

Rock Springs - 1946

by
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History of Wyoming
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Jessie Paterson Lindroos gave to me, Joan H. Fowler on April 17, 1984 some of her life history concerning the time she lived in Rock Springs, Wyoming in 1946. We sat in her living room at 430 Gobel Street talking to each other while recording our conversation. In composing this story, I have pieced together, hopefully in sequence some interesting events in her life before and since she has been in Rock Springs some 37 years ago. Here is her story:

My husband was born in Finland, but was raised in Reliance, Wyoming. When World War II broke out, he went in the army where he was stationed in England, France and Scotland. It was while he was in Scotland that I met him. We dated about four times before he was again transferred to England. During these next few months we wrote to each other. When he was able to get his next leave, we made arrangements to be married. All of my family were married in a church and so I wanted a church wedding. An old Scottish custom says that a bride should not see her bridegroom the evening before the wedding until the wedding time, so I did not get to see Ed until we were at the Congregational Church in Glasgow. I wore the dress, veil and shoes that my sister wore twelve years previously. When Ed walked in for the wedding, I think he thought he had married into a clan when he saw all of my aunts, uncles, cousins, brothers and sisters. It was a rather small wedding with just mostly relatives and some friends. Our best friends were Margaret and Bill. Ed was so anxious to get me that he said 'I

do' at two different times in the ceremony. I teased him a long time about that.

On Friday night we crossed the Channel and went to a seaside town called Porta Belle. We were coming down the spiral staircase in the tram and as is the custom in America of "ladies first" I was leading down the tram when the tram gave a lurch forward sending me forward and swinging me against the side where I got a big nasty bruise on my arm. Everybody later made such fun of me, they said, 'Two days married and she has bruises already.' You see, in Scotland, to be a gentleman, the man leads, not the woman. Well now, Ed left France, where we were honeymooning and went to Fort Logan, Colorado where he was discharged from the army on the 12th of November 1945, the same day as his brother's birthday. He took the train from Colorado to Wyoming where he stopped in at Hanna, Wyoming to visit his sister and her niece. He spent two or three days there and then they all came to Reliance, where his mother, dad, brothers and sisters lived. Now while he was in Rock Springs, I was still in Glasgow, Scotland. There was a lot of red tape to get passports, visa's and whatever else he needed in order to bring me over here.

The first of the "War Brides" started in January of 1946 and the Queen Mary was the ship that brought over 1,000 brides and their babies. So, during January, February and March, Ed was looking for a place for us to live, where we could be alone. Then he found a house at 121 Grant Street, right across from the Cody Motel. It was a little house that belong to a man by the name of Tom Thumb. It was only a two-roomed house but at least it had a toilet, even if it was outside. The toilet was sanitary and it

was our own, and in those days you could not be choosers, you took what you got, and we wanted a place of our own. The rent was only \$15.00 a month, and we paid \$1.00 for water and \$2.00 covered your lights. The house had a stove that stood on four legs. It was the rustiest looking stove I had ever seen, but it made the best cream puffs you have ever tasted. Ed had bought a lovely bedroom set from his sister, who had gone through a divorce. It was a beautiful set with a headboard and bottom board, queen size by todays standards. There was a vanity with a mirror and a matching stool with a tallboy. She paid \$500.00 for it new, but let Ed have it for \$175.00. Ed bought it because furniture was hard to get after the war and very expensive. Ed also bought a radio, which his father was against him having, until he heard it once; then he had it on night and day. Well, anyway, the house was ready for my arrival.

I arrived here on July 14, 1946 at 5:10 a.m. and it was already yucky hot. I was wearing a pretty grey tweed dress with pleats all around and a jacket to match. The buttons were pretty strawberries. It was a really beautiful suit and I even wore a hat, which I took off because of the heat. In Scotland they told us to limit our luggage and bring only a few change of clothes; as we could get all the clothes we wanted in America. We were to leave what we did not need in Scotland along with our coupons so people could buy clothes with coupons over there. Anyway, people were used to wearing hats in Scotland, but apparently not in Rock Springs. Well, the train was to have been here by 3:10 a.m. but it did not come until 5:10 a.m. and my husband and his family had been waiting for a little over two hours. The New Grand Cafe was

across the street from the depot and apparently they knew the train was always late, so they would run back and forth from the New Grand Cafe to the depot. When the trains came in from Chicago or the East, they were always late, but were not late when coming from the West. Finally, the train arrived in Rock Springs and the porter got my overnight case and my small suit cases; my trunk arrived ahead of me. When the train stoppped, Ed's father and mother, Helen, Donnie, Eric, Elsie, Frank and John were looking for me. I guess I walked a little fast because when Ed looked way up the train and yelled, 'That's her, I can tell by the way she walks.'

