

Oral History Program

OH-459

Box #21

Oral History Program

Arvilla Finn

Copyright BYU-Hawaii Archives

BYU-Hawaii

Brigham Young University-Hawaii
ORAL-HISTORY PROGRAM
Hawaiian Studies Division
Laie, Hawaii 96762

Arvilla Finn

INTERVIEW NO: OH 459
DATE OF INTERVIEW: February 03, 2003
INTERVIEWER: Tammy Colipano
SUBJECT: Growing Up During the Great Depression



ARU LLA AGE 3

ANDA AGE 5





Copyright BYU-Hawaii Archives

ARMILLA AGE 15



1949

ARUILLA
AND
CHARLIE



1963



ARUILLA WITH HER SIBLINGS AND PARENTS

Table of Contents

Introduction by Interviewer

Dedication Page

Genealogy of Immediate Family

Page 1

Introduction

Great Depression

Clothing

Father and WPA

Page 2

What the Family had to Eat

Getting Water

Page 3

Doing Laundry

Fixing Shoes

Page 4

What Mom Taught the Children

Madeline and Pneumonia

Wars

Page 5

Brothers

About the Grandchildren

Page 6

Death of Parents

Importance of Getting an Education

Page 7

Bert and Polio

The Sixth Grade

Mother and Reading

Page 8

Marriage

Father

Little Sister Verla

Page 9

End of Interview

This oral history was compiled during the month of February in 2003 at the home of Arvilla Bernice (Fellows) Finn in Salt Lake City, UT. The interviewee did the actual recording of the interview alone in order to help her feel more comfortable. Prior to the recording she was given a list of question to ponder but was told to focus on what she felt was most important. What follows is a transcript of the audio recording; however, it has been modified slightly so that related subjects are grouped together. As you will read, the interviewee focuses on her family, especially her mother, and expresses her gratitude towards them. This is a perfect example of the selfless life Arvilla has lived. She had dedicated her life to her family and has helped shape three generation.

Too often there is someone special in our life who never knows just how much we care about them. I choose to compile an oral history of my great aunt Arvilla (my grandmother's sister) so she will know how much I love her. This is my way of saying "Thank you." Thank you for always being there for me, for teaching me good manners, for being an example of an honorable person, and for helping me to become a person of integrity.

I love you Auntie.

Tammy Diane Jensen Colipano

Tammy Diane (Jensen) Colipano

ARVILLA BERNICE (FELLOWS) FINN

Born on May 8, 1931 to:

HENRY LUTHER FELLOWS (June 5, 1907)

And

MYRA ALFREDA (HATCH) FELLOWS (January, 22, 1903)

Sister of:

BERT LEONARD ROSS FELLOWS (July 19, 1928)

ARCHIBALD LUTHER FELLOWS (August 2, 1932)

RICHARD STEVEN FELLOWS (September 22, 1933)

DWIGHT LaVERE FELLOWS (December 26, 1934)

MADELINE LARAE FELLOWS (August 21, 1936)

THEODORE HALISTER FELLOWS (September 25, 1938)

VERLA DIANE (FELLOWS) SCHLUTER (November 18, 1940)

Married on June 11, 1949 to:

CHARLES WESLEY FINN (July 15, 1921)

Mother of:

GEORGE WESLEY FINN (January 25, 1957)

And

MYRA ANN FINN (September 19, 1958)

AF: My name is Arvilla Bernice Finn. I am the oldest of seven children born to Henery L. Fellows and Myra Hatch Fellows. I have one older brother born to my mother Myra. I have four brothers and three sisters (really only 2). I will be seventy two years old on May 8, 2003.

I want to tell you my life story, especially during the Great Depression. Now during that era, my mother was telling me about how people would stand in line, the soup line, for food. So many people stood in line so they had something to eat. It was so bad that some of the children and elderly passed on from starvation. My mom had worked so hard during that time. She made our own bread, bottled our own fruit, and made our jam. She also had took and made our clothes out of flour sacks, made my brothers' shirts and me dresses. She also had the sacks from grain, which had figures on those, too. There were figures on the flour sacks, different designs. My mother had an old Singer sewing machine. It was a pedal. She would pedal for hours just trying to mend clothes and make clothes for us. She was just a hard worker. God bless her soul.

