

GEORGE "BUD" NELSON

by

SCOTT NELSON

George W. Nelson was born in Oak Creek, Colorado on Sept. 21, 1931. His father worked in the coal mines of the area until they closed. After hearing of work in Wyoming, the family drove to the Rock springs area in 1941, in a "29" Buick.

Mr. Nelson recalls the first time he saw Sweetwater County. It was a complete contrast to what he had known. Oak Creek was a town of many trees and fertile land. It contrasted considerably with the barren rangeland of southwest Wyoming.

Upon arriving, Nelson's father, Carl F. Nelson searched for a home. He found what many of the mine workers lived in, box cars. They family moved into the box car and made a home of it. There were five left in the family when the family arrived. Carl and Margaret Nelson and their children, Carl Junior, George and Jane. One of the sisters died in infancy and the others, Dorothy, Patricia, and Nora were married and had left home.

George was nine when he arrived at Rock Springs. Besides the regular union sponsored games such as baseball, the children of these camps would play there own games such as "Run Sheepy Run." This game is a lot like hide and go seek only the children were divided into teams and would hide in groups. The children played these games under the street lights at night, adding to the excitement of the game. The group of youngsters were not ethnically mixed because the races in the community basically lived in separate places of the town.

Mr. Nelson was in the fifth grade when he started school in Wyoming. He recalls the strong discipline the teachers had in classes. If a student stepped out of line he was reprimanded by his teacher and/or principle, often by a paddle kept in their office. Things weren't much better when they returned home, for they were often spanked again by their parents. The parents didn't like their kids to get in trouble at school because they had a great respect for the teachers. The only difference accorded the sexes in school was boys could compete in athletics, whereas girls could not.

Carl Nelson, Georges father, started working in the coal mines when he was nine years of age but George didn't start until after high school. He worked only to make enough money in order to get to college, but still learned a lot of the mining field.

He recalls how the Union Pacific Coal Company not only ran the coal mines but also most of the other businesses in town. The workers were forced to patronize the corporated stores, and were occasionally subject to fairly high prices because of the lack of competition.

Nelson's family was very pro-union, Carl Nelson was actively involved in initiating union activity in Colorado. Union leaders were thought of in the same breath as Franklin D. Roosevelt (who was greatly loved by the people in this area). When United Mine Workers President, John L. Lewis came to town he was given the royal treatment. Although there was some talk of his salary and that of his daughters being too high.

Life for the miners centered around the union. The union hall was the center of activity on most every week-end. It was the site of the dances and town celebrations. At the union hall one could

dance, converse, and drink. Not only the adults drank but also can occasional youngster, at the time there were no drinking laws. Also, there was a one lane bowling alley in the back.

The unions were the center of entertainment for all of those in town. If the union didn't help to entertain the workers went without. The workers didn't have much to spend on birthdays and Christmas so therefore, the big holiday was Labor Day. On Labor Day the union would bring in such celebrities as Glen Miller and Orin Tucker. Much of the celebration occurred on K Street. They had coal choveling contest and other work related games. K Street had about twenty saloon and much merriment occurred during this celebration.

The unions changed conditions for the worker greatly. It enhanced his wages and hours and also set up safety regulations. When George's father worked in the mines, he only worked eight hours but was also responsible for getting in and out of the mine. He would often go in before light and get out after dark and accidents were common. When George and his brother went to work for the company they worked stright hours and their employers had instituted safety regulations and even had contests between mining crews for safety.

Striking during this time had been cut down somewhat, but strikes still occurred. Often the employers would bring in scabs to replace the workers, this resulted in violence toward the scab workers. Not all strikes were major walkouts. Mr. Nelson reports of different conditions in different mines being the culprit of minor striking. For Instance, the mines that he worked in, the coal vane was high and easily picked however at Qualy (another mine)

the vein was low and required constant stooping and was harder to pick. Therefore, the miners walked out. The miners had lunch buckets which had a tray that held water for drinking. When the miners were tired of his circumstances he would spill his water and that would signal a walkout. All union members (which was all the laborers) would leave the mine. During the strike miners would treat the first days as a vacation. They would hunt, fish, and work in their gardens, however, if the strike went on often they were forced to find other employment.

The government passed a law that prevented the Union Pacific from selling their coal to private corporations. They could only use it themselves. Since the trains were converting to diesel there was little need for coal. Eventually the mines shut down and most of the men left or went to work in the new trona mines.

On his father's advice, young Nelson attended Colorado School of Mines. His father wanted him to be a miner engineer. But he soon quit and went to the University of Wyoming in order to seek a future as a Coach. He attended college on a baseball scholarship. His education plans were cut short though when he was drafted into the army.

He was sent to Camp Roberts in California in order to train for active duty in Korea. The Korean Conflict ended before he saw action and he served his hitch in Germany. He was released early in order to complete his education.

After graduating from the University of Wyoming he secured a job as a teacher and coach at Cokeville, Wyoming High School. He lived there five years. It is there that he met his wife, Karen Nate. He knew her three years before marrying her and then married

her at Cokeville in the L.D.S. church.

They returned to Rock Springs in 1963 when he landed a teaching and coaching position at Western Wyoming College (then stationed in Reliance). He then went to work at Rock Springs High School as a counselor, then a principle, and finally as the athletic director, a title he still holds.

Mr. & Mrs. Nelson have four children: Scott is twenty years old and attends Western Wyoming College, Shawn is eighttteen and is graduating this year from Rock Springs High School, Chad is nearing his fourteenth and is in the eight grade, Kristin is fifteen and a sophomore at Rock Springs High School. The family resides at 421 Fremont Avenue. Mr. Nelson is the last member of his family still residing in Wyoming.

NAME: GEORGE W. NELSON

PRESENT ADDRESS: 421 FREMONT AVE. ROCK SPRINGS, WYO

1. Present profession or occupation:
ATHLETIC DIRECTOR (R.S.H.S.)
2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates):
3. Date of birth: 9-21-1931 Place of birth: OAK CREEK COL.
4. Date of moving to Wyoming: 1941

5. Full name of parents (give mother's maiden name)
CARL F. NELSON
MARGARET FURREYSON

6. Names of brothers and sisters (and to whom married):
CARL R. NELSON MARRIED DOROTHY DOROTHY NELSON MARRIED LEONARD CLARK
NORA NELSON " NEALE PINE PATRICIA NELSON MARRIED DOYLE GAGER
VIVIAN NELSON " ROBERT SHIRK
JANE NELSON " ROBERT BURNS

7. Schools attended (give dates):
RELIANCE HIGH SCHOOL 1946-49 UNIVERSITY OF WYO. 1950-55
COLORADO SCHOOL OF MINES 1950

8. Places of residence in Wyoming (give dates):
RELIANCE 1941-1949 ROCK SPRINGS 1962-
COKEVILLE 1957-1962 LARAMIE 1951-1955

9. Military service (dates, awards, area served, rank, etc.):
ARMY 1953-55, PRIVATE

10. Political offices held (give dates):
NONE

11. Political affiliation: DEMOCRAT

12. Religious affiliation: LDS

13. Marriage (spouse's name, date and place of marriage):
KAREN NATE, 4-15-61, Cokeville, Wyoming

14. Children (names, dates of birth, grandchildren, etc.):
GEORGE SCOTT NELSON, 4-20-63
MICHAEL SHAWN NELSON, 12-29-64
KRISTI NELSON, 6-21-66
DAVID CHAD NELSON, 5-17-68

15. List of clubs and societies of which you are a member:
LIONS
ELKS
WYOMING COACHES ASSOCIATION
" ATHLETIC DIRECTORS ASSOCIATION