

Argonaut High School
Oral History Interview
Biographical Sketch

Subjects full name: Deloris Bryant Garrison

Address: 12380 Eldel Road
Pine Grove, CA

Telephone: Home: 296- Work: _____

Date of birth: 4-25-29 Place of birth: Sutter Creek

Date of marriage: 2-28-49 Place of marriage: Reno

Name of spouse: Ray Garrison

date of birth: 10-14-27 Place of birth: Grenada, Minnesota

Subject occupation: Sales

Spouse occupation: Boilermaker

Name of mother: Rosa Menter Bryant

Date of birth: 5-10-06 Place of birth: Missouri

Occupation: Housewife

Name of father: Charles Bryant

Date of birth: 12-29-06 Place of birth: Sutter Creek

Occupation: Miner

Subject's children and dates of birth: _____

Lindy: 8-12-49

Terri: 12-29-54

Subject's brothers and sisters and dates of birth: _____

Charles: 1-4-27

Jack: 11-?-33

Subject's primary and secondary education: (Schools attended and dates) Grades 1-7 : Sutter Creek School

Grades 8-12 : Mt. Diablo High School (Concord)

Subject's higher education: (Schools attended, graduation date, majors, degrees) _____

none

Subject's profession or occupations: (Job, dates, where) _____

Sales - Concord

Military service: (Branch, rank, dates of service) _____

none

Civic and community activities:(Offices held, activities, etc.) _____

Miscellaneous information: _____

Prepared by: Jeff Port & Bea Garrison & Patrick Keene

Date: 6-13-97

Project: Kennedy Mine Project

Bea Garrison

It's true that your father worked in the mine?

He worked in the Argonaut yes.

And how long did he work there?

Oh ever since I can remember. When they closed the mines in 1942 of course he quit and we moved to Concord. I guess from the time he was eighteen years old.

Do you remember what his work shift was?

It was an eight hour shift.

What shifts did he work?

He worked day and night shifts.

Do you remember what different jobs he had?

That I can't remember.

What was it like to live around the mine and how did it change your life?

Well there wasn't really a whole lot because like I said I was so young and I didn't pay that much attention. We used to live in fear when an ambulance went by because we were afraid an accident may have happened in the mine. If I had been older it probably would have made more of an impression on me.

Was your dad ever injured in the mine?

No.

Did working in the mine affect his health?

Yes, in that respect. After we went to Concord he had to go to the doctor for something and they found a spot on his lung, but they don't know if that was caused by the mine or because he smoked at the time.

Do you remember any smells or sounds from the mine?

Yes. We lived in Sutter Creek up on the hill, which was straight across from the Central Eureka, and I remember sitting out there just listening to the sounds. I mean, there was a definite sound you could hear. Then after they closed, of course, it was just a dead silence. I mean there was nothing! All you heard was cars going by, and I really can't describe the sound. It was just more or less like a constant noise every day, day and night.

What was travel like during those times?

It seemed like Jackson was a long, long way away from Sutter Creek at the time. Of course, the roads are completely different now, than what they were, because I had an Aunt and Uncle that lived out in Jackson a ways, and I remember when we would go from Sutter Creek to Jackson when we went down by the Argonaut Mine, that part of Highway 49 wasn't even there. We went down to that cut-off that went behind Prospect Motors, I can't remember the name of it. Anyway, we had to take that road because Highway 49 didn't even go down the rest of the way into Jackson, and then we went across town, and we had to go down Main Street, that's how you got to Jackson. Because the road wasn't even there we went straight across to what's Highway 88 now, and turned up by where Lucky's is, and then hit Highway 49 and went on over from there.

What were some of the other towns, such as Ione, like?

Well, we didn't really go to Ione, we usually went either to Jackson to visit my relations, or to Sacramento to visit.

What was the trip to Sacramento like?

Oh again, that seemed like it took forever and a day to get there. Of course, with the old cars, and with the roads not being like they are now, they were just little dirt roads, that's all they were. And I can remember there was a bridge there somewhere, and one of the river counties, but I don't even remember where it was, they had hydraulic mining there where there was shooting water at the side of the hill and getting the gold out.

Did you ever travel any farther than Sacramento?

