

Russel Meacham

Farr West, UT

An Interview by

Tori Fairbanks

10 July 2024

LAYTON HISTORY COLLECTION

Verdeland Park Oral History Project

Tape No. HM2024.059.16

**Layton City
and
Heritage Museum of Layton**

GOOD MORNING, MY NAME IS TORI FAIRBANKS, AND TODAY IS WEDNESDAY, JULY 10TH, 2024. WITH ME TODAY IS RUSSEL MEACHAM, AND WE ARE AT HIS HOME IN FARR WEST, UT. I WILL BE INTERVIEWING HIM TODAY FOR THE VERDELAND PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

TF: Before we begin, I just want to be sure that I have your okay to record this interview.

RM: Yes.

TF: Okay, great. Well, let's go ahead and start off by having you tell me your full name, and where and when you were born, and we'll go from there.

RM: My name is Clarence Russel Meacham, and that's Russel with one L. I was born in Rock Springs, WY, on October 31st, 1937. I lived there until I was old enough to start first grade, then we moved to Nebraska. They required a full year of kindergarten in Nebraska, so that put me a year behind most of the kids my age; but I didn't have any trouble. I passed every grade just fine until I graduated from Davis High School in Kaysville, UT.

We moved to Bountiful, UT, from Nebraska, when I was six or seven years old, then we moved to Verdeland Park in Layton when I was eight years old. I lived there until I got married at 20 years old, and I lived in two or three different places in Verdeland Park after I was married.

TF: Can you tell me your parents' names?

RM: Clarence Roger Meacham and May Genevieve Putnam.

TF: Where were they from?

RM: My mother was from Woodruff, UT, and my father was born in Rock Springs, WY.

TF: How many siblings did you have?

RM: I had five sisters and one brother, so there were seven kids all together. I had two sisters older than me, then myself, then one sister, and then my brother. And after my brother, I had two more sisters who were twins.

TF: So, you were the oldest brother. What were some things you enjoyed doing when you were growing up?

RM: Well, I enjoyed going fishing and hunting with my father, but when we moved to Layton when I was eight, there were seven of us kids, and Mom didn't work. She stayed home to take care of us, and sometimes my father didn't make very much money. He did civil service for the government at the Naval Supply Depot. So, I became quite industrious when I was still young.

I started mowing lawns for people when I got old enough to push a lawn mower; we didn't have power mowers at that time. But I did that when school was out for the summer, and then I got a paper route delivering the Salt Lake Tribune every morning when I was ten or eleven years old. I started with a paper route that included half of Verdeland Park, then when the other half of Verdeland Park became available, I took that on too.

Then they started building homes up in Wasatch Heights. So, I took that route and delivered papers there, as well as some of the other streets that were in that area. When I started delivering papers, I had only had thirty-something customers; but by the time I was a senior in high school, I had around 150 customers.

Once in a while, I'd get a chance to go fishing or hunting, and then my mother and my sisters would take over my paper route for a day or two, or however long I was gone. And back then, you collected money for the paper yourself. People didn't just send money to the company—you had to go around to all the customers who got the paper and collect their money.

So, I knew a lot of the people from delivering their newspapers, or mowing their lawns, or things like that. I got to know a lot of people in Verdeland Park that way.

TF: What unit did you first live in?

RM: G-5.

TF: How long did you live there?

RM: Until I got married.

TF: And you lived there with all six of your siblings?

RM: Yes, all seven of us lived in a three-bedroom unit. And connected to our unit on the other side was a one-bedroom unit.

TF: Who shared what bedrooms in your house, if you had five girls and two boys?

RM: Mom and Dad had one bedroom, three of my sisters shared a room, and my brother, me, and my twin sisters—the two youngest—shared the other bedroom.

TF: Okay. Do you remember anything about Nebraska before you moved to Verdeland Park?

RM: I remember the hailstorms. They would move in fast on a sunny day and hit pretty suddenly. The first year we were there, those hailstorms beat the crops down. So, we had to replant, but we were still able to harvest the crop that year.

My dad worked for the railroad in Gering, Nebraska, and they harvested a lot of sugar beets. And we had a cow that my mother's father gave to us when we lived in Woodruff, UT, so we carted that cow with us to Nebraska in a trailer. (laughs) So our family was able to get fresh milk.

But anyway, the hailstorms were bad. One day my dad got caught in a hailstorm where he was out in the field planting. There was kind of an old galvanized metal tub, or something like that. So, he grabbed it and held over his head, and he said that every time a hail stone would hit

the same place twice, it would actually bust a hole through this galvanized tub. But he had to hold it over his head in order to get back to the house. But the hail from those storms would bust windows out of houses, and dent cars up so bad that everybody just drove dented cars around.

