

BEAVERTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with

MRS. ALICE ROSSI

At her home in Beaverton, Oregon

INTERVIEWER: MICHELLE GLAZER

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it got just as curly as can be. I had really curly hair until, well, I got my first permanent when I was about 35. My sister Barbara had beautiful long curls and then she finally got them cut off.

One of my sisters lived in town and worked at Meier & Frank's in Portland. She came home with her hair cut and my dad said, "What have you done!" It was the latest style. It was the flapper days, you know. My mother used to make their dresses for them. They were really short and very pretty. We were all very close. We used to see each other all the time. Three of us live right here.

PART TWO OF ORAL HISTORY BEGINS BELOW

GLAZER: How did your Uncle Claude happen to come to Beaverton?

ALICE: I guess there wasn't any work and they thought if they came to Portland there would be more work. It was after the war, you see. I don't think Uncle Claude ever did any work. What did he do for a living? Well, he lived off his first wife's money. And then he did sell something. They were called electric machines, like they use nowadays for electric currents, for people with arthritis and rheumatism and that kind of thing. I know he traveled around all the time and he and his wife finally separated and he moved back to Bend.

GLAZER: What was in Bend?

ALICE: Well, I don't know. After they moved from LaPine, they went to Bend. They made friends and knew the area quite well. He had charge of the high school gymnasium. A lot of people who lived on the homesteads moved to Bend, because there was nothing for them to do. It wasn't really farming land. It would be more for cattle. They run cattle in that area now.

There was also a mill there, you see. Uncle Claude might of worked in the mill. He had a home there right on the river but my folks never bought a house in Bend, they rented. And it was during the flu you know, that so many died.

GLAZER: This was 1918?

ALICE: That was when the flu struck, yes, right at the end of the war. My dad and brother didn't get it. They moved out of the house and stayed with my grandmother. Mama didn't get it but all of us kids got it; one by one someone would be stricken with it -- and very sick. None of us died, of course, but I think Kathleen was the closest. There was no remedy for the darn stuff. Everybody was quarantined; schools were closed. Many, many people died. Of course, it was all over the country, I guess.

They had a nurse who came and relieved Mama at night. She had to take care of others in the daytime. I faintly remember a lady there in white; and I wanted something in the night and she made me some Postum. But there was a nurse. And my dad would come every day and just talk through the window or the door to my mother to see what was going on and if anybody else was sick. They had terribly high fevers and nosebleeds with it. They gave them some kind of powder. I suppose it was for the fever. I don't know what it was. I suppose the doctor would come along and hand out something for them to use.

GLAZER: Were there a lot of deaths?

ALICE: Oh, many deaths. Many deaths. A couple of cousins died who lived in Portland, but my mother didn't ever get it. It's a wonder, having to take care of everyone. She was stronger than you might have thought; not a heavy woman, thin really. She always thought she was tall, but I didn't think so. She looked little to me. I have one sister tall like me and the rest of them are just average. My father was tall, about 5'11", and my brother was about the same height. Barbara and I are both 5'8". Why we had to be that tall, I don't know. I don't mind it now but I hated it when I was in school because there weren't that many kids; you'd be the last one in line, the tallest one. And the boys were all short. Seemed like they didn't grow as fast as the girls.

GLAZER: What was your first thought as you got off the train here -- here was this land; it was all so different...

ALICE: I didn't cry, but my mother said Annabelle just laid in bed and cried and cried, "I want to go home." When we left Hood River, we stayed in a hotel before we got on the train. We had moved off the ranch and my mother was very ill. She got blood poisoning and almost died when we were in Hood River. They used to have wood stoves and my dad always cut the kindling and he got the fire ready for the next morning, you see. But my mother got a sliver in her finger. Well, by gosh, it infected because (and he tried to get it out) he couldn't get it out. She was finally hospitalized and almost died from the blood poisoning. I remember we were in an open car (probably belonged to the man who owned the place -- they raised cherries and all the fruits, you know, pears and whatever) and we went to see my mother in the hospital at Hood River. She was in a room with several women and she was getting better by then, but the finger they operated on was stiff and just slick. She couldn't bend it or anything. She was in the hospital about ten days and they didn't know if she was going to live. My sister Georgie used to worry; she said, "Papa, what are we going to do if Mama doesn't live?"

GLAZER: It would have been really difficult.

