

ORAL HISTORY OF ANNIE RASMUSSEN HYSELL

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HISTORY OF WYOMING

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Annie Rasmussen Hysell was born September 30, 1897, in a log cabin on the family homestead in Robertson, Wyoming. She was the seventh of eleven children born to George Rasmussen, Sr. and Mary Jane Kimber Rasmussen. There were six girls: Katie, Eunice, Annie, Mary, Martha and Alice, and five boys: Jim, Walt, Joe, Will and Nelson. Nelson died when he was only six months old. Annie's father came to the United States from Denmark. His first wife died, leaving him with two sons, George A. and Conrad. Her mother was from England.

Annie spent her childhood in Robertson. Robertson was, and is today, a ranching community. There are several communities in the area: Robertson, Milbourne, Fort Bridger and Mountain View. Fort Supply is located in the Robertson area, and Annie's family settled on a homestead southwest of Fort Supply. The designation of names for the area was sometimes dependent on the mail delivery. Some of the ranches, although considered to be part of the Robertson area, received their mail from the Milbourne Post Office and many of the birth certificates reflect Milbourne although technically, the people were born in Robertson. (Hysell, Leslie) The actual size of the area is much the same today as it was in Annie's youth, but distances were greater back then, as the only mode of transportation was by foot or

horseback. A trip to Mountain View, approximately fifteen to twenty miles, was a major event. Today the trip is made in a matter of minutes.

Annie's family lived in a three room log cabin when she was a baby. Later on, they moved to the Cold Spring ranch, south of the homestead. It was quite a change for the family, as the house at Cold Spring ranch had three bedrooms, a dining room, living room, kitchen and pantry. "It seemed like a palace to us after living in a little log house."

The first school Annie attended was in a one room building on a far corner of her father's property. The year was about 1903, and in those days the children walked to school when the weather was nice. She reflected that, "In the spring when the water was on the meadow, we would have to walk along the fence to get to school." In the winter, they went by team and sleigh. The teachers usually boarded with families in the area. At Christmas time, the children would all perform in a program and their families would come and watch. Annie remembers her dad being the one to get the Christmas tree for the school house, and that the teacher would always give their students a little gift. The Robertson school had eight grades, and there was no high school at the time. In order to graduate from the eighth grade, they had to take the State examination.

Going to school also provided a chance to socialize with children other than brothers and sisters. "I loved school...I didn't care much for history, but I did love school...getting

away from home and being among your friends you know. People lived so far apart at that time, that you didn't visit too often."

Besides school, the children had other responsibilities. Everyone in the family worked hard. Annie's father grubbed sagebrush to clear his homestead to make hay meadows. After school the kids would gather the brush into big piles which were burned in the evening. This hard labor was done by hand, as there wasn't the modern machinery we have today. The children also helped with the daily chores, like milking the cows. The boys worked in the hayfields, and the girls pulled weeds in the garden and potato patch.

They didn't have a lot of toys to play with. The girls had dolls and the boys got pocket knives for Christmas. The boys made wagons and sleds to play with. One sled was called "Old Blue" because it was made out of some boards that were painted blue. They called one wagon "Old Lumpadede" because it had one bad wheel. They enjoyed many hours of fun playing on the snow and ice. When they rode the sleds up and down Willow Creek in the winter, they used two short sticks with a nail in the end to push themselves along. (Hysell, Annie: Personal History)

During Annie's youth, the timber industry flourished in the Uinta Mountains. There were several tie camps located south of Robertson, which employed many Swedish people. Annie remembers the men passing through her father's place, and her father, who was Danish, could talk to the men in their own language. She

also remembers watching the ties float down the Smith's Fork river in the springtime during high water. The only things that remain of the tie camps now are some old broken down cabins.

At the age of sixteen or seventeen, Annie got her first job working for the Joe Johnson family. Mrs. Johnson (Maggie) was expecting a baby and needed help with her children and other chores. Annie cooked and cleaned and took care of the family. Of that experience she said, "I worked with the family like, like a mother would you know...Boy and you had to work hard too!" The Johnsons lived right in Robertson, and Annie's family lived several miles south, too far for her to go back and forth each day. Annie lived with the Johnsons during the week and rode her horse home on the weekends. "The first year I worked there I sure got homesick awful easy. And I was always glad when Saturday came then I could go home."

The babies were born at home, sometimes with a doctor or nurse in attendance. Annie didn't help out during the birth, but she was at the house when it was happening. She recalls, "I know that when I heard the woman making the noise she was making, I figured well if I ever have to go through that I'll never make that noise...My kids were all born at home...but I never made that big a noise."

