

A BIOGRAPHY OF LOIS REED

by Ruth Case
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Lois Reed was born April 29, 1922, in her home at 354 'H' Street, Rock Springs, Wyoming.

Lois' first known descendant to reach America was her great great grandfather. He came to Rock Springs in 1886 and worked in the number one coal mine, which is about where DeBernardi, Construction is now. After working there for about two years, the coal mine burned, and he went into ranching.

In 1880, Lois' mother's mother and her parents arrived from England. This was her grandmother Nobel who was just a young girl at the time. Meanwhile, her mother's father, (Grandpa Nobel), arrived in the U.S. from Scotland in 1885.

When electricity became available, the family wanted Grandpa Nobel to get electricity for Grandma Nobel. He was set against it, but once they had it put in, he began to sit and read by the hour.

Grandpa Nobel was a very intelligent man. He made tall, metal chicken brooders which heated the eggs with chicken manure. It has become a legend that men from Germany came to see how the chicken brooders worked. He also built a house on 400 'H' Street with plans of a greenhouse. Because his oldest son went into the service that year, and because his leg was giving him much pain, the greenhouse was not finished. After Lois and her husband, Roy, moved into the house, they made that area into a large kitchen.

Grandpa Nobel's oldest son, Lois' uncle, came back home at the end of World War II in 1918. Lois still has his hat and discharge papers. This is the same year that Grandpa Nobel died.

Lois' father, grandfather, and great grandfather were all coal miners. Her father worked in the coal mines in Scotland. After he arrived in Rock Springs in 1906, he worked in the coal mines and in a store. He was a very ambitious man, and he died young in 1927. Lois was five years old at the time.

Lois' grandmother Potter, her father's mother, was "four foot high and four foot round. She talked with very much of a brogue and her words were laced with laughter." This same pioneer woman lost her husband and two sons within a period of three years.

After Lois' father died, she spent much time at her grandmother Nobel's, who lived only two houses away. Her grandmother became a great source of stability to her while her mother struggled to rearrange her own life after her husband's death. Her mother remarried three times; once in 1939 when Lois was seventeen.

Life was very serious and modest throughout Lois' childhood. There was little place for parties or giddiness for tragedy and disease lurked at the door, and the law of survival was very much in control.

On Sundays, Lois' mother and step-father went to church while Lois and her older sister babysat their two half-sisters. On School days, Lois and her older sister had to clean house, dust, vacuum, sweep, and do dishes before they went to school.

School began for Lois in September 1927, in a two room school located at the end of Ash near the corner of 'H' Street and Lee Street. She attended there for two years, and then went four years to yellowstone School by the old hospital.

There were no school lunches then, so all the children walked home to eat lunch. There was just rocks and sage brush between her home on 354 'H' Street and Yellowstone School. She recalled, "It was just rocks and sage brush and that sort of thing, and we would be across the white rocks, is what it was called. And climb down over the rocks. And there was a big barn on the left side that belonged to the coal company that had the mules and the horses from the mine, and then on the right side was the old ice house where they made the ice, block ice. And they would sometimes if it was hot and that, they also made sure we could find a piece of ice to go to school with. And we'd cut through the creek and up the hill to Yellowstone School."

Lois went to seventh and eighth grades in the old high school on 'B' Street. She attended high school from 1935 to 1939 in the new high school building which is now the East Junior High building.

The high-school curriculum was mostly English, math, and science, with two or three extra-curricular activities, such as orchestra and G.A.L., the girl's athletic league.

Two years of a foreign language were required, so Lois took one year of Latin and one year of Spanish. However, when Lois graduated, at age seventeen, in a class of 300, she was too young to go into nurse's training, so she went back to school. She

She took chemistry, geometry and another year of Latin which fulfilled the curriculum to begin nurse's training.

She went into nurse's training in 1941, and graduated in 1944 at the Wyoming General Hospital, Rock Springs, Wyoming. She continued working as nurse until 1973.

ICE

The ice plant provided ice for the residents of Rock Springs. "Everybody had an ice box and every body had a card and they would put it in the window, and it would show the amount, the size of the cube for the block of ice that they wanted, and the ice man would bring it in on his tongs, the ice tongs and put it in the ice box." The doors were left unlocked for everyone felt safe.

The ice was put into the top of the ice box to keep the food cool. As the ice melted, the water dripped into a pan at the bottom. Many times the pan overflowed and homemakers had to finish by scrubbing the floor.

Lois remembered having their first refrigerator in the 1920's or 1930's.

POTTERSVILLE

The area in and around what is 'H' Street now was first called Pottersville. It was named after Lois' great grandfather Potter. Lois' grandfather Nobel was the marshall until Pottersville was annexed by the city of Rock Springs.

