

**Honors College Senior Capstone Reflection - “Virginia Bryant’s Life Stories”**

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**Introduction:**

My great-grandmother, Virginia Bryant, has been a huge part of my life, especially after she moved to Laramie, Wyoming, in 2008. During my entire childhood, extended family members would ask her to write her life story, with the most outcries for this occurring at her 100th birthday party. Unfortunately, she has yet to accomplish this, and now it may be next to impossible for her because reading and writing have become incredibly difficult for the 107-year-old woman. In the spring of 2022, I decided to take on the task of recording her life stories. I used my studies in journalism and multimedia production to record and edit audio stories from Virginia's life. I wanted to create content that will be treasured by my family for generations and remember my great-grandmother.

Although this project was incredibly personal to my family and me, I utilized the various skills and experiences I acquired from my time pursuing a journalism degree. I approached my project similar to how I would approach writing a profile piece for a magazine. I began with background research and interview prep. During the interviews, I really tried to pull strong narratives from my great-grandmother, despite her declining health and inability to detail her memories. I then used my skills in multimedia production to edit the interviews into short audio vignettes.

**Process:**

I began my project by researching and establishing background knowledge of Hat Creek, Wyoming, where Virginia's family homesteaded. Most of this information came from my great-grandfather's book, *Hat Creek and Hard Times* by Edward Bryant (1988). This book informed the questions I drafted for the interviews and guided how I approached each interview. After testing my equipment to ensure I would have little to no technical difficulties, I started the process of interviewing Virginia. During each interview, I followed the basic guidelines to successful interviewing that I have been taught while pursuing my journalism degree (Clark, 2015). I had a total of seven recordings from six sessions when I decided I had enough content, as well as when her health began to decline.

I listened back to each interview to timestamp and organize the various topics she discussed. This is a common tool used in journalism and audio editing because it streamlines the audio editing process. It was during this time that I noticed there was a loud fan in the background of several parts of the interview. Sometimes the fan almost overpowered my great-grandmother's voice. I addressed this issue during the editing process by using noise reduction and amplifying tools in Audacity. After I finished categorizing, I chose the clips I wanted to use and began editing the recordings into short vignettes. These short edits ranged from three minutes to thirty minutes in length, and focused on certain stories from her life, such as her brother Kenneth's death or her childhood home.

The editing process was the most difficult part of this project. My great-grandmother was 106 at the time of the recordings, and with old age comes a loss of memories and ability to recall details. She often repeated information and jumped from topic to topic during the interviews. Editing this content was difficult because it was hard to create cohesive storylines from the tangled web of stories. I was able to overcome this challenge thanks to the time I committed to sorting through the interview clips. I used the program Audacity to edit the audio files. Audacity is a free to use software that I was introduced to through my journalism courses. Testa (2021) provided additional insights to the program, helping me successfully finish editing, despite the challenges I faced.

Once the audio stories were completed, I displayed each recording on a website focused on Virginia Bryant. I decided a website dedicated to my great-grandmother would be the best medium to access multiple materials from her life, including the interviews I recorded. My decision was also informed by the evolving field of journalism, in which most articles and materials are now digital (Briggs, 2019). I made the website easy to navigate and access by following basic design principles like proximity, contrast, repetition, white space, and alignment (GCFLearnFree, 2016 November).

To add further context to her stories and life, I also included family trees, photographs, letters, and other materials on the website. I designed three family trees that can be found on the page "Virginia's Stories." The first shows her immediate family, the second her children and grandchildren, and the third her great-grandchildren. The colors I chose followed the basic guidelines of color theory and design (GCFLearnFree, 2016 October). Every color in the family

tree sends a message. Dark green is stability and wealth, which represents where my great-grandmother is now. Light green is energetic and vibrant, reflecting how Virginia has lived her life. Light blue is calming and friendly, which perfectly describes Virginia, and happens to be one of her favorite colors.

