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Claire L. Alexander

Hist 320

Oral Histories with Rural Women

7 July 80

Tape Summary; personal interview

Interviewee: Sylvia Leaton

Interviewer: Claire L. Alexander

Date of Interview: June 28, 1980

Tape 1 Side 1

1 minute = 017 on tape

000 - 090	Personal Data	Biographical Data; born 1912, Butte, Montana. Father a miner from Finland; Mother worked as clerk in department stores.
090 - 104	Early 1900's in Butte	Describes Butte in the early 1900's and entertainment available there.
105 - 119	Personal Data	Parent's marriage in 1910. Father 42 at death. Describes miner's consumption.
119 - 132	Miner's Consumption	Describes the effects of mining on the lungs.
132 - 162	Personal Data	Father's birth and death; farming east of Tacoma; Family members.
162 - 235	Leatons Homesteading	Leatons came from Nebraska to Glenwood in 1905. Homesteaded at Missouri Flats. Came by train to Portland and up the Columbia by boat to Lyle. That first winter - Year of the Terrible Storm - lost most of their livestock. Moved to Portland during Panic of 1896 to find a job. Moved 16 times because they had rent enough for only 1 month and then had to move. Returned to Glenwood and stayed with the Kreps' until they bought the ranch in 1905. Earned living by hauling things with his horses.

- 235 - 254 Personal Data Husband packing for fire fighters during Big Fire/ Worked for the Cattle Association checking on cattle out on the range.
- 255 - 293 Personal Data Married in Poulsbo, 1941. Birth of children and their occupations.
- 293 - 305 Education Graduated Lincoln High School, Tacoma in 1930. University of Puget Sound in 1935, Teacher.
- 305 - 345 Teaching Experience Two years at Vaughn - Math, Physics, History; during the Depression. Wanted to get into Home Economics because 'every other engineer was teaching'. Came to Glenwood in 1939; 4 teachers in the school. 2 grade-school and 2 high school.
- 345 - 356 Skills, Hobbies Enjoys crafts and music.
- 356 - 384 Clubs Delta Kappa Gamma, Women's Club, Ladies Aide, Cowbells, Retired Teachers of Klickitat County.
- 384 - 431 Awards Cattlemen of the Year 1966; National Science Foundation grant (1966 & 1967)
- 431 - 532 Rural Life Wonderful place to raise children, but misses city life. Travels whenever possible. Doesn't like winters, misses the rain of western Washington. Urban women have more cultural advantages. As of now, though, cars make living in the country similar to living in the suburbs. Feels that a rancher is 'rich in assets and poor in cash'.
- 532 - 581 Combining Oats During the war, 17 men came to help combine the oats. Rationing of sugar made feeding these men difficult. Each rancher would help the other one. For haying, (put up loose hay; didn't have a baler then.
- 581 - 688 Pa rents Favourite time was mealtime. Father and Mother did most of the discussing; children

didn't take over. Father, having only had 3 months of education himself, was always concerned about his children's education. For entertainment, played cards. Companionship of friends, relatives, and neighbors very important then. A lot of visiting, Finnish dances, buffets, Finnish plays, etc. Remembers an occasion in the first grade when she cried in Finnish after being spanked by the teacher and thinks its a shame that she can no longer speak Finnish.

688 - end      Decision-Making  
Tape 2          of Parents  
000 - 017

Father was head of the household. When he passed away, her mother didn't know how she would cope and this lead to her re-marrying because she felt that she couldn't take care of the problems involved in raising two children. During second marriage, mother and step-father were both bosses. Women in those days were very dependent on their husbands. Remembers parents discussing their problems and that there were areas when the children were banned - told to go to their room or outside to play. Had a very happy childhood; traumatic to lose father at age 12.

017 - 032      Rural Life/  
Parenting

Believes that there are better relations between parents and children in rural communities because most rural women are home.

032 - 075      Childhood

Lived in farming community. Played house, with dolls, hopscotch, baseball, and marbles. Children then had to invent their pasttimes more than they do now. Used their cats as dolls. Children today grow up too fast. They didn't demand attention from parents for entertainment because parents were too busy. Took care of what they did have.