During that time there were only a few houses scattered through the neighborhood. Behind her house was a hill where they found icing glass, that the children used to make doll

houses. There was a cave at the top of that hill that her grandfather had dug. The children liked to roast potatoes in the cave. If they were lucky they got an ear of corn, left on the shuck, and buried it in the coals. "We had more supper from the wood and that than we ever did, but we ate them... half raw, the potatoes were half raw and that sort of stuff, but it was, it was fun!" Her grandmother Nobel always had the children well-furnished with cookies, too.

Lois' grandfather had actually dug the cave years before to nurse his injured leg. At the top of the cave, he dug a hole through which the sun could shine. He sat in the cave with his leg elevated in the sunshine.

At the back of this hill there was nothing but weeds. Lois and the other children used to catch grasshoppers there, and put them in Prince Albert cans for her great uncle. He wanted them to use for fishing bait.

THE LAND

There was very little grass in the yards as Lois was growing up because water was so scarce and expensive, though they did have water lines then. During her grandmother's time, the residents had to haul their water.

Because the soil was mostly blow sand, wind erosion was quite a problem. "You didn't have the vegetation that you have now. I mean, it was just plain blow sand, that's all it was."

Yards were not fenced. People cut through without giving it a second thought.

Lois' grandmother was one of the few people who had a plot

which they ran through a grater and threw in the wash water to melt. The clothes were then hung in the next room of the shantie where there was a fire to dry the clothes. Sometimes the fire went out and the sheets actually froze to the line. Many times the corners of the sheets were torn from trying to pull them from the line.

As soon as the clothes were dry, they were rolled up, put in a basket and ironed. This was difficult because they had many things that were handmade; such as crocheted items, doilies, scarves, and pillowcases. They ironed everything, too -- pillowcases, sheets, towels, socks... Every six weeks Grandmother Noble washed all the curtains in her house, made the starch, starched them, and stretched them on curtain stretchers.

Friday was cleaning-house-day. Saturday was baking day. Sunday was church day, or if one stayed at home, it was Sabbath day. The Sabbath was observed by reading a lot, and visiting other families. The women still supplied three meals a day.

On the first day of every month, Grandma Nobel placed an order at Montgomery Ward for cases of food. She placed the food in an outside room, and she was always able to spread the table for company. She baked pies and cakes, canned fruits, prepared jams, and made scones and raisin cookies, for which she is still well-known. All of the produce for these recipes were shipped in by train.

GAMES

Lois and the children played Kick-the-Can; Annie-I-Over; Run, My Sheepy, Run; and Mumble Pay. They also jumped rope

of grass in her front yard. Since the miners only made \$2.00 a day, they had to watch their pennies. So the luxury of having grass, which meant paying high water prices, was not likely for most residents. Lois' grandmother also had lilac bushes and what Lois still calls "a big, yellow rose bush." The 'big, yellow rose bush' was golden rod that grew about waist high and had big, yellow blossoms on it. Lois remembers, "... and if we were good kids, why, we might get to go out there and sit" in the golden rod.

Lois and the other children used to walk about six miles to a spring on White Mountain. There were trees there, and it was green, restful and peaceful, and time was of no essence.

They used to have a picnic lunch there on summer days where they had access to the cold, spring water.

CHORES

This is the way we wash the clothes,
 wash the clothes,
 wash the clothes,
This is the way we wash the clothes,
So early Monday morning.

Monday was wash day. It actually began on Sunday evening with the lighting of the fire in the stove of the wash shantie. Water was poured in the big copper boiler and heated over night. "... and at 4:00 every Monday, except for Christmas and probably Easter, my mother and my grandmother washed clothes." Rain, shine, blizzard, made no difference, they washed clothes." The clothes were scrubbed on a wash board in a hot tub of water, run through the washing machine, and rinsed in two tubs of warm water. They did not use bleach, but they used Crystal White soap

and played jacks.

Kick-the-Can was a game in which a can was placed in a circle, one person chosen to be 'it', and the others ran to hide. They would try to sneak in and kick the can before 'it' could jump over the can and count, "One, two, three." If they made it in, they could run and hide along with anyone else who had been caught. If they were caught, they had to stay in the circle.

Annie-I-Over was played by two teams. Team one threw a rock over a garage. Team two tried to catch it and then catch team one. If team two caught team one, team two took their turn of throwing the rock over the garage.

In Run, My Sheepy, Run, 'it' hid his sheep, the team. He would then draw a map for the other team to find the sheep. When the other team got too close, he yelled, "Run, my sheepy, run!"

Mumble Pay was played by flipping a pocket knife off different parts of the body. Each time the knife was flipped, it had to stick in the ground. If it did not stick, the next person took his turn.

MINE ACCIDENTS

Coal mining was expected to be dangerous, and in preparation for accidents, fire whistles were set up in order to notify the community.

