

1 Sandra Miller (Lyman, Leibenguth)

Interview for the Southern Utah Oral History Project, June 16th, 2004, Escalante, Utah.

Sandra Lyman Leibenguth Miller interviewed by Marsha Holland, Tropic, Utah

MH: It is June 15th and I am in Escalante, Utah with Sandra Miller. How are you doing today Sandra?

SM: I am fine.

MH: Good. Please tell me where you were born Sandra?

SM: I was born in Idaho Falls, Idaho. I was born on April 9, 1947. My dad is from Boulder and Mom was from Idaho Falls. Mom and Dad had no electricity, no indoor plumbing and when I was born, my mom wanted to be with her mother so she went back to Idaho Falls. There was a hospital there and being her first baby and she was a city girl and my dad was country. There was no doctors over there; they had a midwife and they had to go to Panguitch. It was pretty primitive.

MH: What are the names of your parents?

SM: Truman Lyman and Leona Cleverly. They met on an LDS mission in the Central States Mission, which was in Kansas City. They went their separate ways for ten years and then met again at a missionary reunion and it went from there.

MH: Well, Truman was a famous guy around here...

SM: He knew the area; I wished I had listened better. He is gone now.

MH: Can you tell me what it was like growing up n Boulder? In 1947, the War was just wrapping up.

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SM: Yes, I was born in 1947, and the World War II was just coming to an end. Dad was the oldest and his father was shot, and since he was the oldest he didn't have to go to war. Ivan and Conrad did and Kirk wanted to but they wouldn't take him because of his chest bone.

In Boulder, we lived in the middle of town. My mom was the postmaster. She became postmaster because she wanted to get her mail and the other lady was retiring. We had the post office in our home. She had it just in a separate room in the house and the mail was delivered there every day. It was delivered by truck. The road between Escalante and Boulder had not been built very long.

The first mail carrier I remember was Arthur McInelly. I think I was about eight or nine. When he died his son Kent McInelly took over and he delivered the mail for about thirty years. Arthur was married to Twilla. Arthur trucked all the time and he used to go to Boulder. There was a Christiansen that also went to Boulder two or three times a week to get cream. Sometimes the mail truck took the cream. Everybody milked cows and we put it in cream cans and then set the cans in the ditch, in a big hole in the ditch, in Lower Boulder and then they would come by and pick up the cream.

MH: Then you probably had to milk cows when you were young?

SM: I learned how. I didn't have to. Mom milked cows a lot. Dad trucked all the time and my mom milked cows. The boys milked the cows, my mom milked the cows, but I didn't. The other chores were feed the dogs, fed the chickens, feed the pigs, run the cows in, bring in the wood. In the wintertime we had to bring in the wood for the cook stove to cook on and heat water on. We had to heat the water to wash the dishes and the clothes. We'd heat a big barrel outside or inside and took it out. I remember the washer was on the back porch. We didn't have indoor

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plumbing and I was two years old before we got power. The washing machine was run by gas motor. The washer had a wringer on it. Have you ever got your fingers caught in a wringer?

MH: I have. But it was pretty rustic still as you were growing up.

SM: In fact, we had to carry water to the house everyday from the ditch. I remember thinking, "Oh, them terrible wigglers in that water", and then we would have to strain them out. When I was six or seven, Dad came home from riding on the range. We said, "Let us ride the horse!" He said, "No, she is tired." We begged and begged and finally he told us to get on her. So we got on her, Kent and I did, and she took off just like a bolt of lightning, run up the field and jumped the ditch. As she jumped the ditch, I fell off and Kent fell on me and I broke my arm. I had a compound fracture and as I remember, and I may be wrong, we did not have a vehicle. One of our neighbors took me to Panguitch to have my arm set. But I would never ride a horse again. It scared me so bad, and it also hurt me. There was no doctor, no transportation or anything like that. It was a long trip to Panguitch, but that is where you went whether you had transportation or not. So, I had my arm broken and to get my arm straight I had to carry water. That was my chore. I had to carry water every day. Yes, I started off carrying a coffee can full, that size of can, with a hand warmer. Pretty soon, it got to a five gallon bucket. It took a couple three months to get my arm straightened out. I was thirteen before we had water in our house. We moved into a house further down which had indoor plumbing. Our first house was where the new school house is now. Then we moved to the house across the street and we had running water then. I was married ten years before my mother had an automatic washer. She always washed with the wringer washers and the double decksters; two tubs and one wringer. You'd wash in this one and wring it into this one, it was a wring scrubber.