ALICE: Yes, it would have been. When I was 12 years old, I got a doll. Kids in those days were very naive; we didn't know anything really and when I was 12 years old and Annabelle was 10, we each got a doll for Christmas. And, My Lord, what 12 year old would have a doll now? (Laughter) But we were just like little women, I guess. We have pictures sitting around Mama while she is reading to us. She loved good books and we were always readers; that's how we entertained ourselves.

Oh, on hot summer days when we didn't know what to do, she would say, "Well, let's cut out little blocks for quilts." So we'd cut them and sew them together. We were working with our hands. She tried to amuse us that way. And we'd play with paper dolls. We'd have them all over the bed. They were from the catalog, you know, like Montgomery Ward or Sears and Roebuck. We'd cut out the people in the catalogs and they were our paper dolls.

GLAZER: Did you play different things in Beaverton than you played, say, in Hood River?

ALICE: Oh, we learned to play cards. We played 500. In fact, they had card parties and we played in tournaments. We were pretty good card players.

GLAZER: Who sponsored these?

ALICE: My mother belonged to the Royal Neighbors, a social group, and they met at a place called the White Hall in Beaverton, upstairs. That's where they had dances. We'd also go to Aloha Grange, Huber Grange, Kinton Grange Hall where they had a lot of these things. And, of course, there were activities at the church as well, dinners and things like that.

GLAZER: What other kinds of social activities did Beaverton have?

ALICE: They had a moving picture show; we used to go to that. In fact, we put on a community stage show. I was a dancer, one of the Rockettes, and then I sang a solo and danced (laughter), was a merry widow or something. We had that right at the theater; it wasn't connected with the school. It was a project put on by the town so we all participated.

We'd go to the theater and they'd have grocery night, and if you got a lucky ticket, you'd get a whole bag of groceries. But we couldn't go too often because it was kind of expensive -- I don't know if it cost us two bits or we got in for ten cents.

I also remember going to the Rose Festival. We'd all go in the car to downtown Portland for the day at the parade. We'd take a lunch and eat in the park and then we'd stay for street dances in the evening. Annabelle and I would meet young men and dance; the folks were around there, but we'd be dancing in the street and everything. We spent the whole day and then came home. They used to have more activities for people, it seemed like. And you weren't afraid. The people weren't snatching your purses and everything.

The family used to go to town (downtown Portland) on Saturday quite a bit. During the Depression, we'd go by the theater and say, "Ooooh, I wish we could go to the show." And my dad would say, "I wish I could take you." He just didn't have the money. Maybe it would cost 50¢. Once in a while we'd go to dinner; it was 50¢ to have a nice dinner, per person. But you just didn't have the money. But once in a while, we'd have a splurge. Other than that, we made our own entertainment.

We used to go to the beach, too. I remember when my brother came from Bend. He was married briefly up there; and he had a car so we all went to the beach. It was the first time we ever saw the ocean. There it was! It was at Ocean-side, out of Tillamook, and I remember we were in a Ford open-air thing and went down this hill, and there was the ocean, and we just thought that was wonderful!

Quite often when we went, we'd camp. Everybody had tents and we'd all be a whole group. They would cook breakfast and the meals and we used to camp down by Pacific City. Then we camped at Cannon Beach. I remember we were all sleeping on the ground in tents and my sisters would be there and their boyfriends, and my dad would be sort of the chaperone. One time we didn't get to go. My mother stayed home with me and my younger sister on account of the darn cow. Mama had to milk it and she was a very poor milker, so we'd have to hold the cow's tail while she tried to milk that cow. It would be wandering down out in the field; it wasn't in the barn. It would be moving. I don't think she ever got all the milk out of it, I don't know. (laughter)

GLAZER: Did you live on a farm when you were in Deaverton?

ALICE: Well, it wasn't actually a farm. It was right over here on Perthold. We had a garden and he raised hay. I remember making those (I used to call them hay bumps) piles of hay. I think they put it up in the loft, loose. We had chickens -- and they were stolen. We had some neighbors who were wonderful people but the man drank pretty much and he had other fellows who came there, and they'd all get looped. They were musicians and when there was trouble, Mrs. Hollenbeck would call on the phone (we were the only ones in the neighborhood who had a telephone) and say, "Mr. Benson, can you come over? I don't know what I'm going to do. There's a terrible fight going on over here." So he'd go over and try to straighten them out and throw these guys out of the house. One time they had a terrible battle and one man hit the other buy with the banjo in the eye and knocked his eye out.