My dad, he worked real hard too, he worked during the WPA (Work Projects Administration) for a dollar a day. It was really hard on him because he was not a very well man. He worked so hard on all of the projects they had him do. He would come home and his clothes would be all dirty because they had him digging trenches. My mom would make

sure she had supper on the table (when he came home), and she had all of us children yet she always made sure dinner was on the table. He had also worked for the gardeners- Japanese and Italians- so he could bring us home some vegetables which was like carrots, and potatoes, and a little celery and red beets. And that was one thing that we did get in that time. What we ate during that time, we had to eat almost about the same thing every day. We had potatoes in the morning and night fixed different ways, we had rice, and we had mush. Even if it was only a little- we all ate and we all survived. There were no complaints because we had our stomachs full. My mother always made sure we had milk on the table. And candy! She would try to get the sugar and all of the stuff to make divinity. She would make divinity for hours to make sure we had a little candy in the house. We didn't have too much candy because it cost too much for the sugar and ingredients she used. She made cakes and cookies. Sometimes buying the stuff to make cookies cost more than if we bought graham crackers. She would make her own frosting and put a little bit of coloring in it (and then put the frosting on the crackers). We loved them so much. We thought that was the best thing there was, were those crackers when she'd done that.

My mom had to carry water from quite a ways away to help us to have water in the house. We had no water in the house at the time. She carried water from quite a ways away from a well for her to give us baths and

drinking water. And we bathed in a galvanized tub at that time. She had to put a galvanized tub on top of the old coal stove. When she did that she went to get water and she carried that water to wash the clothes. She'd let the water boil and put some soap in it. But at that time we didn't have powdered soap so you had to cut it up because they were bars. She'd use bluing and she would sit there and stir the clothes, the white clothes, until they got bright white because that was the only way you could do it at the time to make sure the clothes got really bright and clean. All of the whites would get so pretty and clean. She took care of all of us and we were always nice and clean. She would get up early in the morning to wash those clothes. It would take her two days because we had such a big family. And then when it came to Levis, she would have to scrub them on a scrubbing board- she did that with all of the clothes- then she'd take the Levis outside and wring them by hand because they were so heavy. Even with our blankets, sheets, anything she washed, she wrung out by hand. She'd done a lot of hard work that way. I would go out and help her hang clothes and I'd watch how she hung them so I could learn to hang clothes. The boys had hand-me-downs because we didn't have money to buy new clothes. And my mother finally got a wringer washer. At that time it was kind of hard to do clothes and she finally got her washer and made it so she didn't have to work so hard. She was such a hard worker. And my dad, when we didn't have good shoes, they wore out, he would put

cardboard in the shoes so we wouldn't get blisters on the bottom of our feet. That's the only way we had shoes.

My mom also worked for different places latter on in life so we could have a little bit more. She was such a hard worker, my mom. My dad was too but my mother was the rock of the family. She is the one that taught us so much, respect for one thing and how to take care of ourselves.

Then the hardest time I have seen my mom cry was when my little sister died when she was three months old. She had pneumonia in the 30's and passed on. I was only five. And then it was three months latter that I had pneumonia and they thought I wouldn't live through the night. But I did make it from all of the prayers of my family. It was just hard to see how hard my mom cried about my little sister. My dad did too but it just devastated my mom.

So then the war had come, World War II. We had to have everything rationed, like gas, we had ration stamps for food, sugar, gas, and shoes, and a lot of food but I'm not quite sure what other ones right now because I was sort of young then too. And then the Korean affliction came and that was a set back for a lot of people and then Vietnam and then Desert Storm. Everything came up so fast. It just seems like was on wars and I

just hope someday we won't have them but who knows the way life is and the way the people are in the world.