(laughs)

I had an aunt and uncle who lived about a mile from us, and they had a son named Larry Pitchford. He was a year younger than me, and we ran around together until we graduated from Davis High School. But we only lived in Nebraska for two years, because Dad just couldn't make it work. So, we moved to Utah because he got a job at the Naval Supply Depot Clearfield, and we moved to Verdeland Park.

TF: Did your father serve in the military?

RM: No, he never served military. Neither did my brother or I. We had a sister who married a man in the Air Force, but that was the closest we got to the military. But I served in the National Guard for five years.

TF: I'd say that counts.

RM: Other than that, I didn't have any military experience except things like summer camps that the National Guard did.

TF: What are some of your memories of moving into Verdeland Park?

RM: Well, we weren't used to living around a lot of people. In Nebraska, we lived on a farm. And before that, Rock Springs wasn't a very big place either. I remember that, even though I was really young when we lived there.

I should mention, once while I was in Wyoming, when I was only about two and a half or so, I was riding a wagon down a hill. I rode right onto the road, and I got run over by a car.

TF: Oh my goodness!

RM: I could just barely get around, although I could talk some; but when the car passed over me, it folded the wagon right around me, and when they got me out from underneath the car, they had to pry the wagon open in order to get me out, and it broke my leg. I had to go to the hospital, and they put a cast on my leg. I couldn't talk very good at that point, but I remember telling my mother when we got home, "I can walk, I can walk."

But I had an uncle and aunt who lived close to us in Rock Springs, as well as my grandfather and grandmother. We all kind of lived right there together.

TF: When you moved to Verdeland Park, what did your father do at the Naval Supply Depot?

RM: He was a packaging and preservation engineer. Whenever they shipped stuff in or out, he had a lot to do with how they packaged and shipped it.

He worked there for quite a few years, then Sperry Rand, the missile company, got to be a big thing in Utah. So, he quit working for the Naval Supply Depot and went to work for Sperry. He worked for them until they shut down, then he went back to work for the government at Hill Air Force Base as packaging and preservation engineer.

TF: What year did you move to Verdeland Park?

RM: I was eight, and I was born in '37, so it would have been in 1945 or '46. I can't remember exactly what month it was, but I think it was during the summer.

TF: Do you have any memories of WWII?

RM: Not too many. There were a few military people who lived in Verdeland Park that I got to know from delivering newspapers, and mowing lawns, and those kinds of things, but I don't remember much about the war itself.

TF: Do you remember anything about the winter of 1948?

RM: Yes. That was a bad winter, and in Verdeland Park, it was exceedingly tough, because the roads iced over and got ruts in them. There were roads that went between the rows of houses. The people who lived in the houses parked on the side of the road, and a lot of times, they couldn't pass because of the big ruts and ice in the road. If you were on the road at the same time as someone else, somebody had to back up and get off of the road in order for the other car to pass.

That winter was so tough that people actually had to shovel snow off of their roofs to keep them from caving in. I remember getting up on the roof of our house several times, then walking right off the roof into the snow that we had just shoveled off. You could just walk right off the roof onto the piles of snow. (laughs) But other than that, I just remember that it was extremely rough.

I also remember that back then, it was a big thing for kids to grab a hold of car bumpers and just slide along behind the car. And while I would wait for the bus to pick me up to go to school, some of the older boys would get a hold of a car's bumper and go up and down the road, sliding behind the car.

TF: How did you deliver papers during the winter?

RM: Whenever I couldn't ride my bicycle, I walked. I had shoulder bags that I kept the newspapers in, and when the one in the front got low on newspapers, it would start to choke me, because of the weight of the newspapers on my back. So I'd switch the bag around so that the heavy side was in the front, and it wouldn't choke me. (laughs) But I either rode my bicycle, or I walked.

TF: Did they plow the roads in Verdeland Park that winter?

RM: They did, but not very often. Most of the time, the roads just got packed down. But the winter of '48 and '49 was bad because the snow on the roads was just packed down all winter long.

TF: Right. I've heard that that winter was a really bad.

RM: It was. I remember we had to shovel to keep the sidewalks clear from where we parked the car. And there was a walkway that went up to where two houses faced each other, and by the time the winter was mostly over, the snow was packed four or five feet high on both sides of the sidewalk.

TF: Did you know Paul and Dennis Jacobs? They delivered papers as well.

RM: Yes. They were members of our ward. I was older than them, but I do remember them from when I would pass the sacrament in junior Sunday school. The priests and teachers would go in and bless the sacrament, then we'd pass it to the kids in junior Sunday school. But I do remember them, and I think they had a younger sister. But after I got married, I had a service station right outside the main gate of Hill Air Force Base, and Dennis and Paul and their family lived just down the road from the service station on Hill Field Road. They lived there after moving out of Verdeland Park. I don't remember when they moved out of Verdeland Park though.

TF: Tell me what your unit in Verdeland Park was like. How was it situated? Like if you walked in, would you be in the living room? And where were the bedrooms?

