Kristine Murdock

Layton, UT

An Interview by

University of Utah Student (US)

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LAYTON HISTORY COLLECTION

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Layton City
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THIS INTERVIEW WAS CONDUCTED BY A STUDENT FROM THE UNIVERSITY OF UTAH, INTERVIEWING KRISTINE MURDOCK, AT THE LAYTON HERITAGE MUSEUM IN LAYTON, UTAH. THE INTERVIEW WAS FOR THE VERDELAND PARK ORAL HISTORY PROJECT.

US: Can you start by telling me your name, date of birth, and where you were born?

KM: My name is Kristine Murdock, and I was born at the LDS Hospital in Salt Lake City on April 16th, 1950.

US: Did you grow up in Salt Lake City?

KM: No, I grew up in Kaysville.

US: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

KM: My parents were John H. Murdock and Thelma Brierley Murdock.

US: What did they do for work?

KM: My dad worked at Hill Field. and he was a jeweler on the side. He fixed watches and bought rings, and did things for people. He was also in a bagpipe band, and they got paid to play at different events. so that was cool. And my mother was a school lunch cook at Kaysville Junior High.

Back in those days at Kaysville Junior High, which would have been in the 1962 through '66 timeframe, the lunchroom had a girl's side and a boy's side. Boys and girls never lined up together, and they never sat together. You had to sit on the boy's side or the girl's side. It was totally segregated.

US: Was that the school rule, or was it something that social groups decided on?

KM: They had actual school monitors who said, "You can't sit on the boys' side," or "You can't sit on the girl's side." I wanted to say, "Oh yeah? Watch me."

US: Did you ever experience that anywhere else, like at any other schools?

KM: No, it was just that one case. And I thought it was so weird, because the girls' line was always longer. We always had to wait longer to eat. So it was like, "Can't we just go to the boy's line, because it's shorter?' But they were like, "No, you can't." I never understood it. It was a very strange concept. Junior high was scary enough, but then then you have segregation between boys and girls in the lunchroom, and that makes it worse.

US: Right. So you went to Kaysville Junior High, and where did you go to elementary school?

KM: I went to Kaysville Elementary.

US: Okay. Did you meet any kids from Verdeland Park around that time?

KM: Oh, yes. As I remember—I was just a kid—but a lot of people moved into the area because of the Hill Air Force Base. They were in the military or out-of-staters, so the first place that they would go to live was Verland Park. But the goal wasn't to live there forever—it was short-term housing. The goal was for families to get their own house, eventually. But I remember a lot of kids who used to live in Verdeland Park moved to Kaysville, and they always had these fun stories. Like, "I lived in F-Court, or B-Court, or F-7 in Verdeland Park." And I just thought it sounded so awesome.

In fact, I asked my dad several times when I was a kid, "Why can't we live in Verdeland Park?" And he would say, "Consider yourself lucky that you don't." I didn't know what he meant until I was older; when I was in junior high, I would actually go over there to visit my friends who lived there, and I got to go inside of some of the houses. And I was like, "I don't know why I wanted to live here when I was a kid." (laughs)

US: What would you say is your earliest recollection of Verdeland Park? Was it from these students you met?

KM: Yeah, I would say so. My next-door neighbor, Vicki, moved into our neighborhood when she was only about five years old. She came straight from Verdeland Park, and she became my best friend. She still is one of my best friends. But even though she was only five, she had all these great memories, so I kind of got jealous at that time—I was seven and she was five—because she had all these friendships from there. They did all these things together, and it seemed so diverse. Not everyone there was the same like they were in Kaysville. Everyone in Kaysville belonged to the same religion, and everyone was the same race. I didn't know any diversity there, and I was very curious about that. I knew that Verdeland Park had that diversity, and it was something I wanted to be around; but I never had the opportunity.

US: You've expressed a desire to be in Verdeland Park. Did you notice the opposite with other students, when kids from Verdeland Paek moved to Kaysville? Was there any tension between this tight-knit community suddenly getting more diverse people from Verdeland Park moving in? From what you've said, it seems like Verdeland Park people were kind of grouped together, and they had their own relationships there.