- 075 - 142 Teen Years Still playing with dolls at 16. Busy with high school activities, local social group. Parties to celebrate each others' birthdays. Speaks of the drug pushers then - as long as you weren't curious, they didn't harass you. Didn't have the peer pressure ' that they feel they have now'. You made with what you had. Youth today are too concerned with appearance.
- 142 - 168 Dating At social group functions, if you went off alone, you were typed as being 'fast'. Healthy, innocent relationships, although curious about sex.
- 168 - 190 Depression (Schooling) Sylvia wanted to be a doctor, but the Depression squelched these plans. Totally dependent upon herself. Worked as a maid to earn her tuition.
- 190 - 218 Sexual Attitudes Sylvia expresses her feelings about sexual relationships - very open with her children due to life on the farm. Doesn't approve of the close-doored attitudes of older years and feels that the 'pill' had made it too convenient and degrading in present times.
- 218 - 238 Teen Years High-school group was blue-class, working people. Brother in with the well-to-do group, came near to marrying a judge's daughter until her grandmother curbed that by sending the girl to Europe.
- 238 - 267 Childhood Responsibilities Had different household chores - hanging up clothes, washing windows, as well as carrying in the wood and coal for the stove. Coal warmer heat and went further than wood. Brother spoiled by mother - had to carry wood but both girls gone from home by the time he was high-school age. Didn't have to do any housework because that was the female role.

- 267 - 310      Expectations  
of Future      When she graduated from college, Sylvia was going to devote her whole life to teaching, wasn't going to get married. But you change. Engaged to a young man in Vaugh but had to wait to marry because of the Depression. Sylvia came to Glenwood and distance can ruin a relationship. Met Bill and then began to think about having a family. Deleted the word 'never' from her vocabulary. Leading Bill to the altar, 'unbeknownst to him - that's the female role'. "Made it so enticing, he couldn't resist."
- 310 - 338      Marriage      The stars in your eyes disappear shortly after your marriage and you become more realistic. Problems were always economic.
- 338 - 349      Child Bearing      Had all children in hospital; \$50 for MaryAnita, \$75 for Claudia and \$500 for Jim - that's inflation!
- 349 - 430      Marriage      The problems with money were not that of overspending but of asking the uncle (partners in the ranch) for a little more. If you needed money, you got it. If a group of steers were sold, the money was divided, until Bill's uncle got married. Then the checks weren't divided equally because Uncle Frank's wife was a little extravagant. A few marital problems arose because Sylvia saw the inequality and Bill didn't until his uncle passed away and he found that the 60 acres he had bought were willed to him and he had to pay inheritance tax. Sylvia sums up her philosophy of marriage by saying " Marriages need a good battle just as land needs a good thunderstorm - it clears the air."

- 430 - 493 Courtship Met Bill at a Women's Club dance. There used to be a lot of dances in the area - went with Bill and a friend of his. Went to Sunday suppers at his mothers; one time they went to Portland.
- 493 - 527 Cowboys Saw her first cowboy in town and thought there was a movie on location. Saw first Rodeo in Glenwood in 1940. Tried riding but she didn't like it.
- 527 - 622 Driving Cattle When children were growing up, they drove end of tape the cattle to Klickitat. Corral at Synder Hill. Sylvia's job was to take picnic dinner there for the crew while the cows were 'mothering' (getting the right calves with their mothers). Now the cattle are all trucked. Children all learned to ride at age 4 or 5.
- Tape 2 Side 1
- 000 - 028 Wedding Sylvia describes her wedding plans. Her sister made the arrangements for her impromptu wedding in Poulsbo. Spent a couple days in Portland before returning to Glenwood.
- 029 - 077 Early Married Life Substituted for a month because her replacement was killed in a car accident. No electricity until the summer of 1941 - cost very prohibitive. School powered by batteries. Cabin rent \$5 a month when she first came to Glenwood. Powered by Delco plant, but no running water. Explains how a delco plant works.
- 077 - 123 Winter Outdoor toilet, pump outside for water. Kept a 3-gallon bucket on the woodstove for hot water. During second winter, temperature dropped to 45 below zero - stayed up to stoke the fire because of the baby. Sat behind the stove but could still see her breath. Water bucket frozen solid in the morning. Washed on the board, had kerosene lamps.

