride the bus because it was too dangerous. We pushed it `til it got turned around, then we all got back on the bus again and went and played basketball. (Laughs) The boys played too and they won and we won that night. It snowed so bad we had to stay overnight. We couldn't come home, so I stayed at the principal's house and they had the kids all through the town. That was in Escalante. That was my first experience of being in that town. It took three hours to get there from Tropic. Now we can get there in forty-five minutes.

JH: Did they welcome you after beating their team?

EA: Oh, yes. We didn't have any bad feelings at all with Escalante. Our main problem was Panguitch, we still have it. Like East and West in Salt Lake.

MS: So, how many years did you teach in this old school before it burned down?

EA: Gee, I don't know. About ten years in all.

MS: Was it about in the 50s, early 50s?

EA: Burned in 1947...burned down. And we were out of it for about a year and a half and our school was all over town. I taught in Vern Ray building which was across the street and I had home economics there and typing and English and speech. And science class was upstairs, the English and the band classes were downstairs in this old building and part of the building had a bunch of meat lockers in it. And then the seminary and the Ag were over in the scout building. The elementary school was in the church.

MS: Did I already ask you approximately how many students you had in the high school?

EA: I couldn't tell you for sure, Margaret. I don't remember. There were the four grades.

MS: When did they add more teachers to the school? After they got the new building?

EA: Yes, after the new building. Four were added. We had six teachers in the new building. We only had the two high schools... We had a shop teacher come in, Levi Bybee. They built a shop in back of the building for the boys. They could take industrial arts when the girls had sewing. That was an interesting thing, I borrowed the sewing machine, we didn't have any sewing machine, so I borrowed it from the Relief Society and it was an old peddle machine, treadle machine, that looked like it came over on the ark. (Laughter) Oh, that was an old, dilapidated machine. Those kids...I don't think it had been oiled for

years and years and years. But the girls learned to sew and that was the main thing and they really had a lot of fun.

MS: You just had one sewing machine?

EA: One sewing machine. Some of those girls that I taught, I've taught their granddaughters now. Iris Smith and some of them were in school at that time. Some are excellent seamstresses now.

MS: Let's change the subject a little bit and learn about your social life. When you come down here you were single, weren't you?

EA: That's right. And the principal's wife gave me to understand I wasn't to make any eyes at him. (Laughter)

JH: The principal?

EA: Yes.

JH: Oh, yeah.

EA: She was a funny old gal. And I believe the teacher whose place I took, she had her eye set on him and the first date I had with my husband I asked him for it 'cause we had a girl's day dance and the girls dared me to ask him. And I did and he accepted. But it took him three years before he ever got the courage to ask me to marry him. It was six years before we got married.

MS: Before he proposed, huh? So you had to chase him for quite a while?

EA: Well, he chased me up to Salt Lake. That was about 1937.

MS: Okay. (Laughs) So when you come down here back in 1943...

EA: Fall of '43. I came back to Tropic in the Fall of '43, during the war to teach. Married women could not teach until the war and then they changed the state law and I was drafted to teach. It was a beautiful country town with one store; one telephone; a church and a post office. No sidewalks, but a nice big house to live in, and nice people.

MS: And you've been here ever since?

EA: Yes. I have been here ever since I returned during the war. Before the war, I taught in Granite District. And then over in Green River. Then Arnold came up, we got married. And then there was the war and he came back to run the farm for his father. And I was met on the steps by the superintendent, and he told me that I was supposed to teach. Mr. Christensen was the principal then and two years later was the superintendent. So I taught up until I retired.

MS: What are some of the...changing the subject again, what are some of the most memorable experiences that you've had, either teaching or just in the community alone?

EA: Oh, I've had a lot of experiences.

MS: That you'd like to share?

EA: Well, I got the State Vocational Outstanding Teacher's Award. I was president of this organization as well and also helped to organize the Future Homemakers of America here in Utah, along with Gaileen Erickson.

MS: Anything you'd like to say.

EA: I got that for all around vocational teacher for the State. I felt very honored.

MS: Do you remember what year that was?

EA: That was the year before I left, 1975.

MS: Would that have been your third year of teaching here?

EA: Oh, no. After we'd moved back.

MS: I didn't realize that you were gone for three years.

EA: Oh, yes, see I went up and taught in Granite District and Emery County.

MS: Now I know why you said Arnold chased you. (Laughs) Six years is a long time.

EA: That's for sure.

MS: I know I've heard some of the fun activities that you've had in your... Some of the clubs that you've had.

EA: Oh, we had our FHA Club, that was one thing, one accomplishment I was really proud of. I feel sorry that they don't have it now. Our girls had won national honors in it. They were outstanding...the outstanding club in the state. They had three state officers, had a national officer and the girls that were part of that still think that it's too bad that their girls now can't be part of that.

MS: I understand that the faculty has put on some interesting assemblies for the students. Remember some of those for me?