KM: Right. I mean, when you're a kid, you don't really understand things like that, but looking back, I'd say they had a little subculture. There were quite a few Hispanic families, but it wasn't until I got to high school that I had the opportunity to become friends with a lot of them, because we didn't have Hispanic kids in Kaysville. And there were several Black families in Verdeland Park, and in Layton, and that did not exist in Kaysville. And I embraced that, because I wanted to know more about all these different people, even though my parents didn't want me to. But if they told me not to do something, I wanted to do the opposite. (laughs)

This was in the '50s, so things were still very … well, there were words people used that we don't say now, and people had very strong opinions about people who belonged to different races or cultures. But I just wanted to learn more, and I felt like I was being deprived of any opportunity to do that until I got to high school. And to this day, I still have really good friends who lived in Verdeland Park.

US: Could you share some of the things you learned from the friends that you met in Kaysville?

KM: Well, they had their own little … I guess you would call them "clubs," and a lot of them belonged to St. Rose of Lima Catholic Church. Up until that point, I didn't know there even *was* a Catholic Church in Layton. But it just felt like a piece of my life was missing, because I didn't get to have that Verdeland Park experience, even though I kept being told I was lucky. It was a starting place for families, not an ending place. If families got out of Verdeland Park and built their own home, they really got the chance to evolve.

US: Did you notice any difference in how kids were raised in Verdeland Park, compared to how you were raised?

KM: Well, back in those days, we pretty much got to run the streets. Our parents would say, "Come in when it gets dark," and we had leeway to do whatever we wanted. But in Verdeland Park, which is now Layton Commons Park, they had their own place right here to explore. They had The Hollow, and the trees. It was like they lived in the middle of a park, even back then, and I thought that was really cool. I think the property originally belonged to the Green family, and in Spanish, I think verde means green meadow. So when they started building Verdeland Park, they didn't just cut all the trees down; they brought in these wooden homes and put them in

between all these beautiful trees, and the original creek was already here. So to me, it was kind of like a little paradise.

US: Can you describe what the homes in Verdeland Park looked like? Like how they were situated?

KM: Well, there were different courts, like A-Court and B-Court, and the homes each had a number assigned to them. And they were interesting colors, and I don't know what the significance of that was. Some of them were a peach color, and some were a bluish color, and some were a greenish color. I don't know if those colors designated anything specific, but the units had either one, two, or three bedrooms. And they had wooden steps leading up to the front porch.

I remember the first time I went into one of my friend's houses. They lived in this oasis of beauty, but the houses had wooden stairs. They also had floors made out of wood, but the walls were plywood. And I thought, "Maybe I don't have it so bad where I live." (laughs) So they weren't elegant by any means, but I still felt it was something I got left out of, because I didn't get to be a part of it. And I don't even know what I was being left out of. You just always want what the other kids have. I wanted to be one of the ones who said, "I lived in Verdeland Park, and I got to do this too."

US: Did any of your friends ever talk about their experiences going to elementary school there?

KM: Yeah. My first husband went to Verdeland Park Elementary until third grade. But if you look in old newspapers, you see that kids who went to Verdeland Park Elementary got to do a lot. We did things at Kaysville Elementary too, but they just had a lot of fun little projects, and they got to go on walks and field trips. They even had their own baseball team, although the team

didn't have it easy. They had to get people to sponsor them. It wasn't like Kaysville City, where they'd say, "Everybody can come do this." It's almost like Verland Park kind of had to fight for what they wanted, and for the little extra things they got. That's how I saw it.

Verdeland Park had its own Cub Scout troop, and as I understand it, that was hard to come by, because at that time, the Boy Scouts were a mainstream LDS thing. Well, there were all these people in Verdeland Park who didn't belong to the Church, but they still wanted to be in Boy Scouts. So, they started their own scout troop. My friend Charlie Garcia told me once how—and it was the same with baseball—his dad and mom had to get in there and really fight to try to get things like that in Verdeland Park.

US: Would you say that everyone in Verdeland Park was active in the community to try and make it a better place?