- 123 - 173 Pinochle Parties For entertainment, each family would put on a pinochle party during the winter. 8 - 10 tables; served midnight supper. Made extra chairs by making cushions by hand for apple boxes. More socializing then. Now the TVs and cars have taken over.
- 173 - 201 Cattle Assoc. Glenwood Cattle Association would put on dinners. Name cards were by brands. Sylvia didn't know hers - Mrs. Quarter Circle K. Wasn't embarassed about this whereas kids today are more self-conscious.
- 201 - 308 Child-Bearing Describes pre-natal care; wasn't any different then than now. The war had something to do with whether they had any more children because they didn't know if Bill would need to go off to war. Waited four years and then Claudia was born at the end of the war. Had a miscarriage before she went back to teaching. Gave up on having any more children and then Jim was an 'afterthought'. Knowledge of child-bearing and raising from her mother and books. Feels she was more liberal in raising her children, supposes her teaching affected discipline. Baby-sitting at the Butlers while in college. A conflict there due to parents; differing beliefs on child-raising. Bill & Sylvia agreed on the discipline of their children.
- 309 - 367 Role of Children Speaks of her grandchildren. Behavior of children depends on the parents. Speaks of differing views of child-raising and discipline.
- 367 - 396 Children Leaving Home Adjusting to children leaving home was just like adjustment needed when they first came. Suddenly strikes home when your children leave how it was for your own parents. Growing old is lonely.
- 396 - 413 Parent Abuse Physical and emotional abuse of parents -

- How often you write or call your parents is important.
- 413 - 456 Recreation Reads a great deal, both fiction and non-fiction. Takes numerous magazines in areas of news, women's, crafts, gardening and ranching. Watches some special programs on TV - either crocheting or knitting while watching. Goes to sales, etc. with Bill; goes out to dinner at least once a week. Travels when possible.
- 456 - 474 Housework Could do more in the house now, but "the heck with it - there'll be housework when I'm dead and gone." Used to be very particular and got housework done when working. Not a slave to her house now.
- 474 - 491 Caring for Babies Describes washing diapers on the board, boiling diapers and bottles on the wood stove.
- 491 - 608 Teaching/Chores Took 6 weeks off when Jim was born. Did diapers, etc. by hand because it was too hard to bring out the wringer washer. Had a babysitter for Jim, so she could finish out the school year. Encouraged by school board and new superintendent to continue teaching the next fall. Changed babysitters because the first one was a poor disciplinarian. Gave the new one a fly swatter for discipline (to be used on his bottom) - the seat of learning.
- 608 - 626 Philosophy of Life Do not say 'never' or you can't do this or that until you have tried. Gets frustrated with kids' attitudes today - if they're bored, it's their own fault.
- 627 - end Electricity came into valley in 1941. When renting, didn't have it.



Tape 2 Side 2

- 000 - 017 Plumbing Outdoor toilets; had potty chairs for babies. Indoor plumbing materials could not be obtained during the war. Finally got indoor plumbing in 1946.
- 017 - 034 Cookstove Sold kitchen stove in 1948 and bought combination electric and trash burner. Felt they needed the trash burner because of the cold winters.
- 034 - 071 Wood When first married, Bill cut wood and brought into house. After they moved in with Uncle Frank, the men always were sure to bring in enough wood for the kitchen stove and the living room stove. Describes woodbox built into kitchen. For the living room, you had to go out on the porch to get wood. In 1947, bought oil heater. Never had to chop wood.
- 071 - 096 Cow Camp Before they come in to eat or to start supper, the men cut the wood and take care of their horses. Sylvia stays up there to cook for the first couple nights. Then the men are on their own. Describes the difficulties now that the range area is closed due to ST. Helens' eruption.
- 096 - 228 Depression Doesn't know how people would cope with another depression like the one in the 30's. Made her independent. Lost her small savings account. Describes "Bank Day" at the high school. Stayed with the Butlers' and attended UPS. Other than not being able to pursue medicine, the Depression didn't ruin her life. In fact, Sylvia believes she benefited because of the Depression: became self-supportive, worked in a family through which she gained many cultural advantages and was able to meet well-to-do people.

- 228 - 277      Matson Kidnapping      Daughter of Weyerhauser's helped Sylvia develop her attitudes toward money. Sylvia explains the circumstances surrounding the kidnapping and killing of the Matson boy. One case of what money can do - it can be detrimental to those in the family.
- 277 - 379      Life Now      Reminisces of the past; misses teaching. Glad to be living at this time. Describes annual luncheon of Delta Kappa Gamma at the Flying L Ranch. Very fortunate to have experienced remarkable things in her lifetime: 1) Lindbergh flying the Atlantic, 2) Man walking on the moon, 3) Atomic Age, 4) ecclipse, and 5) Mt. St. Helen's eruption.
- 379 - 446      Suicide      Discusses feelings of improving the world, helping students learn about life. Discussion of teenager that committed suicide a year ago.

End of interview