Now I want to talk about my brothers. My brothers were small but they knew my mother and dad couldn't give them money. But they went and sold papers and they were very small. They were between eleven, twelve, and thirteen. Them three always was out selling papers on the corner- it was the Tribune at the time- so they would have a little extra money so they could buy them things they needed and wanted. And that's what made it good for my mother and dad because they had bought their pencils and papers and stuff like that that they needed, and what little activity. They grew up and had families and they worked hard and that's what made my mom and dad really proud of my brothers. That they had done what they had and what we lived through, they had learned so much responsibility. I had one brother that went on a mission recently for two years and I had a brother that was a bishop, and all my brothers were married in the temple of the LDS church. They were quite good brothers, we all stuck together, we help one another.

Another thing I'd like to say about my mom and dad, they had one hundred and twenty grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren and my mother never forgot their birthdays. She always had a present for them on Christmas and their birthdays. She never forgot

them. That is just the way she was. She loved all of them the same, she never loved one more than the other. Even little children that weren't her relation, they all loved her. My mom is a very strong woman. It is like she was put on earth to take care of her children, grandchildren, great-grandchildren, and great-great-grandchildren. We were blessed for what we had. And that is why my mother and dad always gave to those that needed it because they had survived through bad times.

My dad passed on in 1990 and my mom passed on in 2000. I took care of my mom and dad until they passed on. They were such good parents. I would never change it because they were just great. My life had a few little problems but they were always there. I loved them so much especially my mom because I was around my mother more than my father and I tried to help her with the children. I just want to say that I really love my parents very much; they were great. I know I talk about my mother a lot but I do love my father also. It is just that I was around my mother more than my father. I love them both, one a little more than the other but...that's how I feel about that. I know they prayed for God to guide them through the way and that is what happened. They taught us to know good from bad.

This is where I want to talk about school. I got to the sixth grade and I wish today that I'd had an education but it was hard for me because I was

trying to help my mom take care of my brothers and sisters. It is very important for children today to have an education. Because the fact is you can't go and do anything you want or have a good job without an education. You've got to have a diploma to have a good job. And I hope children out there will learn that. You can't think that the good jobs are just going to come to you and even if they did you still have to have that degree.

I'd like to go back a little ways and talk about my brother Bert, he was the oldest. He has polio and it was so hard on my mother because she had me and he was like an invalid because he had to crawl everywhere we went. He couldn't walk until he was four. My mother had to carry him on her back and she carried me in her arms.

I want to tell you about when I was in the sixth grade. I was sick a lot myself at the time. I was out of school quite a bit. But then my mom needed me at home because she was working and my dad was sick. He was sick all of the time and he couldn't work so my mother had to work. She worked and I watched the children. She worked for the church welfare office (also called bishop's warehouse) so she could bring home food. She worked there for quite a few years. My mother worked up until she was 90 years old. She still had her faculties, she was very smart, she could read, she knew everything that could be found in books. She read

all of the time until she started to go blind a little bit then she couldn't read and that made her a little depressed. But other than that she could do anything. But I still took care of my parents until they passed on.

I had a very good marriage. My husband meant a lot to me and we had two children. That's another thing I would never change is my marriage. He died in 1975 and when he died it really hit us hard. He left two children and they were devastated over his death. My daughter went to college for two years, which was good. My son went into the service where he spent eleven years. Whatever happened in my lifetime, I wouldn't change because I had a lot of love from my parents and my husband and children.

I would like to talk about my father again. He was a really hard worker but he was ill, he was sick, his health wasn't very good. But later on in life he got better and ended up getting a real good job, bought a home and took care of us the best he could. I just wanted to tell you he did work because I kept saying he was sick, which he was, but when he did work, he worked at his job for many years.

I'd like to talk about my sister. When she was growing up, she was very special to me. I took her to the park and took her to the shows. She was ten years younger than me. I would play with her so she wouldn't get

bored and read her little stories. When I got married, she was very upset because she thought my husband had taken me away from her. So in the summer time I had her come and stay with me so she would know that I still cared and loved her. When we had both become adults, we were always there for each other. When I needed something she was there and when she needed something I was there for her. She was my sister and my very best friend and I really love her very much.

This is my life story.

END OF INTERVIEW