RM: Well, our apartment was on the east side. G-Court ran east and west; so, you'd enter from the east side, and when you first came in, you'd walk right into the front room. The kitchen was off to the left, and after walking through the front room, you'd go into a long hallway, and the furnace was right there as you walked into the hallway. Then the bathroom was on the left side,

Mom and Dad's bedroom was on the right side, and the girls' bedroom was on the left side. Then the very last bedroom was the one I slept in, and it took up the end of the hall. My brother shared the bed with me in one part of the room, and my twin sister slept on the other side of the room.

So, there was the front room and the kitchen, then you went into a hallway that separated the bedrooms and the bathroom.

TF: I've heard interesting stories about the tubs. Do you have any memories about that?

RM: Oh yeah. We usually only bathed on Saturdays, and that took several hours. The boys didn't get to use the bathroom much, because the girls were always in there. (laughs) But the tub took up the whole end of the bathroom. When you first went in, the toilet was on the left. Then there was the sink, and then the tub.

TF: I've heard that some of the tubs were made out of concrete that was painted over.

RM: Yeah, it was painted, and it had pretty good paint. If they were kept up, it wasn't too bad.

TF: Do you remember any of your neighbors?

RM: I don't remember a lot of people, but I remember there was a family with the last name of Barter that lived on the right side of G-Court, then the Rabensteins lived right there close to us. And there was another family that lived on the other end of our house in G-5, and they wound up buying a place over on Crestwood Rd in Kaysville. But they lived in a single unit, and they had a son my age, as well as two girls. And they all lived in that small house.

I remember that Maureen Thurston lived in the court east of the Verdeland Park administration building. I think it was J-Court. They had two daughters and a son. There was Jan, Sonia, and I can't remember the younger one. But Jan was my age, and Sonia was a year or two older. Their mother worked in the administration office, and their dad died during the war, or was killed some way. So, she was a single mom all those years.

TF: That must have been hard.

RM: Yeah. But I remember one morning when I was delivering newspapers—this was when I was finally old enough to drive a car—I dropped the paper without meaning to; so, I leaned out of my car to pick it up off of the road, and I lost my footing on the brake of the car. So, it rolled backwards and tore my coat, then it went through the fence and banged into the Thurston's house. (laughs) But I was fortunate that I had time to roll out of the way, enough that the front wheel of the car went down my back and tore my coat but didn't run me over. But I remember Jan opening his bedroom window and saying, "What are you doing Meach?" (laughs) I'd banged into their house and woke everybody up.

TF: It doesn't sound like you had very good luck with cars.

RM: No, I didn't. I think that was after the time I'd rolled our car. We'd been playing church ball down at Layton Elementary, and I'd given my wallet to a guy who was there. And one thing led to another, and I didn't get it back from him after the game was over. He'd already gone home. There were three other kids and myself, so we got in my car and drove up to East Layton. He lived on Fort Lane, on the way up to Hill Air Force Base.

So, I got my wallet, and we were coming back home—it was a dirt road at that time—and I can't remember what street we were on, but it intersected with the paved road. And I was going just fast enough that when I took the corner, my car started to slide a little bit. Well, the tires hit the pavement, and it caused us to roll.

None of us got hurt, but part of the back seat was upside down and backwards, and those kids were sitting there wondering what had just happened. But at any rate, my car landed on its wheels in a ditch. So, we pushed it out of the ditch, I drove home, and I had to tell my dad that I'd wrecked the car. (laughs)

RM: But anyway, back to names. The Lake family lived in A-Court, and Gaylene Lake was a year or two younger than me. But I remember her mother used to get colds in her throat, and she couldn't talk. She lost her voice quite frequently. But their family had quite a few kids, and Gaylene was the oldest one. She married a kid that didn't live in Verdeland Park, although he was from Layton.

One of her older boys delivered newspapers when he got old enough, but he was killed while he was doing his paper route one morning. I always felt bad about that, but it was something that could happen. You spend all your time delivering newspapers on your bicycle, riding up and down the street. But anyway, somewhere or other, he was killed. I still remember that.

TF: Was that in Verdeland Park?

RM: No, it was up in Wasatch Heights. But when I quit delivering newspapers, they divided that route up between two or three other kids.

But anyway, I think the Whitesides lived in A-Court.

TF: I didn't know any Whitesides lived in Verdeland Park. I knew there were a lot of Whitesides in Layton, but I didn't realize they lived in Verdeland Park as well. (Russel's daughter walks in and says "hi")

RM: Yeah, the Whitesides lived there. But A-Court just went in and out, and B-Court was over here. But the Trujillos lived in the first house on the left, just as you went into Verdeland Park. That was Erastus Trujillo's family.

TF: Were you Josephine's age?

RM: Yeah, Josephine was my age, and Carol was younger. Then they had Sam. And the younger one, Dave, worked in my service station when he was going to Weber State. He married

Newleen Barnes from Kaysville, and they also lived in Verdeland Park for a while. Then they lived in East Layton at the same time I did, and they rented a place from the Andersons. But my mom used to watch their kids for them while they were working.