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Mom was the postmaster, but Dad had a small sawmill he ran most of the time when we were growing up. He also used to truck freight all the time for people. He'd pick up cattle and he'd bring back in the freight. I never remember going down through Calf Creek when I was young, we always went up over Hell's Backbone, through Widstoe. I remember being told the story when I was very small that my dad and Mother and Parley Coleman were going out over Hell's Backbone and they had a load of cattle and they went around a corner. The truck tipped over, the cows were in the way and I remember Mom saying how Parley couldn't get out, they was all stuck on top of each other on my Dad's side.

Anyway, during the summer when the fruit was on in Capitol Reef, he used to take his big International truck to Capitol Reef and we would load up on peaches, like maybe 200 bushels and he would take them by truck all the way to Idaho Falls. We would sell them along the way or some of the times he'd take the whole load to Idaho Falls and sell them. When I was growing up there was Mom and Dad and the two boys and myself. I have a younger brother, but he is eleven years younger than me, Noel. He didn't go up to Idaho Falls with us. We moved into the house with plumbing when he was born. The bushel of peaches went for three dollars a bushel. So they could make some money and Idaho Falls looked forward to the peaches, and we had family to visit up there.

MH: What a great and resourceful way to think. It seems that most of the people who grew up in this area are very resourceful and they found ways to make things work.

SM: I remember it was nothing for my dad to work a whole day at the sawmill, Mom to work at the post office and then she would wash bottles all day long and when he would come home they'd can peaches all night long. She never did less than 200 bottles of peaches a year. She also did apricots, apples, plums, and pears. We always had 200 bottles of peaches.

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I still can, my kids do also. In fact just before my dad passed away he would pick the fruit, call us up and say, "I'll be over, we're going to can." He'd bring the fruit over, he'd peel them, and he'd make sure we canned. He taught my girls how to can peaches.

MH: Wonderful. Where was his market for the lumber he milled?

SM: He sold it locally and I think he hauled it to Salt Lake and probably Richfield and Salina. He would get the logs up on the Boulder Mountain and cut the logs down. I honestly can't remember how he loaded them on a truck. He had an old half rack. He would haul them down and they had these big forks or things they drove the logs on. I remember he had an old water boiler. They would keep the fire going in the boiler, and I am not sure if that was what made the saw run, but then he would saw and the boiler would go off. I think it is quite a bit like the sawmill one here, not as modern, but it would saw logs. Then they would pull the boards off on the conveyors and stack the boards. He had a saw mill up by my grandmother's home where Del LeFevre lives in Boulder, and there is a lot just above there and across the road where the saw mill was, in Upper Boulder.

MH: Let's talk about community life; you went to school in Boulder, right?

SM: Yes, we all went to a one room school and with one teacher. My first teacher was Cora Munson in kindergarten. Then I had Rosa Petersen for first grade, Ann Spencer taught me in the third grade. She has taught a long time. Ann lives up here, but she began teaching when she was really young, probably twenty. Dave Rose taught us in the fourth grade and a couple of teachers came in from somewhere else for fifth and sixth grades. The school was one room at first, then it got to be one room for first through third and fourth through sixth in the other room. Then when we got to seventh grade we had to get on a bus and come over here, to Escalante, everyday.

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Sometimes in the winter we had some hairy rides. Doyle Munson was the bus driver for forty years, but he never had an accident and no matter how deep the snow was, no matter how muddy it was, the road was dirt, dirt and clay, there was no oil then, the bus would go through, we'd be to school.

MH: Never miss a day?

SM: No. [Laughter] But it was nice. It used to storm a lot in those mountains. I remember when the snow was up to your knees for a week or so. And I remember coming up the Boulder Rocks and it was different then than it is now. It was switchbacks and the boys would all pile off the bus to see if we could make it up, leaving the girls on the bus coming up the switchbacks. I remember slipping back but he always made it. In the spring and fall when it rained, we'd go down to Calf Creek and the floods washed that bridge out every time it flooded. He'd just go around, go right through this old place that we went through. It didn't matter if I was on the bus or with my dad; we always went right through the flood. It never stopped us. The road was not paved until I was a senior in high school and probably in '64, '65. It got pretty slick.