EA: We had a lot of fun. We had a band one day that I can Mayo Rich playing the big Sousaphone, Marian was playing the trumpet. I was playing the piano. And the different teachers were playing different instruments and none of them knew how, but it was funny. It was really a choice experience. And then Marian and I sang a duet, she sang the lady part and I sang the man's part. And, oh dear, neither one of us were on tune. (Laughs) Then we had my school were.... We really had fun with those.

MS: What was one of your favorite that you produced.

EA: Oh, the 'Laurence Welk Show' and 'Mrs. Apple and her Crops'. Both were hilarious.

MS: Mostly were they musicals or

EA: No, they were funny. When I taught the first time down here, I had to teach music. And I put on a school play and an operetta and three one-act plays from each class in the spring. In other words, every six weeks we had something going. And the kids cooperated, they wanted to do it. Our school plays, we'd take them to Cannonville and Henrieville because we didn't have any electricity. And so they put them on the stage and they had gas lanterns all across the front of the stage for the light on the stage. We even took our plays to Hatch. They'd pay for us to bring them over there. During my career I directed five operettas (all in Tropic) and forty school plays as well as several one-act plays.

MS: Since living in Tropic, what are the types of changes and growth have you seen here in this community?

EA: Well, I've seen a new road on the dump. And the cemetery district has been formed, and the Lions Club has been organized. We've had a new business association organized in town, got a new bank and our stake has been reorganized. We've had two new school buildings built, had a new chapel built and then...quite interesting, in 1945, when that group graduated, during World War II, we had a twelve girls and two boys graduate and we had to have the graduation on Tuesday night because the boys had to go into the army the next morning. That was Gene Chynoweth and Leon Barton. And when our town hall burned, the people got together and decided we had to have someplace where we could have some fun anyway, and dance, so the town got together and poured the cement for the new dance hall outside. They built a new dance hall and called it the Silver Moon. And one thing that the women had here I was quite interested in was quilting bees. They used to all get together and have a quilting bee. And it was fun to go listen to them tell all their news and all the gossip. Boy, they could quilt just as fast as they could talk. And now quilting is coming back and I am happy to see it. There is a group of young ladies that have a quilt guild meeting once a month. Their quilts are beautiful.

The Fourth of July was a big celebration, the big celebration here and everybody had new dresses, new shoes and new overalls for that day. And they all got new things on Christmas. Those were the times when the kids got new clothes. I was quite interested when I moved here. People's was wondering how I was going to actually fit into the community because I was a city girl but I had been taught that I was no better than anybody else. I was the only child in the family and I had a neighbor that had eight children and we used to go over there all the time and play with them and my mother always told me, she says, "You want to remember that you're no better than anybody else just because you haven't got brothers and sisters. And that has always stayed with me. I've always tried to teach that to my children too.

When I came down here to teach too, we only had one store and one telephone. That telephone was down at Shakespeare's. Mr. Cope had the store. Melford Ahlstrom had a

little shop up there, he used to cut hair in there and then he had a few odds and ends on the shelves if people wanted them. And then there was across the street from the school there was that little old shop. And the kids used to go over there and Bertha Graff used to serve soup to them at noon, those that came from the lower towns. We'd go over there and have soup at noon. That's all she served was just soup and some crackers. And that's why it always got the name of The Soup Kitchen. We had our first seminary start while I was down here too. Another thing that has come in since I've been here is the water system and sewer system. And we were the only town in the county for a good many years with a sewer system. In fact I think there's only about one other town that had a sewer system and that was Panguitch. And they were just having it put in. Now we all have TV's and most homes have a telephone.

MS: What about changes in the school system that you've seen over the years.

EA: Oh, there's been quite a change. Too much of a change to suit me. I think that if the teachers had...if they had a right to take a child by the arm and say, "Sit down!" the kid would sit down without having to go tell his mother or without the teacher having to worry about being shot. Too much 'machine work' and not enough 'using your head work'. Too much basketball and other sports which have precedence over the basic subjects.

MS: Okay, that's as far as discipline, what about the equipment, or the curriculum, or...

EA: The curriculum has certainly changed. There's so many things now for them to do that that's why they have to have so many teachers. I'd never fit into the school system. I was talking to Gale, my son-in-law, he's an ex-principal. And he says I've been out three years, and he says, "I don't know whether I'd fit in now or not." Because it's changed so fast. Now I remember, I went back one day a few years back, after I... I had to substitute in a math class and they were having story problems. And one of the problems was if

you went to the store and you had to buy ten yards of fabric and it cost \$9.99 a yard, and when you got home you decided you needed another half yard, how much would it cost you? Well, the kids looked at me just like, "Who you trying to kid?" And one little girl says I'll go get my calculator. And I said, "You can't do it without a calculator?" I says, "Figure it out." I says, "You can't take things like that in your pocket and go into a store," and they had a hard time because they was too used to using those things. They're not using their heads, they're using mechanics. I think they need to go back to the three R's -- Reading, Writing and `Rithmetic. That's something I did the first year I came down here to teach. We had a CC camp in Henrieville and the men couldn't read nor write. Some of them couldn't sign their checks. So the government paid Agnes Wilson and me and Mr. Bigler, the principal, \$10 a week, we'd go down three nights a week, teach them how to read, how to write their name and how to add. So Mr. Bigler taught the math, I taught them how to write and Agnes taught them how to read. So they could sign their check. It was sad. But they were just come from the Ozarks and back in those places they were just illiterate people. But \$10 a week, that's what we got paid, and it took us six weeks.