Never did. Went to Modesto once. Mother had family there living in Riverbank. We used to go there, but that was about it. Sacramento, Jackson and Riverbank.

Do you remember actually how long it took to get there?

Well, being a kid I thought it took forever. I really don't know how long.

Did your dad by any chance work during the Argonaut Mine disaster?

I don't think so. I think that happened before he started working.

Do you remember anything about it?

No. I'd only heard what my dad would say from what he heard or read about it, how terrible it was that they couldn't get them out. When my mother died about five years ago I went through her pictures, and there were pictures of the fire, but I have no idea if it was the Kennedy or the Argonaut. And then when I found out about it I took my pictures up to Marianne Torterich and told her about it, and she told me that they were the Kennedy. I asked her if the museum would want them, because I don't think my children would have any interest in them, and she said, "Oh yes, I'd love to have them!" I know they're working on the mine so maybe she'll put them in the museum.

What kind of entertainment was around then?

We played baseball, just played with the neighborhood kids, listened to the radio, that's all we did. There was really nothing for us to do except play with each other.

Do you remember the big events, such as the Italian Picnic and the 4th of July?

Yes. We used to go up to the Italian picnic grounds all the time when they had the Italian picnic. It seems to me that we always went up to Sacramento during the 4th of July. The other events they had was Gold Rush Days. It was just a big celebration, and they had a parade, and some of the stores took some of the bark off the trees and put it on the buildings so it would look like just a little log town. It sounds terrible, but that is the only time I ever remember seeing my dad drunk. Of course, there were so many saloons there in Sutter Creek, and all the miners got together at these events, joking and talking and laughing. I remember I had to take my dad home. That's about the only entertainment other than the Italian Picnic.

What were some of the other industries besides mining that were really big?

Well, lumber is the only one I can think of.

What do you remember about the different ethnic groups?

Well, I was going to say Bryant is an English name, it's pretty much from my grandparents. Other than a few Mexicans here that went to school, I think everyone around here was Serbian. It seems like everyone's name ended with 'ovich'. Of course, there were some kids that lived right there in Sutter Creek who we would call that had money, where the rest of us didn't. Mr. Wise had the drug store where the Bubble Gum Book Store is today, and I went to school with his daughter and Molitestes had the grocery store, where what used to be Boatworks, and I went to school with his daughter. Of course there were the Italians, Mexicans and Serbians, and whatever you call me, I guess English.

Did the different ethnic groups live in different places in the town, or were they intermixed?

No. They were pretty well intermixed.

Were there different jobs that one group did a lot of?

No. It seemed there were those that ran their businesses in town, or there was mining. Other than that, there was mining.

What were the different businesses and gambling halls in Sutter Creek?

I don't remember.

What were the different stores in Sutter Creek?

Well, like I said, Molitestes had their grocery store on the corner, where the drug store was where the Bubble Gum Book Store is now, and then up the street, right by those stairs, was where Mr. Richards had his grocery store. Then that store right across the street from the Bubble Gum Book Store, that was a meat market, and then we had a shoe repair just a couple doors from there. The Post Office, which was next to the drug store on the other side of the street, where they have the little ice cream parlor, that's the only store still there that they had when I was a kid. Everything else was either what you call antique stores, or clothing stores, or where Pinotti's had their bakery store, and that was right on the creek. It would be the first building on the left hand side of the street. And I remember June Gill, she had some kind of store, but I don't remember what it was, if it was a grocery store or not. There wasn't anything else really, except for Ballotti's, the saloon.

Do you remember the labor strikes?

No. Although I do remember one time when my dad was out of work, and that might have been due to the strike, but being a kid, I don't remember too much about it. I visited Stockton and Daddy going into a great big building and coming out with a box of groceries. But being a kid I had no idea what he was doing there, why he was doing that. That's the only thing about the strike that I remember.

Do you remember boarding houses that were around?

No.

Do you remember if your family had a car when you were a kid?

Yes, but I can't tell you what kind or what year it was. I remember it burned up when we were on driving on Ridge Road behind the lumber mill. I remember the car burning up and we had to walk back to Sutter Creek.

Did most of the families have a car?

Yes, it seemed that they did.

Did ranching and farming have a big impact on the County?

