

INTERVIEW WITH: Darl D. Robinson – Darl's wife Pauline is present  
INTERVIEWER: Jay Haymond  
INTERVIEW NUMBER: One  
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PLACE OF INTERVIEW: Home in Kanab, Utah  
SUBJECT OF INTERVIEW: Life and experiences in Kanab - Kane County  
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JH: Okay, first, tell me about the family into which you were born- your father and mother and your brothers and sisters, and when you were born and that sort of thing if you would please.

DR: Well, I was born to Delmar Graham Robinson, and Adonis Findlay Robinson. There were five of us - three boys and two girls. Emron, then myself, then Georgia, Genevieve, and Alex. And we lived here in Kanab most of our lives. We spent some time up at Skutumpah - that's Grandpa Robinson's ranch. Dad was a sheepherder and he went out on the range, out on the Arizona strip, with the sheep. I never liked the sheep business because they got up so early in the morning.

JH: Yeah, right. (Laughter)

DR: Anyway, I went on to learn to just be a cowpuncher. I worked out on the Kaibab with my uncle. We lived here in town most of the time. We went down to the reservoir and went swimmin'.

JH: Where is the reservoir?

DR: It's down below Kanab -on the edge of Kanab.

JH: Oh, I see.

DR: In the irrigation ditch. We were there one time and we were diving for rocks. One of the fellows was going to throw a rock and he threw it and I dove before he... and he hit me and knocked me out. It put water into my ears and I blamed that for making me deaf. Anyway, I got out and went home and I was all right. That was one of my little experiences.

JH: Did a lot of people go swimming there? Was that a favorite?

DR: It was a little swimmin' hole for boys.

JH: Sure.

DR: We went in the nude. Then there was another one up above there where the girls went.

JH: I see. Well how often was this place frequented for swimming purposes? Every day?

DR: Oh, in the warm summer, yes. Just weather permitting. Then we went ice-skating in the winter. It was a lot colder here then than it is now. I ice-skated from here up to the damn. They used to go to the damn up there and cut ice and bring it down here and put it under saw dust and have it so that we could have ice cream in July.

JH: How do you account for that change in the climate?

DR: I don't understand this weather. I finally got into cow business, but I always thought it was a hard business because of the weather. It never rained on my ranch. It's still dry.

JH: That hasn't changed, has it?

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DR: No. Well, it's getting drier. We've only had that one little storm this year. We had some good storms last fall. Well, I punched cows out on the Kaibab for years and years for my uncle and he helped me get into the cow business in House Rock, up in the valley. I spent most of my time in Arizona - I lived here in Kanab. Dad and I got into the cow business out east of Kanab, out here in what they call Five Mile, but it wasn't very good. It just didn't rain out there.

JH: Yeah. Do you remember the implementation of the Taylor Grazing Act in the late thirties? When they started requiring permits on desert land?

DR: Oh, I remember it coming in. My uncle went back to Washington, D.C. to help start the Taylor Grazing Act all right. The way I understand the Taylor Gazing Act, it was to solve of the problems between stock people - that's what it was set up for.

JH: Yeah.

DR: I don't know . . . later in life it was set up for jobs.

JH: Yeah. (Laughter) Well that's probably right. You ran stock on the Kaibab so you had permits from the Forest Service, I guess?

DR: That was my uncle's, not mine.

JH: I see. Okay.

DR: I didn't have anything out there. Yes, it was the Forest Service. When I first went out there, I thought that the stock people owned something, but later I found out that they didn't own anything. They just had a permit, that's all . . . I thought even out on the

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BLM, at first I thought you owned something when you got that grazing permit but I found out later it was just a grazing permit. 'Privilege' they called it.

JH: Yeah. When you had that idea that somebody owned something . . . did you get that idea from growing up in Kanab when those who ran stock didn't have to have permits?

DR: Well, I guess that's where it came from. Now some of the people did not establish themselves. They thought this range was here forever. They moved out and found out they didn't have any rights. So it hurt a few people, I'm sure. But I don't know all about it, no.

JH: Yeah. What was it about the cowboy life that you liked?

DR: Sittin' on a horse.

JH: (Laughter) Was the horse your friend, or your partner?

DR: He was my partner, I think.

JH: Yeah. Did you have a favorite horse?

DR: Well, I had a lot of different horses. No, I never did have any that you'd call a love horse, no. I loved them all.

JH: That's good. Did they do what you asked them to?

DR: Well, you knew what you wanted to do and they would do what you wanted to do all right. When I was young, my uncle gave me a gentle horse. It was willing to go. There were some of them that acted like burros.

JH: Did you ever get bucked off?

