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Interviewee: Israel Mack Esplin, home in Orderville, Utah.

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Interviewer: Marsha Holland

Subject of Interview: Ranching operation and life story

Transcriber: Marsha Holland, January 9, 2018

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MH: Today is January 3, 2018. I am with Mack Esplin and we are at his home in Orderville, Utah.

Mack would you please introduce yourself, give me your full name and your date of birth please?

ME: Full name is Israel Mack Esplin. Date of birth, July 30, 1934.

MH: Were you born in Orderville?

ME: I was born right here on this lot.

MH: What are the names of your parents?

ME: My father was Lawrence Esplin and my mother was Lucy Heaton before she was married. Both of my grandfathers were in the United Order here.

MH: I believe the United Order here in Orderville, was the longest running Order, the most successful.

ME: Yes. I have read books on it. There is a story that says why they quit...a boy got some store bought pants, then everybody wanted them.

MH: Ah, yes, versus the homespun material, the boys wanted denim.

ME: My grandparents grew up in the United Order, both sets. They went to the Muddy Mission then came back up to Orderville, then were in the Order when it started. The reason they left down at the Muddy Mission was on account of taxes. Nevada was trying to tax them and Utah was trying to tax them, then the floods kept taking out their irrigation system and they could not make a go of it. The irrigation was from the Virgin River.

My dad, he was a sheep man, until I was about eleven years old. He had a homestead and he run sheep. The homestead was out on Clear Creek Mountain, east Zion. My mother was born and raised in Moccasin and she came here to work in the store here and that is how she met my father. My father had been in World War I and had been over in France. They were married after he came home from the war.

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MH: Now, is there a relationship there to Grant Heaton, he was from Moccasin too?

ME: Grant Heaton, yes, Grant's dad was my mother's brother. Grant and I are first cousins.

MH: Ok, your dad was a sheep herder. Did you go out to the herd with him?

ME: I did. I was young and spent the summers out there with him. At Christmas holidays, we went out on the range, me and my younger brother.

MH: And I think Warren spoke to you about my next question, why there was the change away from sheep, your family was in sheep, so you noticed or were part of that change?

ME: When my two older brothers went into the service for the Second World War, my dad got discouraged being out alone all the time, so he decided to go into the cattle business. I was eleven years old when he sold the sheep and bought the cattle and started running cattle.

MH: Sheep were sort of an enticing crop-

ME: Two crops with them, wool crop and the lamb crop- the prices was really bad along that time. My dad sold his lambs for two dollar a head the last year he had them.

MH: And before?

ME: I don't remember.

MH: Well, one of the thoughts for the change was because of the war effort demanded so many young men, taking them off the range, making it hard to find herders. Always had to have a person with the herd.

ME: In the wintertime you always tried to have two people, the only jobs that were here at that time was sheep herding, or logging or the sawmill. I cut timber for a long time. We mostly cut pine, out on the Kaibab. I cut some up here too. Crofts had a sawmill up Swain's Creek, that is where I started cutting timber for them. Then they moved to Panguitch and I went out to the Kaibab. It was a bigger company, better pay, the Whiting Brothers was good to us.

MH: I think there were men who came down from the Bryce Valley Area to work for Whiting Brothers on the Kaibab.

ME: Yes, the last years, there were guys that come up there from Tropic, and Cannonville. You know Mate Baugh? Stan Pollock, and several of the Pollock boys. Ralph came out and ran a loader, he and Kirk for a long time.

MH: I was fortunate to interview Ralph last year- he is still running cattle, like on a year-round permit out Cottonwood.

ME: Yes, yearlong allotment. A lot of the ones on the Arizona Strip are that way. We winter our cattle out there.

MH: Let's cover how your dad moved into cattle a little more.

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ME: My dad kind of got discouraged, the prices were low, and he had to stay out all the time and we were having a lot of predatory, cougars and coyotes bothering the sheep, so we switched to cows.

MH: So you remember a distinct time then when the predators were more and causing problems. Why do you think?

ME: Around 1940s that developed. They predators had always been there, then hunting lions got popular and now they are thinned down some.

MH: I believe the government was paying to hunt or trap the cougars and coyotes, so it must have been a problem.