MH: That bus route was one of the reasons our family chose not to move to Boulder. I thought it was a lot of driving for the students, and potentially a dangerous trip.

SM: It is. You have to say, you have got to respect it in a ways. It is much better now than it was then. I remember when Kent was not quite one, Cleo was three and I was five, we were coming down through Calf Creek. My dad had a new Hudson car and came around a corner; he hit Uncle Lincoln head on. Both cars were in my dad's name. It threw Aunt Rolain into the windshield, cut her nose off. It cut Mother's knee cap up. I remember Cleo and I were in the back window, and when we hit, we rolled down into the rumble seat in the back window. I just remember my mom taking all the diapers from Kent's diaper bag and packing her knee and Aunt

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Rolain's face. And then, oh, a half an hour later somebody came and helped pick us, picked us up and took us to Panguitch to a doctor. You got used to living that way. We don't know how good we have it now. And we are still remote. We still have to go to Panguitch; it is a lot faster than it used to be.

MH: Sandra, we talked a little bit about school, what about things you did for fun, what would you and your friends do for fun?

SM: As I remember for fun we would play paper dolls, dolls, and we used to make willow whistles. We used to make huts out of willows. In the winter time we made snow forts, play snowballs, played fox and geese in the snow, *And I Over*, lots of games like marbles, jacks, mumble peg, games they don't play now.

MH: I used to play some of those games. {Laughter} When did you move over to Escalante?

SM: Okay, I came over here to high school, really seventh through twelfth. Then I came over to work, to wait tables and I'd drive the mail back and see my mom and then return. I'd either ride the mail or I'd drive the mail. Then I'd come back and wait tables. I lived here in town. I lived with one of my girlfriends' parents for several months, and then I rented at the Quiet Falls Motel.

MH: Were there a lot of people traveling through Escalante then?

SM: Actually, no. If you were driving between Boulder and Escalante, the traffic was nothing. You could be all day and not have a car pass you. I remember when I waited tables, things started picking up, and that is when the oilfields started to open up. They were drilling for oil and sometimes they had two rigs going and there were service crews coming in. The café was busy; we were busy, real busy. It was the only café; the Golden Loop is what it is called now. It was Whitey's Café. During the time of the oil rigs was actually one of the better times for Escalante.

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It employed a lot of young men that were able to make a good living. They also had the sawmill then and I think that economically people did real well then.

MH: When was that time period?

SM: That was '65.

MH: An interesting time for the nation, a cultural revolution going on for young people. What did you think about that, were you aware of it and did it affect you?

SM: I was probably aware of it but I didn't let it affect me. I thought they were probably crazy. I had ingrained in me too much moral standard, and then I lived here. I really didn't get out. I went to college over to Cedar City, CSU. I would come home and work in the café to make enough money to go to college again.

MH: Did you put yourself through college?

SM: No, I helped. My folks did. I was going to be a teacher. I lacked four quarters of being a teacher. I don't know. I should have finished because now it takes more than 12 quarters. When I graduated, I went to the banks in St. George for three months. I came back and got married and I started working for the phone company. I worked for the phone company for thirty-one years. The phone company started here, in Escalante. And it is still here. Some people out here would like to see it moved, but it started here by people who lived here, by some of the prominent men in town. They wanted phone service. When I lived in Boulder at first, when I was young, we had the old crank phones. I remember three shorts and a long would get you and three shorts was the neighbor, and two longs...everybody was on the same line.

MH: And would people listen in?

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SM: Oh, you bet they would. If somebody had a problem or a fight, or somebody died, everybody knew within a minute or two. They all listened in.

MH: I guess you learned pretty quickly not to say certain things over the phone.

SM: Probably! We had the old crank phone until we moved to the other house. I was thirteen and we got a phone then. We had electricity at the other house by then.

MH: So you had two and a half years in college, came back and forth to Escalante to work. Then what did you do the next step in your life?

SM: I got married and went to work for the phone company. I married Afton Leibenguth. He was from Henrieville. He was a Smith from Henrieville. His dad came in on the CCC from Kentucky. His dad ran a saw mill for Paul Steed in the Upper Valley. They moved from Henrieville and lived there, at the saw mill.

MH: My friend Hobart Feltner was at that CC Camp.

SM: Hobart Feltner? Him and Walt Leibenguth came at the same time.