DR: Oh, I've been thrown off a lot of times.

JH: Did the partnership dissolve right there?

DR: It kind of did with one, in later life, all righty enough. I had this Pinto horse over here in House Rock. I got him broke and was riding him and doing real good and all of a sudden he decided he wanted to buck. The first time I rode him, but the second time he threw me, he threw me into a prickly pear nest. I had prickly pear sticking in my back. That horse was 'loco'.

JH: What tipped him over? Did he eat something that didn't agree with him?

DR: Yeah. There's loco over there that has fixed a lot of horses.

JH: I didn't know we had locoweed in this country?

DR: Oh yes.

JH: Wow!

DR: Cattle will get it and they'll eat it. You can see it. You can watch them, but they are all right. Horses will live but if they're loco, they might be upset about anything at anytime.

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JH: Yeah. So it's a permanent condition after the horse eats it?

DR: Yeah.

JH: I see. Well that's a sorry thing to see an animal go like that.

DR: Yes.

JH: What did you do with him?

DR: I sold him. I got rid of him. I didn't want him.

JH: I bet. Is there any other kind of poisonous or toxic plants that animals eat out in this country?

DR: Well, there's larkspur. It's deadly poison for cows, but I don't know that it affects horses. I know that, in House Rock, cows died of it.

JH: How do they act when they get that stuff?

DR: I don't . . . I couldn't tell you that cause when I saw them they were just dead and that's what we blamed it on but I couldn't say that was definitely the cause either.

JH: But you believed it was?

DR: Yes.

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JH: Back to the horses. Did you get into the horse-trading business more than just the work stock?

DR: No.

JH: You didn't like trading horses?

DR: No.

JH: That can be a disease.

DR: Well, I guess I never got into the business. I know some of the others traded a lot, but I didn't.

JH: Did you have a favorite color?

DR: Oh, no. I think I loved all horses.

JH: Good. The trade between sheep and cattle in some parts of this country took place in about 1952. Do you remember that change then?

DR: Well, my uncle he had the sheep and he went and traded all of the sheep for cattle. I didn't know what was going on at the time. Since then, I realized why they did. At first the sheep business was the best business because they had their wool and then they had their lambs to sell. People were using wool and I think they quit using wool - we don't use wool anymore. So, I think that was the big reason they changed from sheep to cattle.

JH: Yeah, I do too. I've heard also that the cost of getting herders argued against the sheep and maybe it was difficult to get herders. I don't know. And sheep required herders all the time. You couldn't just take them out on a permit and leave them and then come back and check them occasionally.

DR: Well, the main reason they needed a herder was to keep them away from the coyotes. That is true. It took a camp mover and a herder. It took two fellows all the time with a herd of sheep. But they were running two thousand head of sheep and when the exchange came, they were trading seven sheep for one cow from a feed standpoint of view.

JH: Yeah. That was the ratio that the permitter made to get permits for cattle out of the permits per sheep. Is that correct?

DR: Yes.

JH: Seven to one.

DR: I think that's what it was.

JH: I've never heard that ratio, but it sounds about right. Back to being a cowboy, did being a cowboy mean that there was a certain dress, or a uniform even. What kind of uniform did you have?

DR: Levi Strausses and denim shirts.

PR: Cowboy boots and a cowboy hat.



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DR: I wouldn't have called it the big ten gallon, but it was a ten-gallon Stetson and a pair of boots.

JH: How wide was the brim on that Stetson?

DR: Oh, I always had the narrow brim.

JH: Three inches?

DR: Yeah.

JH: That was enough shade for you?

DR: Yeah.

JH: Good. Did you ever have a string on it to keep it on your head?

DR: No.

JH: What kind of boots did you use?

DR: Oh, just the western cowboy boots with two and a half inch heels. The heel was there to help keep your foot from going through the stirrup.

JH: Right.

DR: They weren't walking boots.

JH: Right. Was there a local idea that walking was not for a cowboy? In other words, you weren't really a cowboy unless you rode all the time.

DR: Well, I don't quite follow your question there.

JH: I'm thinking about a folk belief that if you had to walk to do your work then you weren't really a cowboy.

DR: Well, that could have been. Later on I wore flat heeled shoes -we called them □program boots - they were lace up boots, they come up about that high but they didn't have the heel on them. In those, you could walk or ride. That's what I used the last years. I decided those high heel boots weren't for me. You couldn't walk in them.

JH: Especially on an uneven ground.

DR: Well they are uphill boots, not downhill boots.

JH: Right. That's right. How did you get into the cattle business for yourself? Did you say your uncle helped you get into the business?

DR: Yes.

JH: Tell me how he helped you make that change. Did he finance it?

