

My oral history is on my grandpa, John B. Larrabaster. He was born right here in Rock Springs, WY, on April 21, 1914. His folks are Spanish Basquoes from the Pyrosese Mountains in Spain and came over sometime in 1904 or 1906. Born into a Catholic family, John was the fifth child out of eight. He had five brothers and three sisters. The oldest of the children was a brother named, Roman. Then came George, Joe, his oldest sister Leona, and then John. Younger than John, was Frank and then his two younger sisters, Virginia and Elvira. John's mother and father were owners of a boarding house which was the same house that John was living in. The address was 323 Spruce St. which later changed to 416 Blair Ave. when John was born in 1914. During Prohibition, John said he didn't remember anyone ever talking about secret stills or anything like that. He did say though, that with his parents running a boarding house, that there they had beer right in the house. Even the boarders living with John would usually have their own stuff. Sometimes they would have a couple of nice, big shots of whiskey with a piece of homemade bread before breakfast in the early mornings. John's mother always had three big meals a day, and he says they never went hungry.

Growing up as a kid, was alot of fun for John. A couple of his brothers and friends were always playing games around the neighborhood. One game that they used to play was called "tin can cricket." The game was played by

Lisa Larrabaster

throwing a ball over a house or barn and it was called a crick. As the ball was being thrown over the roof, they would yell, "Cricket!" Then, the boys on the other side would catch the ball. One other game that was favorite to play was called "run sheepy, run." In this game, there was a spot that given a name like goal. One person was selected as a goaler and went looking for everyone else who was hiding. I guess the point of the game was to run away from the goaler and then run to the goal without being touched. While playing this game one day, John and his friends were told by an older lady in the neighborhood to stay out of her yard. They couldn't figure out why she was so hateful because they weren't doing any harm, but as boys are, they didn't listen and ended up in her yard. Well, the lady ended up calling the cops. So, the cops came and they had to march in line like the Chinese used to do, down to the City Hall, which was a block away. As they were marching down the City Hall, all of John's friends and himself began hollering, "Ally, ally oxen free," which means we all commence. While they were hollering this, some other friends came running to see what was going on. They asked what my grandpa was doing and he told them that he and his friends had to go to jail! So hearing this, the other boys followed in line, single file all the way to the City Hall. Once they were at the City Hall, the cops just told them to stay out of that lady's yard and there wouldn't be any

trouble. The cops back then were real gentle people and were always trying to help others all the time.

When John wasn't playing those games, he and his friends ~~with~~^{would} play with a bat and ball that they had managed to get someplace. Many days they would go over to the ball games and when a bat would break, they'd run like the dickens to get that bat. Then if they were lucky enough to get the bat they'd put a nail in it and wrap some tape around it and it would be as good as new. Then when John was older, his friends and he formed their own baseball diamond down by the round house. This was located down by the tracks along Blair Ave. in that big dirt space. In order to clear a big enough space, they found a guy with a big truck. On the back of the truck, they hooked a rail on and drug it behind the truck using it as a scraper. After the diamond was completed, several teams got together and games were finally played. One neat thing about these games was the scoreboard. It was a big board found in the junk yard. The numbers that were used were numbers taken off of old license plates found in the garbage. John and friends used to dig through the garbages and cut the numbers off to be able to use as the scores on the scoreboard.

My grandpa told me that he mostly hung around with friends his own age, but occasionally he did run around with his brother Frank. Once in awhile John would go with one of his older brothers, Joe, but Joe thought John and his friends were pests. Joe said he was too old to be hanging

around with them. Even though Joe thought that John and his friends were pests, John and all of his brothers played and got along real well. Another game that John mentions his friends and brothers playing is touch ball. Whenever a person had the ball, they tried to get rid of it as soon as possible because if they didn't they would get clobbered. Sometimes team mates would even jump on one another. John described it as everyone on their own, and everyone just having alot of fun falling. After a hard game of touch ball, John used to come home pretty tired and dirty. Every once in awhile there would be skinned knees and torn jeans but nothing real major.

Besides having fun playing games, John, his brothers, and his friends enjoyed calling each other by their nicknames. John's oldest brother Roman had the nickname of "Pork Chops" but they called him "Porko!" George was called "Duke", Joe was called "Hungry", and John was just nicknamed "Larry." For some reason, John didn't get an odd name. Then finally, the youngest brother Frank was called "Lung."