After our introductions, they all took me to Reliance and the first thing they did was give me a steam bath. I had been traveling eighteen days and I was in need of cleaning. In Scotland we called these baths Turkish baths, and you usually had to be a member of a club to be able to use them. This sauna bath was built by Ed's brothers. It was a real old fashioned sauna that was built onto the back of the house. This house that Ed was raised in is the only house in Reliance that is now torn down. But when you went into Reliance, you drove past the high school and turned to the left; it was the second to the last house on the left. This sauna was a nice little room with homemade rugs on the floor that Helen had made. There was an old vanity with a nice cover on it in the room which had lots of brushes, combs and lots of towels. Along its side were long benches with sheets on it so that we could lay down and relax. Then you went into the steam room where in the corner stood an old fashioned coal stove, which was covered with racks. After turning on the faucet and filling

the buckets with water, you would throw the water onto the hot coals and steam immediately came forth. 'Oh man, that surely did make you feel refreshed; every pore in your body was cleaned. That did more for me.'

'I liked this country the minute I stepped in it, even though this was my adoptive country.'

I acquainted myself quite smartly with the town. Being the youngest of a large family and the youngest of all my cousins, I was really thought of a lot, and I really thought that coming here was going to hurt me more than it did. But Ed was such a good man. I gave up a lot for him and he knew that. The only time I got a blue-streak and was lonely for home was when I got letters from home, which was every week. My brothers and sisters said, 'Now Jessie, we've only got you to write to but you have all of us to write to, so every week, you write to mother and dad and we'll get the news from them.'

Union Merc was where we did our shopping. There was a Safeways store here, but my husband was not a Safeways man. Union Merc would let us buy things on credit, then by the next payday, we would of course, pay the bill. We did not like to use the credit, but it was nice. Also, there was a Progressive Market on "K" Street, near Sweetbriars. You could get ten tall cans of Sego milk for 59 cents; a penny for a bunch of radishes and a penny for green onions. A twenty-five pound sack of potatoes cost 89 cents and bread from 10 to 12 cents a loaf. Milk was 15 cents a quart and 12 cents for buttermilk. Coffee was 32 cents a pound. Bones for soups were free and stew meat was ten cents while a roast only cost 15 cents a pound.

I caught on here very well. In spite of the roads, I found my way around, even to the number one hill to visit my sister-in-law. The street across from where the depot is, was where Newberry's, West's, Woolworths, and J. C. Penney's used to be; and where Young World is today, there used to be the Western Cafe. The Park Hotel still stands there and Vase Funeral Home was once owned by Wildermuth's. He was a mortician too. We lived near Safeway's.

I did not have a washing machine, so every Monday, Helen would come in and get me and her sister-in-law and we would go do our washing. It would take us nearly all day. I used to do wash over the tub outside, until my mother-in-law in Reliance let us use her Maytag washing machine. But we still had to heat the water in these two tubs on top of the stove. There is a yellow and green house on the corner where we used to live on Grant Street that has two old fashioned tubs outside in his yard that he has put plants in; those are the tubs we used to heat the water in. We would get the fire going early in the morning and put the water inside the washing machine. The clothes would sometimes take four or five washes because our husbands worked in the mines and the clothes would get so dirty. Then we would rinse the clothes twice to get them clean. Sometimes we had to change the water five and six times.

I did many things to keep myself busy as we never had any children to occupy my time. My husband used to say we will just have to trust in the Lord, it's just what is meant to be. We did not want to blame each other. I knew this was a disappointment to him, but he just never showed it, he was just too good of a nature to show it. But one time when he went to the timber camp, I had

missed a period. We had just moved to Elias Street and I was arranging the furniture when I doubled over with cramps. I went to Dr. Harrison and he said that I had lost two blood clots each the size of a piece of liver. Dr. Harrison said he thought that it might have been twins that I had lost. I felt very sad, you see my husband was a twin. His twin brother died when he was just six months old. Dr. Harrison thought that perhaps this was something hereditary. Anyway, I was very sad, and I would cook or bake, write letters and help tend other people's children to keep busy. When someone came over to America from another country, the Red Cross gave that person three to six months to acclimatize himself here. If you did not like it, the Red Cross would send you back. They paid for you to come over and to go back if you did not like it here, but after that, if you wanted to come back, you had to pay the trip yourself. So anyway, I kept busy.