The next year, she worked at the Wallace Johnson home. Again, Mrs. Johnson was expecting "a newcomer", and Annie was hired to help out with the family. It was while she was working there that she began dating the man she would marry, Denver

Llewellyn Hysell, Jr. She met him at a dance, and he asked to take her home. They rode home together on one horse. She never dated anyone else. "...but I had plenty of chances! ...Even after I was married...I had a chance but I didn't go."

Denver and Annie were married on September 25, 1916. They lived with Denver's parents for awhile, until their own house, a two room cabin in Robertson, was finished. Annie said she was a bit uncomfortable at first, living with her in-laws. She felt she had to do everything just right. "Grandma wanted me to make a cake one day, and I was afraid I'd make a mistake and have a failure. ...But I made a good cake." In telling about the cake, she related another story about making a cherry pie with the seeds in it. "It was hard to eat! ...I didn't make that one when she [Grandma] knew anything about it. ...I made that pie later on for us. It was quite funny to eat."

Their first son, Leslie Llewellyn, was born November 12, 1917, in the little two room cabin in Robertson. Denver had a homestead in Robertson, south of Annie's family's place, and they built a little house on it. They lived there during the summer to "prove up" on the homestead, and went to the mining towns during the winter.

They lived for a time in Spring Valley, which is located between Leroy and Altamont. Denver, his brother Spence and their dad were going to open a coal mine, but it didn't pan out. About 1920, Denver worked on the double track railroad which was being built between Spring Valley and Leroy. They lived in a tent and

Annie cooked for some of the men. (Hysell, Annie: Personal History)

In Rock Springs, they lived at the Number 4 mining camp. Denver's father and two brothers went with them, and his mother stayed on the family ranch with the younger children. Annie went with her little family to Rock Springs, where she kept house for all of them. They lived in a house owned by the Union Pacific Coal Mines. "It seemed like it was well built except for the floor. It was kind of crooked. ...this floor was so sloping that, we had a table with rollers under it...you'd have to park it just so or it'd come rolling." The Number 4 mine is in Rock Springs now. "It's a big city where we used to live. It was crummy when we lived there. ...Well I was always a coward...about being alone. ...It was pretty scary when I was there alone...most of the people were foreigners and they were pretty hard to get to know because they talked their language and I talked mine." For recreation, they went to the show, or to the circus if it was in town. Another mining job took them to Reliance, where they lived with Denver's sister Lizzie and her husband Maxwell. The two families shared everything. During this time there was a flu epidemic and many people died from it. (Hysell, Annie: Personal History) When spring came, they went back to the ranch.

On June 8, 1921, back once again on the Hysell ranch, their daughter Martha was born. She was named for Denver's mother. They moved around a lot during those years, ranching in Robertson

in the summer and mining in the winter months.

They lived year round for about two years in another mining town called Sublet, which was north of Kemmerer. Nothing remains of the town now, but when the mine was open it was a regular town with stores and churches and a movie house where they could go and watch silent movies. It was in Sublet that Annie remembers spending one of the worst days of her life. On September 16, 1924, there was an explosion at the Sublet mine. Denver and two of his brothers, Spence and Jake, were inside the mine when it happened. Annie remembers that she was washing that day, and hanging clothes on the line when she saw the smoke coming from the mine. It was late morning, and she and her sisters-in-law, Donna and Erma, joined other people to begin the long vigil of waiting. It was a terrible afternoon, not knowing if their loved ones were alive or hurt or killed.

In family records, Jacob Hysell's history refers to that event:

On September 24, 1924 the Sublet mine had an explosion. Denver, Spence and I were in it. It was an idle day. There were fifty two men in the mine. Thirty nine were killed and thirteen of us came out alive. The mine blew up at about five to twelve, lunch time. We were not rescued as we made it to the parting by ourselves. ...We realized we were in a dangerous situation. So we conserved our water...and used several precautions. ...We crawled through places that I can't figure out yet how we ever got through. ...If it had been a working day there would have been about two hundred fifty men in the mine. (Hysell, Jacob: History of Jacob Hysell)

Denver and Annie's son Leslie was six years old at the time of the explosion. He remembers standing on top of the

underground mine when the black smoke started boiling out. "I remember my mother crying and I tried to comfort her by patting her and saying, 'Don't worry Mom, you'll find another man.'" He also remembers going with his dad to the mortuary in Kemmerer, where he saw rows and rows of wooden caskets containing the remains of the dead men, burned and blackened beyond recognition. He said, "It was a terrible, terrible sight." (Hysell, Leslie)

Of the thirteen survivors, Denver and his two brothers escaped injury and came out of the mine late in the afternoon.