When John and his friends weren't playing their baseball games or neighborhood games, they would try to go to the social gatherings around Rock Springs. There were always alot of dances that were held through the church, but all the other dances were held at the Plamor Bowl. This was the big dance hall in those days where orchestras would come in and play. If they had enough monies (money), then John and his friends would go, but if they didn't, they would

heckle everyone who was going. There was one particular orchestra called Mike's orchestra that was their favorite. After he play in Rock Springs, he would travel up to Pinedale. John and his friends would then follow him up there and dance like crazy up in Pinedale. Sometimes the night would lead everybody to Green River and the same crazy dancing would happen again.

As a young boy, John began to sell papers and work as a janitor at the Commercial Hotel. When working at the hotel, John would mostly be down there to wake some of the guys so that they could get to work. After awakening these men, John would then do some cleaning up and then he would be off to school. Rock Springs never had any special Catholic schools so John and his friends went to the same public school. After school, John would head down to the train station to pick up his papers call the Salt Lake Tribune. It was coming in on the eastbound train #9. The east bound trains were always odd numbered whereas the west bound trains were even. From there, John would hit the streets to try and sell all of his papers in order to make any money. He would go from business to business besides selling to people just walking downtown. The hospital on the top of "C" St. was usually the last stop John would make before heading home for a late supper. Every once in awhile if John had an extra paper or two, he would go over to a house for the homeless called the "Pest House." He said they were sure delighted to see him, and the papers gave them

something to read. Right close to this house lived a lady that expected John to come to her house everyday with her paper. Knowing that he hadn't had any supper, the lady always saved John a piece of pie. That was sheer delight for John! John had one other man that he used sell a paper to who used to teach John some manners. One day John met this man at their regular spot in front of the grand theater. This one particular day, this man was talking to a young women when John gave him his paper. The man paid John and then John went to walk away and walked right in between the women and the man. The man immediately stopped John and said that wasn't very nice manners and he shouldn't have disrespected that woman like that. John said he did end up losing that man as a customer, but he did learn about manners in the process.

In September of 1941, John started working for the Union Pacific Railroad. His line of work had him working in Green River in the beginning. He never did run any of the engines, but what he did do was put trains together, or switch them around. The day shift was the most preferred, but when John had to start out, he had to work nights until business would increase and men would start to leave so that John could move into a daytime position. While working on the railroad, John was fortunate enough to meet the president of the railroad, and made friends with several superintendents. John remembers one superintendent named E.H. Bailey. John and the other members of his crew thought

of Bailey as a real "crackerjack guy." he wasn't as touchy as the other bosses were and he always attempted to talk to the men as he came into the yard. Then, on the other hand, John remembers other bosses who got their job because they knew somebody. It seemed like they didn't know their job at all, and they weren't allowed to ask the ordinary switchmen, so they would walk around thinking they knew what they were doing.

Whenever winter hit, it wouldn't hit lightly. John recalls that all of the winters were real bad and real cold. Between Rock Springs and Green River the weather could change 10 to 12 degrees without a person realizing it, until the cars were checked out and they ended up being frosted out. One year in May, John told me about a cold spell that came in and ended up turning everything to ice. As passengers trains come through the freight cars would have to be switched and put out of the way. During this particular storm a passenger train was coming through and the tracks were flooded with ice and hadn't been cleared. As the train was moving across the tracks, the train ended up right off of the tracks. John sure remembers what a mess that was trying to retrack the train because of the heaviness of the train. Besides passengers trains passing through the yard, John delt with alot of stock cars filled with animals. When the stock cars came through they had to "spot" the animals by watering and feeding them at the stock yards. If the animals weren't taken off the train and

spotted the railroad was taking a big chance of the animals freezing. Hogs were the biggest concern because of their fat would freeze so easily. I thought this was pretty surprising because I figured their thick skin would keep them warm, but John told me that they couldn't stand the weather like cattle can. Everyone once in awhile along with these stock cars, were real special cars called "zooloos." A zooloo was a box car filled with hay and only one or two animals were condensed inside to keep warm. These cars had nice trofts and alot of hay, and were taken care of really nice. One time, right behind one of the zooloo cars, was a stock car filled with chickens. This was the first "chicken car" John had ever seen. He said this one time when the train was jerked or something happened, the chickens got all excited and they ended up throwing feathers all over. John thought that was kind of funny.