ANYWAY, our chickens, one morning, were gone. All that was left were the feathers. We went down to a sort of meadow that was back through here, and there were a lot of chicken feathers. I think they probably killed them and took the feathers off and sold them. We always figured it was the neighbor. The Hollenbecks, or the man who used to hang around there, Pete Vanderhy, his name was. We figured those guys stole those chickens and sold them so they'd get some booze. And we never had any more chickens.

GLAZER: Was alcohol a big problem around here?

ALICE: I don't know. It seemed like we always had somebody in our neighborhood that was drunk. We had some people across the street, two ladies (now thinking about it, I'm sure they must have been lesbians); one woman was very mannish and the other was a very delicate-looking lady with a couple of children. The one woman drank; this was later on. My younger sister wasn't married. I learned she had a boyfriend. Anyhow one night there was a big fight going on over there; we could hear them. So my dad and Bill, my sister's boyfriend, went over there and this Jean had locked herself in the bathroom and she was going to commit suicide. I guess the other woman had called to see if my dad couldn't come over, see. So they called the police. I don't know if she was drunk or something. He said, I wish we'd get somebody... I wish they'd MOVE.

But poor Mr. Hollenbeck, they finally moved. He just had an alcoholic problem, that's all.

GLAZER: What kind of crime was there?

ALICE: In school there were a few that would get into your purses; we didn't have lockers. A few people would be little pickpockets, but I never had any of that trouble. I don't remember any problems at school; nobody being kicked out or anything.

This Saturday, we're having our 1925-35 class reunion. Last year was our 50th. I graduated in 1932. The lady that has been in charge (she was in the Class of 1930) had me help her and last year she dumped it all on me. So I sent out 350 notices for this Saturday at Deaverton High school; it's a potluck.

GLAZER: Was the train you came out on the Red Electric?

ALICE: Yes, it was the Red Electric.

GLAZER: That's the famous train, from what I've heard.

ALICE: Yes. There was a terrible accident, you know, down here at Raleigh Station. The engineer was killed and one fellow had his leg cut off. That was before we lived here, I think. My dad, when he worked in Portland, rode the Red Electric and it went as far as Reedville and then turned around. Reedville is, you know where Aloha is, beyond it a couple of miles. It went up that far and then it turned around. It didn't go on to Forest Grove or Hillsboro. And so when he heard the train going up, he knew it was time to leave and he'd walk. At that time he didn't have a car and he'd walk to Beaverton to get on the train. I don't know if he was working on the docks then, or if he was working for Gill Bros. Seed and Feed.

GLAZER: How did he get into Portland?

ALICE: Well, he rode on the train! It took an hour to run from Beaverton to Portland.

(reads from Albert's railroad book) ..."the Oregon California manager named the station Bertha Station. ...Only remembrance among railroad people is a disastrous head-on collision of two electric trains causing heavy loss of life and injury in the early 20's."

GLAZER: So you were just very young then?

ALICE: Yes. I don't remember anything about it at all. But it was called the Red Electric. I remember going down 4th Street and getting on the train.

GLAZER: It ran from Reedville into Portland?

ALBERT ROSSI: Yes. It went to the Union Depot where the trains went but they had a depot on 4th & Stark in Portland.

ALICE: Yes, people would get on it there. I remember getting on the train with Georgie and it traveled the Bertha-Beaverton Highway, that way. The Portland city ticket office was opened January 27, 1917 (reading) 8-10:30 PM 1914, the Red Electric started.

GLAZER: When did it end?

ALBERT: 1930, or 31, or 29, somewhere in there.

ALICE: Here it says, Hillsboro, McMinnville and Yamhill. Weekend tickets... They'd catch the train in Beaverton. When we first came, we must have come right from Hood River on it, all the way out. We probably changed trains. I suppose that was the Union Pacific then.

Maybe it was Portland where we stayed all night. I'll bet it was in a hotel in Portland. And then we got on the train and came to Beaverton; probably caught it on 4th Street. Or maybe we caught it at the Union Station. What it cost, I don't know a thing about.

Oh, they picked strawberries and my mother worked where they sorted apples in Hood River. I remember the irrigation ditches in Hood River and being warned not to get near the water because it was real fast. You could fall in there. But we must have minded pretty well. We survived.