ME: Yes, I heard that my father-in-law of my first wife, he was a sheep man and I worked with the sheep with him until they sold out, about 1952 to around 1960 something. I would cut timber in the summer and go herding in the winter. We had a lot of troubles with predators in the winter range out on the Arizona strip. More Coyotes out there. Cougars up in this country.

MH: See them much anymore?

ME: No, I have hunted them quite a bit in years past. I have a nephew who is a lion hunter, so I hunted with him a lot. Then another guy with the government, a trapper, I hunted with him. I and Leon, my nephew, one year around Christmas, after we quit cutting timber, we went out and in one week we got 13 cougars out on East Zion country. He got a lot of them too- he hunted cougars and bears all his life. That was in the middle 70s. One problem that happened is they used to let us use poison and then that was stopped. Along that time the cougars got worse, now the government flies out on the winter range and shoots them.

They had some good poison in the 70s, but the enviros put a stop to it. DDT was the pesticide. 10-80 was the good poison. Eagles were getting poisoned. If an eagle ate a coyote that died from the poison it would kill the eagle. Now you have to have tag, you can get so many. A livestock man can kill a coyote if he figures it is killing his cattle. Generally, if you see one, it means they are in your cattle and we kill them. We have had trouble every year with them getting our calves. You would see the cougar down under the mountains up here. In the oak country, East Zion country.

MH: Herding is a lonely job, did you mind it much, like your father?

ME: I didn't mind it, there was two of us out in the winter time, most of the time. I had one guy that was out with me and I just as soon have been alone.

MH: (laughter) I have spoken to different herders, and often they developed hobbies while on the range. Sometimes reading. What would you do?

ME: When I was out to the sheep herd, I did mostly reading, Zane Grey magazines.

MH: Did you ever meet him? I read that he spent time around here, or came through here.

ME: No. Or the Rusts (In Kanab). I was probably pretty young when Zane Grey was here. Otherwise, I cut timber all the time, ran sheep in the winter. I came home on weekends. My dad and boys

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ran the farm and the cattle for a long time. We had a family then. I was married to Betty, Betty Brinkerhoff. She was from Glendale. We went to school together and were in the same class in school. We got married right after we graduated in September. I was working for Crofts cutting timber at the time, then they moved out and slowed down so I went to Kaibab. We had five children, three boys and two girls. (More family information on page 8) We had some farm ground then and my boys and my dad were taking care of the farm and checking on the cows and irrigating. It kept them so tired they didn't get into trouble.

MH: But they got to stay in Orderville, go to school, graduate here?

ME: Right, yes. One of them still lives here, he is running the ranch now. He married a rancher's daughter and so we combined the two [operations] together and made it more worthwhile, and he can make a living at it now. He married into the Norman Carrol family, Henry Carrol was the original one. Norman was a good old guy. He and I grew up together, he was a few years older, but we worked together in cattle and sheep. He was a Kane County Commissioner, was on a lot of committees.

MH: We interviewed Mr. Carroll and many others from this area twenty years ago, around the time the Monument was designated. That was the purpose, to come through, see how everyone was doing, how was the job situation, what ranching operations were going, what was going on. Norman Carroll had some really strong opinions about these issues, mostly the idea of more federal government was not welcome. What about you, how did the Grand Staircase designation impact you? Did it change your life a lot?

ME: It didn't bother us too much. We border on to the Monument between here and Johnson Canyon, so for us we use mostly private land, a little permitted land. We go up over the Glendale Bench. The cows are now out on the winter range.

MH: We just drove through that area today but I have noticed over that last 4 or 5 years that the land near the road has been chained.

ME: I have been clearing a lot of land out there on the private ground, but the last couple of years the BLM has done the bull-hogging on BLM property out there. You would have come through where you could see that. I think the sage grouse habitat helped to get that through because they pretty much had them shut off from chaining and railing and everything. The sage grouse deal come up and the wildlife people figured it is more for wildlife is what they are claiming but it helps us a lot.

MH: Interesting, I was just reading about this today- the Interior Secretary has taken away protections for sage grouse and ranchers and wildlife proponents, conservationists are not happy. The idea is that it worked for many groups including cattle ranchers.

ME: Yes, I don't know whether they know it or not. You see a little about it now, that ranchers, game and wildlife people are working together.