Then, there were the Lowries. Have you heard that name?

TF: I haven't.

RM: Their oldest boy was working for the Border Patrol when I met him. And Burt, their second son, was my age. Burt and I went to school together, and then there was Roger and Steven. He had polio when he was younger and was disabled that way. But at any rate, Burt and I were really close. They lived at the top of G-Court, and I don't remember what it turned into. Eventually, it wasn't G-Court any longer; but they lived there for a while.

The Lowries moved away from Verdeland Park, then they come back when Burt was a senior in high school, so he and I got together again. I was only eight or nine years old and then they moved away, but then they came back. (Russel says goodbye to his daughter)

TF: That reminds me of another question. Who were some of your really good friends?

RM: Burt was one, and Jan Thurston was another. And there was Larry Salisbury. He was a year or two older than me. His mother was either divorced, or she was a widow. I don't remember which. But they lived in E-Court, about halfway up on the right-hand side. E-Court was on the east side of the main road that went up through Verdeland Park. But I remember his mother was quite a nice-looking lady.

I remember one time when I was younger, some older kids were picking on me, and Larry stepped in and put a stop to it. So, we were friends from then on. But along with the Salisburys, the Schows also lived in E-Court. They had a kid, Eugene, who was two or three years older than me. Then at the top of that court was a kid by the name of Walt. He was a year

or two younger than me, and he had a missing thumb on one hand. My younger brother's name was also Walt; but the two of them got into a fight one night, so, I had to put a stop to it. But anyway, I can't remember their unit number, but it was at the top of E-Court.

Then up at the top of that court by the Thurstons, there was a family with two girls. The older one was a pretty girl, but there was something wrong with one of her eyes, and her dad only had one arm. But he built a chicken coop there and raised chickens. He had them all encased in wire, so they didn't run loose all over the place. I'm not sure what their last name was.

Later on, the older daughter married into the family that owned Perks Auto Body Shop that's right by where the Naval Supply Depot used to be, and her son and family ran it for quite a while. But as you're going up from Clearfield High School towards Hill Air Force Base, there's a service station there on the right-hand side, and they lived down on that road for quite a while. (Russel's daughter comes back into the room & says goodbye again)

But anyway, I had a crush on her at one time. I was just a little fellow, and she was older than me, but she grabbed me and gave me a kiss on the street one day. (laughs)

TF: Those girls are trouble sometimes. (laughs)

RM: Yes, they are. But we were just kids at the time.

TF: Can you tell me about The Hollow?

RM: Well, they kind of put a stop to The Hollow when they put the freeway in. The Hollow came down from East Layton. The reservoirs up there fed into a stream that came down through the back of The Hollow, and that's where all those homes are now. But I lived up on Cherry Lane, and it was right in there behind our house. From the back of our house, you could see clear across The Hollow, and over to where I had my service station by the main gate at Hill Air Force

Base. And when my boys got big enough, they used to go through The Hollow to get to my gas station, and they hung around with me there all the time.

So, The Hollow came down through there, and it ran down behind where the post office in Layton is now. And it skirted the outside part of Verdeland Park. Then they put in the freeway, but it ran down by the Old Farmers Union, then down towards the lake. And the Bamberger tracks used to go across The Hollow, right there by the Old Layton First Ward chapel.

I remember one time when I got cut up terrible. There was a place where they would move cattle in underneath there, through The Hollow, although they didn't do it very often. But there was a cement culvert that went under the Bamberger tracks, right by the old First Ward chapel.

But I used to roam The Hollow quite a bit when I wasn't working. I worked a lot, and I had some things that my parents didn't know about. I'll tell you about that in a minute. But one time, I was going down the outside cement part of one of those culverts, and they ran barbed wire down there to keep the cattle from going up that way. But I had one arm over the barbed wire, and I was going down, and my feet slipped on the cement culvert. Well, I rode that barbed wire all the way down on my arm, and I had terrible scars, from right up under my arm clear down to my elbow. I never did get it sewed up; I just went home and bandaged it up.

I also got shot in the eye when I was a young kid, and that blinded my eye. Jerry Richards was the kid's name. He had a younger brother and a younger sister, and they lived in I or J-Court. I don't think they had a father—it was just their mother and them. I mean, Verdeland Park was government housing, and there were probably some military families whose husbands and fathers were killed during the war. And those families probably continued to live there for quite a

while. I know the Richards family, that I just mentioned, only had their mom. And I know there were others.

But anyway, Jerry Richards and I were close friends, and we had an old slingshot. We'd get these old red inner tubes ... there was a special rubber inner tube that they used back in the old days in cars. But you'd make your rubber thing for your slingshot, then you'd put a pouch on the end, and you'd get a Y-shaped piece out of a tree. Then you'd make your slingshot.