DR: Well, he gave me cows for wages, at first.

JH: Oh, I see.

DR: Then I got some cows there. Then dad and I went out here. We couldn't make a living there. He got a chance to sell it and he sold it. Then my uncle had a permit out in House Rock, and he gave it to me.

JH: Oh, I see. So where did you put your cows in the summertime, with the winter range out in House Rock?

DR: That was one of the problems. We ran them there year around, and it wasn't a year around set up.

JH: Oh, yeah.

DR: It was a winter set up. That's the way the early pioneers ran it.

JH: Sure.

DR: They run in House Rock Valley, and then up on the Kaibab in the summer. They had a good operation.

JH: So how did you make out?

DR: I finally sold out and quit. Twenty years ago. I came out all right.

JH: What have you done in the last twenty years in the livestock business?

DR: Nothing.

JH: You got out of it completely?

DR: I got out and retired.

JH: Good move. That's a good time to make that change - sounds to me like. What do you think is in store for the livestock business now?

DR: Well, I don't think you can fight the weather, the BLM and the environmentalists. The weather is number one. I don't know that the livestock business is too good a business right now.

JH: Is there a way to survive the economics of the business? In other words . . . I'm thinking about feedlot beef compared to range-fed beef and how the consuming public maybe even prefers feedlot beef.

DR: Well I like beef, and I think it's gonna be here forever. Somebody's going to have to raise the beef, even if they have to ship it in. Transportation's no problem. Hell, they can put them on a plane and they could be there in a few minutes.

JH: Yeah. Drop them out of a parachute, huh?

DR: Yeah. (Laughter)

JH: (Laughter) So what does a retired cowboy do?

DR: Well, after we retired, why we did a little traveling, in the western states only. We went to all eleven western states.

JH: Oh yeah.

DR: I was always fascinated with racehorses. I didn't want to own one, but I like to play two dollars on one, so we went to Phoenix a lot. I've been to a lot of racetracks in California.

JH: Did you ever think that you'd like to be a jockey?

DR: I couldn't ride bareback. I tried bareback, but some of the horses ran away with me. I wasn't able to sit on a bareback horse. I thought that was somebody else's game.

JH: But you like to watch them?

DR: Oh, I love to watch them.

JH: Is it the joy seeing a man and a horse working together? Or is it just the joy of seeing a horse working well under control?

DR: Oh, I think it's the joy of seeing the horse work well. Of course they've got to be together if they are going to win a race.

JH: Oh yeah. You don't have a pair of workhorses out here in the back, do you?

DR: I've never had a workhorse.

JH: I thought maybe you'd buy a pair of Clydesdales or something.

DR: Nope. I wasn't a teamster.

JH: (Laughter) Yeah.

DR: I think that Budweiser set-up is beautiful.

JH: Isn't that pretty?

DR: It is beautiful. Hell, it takes so damn much pay, I couldn't afford them.

JH: I haven't seen the figures, but those hay burners seem like they consume a lot. I understand that their feet are this big and round. That's an awful big horse. Tell me some of the other things you've done in your life. You've had a family. Tell me about your family.

DR: Oh, we have three children and we've got nine grandchildren.

JH: Very good. Did you give each of those grandchildren a pony?

DR: No. That's something I never did consider. No, I wasn't in that much. I only had two horses, three at the most.

JH: Yeah. Did you think of them as pets, or were they just your working partners?

DR: Just working partners.

PR: He never had them in town. They were always out at the ranch.

JH: Yeah. What else did you do besides raise a family?

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DR: You mean working?

JH: Besides working, yeah.

PR: He was in the army.

JH: When did you go into the army?

DR: In forty-one.

JH: Were you drafted into the army?

DR: Well, I was drafted with a twist of the arm.

JH: Yeah.

DR: Or I volunteered with a twist of the arm.

JH: Tell me about that army experience.

DR: Oh, I spent three and a half years in the army. I thought at first I was going to see the world, but I only saw Los Angeles. I spent three years in Los Angeles County.

JH: What were you doing down there?

DR: On a searchlight - anti-aircraft.

JH: Did you ever get to fire the anti-aircraft gun?

DR: Oh, I fired a fifty-caliber machine gun. That was mostly just on a searchlight- we didn't have anything but rifles. We were supposed to illuminate the airplanes, and the other battalions were supposed to do the shooting.

JH: Oh, that's a good deal. That was a lot quieter duty it seems to me.

DR: Well, it was a good duty. We were up all night watching for airplanes.

JH: Did they let you rest in the daytime?

DR: Yes. Hell, we went to bed at six o'clock in the morning and got up about twelve. It was a hard way to live. Nights were meant to sleep.