MH: It takes so long for range improvements to take hold.

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ME: Yes, in the early days, before my time, people in livestock were running more than they should of. Overgrazed it some. Now, I don't think that is happening, the ranchers I know are trying to improve it, even the BLM part.

MH: It was true. And at that time there were few to no regulations.

ME: Yes, if you wanted to build a pond you could go do it. Now if you want to it takes a year to get the paper work done.

MH: I think what has really changed is the science.

ME: Yes, before they used to say, "You are over grazing, get off." Now, they help improve things. We have some good guys there in Kanab, local guys in the BLM, and in Arizona, they have been good too.

MH: It seems like it is difficult land in which to conduct agriculture.

ME: It is kind of dry, the weather effects it a lot and different things.

MH: And this year, not shaping up particularly well for moisture.

ME: I can tell you how to make a small fortune. Have a large one and go into the cow business.

MH: (Laughter) Good to hear a joke about it.

So, would you tell me about your operation, how it grew, how you maintain it?

ME: I was running about 200 cows mostly on leased private ground and BLM permits, I had a Forest permit too. And a winter BLM permit. From the time I got of high school, my dad had a few cows and I had a few cows and lease more property and gradually built up to about 200 head. IN about 2000 my son started to take over Norman's place and we combined them together and now we are running about 500 cows. 500 mother cows, they are out by the Mt. Trumbull country. We are out by the ponds area, "Carroll Ranch" BLM winter permits, are on record as the Fern's Allotment. We have big ponds that are probably named after the guys who originally put them in; Fern's, Spendlove's, Nickle's, Shanles, and Carroll Tanks. We have put in several smaller ones and several catchments.

MH: Are you one of the biggest operators now?

ME: Heaton brothers up to Alton are a little bigger.

MH: The terrain out on the Strip is much easier for livestock right?

ME: Yes, more open country. Ours (on the Strip) is a little rougher, some grass country. But off under the Hurricane Rim it is more grass country.

MH: In this country you have been grazing cattle and sheep all these years, has it changed, anything you noticed?

ME: Yes, because of the reseeding we have been doing, it has gotten a lot better, the cows do better, and we can run more cows. I have been clearing ground ever since I was big enough to get on a Caterpillar- (Pinyon Juniper clearing). When I am clearing land, I push the sagebrush and rabbit

brush out, and plow where the sage was and then seed it. The seed is crested wheat, intermediate wheat, some brome, tall wheat, and sometimes the Fish and Game furnishes some seeds that wildlife like; clover, alfalfa, flax (for birds). They have not helped us much with seed for several years, but there was a while they did. After this fire up here this summer (Brian Head fire June 2017), the Forest Service seeded it mostly with native grasses. There was a fire on Swain's Creek where our Forest Service permit is, about 4 years ago. It sure is better now than it was. One time I cleared some ground and it took me three years planting to get enough storm that the seed/grass made it. Seed is getting really high priced so I hope it doesn't do that this year. Merlin (Mack's son) bought enough seed to plant this 460 acres I am working on now, it cost \$10,000 for the seed. You plant about twelve pounds to the acre.

MH: What breed of cows do you prefer, generally?

ME: I started out with Herefords, then starting crossing with Angus. Most of our cows are Angus, now, Hereford-Angus cross and some Gelbvieh in them now. They are doing pretty good on that range now. Hereford Angus cross are probably the best cows on our country.

MH: When your Dad got in the business, this is the transition time when ranchers are also looking for a beefier, more marketable and profitable breed stock?

ME: That cross breeding helped a lot with that. My dad bought some pure breed Herefords from his cousins when he was starting out. They were not very good producers. I don't know what the deal was- maybe the range was a little rough, I don't know.

MH: Yes, rough. Jack Seaton came into Cannonville area with a herd of herd of registered Roan-Durham cattle from Jackson Hole. He drove them to Cannonville and wintered them on the Colorado just before the Taylor Grazing. He lost half the herd in one winter. Fell, slipped, starved- it was tough on his Wyoming cattle. It takes so much range to feed a cow. What is the number you use acres per cow?

