

Crowder, Dr. David L. Oral History Project

Pearl Armstrong Stanger

By Pearl Armstrong Stanger

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Box 2 Folder 42

Oral Interview conducted by Terri Erickson

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This is an oral history report. I am Terri Erickson. Today, November thirtieth, I am going to interview Mrs. Pearl Stanger. The general topic will be the depression of 1929.

Terri Erickson: Mrs. Stanger, where were you born?

Pearl Armstrong Stanger: I was born in Canada. Taylorville, Alberta, Canada in 1905.

TE: How long have you lived in Eastern Idaho?

PS: I came here when I was six months old. Mother and Father moved back to Idaho and I was about six months old, so I have lived here all my life.

TE: Where were your parents born?

PS: My mother was born in Utah; and my Father was born in Ontario, Canada.

TE: What was your occupation during the depression?

PS: When mother died, she dies a couple of weeks after I graduated from high school, one of my brothers sent me some money from California to help me and I used that to go to college. I went that one summer and taught school. I taught school for three years. Then I met Jim and married him in 1929.

TE: What time period in your life were you in the depression started?

PS: I was twenty-four years old when I was married. We were married on the second of June in 1929 just as the depression was starting right good.

TE: How did your life style change?

PS: Well, it changed a great deal for me because I had taught school for three years and had been going to school in the summertime, going to college. And, of course, I was rooming and boarding out and I was making money, but after I got married in twenty-nine, I didn't go back to teach school any more. There was no work. Although groceries and things were cheap, now we could buy flour for thirty-five cents a sack, but we didn't have the thirty-five cents. Jim went out and worked for the farmers, but each time that he worked why you'd have to take some of their produce and they wouldn't part with very much of it at that. He worked about three weeks and got one so we could raise a few little pigs. That fall, he loved to fish and hunt anyway, so he and the neighbors, when they were out of work, they had nothing to do they would walk up to a canal which was about a half a mile maybe three quarters of a mile from our place, and fish for whitefish and trout. They would bring home gunny sacks full of whitefish. We'd clean them and got some coarse salt and salted them and put them down in a twenty gallon crock that I had. They made their own brine and they kept perfectly all until spring.

TE: What did you live in during the depression?

PS: I owned my own home. It was mother's home and I bought it out of my school teaching earnings, my salary.

TE: So you lived in this house?

PS: Yes.

TE: So you had a place of your own to live? So you were better off than your neighbors?

PS: Yes.

TE: Yes, much more so because I think we had one, two neighbors that owned their own place, the rest of them all rented. And at this time, they had no money so therefore they couldn't pay the rent, but they went on living. But we couldn't use our electricity, we had electricity in the home but you couldn't use it because we couldn't pay for it. Some of the neighbors went ahead and used it. They found that they could put pennies in back of the meter and it wouldn't register so they could go on and have lights. Even in those days people found ways to cheat others.

PS: Were your children born during the depression?

TE: One of them was. My oldest boy was born a year after we were married. He was born in 1930. We had a doctor who came to the home. He came from Ririe. We'd gone up fishing that day and I got sick and we stopped in Ririe to see the doctor and he followed us on down to Rigby and the baby was born at twelve o'clock that night.

PS: How did Christmas change for your family?

TE: Well, when I'd been at home, we'd always had some kind of Christmas tree and mother always had ornaments and she made ornaments a lot of them. But what few ornaments we had, the other children had taken. When my baby was born this first Christmas, Jim brought home a small cedar tree. We had a dollar to spend so we bought apples and oranges and pieces of candy, and some popcorn. I popped the popcorn and some cranberries strung it around the tree and hung the apples and oranges and candy around on it. It looked real pretty. Jim made him a little rocking horse. He took the leaves out of my table, the extension leaves, and they were made of hardwood, and he made this little rocking horse for the little boy and that was his Christmas. That was his toy. Oh, I made him a little yarn doll and a little rag doll so he had something to play with. Painted up little spools and things but we didn't buy him anything. Jim made this little rocking horse and we had these little painted spools and stuff to take up his time. He was small so he enjoyed it, he didn't realize that there was a depression.