One night I went to this club (she could not remember the name of the club) and May Dikes, who was head of the Red Cross, asked me how I liked it here and if I was getting along very well. I told her that I was happy but the only thing that I really wanted was a house with a bathroom because my husband had to bathe in two big tubs and he had to walk about 15 feet to get to the bathroom. That was my only complaint. The water was inside the house, so I did not have to haul it in, but the toilet, even though it was sanitary, was a long ways away. Ed put some powder boxes on the wall, which would be a collectors item today, and he painted them. When he came in at night, he would put his lunch bucket by the back door and then walk on the wooden path that he made which leads to the bathroom. He would open the door and take

his hat and money belt and put them in one of the powder boxes. Then he would hang his coat and clothes on the rack and take his shoes off, and climb in the tub to clean.

Ed was a big strong union man, who worked for Green River Peacock Mine. He would leave the house at 2:30 p.m. so that he could be in Green River by 3:30 p.m. He would sometimes drive the car to the place where the bus would pick them up. I did not need the car, because I was used to a big city where I would walk everywhere. There was a bakery on "C" Street called Johnny's Bakery and that is where the bus would drop them off and then he would walk home from there.

There was a lady who lived across the street that I would go and visit once a week and wash her windows for her. Every Monday I would write a letter home and by Friday, my parents would get the letter. They would quickly write a letter and mail it on Monday and by Friday, I got their letter. The mail service was very fast in those days, today it takes about two weeks to send a letter to Scotland. In one of the first letters that I wrote to my mother I told her how quiet the town was. Everything closed down by 6:00 p.m. All of the stores were closed and the town became so quiet. You could even go to bed at night and leave the doors unlocked and not be disturbed. I remember telling mother that it was so quiet here that you could hear day break and night fall.

One Monday, I baked a Sultana Cake. Sultanas are white raisins. I didn't know about the difference in altitude then and so I baked this cake that looks like a pound cake. You take and beat your eggs, then after that you beat the butter and sugar

together in a separate bowl. Then you sift the flour together with the baking powder. Then you alternate the batter, mixed with the eggs and then with the flour and mix until everything is mixed smoothly together; and then add the Sultanas. I put it in the oven to bake. I did not have a glass door on my oven, so I had to just keep peeking into the oven. I did not have to bend down to look in the oven, as my oven was high up at eye level. I looked in and the cakes were raising beautifully and there was a crack across the top of the loaf. An old Scottish lady said to me once when she walked into a Canteen and I was baking something in the oven and she said, "It's ready lassie, it's laughing at ya." So that is how I tell when my loaf or pound cakes are ready. Anyway, I gave my cakes the usual time, and I tookd a piece of straw from a broom and poked it into the cake to see if it was done. It's done if the straw comes out clean, and it came out clean. I put the cake on a rake to cook when Helen came in the house. She said, 'Oh you have been to the bakery shop. I have never seen cakes like these before, when did Johnny start baking these cakes?' I told her that I had baked these two loaf cakes. They did turn out all right, even with the altitude change.

John Lucas, now President of North Side State Bank, gave me my first job. I cleaned two offices after hours, once on Wednesday and then again on Saturday. I cannot remember what my salary was from him. Later, I quit and went to work in the hospital. I worked six days a week. I got paid \$130 a month and from this \$25.00 was taken off for my dinners. After I had worked there for six months I got a \$5.00 raise and got another \$5.00 raise after I had worked there a year. We got a coffee break at

9:00 a.m. and then we got an outstanding dinner. Mrs. Henderson, the dietician, was also an old Scottish lady. She saw me on my hands and knees under a desk scrubbing the floor and she said to me, 'Jessie we're in America, we don't get on our hands and knees to scrub floors.' I said to her, 'you might be in America, but a floor is still a floor until it's scrubbed.'"

With these parting words I ended my interview with Jessie Paterson Lindroos. I hope that whoever reads this may find her as delightful and entertaining as I did while visiting with her.