ME: Thirteen cows per section, 640 acres is what ours is rated at out on the Strip. Eighty percent of our grazing land up here is private ground, so I don't know. On the Forest Permits, I don't know the acres on those permits, but we do not have that many acres, but not many cows per acre up on the Forest Service. Usually it is better graze than the BLM land. More mountain, cooler, more grass.

MH: You have been in this business a long time. What do you think about the future?

ME: It is looking good right now. I sold calves for twenty cents a pound. Year before last we sold a bunch of yearling heifers that weighed about seven hundred pounds and got about \$1000.00 a piece for them. I did not ask Merlin how much we got a piece this year, but a little over a dollar a pound for the steers. The year before it was up over 2 dollars a pound. Six hundred pound calf brought us \$1100.

MH: What, then, is going on with the market creating this boon?

ME: Probably less cows going to market- all over the nation.

MH: Southern Utah is unique in the cow business, for its aridity, its terrain.

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ME: Some people say we shouldn't even have cows here. (Chuckles) The people who build summer homes up on the mountain don't think there should be cows up there. A lot of where the private ground is, say in Missouri, they can run a lot more cows per acre. But, I think the older cattlemen are dying off and the young guys are not interested so those guys are selling their ranches. A lot of them are owned by people who are hunting tax deductions.

MH: I have read about wealthy people who are doing that in Kansas. Never see the land. Just a tax write-off.

ME: There are a lot of ranches in Southern Arizona, outside owners, hire somebody to run them, big ranches, tax write-offs.

MH: In the world market, how do you see your operation in the world market of beef production?

ME: I don't know whether we are or not (in the world market) here. The world market helps us. We have good sales on cattle for quite a few years. We sell them on the video auction.

MH: So, they are bought via video, then they are loaded up- then are they inspected here, then?

ME: We have to have them inspected before we ship them out anywhere, a health inspection. If they are going across the State lines, another inspection. We have to pay the inspectors, there is a brand inspector, and used to be two. One and a helper is doing Arizona. We have to have ours inspected before we leave Utah and go into Arizona. Then we have to have Arizona inspect them before we come back into Utah. We used to just move them. Ever since I have been selling calves of my own, you had to have them inspected when they were being shipped out.

MH: So, that is a cost each time?

ME: Yes, and they have added some costs in now, it costs quite a bit.

MH: So, coming and going, Utah benefits and Arizona benefits...

ME: And beef associations gets some, brand inspectors collect it, and a National Beef Association takes some out. I am not a member of these associations right now, but Merlin is a member of the National/Utah Cattlemen's Associations.

MH: Do you feel Utah State legislators are aware of what the needs of livestock producers are down here? For example, a bison operation near here felt that field inspectors were necessary for his operation, but it is not allowed in Utah.

ME: I guess you would have to hire a vet to do that probably. There are a few people around running elk to sell them to hunters. There is a buffalo herd out by East Zion, costs a lot to go hunt one. The Utah government guys are interested in helping us- I don't know if the brand inspection does that much good. If a guy wanted to haul some cows into Arizona and not tell a brand inspector, you could do it, haul them out, you could do it. All they are doing with that is collecting their fees.

MH: So, the Heatons of today have an interesting operation, marketing grass fed beef and wrangling dudes up the Toroweap Rim of the Grand Canyon.

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ME: Kelly Heaton has that, he is my cousin, too. We join together on winter range, too. He runs year round out there, and he takes the cows up to Panguitch on pasture.

MH: That seems to be the trend, running cattle now on private pasture vs. BLM permits.

ME: Our summer country is 80% private, 20% BLM. Out on the Arizona Strip we have 100,000 acres and only 40% of it is private ground. We have several State sections there. Arizona is good to work with because they will let you develop water and run it out into catchments on the BLM. We are developing another one right now. The catchments catch water better than the old ponds because we are getting more grass, and the water don't run as well- put down plastic aprons and have a big storage tank and then pipe the water out from them.

MH: How long does it take to get out on that winter range from Orderville?

ME: I haven't gone out much this year but, generally I have. I have an injury from riding. I helped gather last spring. It takes us two hours, almost a hundred miles of mostly dirt roads to get out there. My knee started hurting, from being tromped on a few times.

MH: Still have horses?

ME: I used to have some special horses, but I don't own any horses now, my son owns the horses.