Oh yes, yeah I had forgotten about that as far as industry. There were quite a few. The Allen's had quite a bit of property and cattle. The Cummings also had a farm on Shake Ridge Road.

We know the timber industry was real big. What do you remember of it?

Well, other than the trucks going by with the big logs, I don't remember much else.

Do you remember big areas being completely cleared out of trees?

I don't remember any, no. We really didn't do much traveling around. I really don't know why.

Who was your doctor, or did you have a family doctor?

Well, the doctor that Mother said was supposed to have delivered me was Dr. Grayfield. His office was near where the car agency is in Sutter Creek right by the creek. In fact, he had a daughter, Nancy Grayfield. But that's the only doctor that I can remember.

What about gas stations that were around?

Well, where the car agency is now, that was a gas station. I remember they had the garage, and then the pumps outside. As far as I can remember, that was the only one in Sutter Creek.

Do you have any interesting stories you'd like to tell us?

Gosh, I can't recall a thing. Like I said, if I had been older it might have made more of an impression on me, but being a kid I could have cared less, I guess.

Did you ever go down in the mine?

No. We just watched my dad go down. They couldn't have paid me enough to go down in the mine. It seemed to me that it wasn't exactly a box that they were in. It was some kind of a container, but they were standing as they were going down, but I don't even remember how long we lived there. It was from when I was two years old until when we had to leave.

So were you ever right next to the mine and were you able to see the whole operation?

Well, watching him go down was the only thing I could remember. I don't remember the workings of the mine. And I know he did work at the Central Eureka because we didn't live too far from there when my younger brother was born.

Did your father ever work in any other mines?

No, just the Argonaut and the Central Eureka.

Did any other friends or relatives work in the mine?

My grandfather worked there, but I didn't really know him, he died when I was a baby. Then my dad's uncle worked there for quite a while.

So you didn't live real close to your family?

Well we did, my Great Uncle, he lived right by the Central Eureka Mine when my younger brother was born, and my Uncle lived just next door to us there. My Grandmother's house is still there in Sutter Creek. She lived down the hill from us when we lived on top of the hill. My last Aunt died just a couple of years ago, and I guess my cousins are living in the house there now, and that's just right down Main Street.

So did your father and your uncle ever work together?

No. They had different shifts, and I don't remember my dad ever saying he worked with him.

Do you have anything else you'd like to tell us about the mine or the town?

No, I can't really think of anything other than when we left here.

Were you sad to leave?

Oh yes. I cried all the way to Concord. I didn't want to leave. When they closed all the mines in 1942 there wasn't anything to do, and we had to make a living. We ended up in Concord where my father worked in an oil refinery. We left a little before they closed the mine because we knew we had to get out, so we moved down there in 1942, I finished school down there, married, had my two kids, and then my husband and I then build this house here in 1976. I had been out of the county for almost forty years before I moved back up here.

Did you come back up to the County at all?

Oh yes, yes.

It must have been really different with the mine shut down.

Well, what I really couldn't get over was the town of Sutter Creek. The things that I knew when I was there as a kid just wasn't there anymore. Like I said that one drug store that was there when I was a kid is the only store that is still there. Everything else is gone. Even one of the saloons is now that Somewhere In Time, where you have tea and crumpets, that was one of the saloons. The town is like it was, but not the stores. That hasn't changed much. In fact my Grandmother's house, you know where the Hampshores house is, where you go out of town, where the Pelagorium is, right

across the street from there, that was my Grandmother's house. Now there is a lane, called Tucker Lane, and my Grandmother's house is just on the other side of Tucker Lane. When we lived up on the hill it was just dirt. Nobody drove up there, it was just a dirt alley. Where our house was someone just bought it, tore it down, and built another one. But all my relations are buried here in Sutter Creek or Sacramento, except for my dad who was buried in Concord.

Did the town seem smaller after the mine closed?

Oh yes. I wish I could tell you more about it, but I was just a kid, and not paying much attention.

But what a difference when we moved to Concord. I mean those kids down there, they were so much different than I was. They always acted so much older than they were. They just seemed like they were more experienced, I guess. I was just a hillbilly.

Thank you for your time.

Well, you're completely welcome, and I hope this helps.

Interviewed by
Jeff Porte and
Patrick Keene