Well, one night, Jerry and I got mad at each other and decided that we would shoot it out. And this was back during the time when there used to be a lot of fog in Layton during the winter. So, we went over by the administration building in Verdeland Park, and I crouched down behind the logs that lined the parking area. Well, I stood up at the wrong time, and Jerry shot me right in the eye. It busted a hole in the retina, in the back of my eye. And back then, there was nothing they could do if that happened.

So at any rate, I went home, and my father gave me a blessing. After that, I never had any pain from it ever again, but I was blind in that eye, clear until I was in my 60s. My eye doctor said, "Russ, I think they can do something for that eye. Let me refer you to another doctor." So he referred me to [Dr. Lamelas?]. He was famous for having operated on gorillas' eyes in the zoos, and he was at the University of Utah. So, I went down there and saw him, and he said, "Yeah, I can help you."

Over the years, I'd developed a cataract that wasn't visible. Pat, who I told you about, had a visible cataract in her eye, and you could see that there was something wrong with her eye. But you couldn't see mine, so no one know about it. But I had to wear special glasses to drive, because I was blind in one eye. I didn't really need them, but I figured I'd just better wear them, rather than get caught without. So, I figured I'd just learn to wear them for the rest of my life.

But anyway, that doctor took the cataract out of my eye, and he gave me back 80% of my vision in that eye, which I'd been blind in for 40 years. But being blind in one eye was a blessing in a way, but I'd learned to deal with not having that vision.

But anyway, let me think of who else was in Verdeland Park. There was the Rasmussen family. They moved over to Kaysville and lived on the part of Main St. that went past Davis High School. In the old days, it used to go right through Farmington as well. I don't remember exactly where in Verdeland Park they lived. And there was one kid who had only one part of his arm ... well, his arm was all there, but it was dwarfed.

Who else was there? Have you heard of the Haynes?

TF: That name doesn't sound familiar.

RM: Ruth Haynes lived in Verland Park in I Court, and she had several sons. Les was the older boy's name. She and her first husband either got divorced, or he was killed in the war. But then she married a Haynes, and they had two sons together. One of them was Richard Haynes, and he married a girl from Kaysville that was a telephone operator for years and years. And they built a home over in Kaysville. He was a mechanic for the Ford dealership in Layton for years. And Jim Haynes was the other son.

And there were the Leths. They had two or three sons, and they all lived in Verdeland Park at one time or another. Bob Leth had quite a few kids, but I can't remember all of them. Ruth Haynes was my wife's grandmother, so that's how I got to know all of the Leths, and all the Haynes. But Jim Haynes served some time in prison. He turned into a pretty good kid later on, but he did get into trouble a couple times.

Let's see—there was Bob Leth, and Harlan. He had a daughter who married one of the Langston Boys from Verdeland Park. I think the Langstons lived in L-Court, or in one of those

other ones up there. But they weren't too good. She wound up getting killed by her husband, or one of his associates. I can't think of her name, but she was about the same age as my wife.

TF: Do you know what happened? Why was she killed?

RM: Well, her husband was kind of a gangster; let's put it that way. He was in with the wrong bunch. But there was also another bunch besides the Langstons ... I mean, some of the Langstons were all right. The oldest one, Gary Langston, was fairly decent. He was just a year or two younger than me, and he married a girl from East Layton, although they wound up getting divorced; but she was a Leth.

There was another guy who was associated with the Langstons. I can't remember his name, but this relative of my wife was the father of the girl. He went to work at the prison where these kids wound up, and they said he had something to do with the one kid getting killed there at the prison. But it was never publicized, or anything like that. So, I don't know what happened.

TF: You mentioned earlier about having something your parents didn't know about.

RM: Oh yeah. When I was growing up, I made a lot of money, but I wasn't out running around and getting in trouble. I helped buy clothing and stuff for my sisters, and other things that Mom and Dad sometimes couldn't afford. I did that because ... (pauses, gets emotional) I love my sisters. Two of them are gone already. But anyway, sometimes I would also go down and buy a BB gun if I wanted, but I wouldn't take it home, because I wasn't supposed to have it. So, I would hide it down in The Hollow, in a hollow tree where it would be protected from the weather.

And I used to go around with my slingshot and shoot birds, and all kinds of stuff. My friend Jerry Richards kind of indoctrinated me into that kind of stuff; but after I got an eye shot, that was the end of that. But anyway, I'd just buy different things that I had the money for, like

toys I never brought home. I'd just hide them, and sometimes they came up missing, but I didn't worry about it too much. But that was just my way of enjoying some of the fruits of my labor. I had stuff like toys, and different cars, and BB guns—stuff that I hid and never took home.

TF: Did you ever forget ever where you hid them?