MH: Let's talk about your family a bit more.

ME: I was married to Betty Brinkerhoff, married 42 years. She died in 1996. They [the family] had blood problems, lots of Brinkerhoff's died of heart attacks. She had blood clots, and her blood became so thin, she bled internally and died. Then I met Peggy who I am married to now. She had a niece that was married to one of the Heaton boys up in Alton, so I went down to Stafford, Arizona and got her.

Betty and I had 2 girls and three boys. All the kids went to school here. I have a boy lives in Enoch, teaches college and high school Automotive. My other son is in Tremonton country teaching school, and one daughter, Sharon, is a school teacher in Kanab. The oldest daughter is Rebecca and she is in Tucson working at Research Corporation. She probably makes more money than all the rest of us put together. Mack, Merlin and Wade. They all grew up here and worked on the place until they got married and had families. I was in hopes to get a ranch so that I could keep my kids here, but it never happened.

MH: Grandkids?

ME: Not many. I got 2 great grandsons at one time, a few months ago. Twins! Merlin's daughter. I got another grandson over to Enoch, a little over a year old, running around now. I have some older grandkids, Merlin's got two daughters and Wade has got two sons. And Mack has two boys and one girl.

MH: Merlin is here. There is just not that much land here to pass on or use in agricultural. Seems like consolidation worked with his wife's family though.

ME: Yes, he could not have done it with just what I had, but with his wife's family's operation, the two places together, he does pretty well.

MH: Honestly, it is unique and fortunate that even that has occurred, that he is making most of his living in ranching, don't you think? Most offspring either have to leave altogether, or have a different profession, like be the principal, or a teacher and run cows in the spare time.

ME: Most of the cattlemen around here have jobs on the side. Merlin does water monitoring as well for the State.

MH: Tell me about your retirement. When did that happen?

ME: Well, Kaibab closed down, I was old enough to retire. I retired when I was...well, I worked for a contract logger for a while after. It was 1996 that Kaibab shut down. Kaibab Industries had a sawmill in Fredonia, Arizona, and one in Panguitch, Utah. When they shut down, they were cutting about 90 million board feet of lumber a year. Around 300 people in Southern Utah and Northern Arizona lost their jobs when the mills shut down. I retired about 1971 from logging. But one thing I like to do is clear land, so I do that now.

Merlin was working for Kaibab, too. About the time I retired he started to take over Norman's place and we combined the two operations together.

MH: The changes going on now, the chopping up of the Monument lands, will that effect your operation at all?

ME: No, we border the Monument. We border the Monument out the Parashant too, a little of that comes onto our BLM permit- but they have never done anything. The Monument here has never affected us. I don't know what they are doing there now, but they don't need that many acres, in that Monument, where people think they could walk over 1.7 million acres, but they can't. It has a lot of impassable country. The people not from around here, think they want to save it for open spaces, and they think we want to take it all. It is rough. The road over on the Glendale Bench- you can hardly stay on the road, where you come off into Glendale, really bad washboards. I am working only about ten miles from here.

MH: The Skutumpah is in rough shape on the north end, white sand pits that gobble up your vehicle. I think that is from the South Central Fiber Optic line work, installing the cable- then no moisture, so the road can't be worked.

ME: We hired my nephew's boy (who works for us), cleaning out the ditches above Glendale, and dug up one of the phone company's lines, and wanted us to pay \$6000 for the repair so Merlin got out there, and saw there were no right of way signs, they didn't have the signs there, so we didn't have to pay anything. Then they did put up their signs after that.

MH: Any other thoughts about the future of ranching- you seem like you can hang on to the operation no problem. Where do your cows get sold- where do they go?

ME: Yes. Midwest, California, mostly the Midwest. Last year all of them went to California. There is a guy, Spendlove, bought quite a few of our calves one year.

MH: Thank you Mack for answering all my questions and sharing your story with me.

End of interview. Time 0:52:58

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“Mud horses” introduced by Mack’s wife, Peggy- Mack uses local clay from Orderville to make clay models of cows and horses, and other historic pieces. These are being displayed at the Utah Division of State History in Salt Lake City’s History Research Library.

Additionally, in his own hand, Mack gives some of the cattle brands used in the area discussed in this interview.