During the thirty-five years that John had worked on the railroad, he had seen alot of train wrecks around Rock Springs. He commented on this one particular time when the yard was just filled with cars all over. John and his crew were switching around a pretty long train when a train coming from the other direction ended up on the same track and hit the train John was working on in the front. John didn't actually see the wreck, but knew something was wrong because the train just stopped and there was no movement. So, John and his crew walked up towards the front, and that's when they heard their engineer, Alton Thrasher,

calling for help. He was the only one hurt but seemed to be hurt pretty bad. So, with John recently taking a first-aid class, took charge and wrapped splinters that were found along the train and around the Alton's leg until the ambulance crew arrived. Once the crew arrived, they praised John for his work because the Alton only ended up with a fractured leg instead of a broken one. John said he felt really proud for helping his friend out.

While working at a small grocery place called Stockgrowers, John was introduced to Cecelia Yedinak who was working in the office at that time. One day there was some kind of incident that happened, and Cecelia was asked to go somewhere but was unable to because she didn't have a car to drive. So, Mr. Rumsey, the owner of Stockgrowers asked John to drive Cecelia wherever she needed to go, and he agreed. From then on, they were acquainted quite well and John courted Cecelia for about seven years. On June 14, 1939 John and Cecelia were married in the Catholic church. They lived in a small house on MacDonald St. located on the west side of the East Junior High parking lot. They lived there for a little while, and then moved up on Cedar St. and landlarded from a lady named Mrs. Clark. John talks about her as a very gracious person and a delight to landlord from. After living there for a few years, they moved up to 846 Rhode Island, where they are still living very happily. In June of 1943, John and Cecelia had a son and named him

John, also. Three years later in 1946, they had a daughter named, Jean.

During the war years, John took on any extra job working at the post office always trying to help out in some way. He said some days he would leave for work early in the morning while it was still dark and not come home again until later that night when it was still dark. While John was helping out in Rock Springs, two of his brother went into the army but were never really involved with any of the fighting. I asked John what he was doing on December 7, 1941, because the fiftieth anniversary of Pearl Harbor was just recently upon us. John told me that his family and friends were up on Pine Mountain hunting for Christmas trees. Someone else that was with him happen to have his radio on when the announcement was made that Pearl Harbor was being bombed by the Japanese. John said at that time, they stopped to rest for a minute and then went on to find their Christmas trees.

In 1975, John retired from the railroad and he and his wife Cecelia began fishing more often and doing some extra traveling. Right around this time, or thereabouts, the big boom hit Rock Springs. John remembers all the people and trailers moving into town. He said they were good people just making alot of "quick" money and didn't have any sense when it came to spending it. Because of this quick money, Rock Springs, inherited "K" St, where the quick money was spent on that jazz that was happening down there. John

really thought that it was terrible how Dan Rather brought all of his TV cameras down to "K" St. and took pictures. John said the pictures were horrible and half of the buildings couldn't be identified. John personally believes that it was the merchants who were to blame because they weren't ready.

At the present time, John and his wife Cecelia are still living at 846 Rhode Island. They are still plugging along taking one day as it comes. They still like to fish and continue their travels throughout the states. Whenever there's a job to do around the house, he enjoys being somewhat of a handy craftsman. When I asked John if he had any comments on the future, he told me that it's pretty hard to talk about the future. He says a person has to take it as it comes. John and his wife Cecelia are just keeping up with everything and if he had to do it all over again, he wouldn't change a thing, except for the fact about schooling. John said he never got the chance to go off to college because of the lack of money, but he said he never went without when it came to anything else. John did work alot during his life, but it was never hard to him. He said he had a good life.

Playing all of his favorite games with his friends, growing up and learning more responsibility, and then settling down with his wife, were just a few of the things that John B. Larrabaster commented on his Rock Springs native life. I really enjoyed interviewing my grandpa,

because he has so much history in his life that it was nice of him to share it with me, and it was nice that I could let everyone else in on his fun!