PS: About your clothes, did you make most of them?

TE: Yes, we had to. I bought the home from Mother and upstairs we had a little attic room up there where she used to put all of the old clothing and things and then in the wintertime she'd cut them up into quilt blocks and what she couldn't use for quilt blocks she would make rag rugs out of. There was a lot of clothing up there, so I used this. With the help of the neighbors, they showed me how to make underwear for my baby. We'd take the arms of the underwear and put a piece in-between them and that was the legs. Put a piece of elastic around the waist or else just a band and put a button hole, button and button hole. Then I made his overalls and his shirts and everything. We did an awful lot of patching and sewing, but we stayed clean and kept warm. Everybody had a different style. It was pretty much like it is today. Anything you put on, it's in style today and it was the same then. Nobody paid any attention to that; it was how warm you were going to be. We didn't have any clothing, we couldn't buy any, you k now. They had it, but we couldn't buy it.

TE: What about your feet wear?

PS: Well, when our shoes wore out we had an old cobbler that lived over there. He used to make leather saddles, he had this leather. People couldn't afford just to go there and have their shoes fixed and he had this leather. I bought a large piece of leather for about fifty cents. Then we'd lay our shoes on there, cut it out for the sole; and Mother had a shoe lace, I don't know where she got it from but it was there. We'd buy ten cents worth of tacks, we had a hammer and I got so I was quite a cobbler. I could put new soles on these shoes and we made our old shoes last us a long, long time. Many people in that day, when it was in the wintertime, we didn't have overshoes so they would take gunny sacks and cut them into strips and wrap them around their shoes and up their legs to keep their feet dry and warm.

TE: What about shoes for you baby?

PS: I didn't have any shoes for the baby. When he got ready to walk, it was cold and I looked around, there was an old car sitting out that had been abandoned. They used to use real leather for the upholstery for the seats. So I went out and cut the back off this seat and cut out a kind of moccasin and gathered it over the toe. Put a leather strip around the ankle and tied that on him. Then I'd take a piece of wool and line them with, so that they would be warm. We sued up all the upholstery there was in that old car making shoes for all the babies that were in the community. Everybody helped everybody else, and if someone didn't know how to cut this out, why somebody else would come with their knowledge. Everybody learned a great deal on how to do this. I had mother's sewing machine, it was a treddle, so I was really luckier than most of them because most people did have a sewing machine. I still have that sewing machine and I'm holding it. It's one of my greatest possessions. I think I enjoyed that more than anything.

TE: How did your eating habits change?

PS: Well, we didn't live out of the stores like they do today. They didn't have the convenience foods that they have today anyway. But I planted a garden and we bottled everything there was in the garden. The corn, peas, beans, everything that we could get, but we didn't have refrigerators or anything to keep it in, so everything had to be bottled. We could buy our lids for five cents a dozen, so it wasn't any great deal to get lids for this. We bottled all of our vegetables and fruits, everything that we could get and then we'd divide them among all the people so that everybody had some. Then we got some chickens and raised chickens. Like I said before, Jim worked for three weeks to get a pig so we could have some little pigs and we raised those. We'd kill a pig, than we'd trade a pig to somebody else for a calf or something. It was almost like the United Order that you hear about now-a-days that they want us to follow. Because everybody was willing to help everybody else and that was the only way we could get along.

TE: What are some of the things that you ate, we today would never think of eating in our modern civilization?

PS: Well, when my grandchildren see me cut a head up to get the brains out and take the tongue out, they have a fit. I like these; I like to take the brains and cook them and mix them with eggs and have scrambled eggs and brains. Boil the tongue and I like that. I learned to like these when I was a child. Mother was left with nine children and I was among the younger of them. So when she'd kill a pig, she said she saved everything but the "squeal". She used to use the brains, the tongue, and then we'd take the head and clean it, take all the meat off of it and cook it and make it into head cheese. So we never missed anything, we used everything there was on a pig. This was true even today. I like to get a head of any kind of animal, a beef, or sheep, or whatever and get the brains and the tongue, and get the head cheese from it, cause I like it.

Well, thank you very much. This tape will be placed in the library at Ricks College for use by future researchers.