

INTERVIEW WITH: Ruby Griffin
INTERVIEWER: Marsha Holland
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TRANSCRIBER: Marsha Holland
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Interview begins: Sony DAT recorder, Sony digital 95 tape.

RB: I am Ruby Black Griffin. I was born in March 20, 1920.

MH: Where were you born?

RG: In Provo. My parents had some terrible misfortunes. They felt like everything they had was taken from them, so my father bought a beautiful home in Provo and moved my mother up there, because they had lost four boys, part of them grown and she was broken hearted, of course. Little did she know as soon as she got up there she'd pick up a little Provo baby, and I was born up there. So, they lived there for four or five years and she said it wasn't fair for my dad to be running farms and cattle herds and a big house in Escalante, so they sold the Provo home and moved back to Escalante. And that was home from when I was six years old.

MH: So, that was about nineteen twenty-six and that was just before the Depression. What was your father's name?

RG: John Black. He was one of the wealthiest men in Garfield County. He had a big cattle ranch. When the Depression came, then he lost it all.

MH: Let's get you mom's name.

RG: Dora Robison. She was from Kanosh.

MH: Did they ever tell you how they met?

RG: Yes, he was there too. He went over to herd cattle for a Robison, who was a relative, no relation. His was [in] Providence and hers was [in] Kanosh. They went over there to take care of that and eventually worked and bought them and so he had the herd.

MH: You were telling me when your family moved back down to Escalante. Was it just you and your parents then?

RG: No, we had five in our family then. We went back to Escalante in the summer to help my dad. I was the tenth child. She had lost five. They were quite close. One was sleigh riding and he got an appendicitis from riding and he died. They couldn't get a doctor there in time. Then a month or two later, her oldest boy, who was sixteen, died of pneumonia. Then she had one die when he fell into a pan of wash water which burned him to his elbows and he died. One thing after another, all close together. She lost four right close, and then she left. It was a tragedy.

MH: OK, you are back in Escalante, growing up and your dad is in ranching and he was very successful rancher...

RG: Until The Crash. He rushed out with a herd of cattle, sold them and rushed into Richfield to put the money in the bank and made it there just as they closed their doors. His check was no good. He got a job for the government inspecting cattle for the government, to see what kind was left and he died during that job.

MH: Do you remember during the time of The Depression when they starting killing the cattle- slaughtering the herds?

RG: I never heard him say that. He sold his for nothing though, same difference. You will read in that book a lot of things that I wrote about this.

MH: A few more questions. Your dad ended up being a cattle inspector. What about home. Did you have a big garden?

RG: Always a big garden and orchard and raspberry patch. It was a great place to grow up. You know where the church is in Escalante, a red brick home, kitty corner to the church. (Still there)

MH: Did they make bricks there in Escalante?

RG: Yes.

MH: Someone told me that you might remember a visitor that came through one time, Everett Ruess. Do you recall him?

RG: Yes, he stayed at our hotel. He camped, but he stayed overnight to replenish his camp supplies and then he went down in the desert. He had these horses. The cattle men had a corral in town to keep their horses, so, he put his two horses, one was pack horse, he put his horses in that corral, fixed himself lunch, evidently. Then he must have wandered around. My dad's theory was that he walked off the ledge. Another man who ran his cattle there went down and caught the horses, fed and watered them, then came Ruess' parents and my dad told them his theory and got his car and took them to the desert and pointed out to them how it happened and the place, so they could go back to California and they wrote him the nicest thank you letter. So, that is our story of Everett Ruess. I don't like these people that just surmise that someone, that it was foul play. It wasn't.

MH: Do you remember anything about Everett personally? Did you speak with him?

RG: Yes, he stayed at our hotel. He was a very mannerly young man. He was curious and doing what he wanted to do. He was older. I was thirteen or fourteen.

MH: Some of the women I met and talked to about him over in Tropic thought he was so handsome.

RG: He was.

MH: Tell me what it was like for you growing up in Escalante?

RG: All of us had the same issue, trying to all be normal and have fun. I as the youngest one so, I had the run of things. My mother didn't die until after I was married. I had a good life. It was during the Depression we trusted people. I had good friends.