I digitized materials from my great-grandmother's life to highlight moments in her life she didn't speak about, that added context to what she discussed, or that provided visual aids to her stories. For example, I included materials her son Eddie gathered to tell his life story because it added context to Virginia's adult life, of which she spoke little. It was interesting, but also difficult, to sift through all of Virginia's photos and physical memories of her life. She lived through the Great Depression, so she developed the habit to not waste or throw out anything that may become useful later. This meant I had to use a critical eye to decide what was worth including on the website. The final product of my project is a website that has Virginia's stories, family trees, and materials from her life.

After I had completed the audio stories and website, I felt that something was missing. I realized that despite my best efforts, the information I got from my great-grandmother focused almost exclusively on the first quarter of her life. I decided to add one more page to the website to help fill this gap. This page was set up similar to a forum, where her family members can share their favorite stories of Virginia. Once I share the website with my extended family, I hope for this page to be full of interesting short stories that can't be found in the audio stories I created.

### **Conclusion:**

I faced several obstacles while creating this project, but the skills and experiences I gained through my journalism degree equipped me with the tools to overcome these challenges. What I wasn't prepared to face were the several health issues my great-grandmother had this year. For the past few months, she has been in and out of the hospital after she overcame COVID-19. Although she has always been really strong and healthy for her age, it was jarring to see her old age finally catch up to her. This project has been really fulfilling and I am glad to have had the opportunity to work on it through the Honors College.

### **Annotated Bibliography**

Briggs, M. (2019). *Journalism next. A practical guide to digital reporting and publishing*. Sage Publications.

Briggs provides insight to the evolving field of journalism. He explains how journalism is changing with the digital age and how journalists need to adapt. The book provides tools the readers can utilize in digital reporting and multimedia production. This book guided me through the process of digital reporting and creating a website that is easy to navigate and access.

Bryant, E. C. (1988). *Hat Creek and hard times: People and events in the history of a Wyoming community*. Hero Books.

Edward Bryant is my great-grandfather, and his book details his life homesteading in Hat Creek, Wyoming. This book gave me insight to what my great-grandmother's life may have been like as a child. It provided information about community events, the inclement weather of Wyoming, homesteading during the Great Depression, the schooling experience and environment, and the difficulties with ranching in Wyoming. This book guided the questions I asked my great-grandmother for this project.

Clark, R. P. (2015, August 28). *12 basics of interviewing, listening and note-taking*. Poynter. Retrieved April 17, 2022, from <https://www.poynter.org/reporting-editing/2015/12-basics-of-interviewing-listening-and-note-taking/>

This webpage summarizes the basic principles of interviewing I have learned through several courses. Clark provides the fundamentals that guided me during my interviews with my great-grandmother. During my interviews, I asked open-ended questions and let her responses guide which question I asked next.

GCFLearnFree.org. (2016, November 22). *Beginning graphic design: Layout & composition* [Video]. YouTube. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a5KYIHNKQB8>

GCFLearnFree has several introductory videos to basic graphic design. This video specifically helped me design my website's layout. I used the five basic principles of proximity, white space, alignment, contrast, and repetition to ensure my final product was easy to follow and visually appealing.

GCFLearnFree.org. (2016, October 5). *Beginning graphic design: Color* [Video]. YouTube.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2LLXnUdUic&list=PLpQQipWcxwt9U7qgyYkvNH3Mp8XHXCMMQ&index=6>

This introductory video to graphic design specifically covers color. Color plays an important role in what is communicated visually and is a deciding factor in the visual appeal of a media. The video's introduction to color theory helped me decide the colors used in my supplemental materials.

Testa, R. (2021). *Audacity: Tips & tricks - library.albany.edu*. University Libraries.

Retrieved September 8, 2022, from

[https://library.albany.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/imc/Audacity\\_tips\\_tricks\\_import\\_export.pdf](https://library.albany.edu/sites/default/files/pdfs/imc/Audacity_tips_tricks_import_export.pdf)

This PDF guided me through some of the basics of editing in Audacity. I learned these basics in my multimedia production course and used this PDF as a reminder. It covers how to convert and export audios, as well as the importance of backing up and saving projects.