The Sublet mine shut down after the explosion and many of the residents in the town moved away. Annie and Denver went back to Robertson, where they bought the Jace Wilson ranch. There, they had another son, Robert Wesley, who was born May 7, 1925.

Annie's children attended school in Robertson, and they were a happy family on that ranch for about ten years. For entertainment, they would bundle up the kids and go to parties which were held at different homes in the Robertson area. Everyone would go, and usually there would be supper and then a dance afterward. They danced to violin, or "fiddle" music, and sometimes there would be a piano in the home. As it got late they would put the kids to bed and keep dancing until the wee hours.

They raised sheep on the ranch and herded them to the homestead for summer pasture. During lambing season everyone had to work very hard, and at shearing time, Annie cooked for the shearing crew. When the lambs were shipped, Denver rode the

train with them to Omaha, and Annie stayed at home with the kids. On the ranch they had milk cows and sold cream. They also had chickens and, "we raised a good garden and potatoes, so we didn't have to buy vegetables, meat or eggs. It was a real nice life."

The Depression brought their life on the ranch to an end. Denver's father had mortgaged their ranch to help Denver and Annie buy theirs. They didn't want Denver's dad to lose his place, so they let theirs go back because it wasn't paid for. They lost the ranch, and the homestead as well. It was a hard time for everyone. "Oh that was bad, the Depression was. Boy we had quite a time to get along afterwards. But we never begged for anything. We worked and got our own stuff. They, the government was doling out stuff for people at that time too you know. I think the only thing we ever got was a sack of flour."

In 1934 (Hysell, Leslie), they moved to Mountain View and Denver worked for the W.P.A. It was a government job, and he helped build a school house. They rented a little house for awhile for ten dollars a month. (Hysell, Annie: Personal History) After scrimping and saving, they were finally able to buy the place where Annie now lives. Denver and his dad built the house, and over the years more rooms have been added on. The coal mines became a part of their lives again, and they lived for a time in Rock Springs while Denver worked at the Winton mine. Their two oldest children, Leslie and Martha, got married and had homes of their own. During World War II, Robert was drafted, and joined the United States Navy. (Hysell, Annie)

Denver and Annie worked on their little place in Mountain View, grubbing brush for a hay meadow. They also had a large garden spot and potato patch. They had a team of horses, a milk cow, pigs and chickens. They raised almost everything they needed. Both of them enjoyed working in their yard, and it was always full of beautiful flowers and trees. In their spare time, they liked to go fishing, camping or on a picnic.

Denver worked for a number of years for the Mountain View school district as a bus driver and janitor. During this time, Annie was at home, busy with her yard and garden, and sometimes with her grandchildren. She said that after she got married, she didn't work away from her home. "After I got married I was just a homebody. I took care of my family, I never worked out around." Denver retired in 1965, and Annie and Denver were together for sixty four years before his death in June, 1981. In her personal history she wrote:

Its the year of 1989--I'm 91 years old and will be 92 this year. My health has been real good all my life, until I got a bad leg. ...A lot of things have happened in the past some good, some bad. The good was when Denver was still with me. We had so many good times together. I remember he loved to fish, and he went fishing below the state dam [Stateline Dam] the day before he died. One of the saddest days of my life was when I found him in the shop. Its been a lonely life since he's gone but my family have been so good to me, I don't know what I would have done without them. Denver would have enjoyed all his great grandchildren. There's 18 great grandchildren and 9 grandchildren. I do a lot of crocheting now to pass the time away. I also write letters, and read a lot. I still do all my cooking, and take care of myself. (Hysell, Annie: Personal History)

Annie has witnessed progress in the making during her lifetime, and she recalls the effects of modern technology on her own life. She got her first washing machine after her youngest child, Robert, started to school. It was run with a gas motor. Of television she said, "Oh I thought it was a miracle!" Some of the things, such as the washer, made her life easier. She stated, "There's a lot of things that I have now that I wouldn't let go. Because it's so...much more convenient than when we was first married,... But if I had to do it again I'd do it!" She recalls riding in her dad's first car, a Dodge, "...I rode in it in the back and bounced around like a ball it was so rough."

Annie is Mormon, but hasn't lived a structured church-going life. She remembers saying prayers at home when she was a kid, but they lived too far away to go to church all the time. She reads the Bible occasionally.

According to Annie, people have changed and morals have changed. She stated, "...sometimes I think people don't have any modesty about 'em anymore. Maybe I'm old fashioned but, ...Well I guess I'm against a lot of ways that they have nowadays, but I guess it's their life, it's not mine."