MH: What would you and your friends do for fun?

RG: We would have potatoes roasts out in the street and neighborhood kids would come and we would dance. We would have a dance down at the old Star Hall.

MH: Where would the musicians come from?

RG: Most of them were from town, once in a while the Foot Warmers would come. We didn't have access to the other cities. The roads were bad, end of the road.

MH: Now, you and your family were business people?

RG: My family. We opened with four motel rooms and increased it to twenty and then we had the restaurant and I opened a little ladies dress shop and I sold that and we opened the store.

MH: Tell me the name of your business.

RG: The hotel was called Ruby's.

MH: Really! Were you the original Ruby's?

RG: No, but I was sneaky and I took advantage of their advertising.

MH: Nothing wrong with that since you are Ruby. (Laughter)

RG: The dress shop was called Ruby's Dress Shop.

MH: Was it the only dress shop ever in Escalante?

RG: No, the Munsons's. We were in competition.

MH: Then the Café?

RG: Ruby's Restaurant.

MH: Were you there in the 1960s?

RG: Oh, yes.

MH: That was during the uranium boom wasn't it?

RG: It was probably just before then. You were thinking of oil. We had a real good business. It was a different set-up. It was more experimental. The oil boom they set up the oil digging. They struck oil, and that was very good size operation.

MH: That really helped out Escalante's economy then.

RG: Yes.

MH: What do you remember about that time?

RG: Oh, I was right in the middle of it. We had rooms we rented and the restaurant was busy.

MH: How did you meet your husband?

RG: He was from Escalante, three grades ahead of me in school. He was a hard worker. I took care of business and he took care of the work. He would go to Salt Lake and bring back all the goods for the restaurant, hotel, and then also for

the store. He hauled with a General Motors truck. That was his company just hauling in goods for our store.

MH: I remember hearing a little about the Cream Cellar Route, outside of Escalante at the Head of the Rocks, where people from Boulder would store their cars there. Did you hear about that?

RG: No, they would meet someone. He didn't have to use that.

MH: Yes, that was before. But your husband grew up in Escalante. What was his name?

RG: Claron. Ray Griffin was his dad and Lenora Roundy They were old pioneers families. We were in Montana and Oregon and California. He was a pipe fitter on the dams that they were building.

MH: So, you traveled around a lot. So, where was you favorite place that traveled to when you were on the road with your husband?

RG: We enjoyed a lot of them. Then after we retired we traveled a lot and this was one of the places we liked (St. George)

MH: Back to Utah. Where in Montana?

RG: Near Billings, Hood River, Oregon, and he worked on Shasta (California). We lived there for three or four years. We lived in near Dunsmuir, but worked at the Shasta Dam and then in Vegas, at the Hoover Dam. My daughter was born there.

MH: Yes, I have met both of the girls (your Granddaughters). I met them at a Dutch oven cook-off. (Laughter)

RG: So, you are not from Tropic?

MH: No, we moved in here in 1999. We have a business in Cannonville, on Laurie Dee's former land.

RG: We were so isolated; the roads were not all that good. I didn't get over there much.

{Ruby shows a memory album from her eightieth birthday celebration, full of letters from friends and relatives}

MH: (Looking at photos) So, it looks like Claron was a sportsman, hunting...would you go with him?

RG: No, I would go fishing once in awhile. He didn't like to take me because I would catch more fish than he would. (Laughter) We would fish anywhere near Escalante; the Boulders, Barkers, Posey.

MH: Would you use worms?

RG: No, I would use cheese balls. We had a little boat.

MH: Did you ever spend time on horses?

RG: No, I didn't learn to ride. My dad had beautiful horses. I have one brother that is still alive and he always rode horses, Gerald Black. He is three years older than Claron. We talk all the time on the phone. He is in assisted living, too. He wants to come down, but I couldn't take care of him. I have a niece who is a teacher at Dixie College and she swears she will bring him down. But, I don't know how to get him here. He is way too old now.