KM: Well, they had a little community center where they had dances, and they had teen activities. And at one time, they even had a babysitters group, because a lot of the mothers worked at the Hill Air Force Base, and at the time, they didn't have childcare on Base that I'm aware of.

Verdeland Park also had the Jaycees, which was a civic organization. The Jaycees had their headquarters in one of the buildings in Verdeland Park for years, and those people were the movers and shakers of Layton. They did all the fun stuff for Layton, like Santa Clause, all the parties, and things like that.

US: You mentioned that they had a babysitters club. It seems like Verdeland Park had one of the first daycares in Utah. Is that what you're referring to?

KM: Yeah.

US: How would that have been different from what you experienced with younger kids growing up in Kaysville?

KM: I don't remember there ever being a daycare in Kaysville, so I'm not sure.

US: Did moms in Kaysville mostly stay at home to take care of their kids?

KM: Yes, or a neighbor would babysit them.

US: Could they possibly have gone through the LDS church? I know that sometimes, there's, like, one family in a neighborhood that will do a pre-preschool kind of deal.

KM: That could have been. My mother didn't start working at Kaysville Junior High until I was in junior high myself. So, she was always home with us when I was younger. I didn't get babysat during the day—only at night by a teenage girl if my parents ever went out.

US: Did you ever hear about any of the teachers who taught at Verdeland Park Elementary?

KM: Yes. There was Ruby Price, and she was outstanding. She was a trailblazer, and I wish I had known her better. I studied a little bit about her, and I met her a few times, but it was later in life when she was here at the museum. It was when she was helping to get that rock memorial just outside the museum set up. But she was the first Black lady in Utah to do a lot of things, and she lived to be 100.

US: Sounds like she had a very full life. I'm only familiar with her being the first Black teacher in Utah.

KM: I've read things about her, and she did a lot more than that. If I remember correctly, she was the one who started Verdeland Park Boy Scout troop, and she also had a Girl Scout Troop.

US: Do you remember any stigmas or stereotypes that people outside of Verdeland Park had for those who lived there?

KM: Well, when they sold the land to the city to build the high school and started dismantling the units when I was in high school—I graduated from Davis High in 1968, and they had just started building Layton High School—Verdeland Park had gotten pretty ragged looking. Those last years, I don't think it was really a place even a kid would want to live—not like I had wanted to, back in the day.

I'm not sure if other people have told you this, but the bathtubs in the units were made out of cement. They weren't regular tubs like you see today. And even though the kitchens had cabinets and a sink, they were very small and tiny—almost like a pretend kitchen. Like a dollhouse kitchen. (laughs) There wasn't much space to put anything. There were no frills and thrills in the units. Nobody had a fireplace or things like that, and growing up, I just thought that everybody had a fireplace. But when I went into one of those units for the first time, the reality was that they didn't really have much of anything. There was barely any heat, even.

US: Were you alive when people started moving into Verdeland Park?

KM: That was before my time. I think they began building it around 1944 or '45, towards the end of WWII, and I wasn't born until 1950.

US: Did people around Verdeland Park understand that it was kind of like a [military] community?

KM: Sort of. I don't think Verdeland Park even had their own post office, or anything. There was another subdivision that was exactly like Verdeland Park up on Hill Field Road called Sahara Village, and it was built with the same concept as Verdeland Park: to provide housing for people who worked at the base. But the homes were made out of cinder block—they weren't wooden. But they had their own post office, a grocery store, and everything. They were their own little city. But Verland Park never had its own grocery store, or anything like that.

US: Did you ever meet anyone from Sahara Village?

KM: Yeah. Several of the kids I grew up with lived in both Sahara Village and Verdeland Park before their parents finally could afford a house. In the mid-'50s, they started to build little subdivisions in Layton outside of Verdeland Park, like Wasatch Heights, and some of those houses are still there. And families who lived in Verdeland Park … their goal was to eventually get out of Verdeland Park and get their own home.

US: Do you feel like Verdeland Park was successful in helping these other communities start up in Utah?