RM: No, I always knew where they were. I had a good memory. (laughs) But basically, they were for "no good." They were for shooting birds, or things like that; but I eventually grew out of doing stuff like that. Don't get me wrong—I was an outdoors kid, and my father trained me pretty well. He allowed me to own a 22 rifle at a fairly young age, but it could only be used when he was with me.

And what else? Oh, bicycles. I only owned one new bicycle when I was young, while I was doing all those paper routes. Whenever somebody was throwing a bike away and it was out in the trash, I would take it home and strip it down, and keep anything that was worth keeping. I kept all of the spare bicycle parts in an old paper bag, and then I could keep my younger brother, Walt—who was five years younger than me—and myself riding bicycles, and it didn't cost me anything.

I did buy one new bicycle one time, but all the rest of my bicycles were just hand-me-downs, or throwaways that somebody else was getting rid of. I'd take them home and buy a new tire, or a new tube for them. I was industrious that way. I never spent a lot of money that I didn't have; that money went for other things.

TF: Right. When you mowed lawns, did you do it mostly in Verdeland Park, or did you do lawns outside of Verdeland Park as well?

RM: Well, Verdeland Park was the big money maker, because even after I bought a power mower, I still had to push it all over town. So most of the time, I just mowed in Verdeland Park. I

did mow other lawns, like Mrs. Wiggle who that worked at Kowley drug. She lived on Church Street, and I used to clean the ditch banks for her. But there were the Ellisons, and the Kowley's. I just pushed that mower all over downtown.

I also mowed lawns for one lady who lived clear down in West Layton, about four or five miles down Gentile. I would ride my bicycle down there on Saturday mornings, after I delivered newspapers. I'd have breakfast, then I'd ride my bicycle clear down there. She had an electric mower, and I used that to mow her lawn, then trim the edges, and stuff like that. Then I'd ride home.

So, that was a big thing. I mowed lawns for anybody and everybody; but I mostly mowed Verdeland Park, because it was just a short push to get my mower from one lawn to another.

TF: How much did you charge?

RM: I started at just \$0.50 a lawn, and I'd mow and trim their edges, all around the flower beds. But I eventually charged more than that. It seems like I'd mow the Cowleys' lawn at least twice a month, although sometimes, it was three times, but it seems like I got five bucks for mowing for them. I mowed that big corner lot there where they had that wedding chapel for years. The Cowley's lived there to start with.

And there were three or four other Cowleys that lived up along Main Street, from that corner where her house was, all up along there, like where the Dipper Drive-in was.

TF: Was there much interaction between people who lived in Verland Park and those who didn't? It sounds like there was interaction for you, where you mowed lawns for people who didn't live in Verdeland Park; but otherwise, was there much interaction?

RM: Well, we all went to the same school—Davis High School—so I think there was quite a bit of interaction. For instance, when I first moved here, there was only the Second Ward chapel

clear down in West Layton, and the chapel right by Verdeland Park. I don't think there was another one in Layton at that time, because I remember helping build several of the other chapels later on. I helped build the one down by Tanner Clinic, and the old Third Ward Chapel in East Layton. I also helped build the Fifth Ward Chapel on East Gentile.

But yeah, I think all the other chapels came later.

TF: And what about outside of church? Before you went to Davis High, was there much interaction between you and others who lived outside Verdeland Park when you were younger?

RM: I don't know. Like I said, I was into a lot of different things where I associated with kids from all over town, because when I wasn't busy—if I didn't have something to do—I was clear up to Highway 89 at the reservoir on top of Gentile fishing, or I was clear down at the lake bottom at the Great Salt Lake. On days when I didn't have something that demanded my attention, I could be anywhere.

Mom didn't worry about me because I was conscientious about what I was obligated to do, and what I had promised. So, I would take off for an hour or two and go someplace, then I'd be back working. I worked in the Jakes's hay fields. They lived along Hwy 193, where it goes between Layton and Hwy 89. And also worked for the Morgans herding turkeys, and I worked in West Kaysville stomping silage for some farmers.

I remember one time, I was helping the Hills in West Kaysville deliver fuel oil, and I had to help deliver a calf that was coming out backwards; we had to pull it out. I just happened to be there when they needed help. So, I helped deliver a calf that day. (laughs)

I also delivered coal for the old Farmers Co-op. I worked for them for years, starting when I was a senior in high school. I worked in the cherry orchards for the Raymonds, one of the

families up in Fruit Heights by the old Rock Loft. I just worked all over, for a lot of different people.

TF: You were industrious!

RM: Well, during the summer of my ninth-grade year, I was as big as I am now. I was full grown. So if I wasn't working the cherry orchards, I was stomping silage, or helping haul hay. I did all of it. And most of that time, I was still using a bicycle to get to work and back, because I didn't have a driver's license until I was a senior in high school. So, I went all over Davis County on my bicycle.

TF: You put some miles on that bike.

RM: I did.

TF: Well, one thing that interests me about Hill Air Force Base is that it brought in so much diversity to places like Verdeland Park. Can you tell me a little bit about the diversity in Verdeland Park?