Short break

MH: When were you married?

SM: In '68. I lived and raised my family here. I haven't been anywhere. My husband worked in the oil field, he worked for the saw mill, and he was working for Lincoln when he died. Lincoln had a construction company and cement. My husband died of a heart attack. Lincoln had emphysema and couldn't breathe, so they took him to Salt Lake, which is where he passed away.

MH: You saw a lot of change working for the phone company?

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SM: When I worked for the phone company they covered Boulder, Escalante, Antimony, Koosharem, Cannonville, Henrieville, and Beryl Junction on the other side of Cedar City. They picked up Colorado City and then there were 848 customers. That is when I went to work for them and they had seven exchanges. It was started by a few men here in Escalante who were associated with Garkane. At first the Garkane office and the South Central offices were together in Richfield. Then Reid Burr, who was from Garkane, helped to start the phone company. He hired his son who was an accountant, Bruce Burr to do the accounting. Then he became manager and started an office in Tropic. They moved the office from Richfield to Tropic, and it was probably in Tropic for about a year. Then they moved the office to Escalante on Main Street by the café there. Then they expanded. They started that phone company in 1955, and when they expanded they built that building where it is today. Like I said, when I worked for them in '68 they had 848 customers. Now I think they have 25,000. We bought ten exchanges right before I had to take disability retirement. I worked for them for thirty-one years.

When I went to work for them there were still some party lines. There were only two lines in Boulder. At one time we had to put a limit on the number of calls so as not to tie up the lines all day, so other people could call. I remember when we went from dial tone to touch tone, and when we changed phone numbers and went to one party lines. One of the workmen in the office had to go out and change out the all the phones and help change the ringers and other stuff. The first people I worked with were Norman Christensen, Bruce Burr, Beth Burr, Guy Bertelsen and I. There were five of us at work. Now, I think they have 128 employees, maybe more.

MH: Now they are operating in the technological age, high speed internet is the most important product.

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SM: They have internet, their long distance. I remember when we had operators and when you dialed "O" you got the operator in Richfield. The telephone company here has expanded a lot. When I first worked for them we did our own billing, we made the bills by hand and U.S. West billed us for the long distance, then we had to bill our customers. Later we went with a couple of companies who did the billing for us, but now they do their own billing again.

MH: And how did you meet Howard?

SM: Waiting tables. He was an oil worker. I met him and his family then. His brothers were here, the wives, their kids. Then they all left for Wyoming and Nebraska. I was waiting tables part-time again at night. Then they came back, that's how I met Howard again.

MH: Tell me about the family you have.

SM: I have two children. Afton and I had two girls, Lisa and Paula.

MH: Would you tell me about some of the changes you have noticed since you have lived here. You mentioned the weather has changed, not as stormy, which would change the land use. What have you noticed?

SM: Well, maybe. There have been a lot of changes. I miss how it used to be. I think it was a lot better to be that way. It was nothing for us to be able to go up and get a load of wood or we gathered watercress to eat. And we hiked; we hiked all the time, like to Sadie's Nipple all the way to the top. When you are young it seems like it takes all day. I mean time is...you can't wait for time to go by. When you are older there is never enough time. I remember when we used to hike down to Calf Creek Falls or Sadie's Nipple. There is a road within a quarter of a mile of that. It took us all day to walk. But the land, I don't think the look of the land had changed all that much. It is drier weather. I miss seeing the cattle grazing. My dad raised cows. When he wasn't

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raising his own he worked for the Wayne County Cattle Association. They would run cattle on the Boulder Mountain. And in the winter, they were in the Circle Cliffs. But my dad told me how they used to run their sheep down in Bullfrogs in the winter time and they would drive them to a mountain by Koosharem in the spring. I said, "How long did that take?" and he said, "Couple of three days." You don't see that anymore. You don't see cattle very much.

MH: Funny, I just passed a cattle drive in the Upper Valley, about a hundred head, being driven right up the highway. Everyone was stopped taking pictures.

SM: Really? You don't see it that often. I kind of miss some of that. But I think this area is pretty well preserved. I don't see that much change myself. Maybe better roads and that is to my advantage. I would never want to raise my kids in Boulder and have them ride the bus every day. That would be a worry.

MH: Well, good Sandra. I think that was very interesting. I want to say thank you.

SM: O.K.

End of interview