MH: This book is just beautiful. Now, the Blacks were some of the first settlers here?

RG: My dad was from Kanosh and was in one of the first groups here.

MH: Do you remember how they used to run the mail?

RG: Yes, my dad used to run the mail from Escalante to Boulder for years. They would have to take two days.

MH: Back to your family. What year did you marry Claron?

RG: 1937.

MH: Things were starting to shape up after The Depression then. Were there CCC boys around?

RG: We didn't stay long after we were married. We went to Oregon and worked on a fox farm. He worked to feed them. Janet was my oldest daughter and she was a baby then. We left mother behind in Escalante.

We just got settled [in Oregon] and I looked out from our window and I said, "There is a big travel bus stopping out here." Out came my mother.

MH: She traveled to be with you!

RG: She traveled out just after we got there. We were astounded. At every place, she would go home, then when we would move someplace she came, and that is when I told Claron we have got to go home. We are dragging Mama around. She just wanted to be with us.

MH: And her grandchildren. Your first child was Janet.

RG: Janet was the first child died with cancer, then Pauline. I have a grandson who is a superintendent of schools up in Provo and ...

MH: A lot of your grandkids went into education?

RG: All of them. I was telling a friend of mine; Pauline teaches in St. George and Janet lives is the superintendent of schools in the Orem area, and her husband Jim is a teacher and the coach and Dennis is teaching high school. Someone asked me as I

was telling this same story “What did you teach? And I said, “I taught the teachers.” (Laughter).

MH: That’s right. So, you had two children?

RG: Just two, the two girls. But both their husbands were in education.

MH: And this is wonderful tribute here- (the memory album we had been looking at). This is a neat thing to do for your eightieth birthday; Cottams, Colemans, Velma, Munsons, Woolseys, Schows. The Schows were one of the original families?

RG: I was going to show you some other pictures in here.

MH: You like to knit?

RG: Yes, but I can’t see that well. (inaudible section about one of her daughters)

MH: Was she one of the Downwinders, your daughter?

RG: I think it is a possible thing. The doctors said it was a foreign cancer, it was called mesothelioma, and he said the only cases we have had, have gotten it from asbestos, and of course she was a life long school teacher and he said schools were all insulated with asbestos. So, we don’t know, we don’t know what causes it and it is so rare that we don’t know how to treat it. She was such a loving girl. So, is Pauline. Now she has cancer. She is being treated.

MH: That is a tough battle. They have to have a strong will.

RG: I have never had it.

MH: A different kind of cloth for you, tough. Tell me about your mom. Her husband, your dad, passed on early and she remained in Escalante.

RG: We went back home to take care of her. We moved back when the kids were in school and went into business there. It was before the war.

MH: Did your dad ever leave, like on a mission?

RG: He went on a mission before they were married. He got malaria on his mission that weakened his lungs, so he died fairly young. [And] working too hard and too many tragedies in his life.

MH: Ruby, thank you for your time.

RG: I have enjoyed visiting with you. I didn't know it would be like this. That is wonderful. My mom had a philosophy, she said, sometimes you have to be your own doctor and think of what would be best for you.

MH: Wasn't there a midwife in your community? What was her name?

RG: Susan Heaps. Her daughter is Afton Church.

MH: It was so isolated. You would have to take the Main Canyon Route over to Widstoe. Did you ever go on the old route to Boulder?

RG: I wasn't too familiar with that until after I was married and we used the trail. Claron wasn't in the cattle business.

MH: It was your dad who had the cattle business. Did you have a lot of hired hands there?

RG: Yes, had some. My mother would cook for them. If you had seen that big dining room I have over there, she said you shouldn't see fifteen hands around that kitchen table. She was an excellent cook. She would make everything taste good. We had meat, potatoes, gravy and pie. We used to laugh; my dad would eat a piece of cake with icing and all and he would have a piece of bread and butter to eat with it. Always home made bread. The other, we called it store bread; it was

just like cake is to us now. We always had different things like oranges and bananas.

I'm waiting for my granddaughter to arrive.

MH: Well, I have had you for a while here, so let's end our interview.