RM: It was diverse. I remember [Emmy?] Wiggins. He was a colored guy, and he was in the Air Force. His wife's name was Rose Wiggins, and they had a son who was only about two or three. After I was married, we lived in the unit facing them in E-Court. But yeah, I was friends with all those Air Force people, like Paul Holderness. He didn't live in Verdeland Park, but he was an Air Force guy who hung around my service station.

Well, I was at work one day, I just completely lost my sight all of a sudden. I went blind while I was at work, and I had to go in and sit down in the office. My eyesight came back after about an hour, but I still made an appointment to go see an eye doctor down in Salt Lake. I was married at the time, and I don't remember what Phyllis was doing; but I went to see that eye doctor all by myself. And they dilated my eyes, and examine them really good. But I remember

sitting for a half hour in the office after he examined my eyes, and finally his nurse said, "You can go home now." Well, I started heading home, and right by Cut-a-Hay Lane—do you remember that?

TF: No.

RM: As you came out of Salt Lake, when you got out of the city but weren't yet in Bountiful, there was a road that came down from the west, and there was a place where they butchered cattle. It was called Cut-a -Hay Lane. But I was headed out of Salt Lake towards Layton, where that intersected Hwy. 91, and all of a sudden, I went blind again. I was going down the road at 50 miles an hour. So, I decided I'd better stop right there. Well, I hit the brakes and smacked into the back of a Chevy pickup, right at the intersection of Cut-a-Hay Lane and highway 91.

At any rate, it smashed up the front of my car and bent the steering wheel of the car right down against the dash. It carried me up to where I hit just above the windshield, and it peeled back a piece of my scalp, so I was bleeding. I couldn't see, and there I sat, where I'd just caused a wreck. So, they had to call a wrecker to come get my car, and I had him tow it to my home. I was living in Verdeland Park at the time. But I had to go buy another car so my wife and I could still have transportation.

But anyway, the reason I started to tell this story is because Paul Holderness, the Air Force guy, was taking an auto body class up at Weber State at the time. Well, he found out that I wrecked my car, and he came down and looked at it. He wound up taking that car to Weber State and fixing it for me. He put new front fenders on it and everything. And after he got it all fixed up, he repainted it for me too. And as I recall, it didn't cost me very much, because he did all the work. But he used to hang around my service station all the time.

TF: Another question I have is if you ever used to ride the Bamberger.

RM: Oh yes. The Bamberger used to run from Salt Lake to Ogden. I didn't ride it to Ogden very often, but I rode it all the time down to Centerville to pick cherries for John Brown in his cherry orchard. I rode quite a quite a bit, because I didn't have a driver's license. I rode it to go to work in different places.

It's interesting, because back then, there were some actual cars that were just wide enough to fit on the tracks. You could let maybe ten pounds of air out of the tires then go to the crossroads. And if you knew when the trains were coming, and which way they were going, you could actually get your car on the railroad track and ride from Layton to Kaysville in no time at all, because the tires would stay on the tracks. You didn't even have to touch your steering wheel. You'd just step on the gas and away you'd go down the tracks. (laughs)

TF: Did you connect your car to the train?

RM: No.

TF: Then how did you drive your car on the tracks?

RM: You'd just put your car on the tracks and get it lined up so that it would actually fit on the tracks.

TF: Oh, okay. I see what you're saying.

RM: By letting a little bit of air out of your tires, you could put your car on the tracks and just ride the steel rail. And that's why you didn't have to touch the steering wheel, because you'd put your car right on the tracks, and your car would just go. Then you could pull off someplace in Kaysville or wherever, stop by a gas station, and put a little bit of air back in your tires. Then away you'd go.

TF: Did you do this often?

RM: Probably more often than we should have, but we never got caught. (laughs) There were a few times that we did it in order to get away from older kids who were chasing us. Burt Lowry had a Henry J car that he bought from Sears, and it was just the right fit for those railroad tracks. So, when the older kids got mad at us, we'd put his car on the railroad tracks, and we'd drive down them. The older kids would zip here and there, down this road, and back up this road, but they'd miss us, because we'd already be past the intersection where they'd try to catch us. They couldn't catch us. (laughs) That was Burt Lowry, me, and his brother.

TF: Did anybody else know about this, or was it just you and your friends?

RM: I didn't ever see anybody else do it or hear about anybody else doing it.

TF: How did you find out about doing this? (laughs) Did you just decide to try it one day?

RM: Yeah. Burt Lowry's car was just the right size to fit on the tracks, and away we'd go. They'd print the Bamberger schedule of when the trains were supposed to stop in Layton or Kaysville, so we knew which track to get on, whether or not they were coming, and what time they were coming.