I don't think any of them were terribly ill. Only I did have polio when I was 8. Thank God, I wasn't crippled. I have one weak arm; my arm isn't as strong -- but out of the blue, I guess I had like the flu. It was on a Sunday morning and I remember that I said to my dad when I was getting dressed, I couldn't put my hands up to my waist. So they called the doctor and he used to come to the house and he diagnosed it right away. It was polio -- infantile paralysis they called it, and they didn't know where I got it from, because I was the only one in the area that had it. It came on so suddenly.

GLAZER: (Question lost)

ALICE: Motion picture studio, yes. It was right up the street here, like at Ericson. There are old offices still at one side there, and they kind of developed it in here. In back of those houses there was a street. But anyhow, they had this great big studio that they built.

Oh, it was a big place and there were some movie stars and we kids were in some of the movies. We used to go to the office and sit there waiting to be in the casting, and I was in a school scene. They took us right over at Cedar Mill and we were in like a school. I remember one of the directors took us all for a ride in a big car once. I can't remember the movie actress; she sent me and another girl a pretty doll. That doll is someplace and I can't figure out where it is. But I was fair and she was dark; well, it turned out I got the dark-haired doll and she got the fair, but she sent it from Hollywood. They were small dolls but they had real hair and the eyes closed.

GLAZER: Who was the actress?

ALICE: I don't recall her name.

GLAZER: Whose studio was it?

ALICE: Well, Dr. Watt started it. No, it was an airport after that. It was Premier Motion Pictures. It was from Hollywood and they made quite a few movies. One of them was "The Perils of Pauline" and the other one was something about Vengeance. We have a big picture of one of the things, because the local people were in it. We used to come home from school and they had a big log cabin they built. I remember when they burnt it, you see.

My brother-in-law (my older sister was married) was a small man, so he took the star's place and they carried him through this burning -- they put up a bunch of timber, woods, because there wasn't any woods in this part here, they'd put up some forest, like big log trees and stuff. They set them on fire and carried him from that burning cabin and through the timber. He was her fill-in.

I remember they had a big, big, big building with a regular Hollywood set in there, like a city. We kids used to go in there and play. And they had a big dance, like a ball, and my sister Barbara (she was 16 or 17 at the time) was

in it and they made her and her partner be in the background, away -- because she was just as pretty as the darn movie star. They wanted them to be not up in the front.

Anyhow, this was all their land. After the movie studio went away they had an airport here and used this big building for a hangar. Then they had like a speakeasy called The Silver Star Inn. It was built when the studio was here, and they had dancing and all kinds of things. I think it was during the days of Prohibition.

GLAZER: Why did the studio leave?

ALICE: Well, I guess it was not very successful, really. They're doing something about that now, too. They're getting the reels of it that they have been able to get. It's connected with the City of Beaverton because one of the Councilmen called here one day and talked to my husband wondering if he had any pictures of some of the old studios and all about the pictures. They have some reels they're getting together so people can rent them if they want to.

GLAZER: For what reason did Hollywood decide to put a studio in Beaverton?

ALICE: That's a good question. I don't know. Madame Schuman-Heink had some money in it. She was quite an opera singer, and her son was here. I don't know where they put them up. There were rooms in the big building, though. I think they may have stayed there, you know. I remember going to a restroom upstairs. Maybe they stayed in Portland and then came out. There were automobiles at that time. But they were only here about four years. They thought this would be part of something for Beaverton -- a big movie studio, but that didn't last. I was around ten years old, so it was in the 20's.

I was in school and I'd run through the airport to see if anything was coming down, and a plane did crash one time, oh, right down here in the ditch. I know our neighbor here was in that plane, but nobody was hurt. But that big plane just came down and crashed.

GLAZER: And it's all built up -- it's all houses now?

ALICE: All houses, yes. The only place that isn't built up -- on the other side of those big trees you can see there. You see, our property ended where those big trees are way back in there, those big maple trees. There is a big park, an open area, well, it's about two blocks. There's a street -- Berthold. There is Hazel and Berthold and then on the other side of Berthold from Ericson, which is down by the school, clear to Lenlo -- it's all clear. It's a city park. In fact, there were neighbors of ours who owned part of that and when they died, they left that property to the city of Beaverton. They moved out and built the house in 1932. Anyhow, when they died, they donated their land to the city of Beaverton and now we have a lovely park there. That's where we have our Good Neighbor Days, and big affairs.