JH: I agree with that. Let me turn this tape over.

End of Side One Tape One  
Begin Side Two Tape One

JH: Once you finished that searchlight duty, what did you do then?

DR: Well they broke our outfit up there in the Los Angeles area. They shipped me back to Alexander, Louisiana. We were headed for Germany. Then the war over in Germany ended, so they turned us around and shipped us back to this way. We came back and went to San Francisco, and up to Seattle. We were going up to the Aleutian Islands. Then they decided they didn't want us up there, so they shipped us down to the Hawaiian Islands. I spent two months on Hawaii, on Honolulu. Then they shipped me down to Christmas Island. I was down there for two months. Then it was time to come home.



JH: What were you doing on Christmas Island?

DR: Mostly maintaining an airport. It was an emergency airfield.

JH: By maintaining, does that mean - was it fixing up the equipment or fixing the airfield, or what?

DR: Well, mostly maintaining our own lives.

JH: Yeah, right.

DR: It was an emergency airfield, and there was no water there. We pumped water out of the ocean, and boiled it to steam, and cooled it back to water for drinking water. That was one of the jobs that I did down there. I worked on that.

JH: That's a hard way to get water, isn't it?

DR: It was bad water.

JH: Tell me how you heated the water.

DR: They had oil. Diesel fuel.

JH: They had to ship in the diesel? Wow!

DR: Everything was shipped in there.

JH: Well, I guess the question I wanted to ask you is out of that army experience what did you bring back to use on your livestock business? What kind of skills or point of view or whatever?

DR: Oh, I don't think I brought anything back. Other than that I existed there. We had to exist, and that's what we did here in the cow business, just exist.

JH: Yeah. Did you feel like there were some similarities when you were there in the army to the way you operated in the livestock business here?

DR: I don't know how to answer that. Those generals, the officers that managed, were a lot smarter people than I was. They knew how to do those things. Manipulate and get those people every place they are supposed to be. They were real good people.

JH: You got along with them okay?

DR: Yeah. I didn't understand well what they were doing.

JH: Yeah. Tell me how you made the adjustment between army life and the civilian life when you got back. Was that 1945, 46? What did you find when you got back?

DR: Well, I went back punching cows just like I did before I went. That was before I was married. I came back just the same as before I went, as far as I was concerned.

JH: Why did you come back; was it because this was home?

DR: Yes.

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JH: Were you in business with your father then or were you just working wages?

DR: I was just working wages. That's about all I ever did do until '58 when I got those cattle in House Rock, but I couldn't make a living at that. I had to job - I jobbed at other jobs all the time.

JH: Sure. Did the army provide you with any kind of a pension when you retired?

DR: Well, I had a job with the BLM here. I worked for them for twelve years, and after working for them twelve years they added my military service as a service to the government, so I did come out with a little pension.

JH: What were you doing for the BLM?

DR: I was a fire fighter. A general flunky, a shovel operator.

JH: Did you ever find one of those shovels that the seat fit?

DR: Huh?

JH: Did the seat ever fit on one of those shovels?

DR: Well, my hands got sore.

JH: (Laughter) I was trying to make a joke out of those hand shovels being equipped with a seat.

DR: We called them ignorant sticks.

JH: I've heard that.

DR: But they are a good tool when you need one.

JH: That's right. So government employment was really fairly good in your case, wasn't it?

DR: Yes.

JH: The community has generally benefited from government employment. Would that be a true statement in your perspective?

DR: Well, there are many families that are getting a payroll and that's what all of us families need is a payroll.

JH: Right, exactly right.

DR: To make everything go, if you don't have a payroll for everybody, it's going to be a rough life.

JH: Right. What question have I failed to ask you that I ought to have, that you haven't all ready answered?

DR: No, I don't think so.

JH: I was wondering if you had something to tell me that I haven't asked you about.

DR: No. No, I've about run out.

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JH: Have you? You didn't tell me how old you were, or when you were born and that.

DR: Oh, I was born in 1919.

JH: That's a good year.

DR: It was eighty years ago.

JH: Yeah. What month?

DR: January 15, 1919.

JH: World War II ended in November, just before your birthday. Did anyone ever talk about that?

DR: World War II?

JH: World War I. Did I say World War II? I made a mistake.

DR: Yeah, yeah. Some of my old friends that I worked around - they were over there.

JH: Yeah. Would they come back and be cowboys after the war?

DR: Yeah.

JH: Yeah. Well, again, I appreciate very much you sharing your time with me this afternoon.  
I thank you.

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DR: Well, I hope it helps you along.

JH: It will; you can plan on it. Thank you.

End of Interview