TF: That is so great. (laughs)

RM: Yeah, it's surprising what kids can find out, and what they can do. (laugh) We did some crazy things. Burt Lowry was a good buddy of mine. He became some type of ranger later on in life, and he worked for the Bureau of Land Management. So, he and his wife moved down to Richfield, UT. But he died a few years ago. So many of my friends have passed away. They're just up and gone. But anyway, we did some things that if my parents had known about, they probably would've had a fit. (laughs)

TF: What were some of the other things you did?

RM: Well, like I said, I had the BB gun, and I rode the railroad tracks. I don't know. I didn't do a lot of stuff that would have gotten me in trouble. I just didn't do those kinds of things very often. I got shot in the eye because I was doing something I shouldn't have been, and my parents felt bad about it, but it was me who had to suffer, not them.

TF: Right. Well, another question I had is what made you decide to go back to Verdeland Park after you were married?

RM: Well, when I got married, we rented a place in Keysville for a while. Then a unit came open in Verdeland Park. The rent was cheaper, and it was closer to work. It was also where I'd grown up, and people knew me because I'd interacted with them in all the work I'd done growing up. So we lived in Verdeland Park for a little while, then the service station became available right at the main gate to Hill Air Force Base, and it was centrally located to a lot of things.

TF: How had Verdeland Park changed by the time you came back, after you were married?

RM: It was pretty much the same old Verdeland Park. And once they started closing it down and selling homes so they could build Layton High School ... let's see. I had two kids by the time we left Verdeland Park. We went to Wyoming for one winter, then we came back to Layton and rented a couple of different places here. Then we built our home up in East Layton, and we lived there and ran the service station until I got out of that. Then we went to Wyoming for ten years, then we came back to Layton.

TF: What were some things that you liked about Verdeland Park?

RM: There were just good people there, and it was a good place to live. Having grown up there, I knew most of the people who lived there, like the O'Briens. They lived in H-Court, and they had a son who was a year or two older than me. And Spencer Kinard, who did Music and

the Spoken Word, grew up in Layton, and he married a girl from Verdeland Park. I think her name was Lynette Layton. When they got married, they lived right along Gentile for a while, and he worked at a radio station in Centerville. Then one thing led to another, and he started doing Music and the Spoken Word.

Lloyd Newell, who was doing it most recently, is going on a mission, and some young kid just took over. I think this was about three weeks ago.

TF: Yeah, it was pretty recent. Well, I think I've covered all of my questions. Is there anything else that we haven't covered in this interview that you wanted to include?

RM: One thing that comes to mind is just how bad some of the winters were, and how I would shovel snow off of peoples' roofs for them. And what else? Oh, Brent Adams lived in Verdeland Park. And Janeil ... what was her husband's name? Anyway, their daughter, Mary, married a golf pro at one of the courses around here. That family had two girls and one boy—Brent, Mary, and Jackie. And what was Mary's husband's name? He probably doesn't play anymore. But he played at Davis Golf Course for a while. Mary would be mad at me for forgetting his name.

(laughs)

Brent worked for me at the service station for a couple of years, but I don't remember Jackie to well. But Mary and her husband bought a place somewhere up between Kaysville and Layton, on Mutton Hollow Road.

TF: Do you know if she's still around?

RM: I think she is. She was an Adams before she got married.

TF: Is there anybody else still around, who lived in Verdeland Park, that you know of?

RM: I'm trying to think. Most of the kids who were my age are getting to be fairly old now, and a lot of them have died. That that's the surprising thing—how many of the kids who were

my age have passed away. But let's see. There were the Schows, the Leths, the Rasmussens, the Langstons, the Thurstons, and the Rabensteins.

TF: I interviewed Bob and Ruth Anne Rabenstein. They were fun to talk to.

RM: Bobby and I were the same age. I can't remember if his parents were very religious or not, but in their front room, they had one of those wine decanters, or whatever they're called. And they had wine glasses and stuff. Both he and his wife worked at Hill Air Force Base.

But anyway, Bobby took us in his house one day, and all of us had a shot of whiskey.

(laughs) That's one of the things I remember about Bobby Rabenstein. He lived there in G court. He probably didn't tell you about that.

TF: No, he didn't. (laughs)

RM: We were only about ten years old. That's the only shot of hard liquor I've ever had in my life. (laughs) There was a kid by the name of Kyle who was our age that lived in Verdeland Park, and he was disabled. He also had a younger sister who was the same way. But he got killed on a garbage truck. He was in the same grade as me when we were in grade school, even though he was four or five years older than me. But I remember they were promoting him to sixth grade, but I don't think he went to school beyond that. I think their last name was Dowdle.

But O'Brien Dowdle was the kid who was killed while he was working on a garbage truck. This was back the garbage man used to grab the garbage cans when they got full and dump them into the garbage truck. Well, one day, he got caught in the garbage truck and he was killed.

TF: Well, I think that's all the questions I have. I have to go pick up my little boy from daycare on Base.

RM: Okay. I have a son-in-law who works at Hill (recording stops)