As a nurse, Lois found that broken bones were typical injuries of the mine accidents. Other injuries associated with mine accidents were head injuries, fractures, back injuries, and fractured necks. Lois' great uncle lost both legs from a

runaway trolley car.

Many women went to work during World War II. They worked in the coal mine as boney pickers. Very few, if any, worked underground. Lois noted that even during that time of a great influx of women into the work force, there was much less competition between men and women, than today. The career choices that women had were to be a school teacher, a waitress, work in a store, or be a nurse. Many of the women chose to be nurses.

When asked if she would go through nursing again, Lois replied, "No, but at the time, I enjoyed it."

FURNITURE

Like clothing and food, furniture was also shipped in to Rock Springs. It was not made by local carpenters. Instead, residents collected Larkins, which are coupons much like the S&H Stamps. The Larkins could be reimbursed for furniture, dishes, and doll buntings. These items were all mass-produced.

VIOLENCE AND PEACE

The most violent event in Rock Springs that Lois remembers was the murder of a man at a saloon called The Bucket of Blood. He was killed with a hammer. The hammer was found and the assailant arrested.

Although the bars were very numerous, there were actually more churches than bars. Each ethnic group brought with it its own religion. There were Mormon churches, Episcopalian, Greek Orthodox, Catholic, Baptist, and Congregational churches.

INDIANS

Lois' mother told her that when she (Lois' mother) was a little girl, her family moved near number six mine. Their house was near what is now the intersection of Elk Street and I-80. During this period of her life, the Indians used to come from the reservation in Lander presumably on their way to hunt on the Green. They begged for bread. The first time the Indians stopped, her family was scared, but after that, they just gave them the bread.

That part of Rock Springs was just open prairie then. Lois' mother had memories of the coyotes jumping on the roof of her house and howling.

THE COMMUNITY

Wine season was a memorable time because of the aroma of the white and red grapes. Though Lois' family never made wine, it was evident that many in the neighborhood made it. They had to get a permit to make the wine, though.

Prejudice was not a problem during Lois' childhood. "... you went to school, you sat by black, white, asian. I mean, everybody was your friend. You didn't think anything about it. And they used to have at one time, they had a get-together or something and they put on their dances and you would mingle with people and learn about them. There were, I don't remember any prejudice. You didn't, you went to school. You learned and you didn't carry that with you."

However, they had nick names for the kids in different schools. The kids who went to Yellowstone were called

'yellow-bellies'. Those who went to Washington School were called 'wash tubs'.

Most of the prejudice was actually between the mines. Number one kids were not allowed to associate with number four kids because they were 'ornery kids'. These same children went to school together.

The U.P. store was located across from where the Greek Orthodox Church is now. It was the company store that supplied everything, and in order to buy anything there, the purchase was charged and taken out of the paycheck. Lois said that it was much like the store in Tennessee Ernie's song, I Owe My Soul to the Company Sto'.

Sunlight Bakery was located where Ninth Street is now. It was close to both number four mine and number eight mine.

Colony Coal and Coal was a coal company which was located behind where the Sands Cafe is today.

ENTERTAINMENT

The symphony orchestra was led by the school music director, and the members were school student. Every student played an instrument. Lois played the violin. The U.P. band was led by Mr. Satoris, and the members were workers in the community. The U.P. band and the school bands played in the parades.

There was also singing and dancing at the theatres where the stages were found. Lois noted, "If they didn't like you, they had a big hook that they pulled you off the stage with... If you weren't liked, why, you were eliminated." The hook was "pretty good size. I mean, probably not as big as it looked when

I was a kid."

One group of dancers wore formals, suits and tuxedos, and staged ballroom dancing. Roy and Lois belonged to a square dance group which met every Saturday evening. They travelled around the state, and went to many festivals. The churches sponsored dances, plays, and choruses, too.

There were three movie theatres then. The Grand Theatre, which was located where Callas Realty is today, ran cowboy shows and summarized the news of the week. They also kept abreast of outstanding events of the community. The cost was 10¢. Another theatre was well-known for its mother goose popcorn.

The Realto was the theatre to which the boys took their dates for it ran the latest movies. The Realto was located where Rock Springs National Bank is today.

The Carmelcorn, a confection stand that sold ice cream, soda and candy was located at about the back door of the police station on 'C' Street. The younger children, who could not go to the movies, went there.

Near the Union Pacific freight depot there was a viaduct that went across the track. The side walk for the viaduct began at the Playmor, which is now a theater, and went over to the east side. The steps on the east side were nearly straight up and down. Near to 'C' Street there was a gate to block the tracks. The gate was controlled by a man who sat in a room over the tracks. Pedestrians could run from the South side to the North side, or vice-versa when the gates were up.

Lois believes that geneology is very important, and is

working on her family tree. She believes that family history and records are important. She wishes to retain for herself and future generations, the history of what past generations saw, what they did, and how they survived.