My first paycheck, for the first year I taught school down here, was \$722. That was for the year! No, that was for nine months. Figure that out, how much money I made and how much I saved. I paid \$25 a month board and room. Yet I still saved enough money to buy myself a car. I bought a '35 Ford, I bought it at Petty Motor in Cedar City and I saved enough money to pay cash for it so he gave me a spare tire and two Indian blankets to go on the seats because I paid cash for it. And I think it cost \$630 I paid for it.

MS: Took most of your pay check then.

EA: Yeah, that's for sure. We did have a lot of fun down here, though. People had to make their own fun. The kids, if it was too cold to play outside, it was nothing to have kids in the house, either playing Monopoly or having a taffy pull. Our homes were open to the

kids. And they came and they enjoyed themselves.

MS: How many children did you have?

EA: I had three. I had three children, two boys and a girl. Lost one son in the air force, same age as Franz.

MS: Do you dare tell the story of where you tied Ronald to the clothesline.

EA: Not Larry, you mean Ronald. (Laughter) They wore bib overalls and that's my little boy, he was, oh, maybe three or four, and the girl who was taking care of him just couldn't keep an eye on him.

End of Side One, Tape One

Begin Side Two, Tape One

EA: Okay, this little boy, he had a habit of running away. So my babysitter decided she'd try putting a rope on the clothesline and tie it to galluses or to the back of his bib overalls. She went in the house and so she came outside a few minutes later to see if she'd check on him, see if he was all right, and there was nothing there but the overalls...he was gone. He had undone the overalls. And so she had to hunt him...found him over at her mother's place, over in the next block. He'd run over to her house. And her father always babied him and would hide him every time he come over. So he'd get over there and Mr. Bybee'd, I never seen him, but they'd go out and he was out there where they were making their honey. They had a lot of fun taking care of that little boy. I am quite interested in summarizing some of the things that I've noticed that have come into Tropic from the time I moved here. They've had 14 homes remodeled, that means completely remodeled. Fifty-seven new homes built, that's from the ground up. Thirty-five trailer homes are here right now and we've had two new churches and we've had two new

school buildings and the town boundaries have been changed so the town is larger.

We've had electricity, television, telephones, five motels, one pizza place and six bed and breakfasts, a fast food shop, and a fire station.

MS: We used to have gas stations.

EA: We had one gas station and we've had, in the time I've been here, we've had eight stores or places of business. Plus, a boutique where they sell tapes and the county news office is also here. And then transportation: when I first came down here there were very few cars in town and most everybody either went by horseback or just walked. And right now we have three-wheelers, we have motor scooters, van, buses, airplanes, helicopters and ambulances. This is the transportation that we have available here in Tropic at the present time, if you want to use it. We've also had a new sewer and water system put in. When people used to have parties, we used to go up what we called Cook's Ranch, which is up at the base of the park line. We'd go up there and we'd play softball and we'd have a bake-out, we always had a big mutton fry and that's where we'd have all of our town and church parties. They were always held up there. And it was a great big meadow up there where they can go play.

MS: I was going to ask you how involved you were in your church activities, community activities.

EA: When I first come down here I did Relief Society teaching and was a Gleaner Girl teacher in the church. And then later on, when my daughter Bonnie was a junior in high school, they divided the stake and I was made the stake Young Ladies Mutual president. I had that job for seven years. And I served as home making leader on Stake Relief Society Board and did visiting teaching in the Relief Society and I was Sunday school secretary.

MS: What about the community?

EA: Well, I've been on the town board and served a term as the mayor. I got the Cedar City community service award that Southern Utah State University gives. I'm the only lady that's ever received the humanitarian award for the Lions Club in the state, so I was right happy to get that. Quite funny, I received it for the state the same day President Carter received it for the national convention. I belong to the Bryce Lions club- served as the president of the Lady Lions two times. I attended the National Convention as delegate with my husband.

Tape Ends At This Point.

I feel that this community 'under the dump' is a very desirable place in which to live and raise a family. The school is accredited and teachers are well trained. The area is a wonderful tourist attraction. It is sad that there is no industry that young people can get a job in so they could remain here. People are very hospitable and caring- no racial prejudices. We have good medical service available in a clinic or Panguitch hospital. The Fruit and produce is well known out of here- people want to come back to purchase it- the flavor is very good.

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