KM: I do. In fact, it changed the whole landscape of Layton. Before WWII—before Verdeland Park and Sahara Village were built—I think Layton had, like, 600 people; but when Verdeland Park and Sahara Village were built, the population quadrupled. And there was also a little trailer park where Layton Hills Mall is now, and it was a smiliar government housing concept, except it was BYOT: bring your own trailer. (laughs) But those housing projects changed the whole landscape of Layton.

There was a huge shortage of housing after World War II. Before the war, Layton was a farming community; but after Hill Field was built, people realized, "Instead of losing money on my farm every year, I can get a government job. I can have benefits." So in the '50s, people started selling their farms, and that's when they started building different subdivisions.

There was a subdivision in Kaysville—and I was going to mention this, because it was built in 1958 or '59, around the same time as a lot of subdivisions in Layton—but they called this subdivision "Happy Homes." So, I went from wanting to live in Verdeland Park to asking my dad, "Why can't we live in Happy Homes?" And he said, "Because we would rather stay where we are and be miserable." (laughs) My dad had a sense of humor.

US: It sounds like everybody was trying to move out of these government housing projects. Towards the end of Verdeland Park, were there still a lot of families who lived there?

KM: There were some die-hard ones who still lived there when I was in high school. A lot of them were my classmates, but they've passed away. My friend Charlie Garcia lived there for quite a while, and he said, "I was there in the trenches all those years." (laughs)

US: Was there ever any gossip surrounding Verdeland Park? I know sometimes in old newspapers, there would be random tidbits about people's lives, like specific gangs, or projects going on, or clubs they were involved in. Was there anything like that that you remember hearing about Verdeland Park?

KM: Well, I'm not sure about gangs; I think they called them clubs. But Charlie would tell me how people in Verdeland Park felt like they were all the same. He said, "We didn't have discrimination or anything. We were one big, happy family." There had to have been gossip, because of people being in the military, moving in and out, and not always just staying in one place. It wasn't a lifetime commitment to live there: you either lived there if you were stationed at Hill, or you lived there until you could get a better place to live.

You had to qualify to live there. It was a housing project, so you had to have a certain income to qualify to live there. It wasn't for rich people—it was on the other end of the scale. That's the way I understood it.

US: Were the units in Verdeland Park [a good size]? Or were they smaller family units?

KM: Well, it seemed to me like everybody during that time had a lot of kids, so I think the units were probably small to them. My first husband's family had eight kids, and the biggest unit they could get in Verdeland Park only had three bedrooms. And I know other people who had,

like, four or five kids in their family, but they only had a one or two-bedroom unit, because that's all that was available. There was a waiting list to get into Verdeland Park.

US: Well, that's all the questions I have. Is there anything else we haven't covered in this interview that you'd like to mention?

KM: Not really. When you talk to people who actually lived there, you get a different view. I was just on the outside looking in; but I saw Verdeand Park as a very fun place to grow up in—a very diverse, yet united community. The kids and families all got along, and I think that's why I felt a little jealous when I was a kid. Kids from Verdeland Park would move to Kaysville and say things like, "I used to live in Verdeland Park. We did this, and we did that." I had friends who would talk about living in A-Court, or B-Court, and I was like, "I don't know what these courts are, but they sound cool." (laughs) I didn't know if they were talking about something like a tennis court, or what. I mean, what's a court to a little kid? I didn't know what kind of "courts" they were talking about, but whatever it was, I wanted to be a part of it.

But I'm still learning about Verdeland Park, because I'm a historian, and I've been researching it for a while. There are so many fun things to uncover.

US: Are there any fun stories you've found while doing your research of Verdeland Park?

KM: I can't really think of any off the top of my head, but I know there were several fires that happened there. I know of one specific fire that started, and I know about it because it was started by my uncle. (laughs) This was in the early days of Verdeland Park, in the late '40s, but he and his wife were not getting along, and he knew that she loved her piano. So, he snuck in and started her piano on fire, and it almost burned the whole thing down. (laughs)

US: Well, thank you very much. I've enjoyed what you've shared with me today.

KM: Thank you.