

# MY PERSONAL HISTORY

## *Life & Times in Southeast Utah...By Verona Stocks*

*EDITOR'S NOTE: When Verona Stocks died in June 1993, she left a big hole in Grand County. Born on April 1, 1905, Verona watched southeast Utah transformed...from a pioneer town at the turn of the century, to a uranium mining boom town in the 50s, to the tourist community it has become today. Fortunately, for us, Verona was also a chronicler of the times in which she lived. She had rheumatic fever as a child, and because she could not always be as active as she may have wanted, Verona, in her own words, "heard things and watched how people acted."*

*About a week after her death, I got a call from Verona's daughter, Lynda Stocks. She wanted to know if I would be interested in writing a story about her mother. Verona's life spanned almost the entire 20th Century and Linda felt compelled to share that life with others. Linda mentioned that Verona had written a history of her life and wondered if I might want to use an excerpt or two from it.*

*Later that day, Lynda, her daughter Monique and I sat down over a cup of coffee and I got to see the "histories" Linda's mother had compiled. Before I had completed the first page, I knew that I was holding a treasure in my hands. I asked Lynda if I could print the entire history, in chapters, for as long as it took to tell the story. She and Monique instantly agreed.*

*In transcribing Verona's story, I have tried to keep it exactly as she wrote it. I have even left the occasional misspelled word and avoided an attempt to "correct" Verona's grammar. To me, this story feels like a conversation, and that's really what it is. It's her story and her gift to you and me.*

*We first printed Verona's history in 1993-4. But there was no internet then and the story lives only for those few who saved their old paper Zephyrs. Now, we'd like to publish Verona Stocks' 'personal history' again. This is part one...many more stories will follow, over the next couple of years...JS*

My earliest memories of home was a little log cabin, across the road from Grandpa and Grandma Murphy's Rock House. There were all poplar trees growing in front of the cabin, a little stream of clear cool water, a trough the water ran through to make it a water fall and a tiny pond. My older sister, Mary and I waded in the stream and make mud pies and sand castles around the pond.

Mary could do many things I could not do. In summer she could walk in the hot sand barefoot, she did not cry if she stepped on a sand burr. I can remember her carrying me piggyback through the burrs and hot sand, a bucket of water or vegetables in one hand. I do not know why she took me along. I was a crybaby or so they told me... I do not remember Mary crying about anything.

In 1908 Dad and Grandpa Murphy bought the Cane Spring ranch, they got a contract to carry the mail from Moab and LaSal to Hatch Wash where they met the carrier from Monticello. The mail was carried horse back in leather saddle bags.

The mail station or Half Way House was across the road from where the Hole-In-the-Rock is now. There was two small houses, one was to accomodate travelers that stayed all night. The other was the kitchen, dining room and living quarters for the people who ran the Way Station. They were both washed away in big floods in 1910 and 1911 most of the farm was gone too.

The Indians came through by hundreds both Spring and Fall. They never bothered the mail station.

When Mother and Dad moved to the Cane Spring ranch they had three children, Mary, Verona (Me), and Annie who was born Feb.19,1907. Mary and

I had a lot of fun at the ranch. The creek was narrow and there were a lot of bubbly springs, frogs to catch, lots of grass, flowers, butterflys and birds. Mary carried water from a pipe that came out of the rocks across the wash, the water was very cold, I could go with her and carry water too, there was no hot sand or burrs to go through.

There was a long table in the dining room, it always had a big white table cloth on it. Sometimes when people stopped to eat we would hide under the table, I more than Mary. We seldom got caught or kicked when someone stretched a leg. Then there was a big bull, when we caught him laying down we

would slide off his back. I thought it fun to climb up his neck, sit on his head between his horns my legs down by his eyes. Then we got caught. Uncle Felix was scared and he spanked us both and sent us to the house telling us not to go near that bull or the corral again as that bull was mean. He had chased some of the men over the fence a few times and they had some bronko horses there too.

Just before Christmas Dad moved his family back to Moab. He was supposed to carry the mail from Moab to Cane Springs. He didn't always make it so Uncle Heber would have to go. Dad had drinking problems.

Mother had her fourth child March 6, 1909, a little boy the named him William John after his father. He did not stay with the family long, he died March 30, 1909. Soon after that the family moved back to Cane Springs. It was better for Dad to be out of town because when he drank he liked to fight. When he came home drunk he always spanked Mary. I wondered why she did not hide from him as I did.

That fall Mary was six, the family moved back to Moab so she could go to school. I lived part time with Dad and Mother in Moab, then for awhile with Uncle Felix and Aunt Mame in Cane Springs, Dad carried the mail so of course I saw him both places.

I had lots of dolls to play with, Uncle Felix carved little dolls out of wood, Aunt Mame dressed them. Uncle Felix told me funny storys and he bought me other dolls, one was a beautiful China doll with long hair. I was so careful when playing with it.

Feb. 11, 1910 mother had another baby, a fair little baby girl they named her Neva Willma. Aunt Pearl, a young girl still in school loved that baby, played with her a lot. She spoiled her too.

Dad and Mother came to Cane Springs and almost the first thing Mary did was

break my beautiful china doll. I saw her take it by the feet and hit its head on a stone hearth in front of the fire place. I never knew why she did that until years later. I cannot remember of even talking to her about it. Finally years later she told me Uncle Felix told Mother to take the doll from her before she broke it. That made her so mad she just broke it.

We lived around Dad's people so much, they did have favorites. Most of his brothers liked Mary best, Uncle Felix liked me. The others were all right I just left them pretty much alone.

My formative years were spent under circumstances not much different from those of my Grandparents. Southeast Utah and the western slope of the Colorado was untouched by the whole ninetheenth century, because the treaty with the Indians was not signed until 1877. The Indians did not want to lose their winter camping ground in Spanish Valley, and some of them resented the white man even in the early 1900's.

We traveled in covered wagons, buggys and horse back as everyone else did who lived in Southeast Utah.

Dad and Grandma Murphy filed on dry farms five miles south of Blanding. That was nearly 90 miles from Moab the way the roads curved and wandered





through the hills and canyons, following the line of least resistance.

We moved back and forth from Moab to Blanding from 1910 to 1916. Mary's job with my help was to drive from five to ten head of milk stock, all the way. I always got sick going to Blanding. Mary rode her poney, drove the cows, and learned to whistle. She also practiced swearing like Dad. To her a great accomplishment.

It usually took about two weeks for the trip. The wagons were overloaded for the small horses that had to pull them. The roads were sandy to Peters Hill and muddy from there to Blanding. There was dust storms in Dry Valley and rain the rest of the way. We usually traveled in the spring or fall.

Dad and his brother Jack went to Blanding first to look the country over; that is when Dad filed on his farm. They liked what they saw so Grandma went to have a look.

Mary went to school once again in Moab. Aunt Mame (Mary) Murphy married Theodore Duncan Nov. 25, 1910 in Moab. He was a veterinarian, fairly good for that time, he also trained race horses. He had two boys, Elven and Wendell.

I liked riding in the back of the covered wagon, watching the Prarie Dogs, They always had a sentinel to warn the village if something did not look right, he barked and all the others scampered for their hole. When the danger was past, little hands began popping up all over, soon they were out feeding as usual. We went by so slow and their villages were so large I could watch for quite awhile.

Dad got a mail contract, carrying the mail from Blanding to Bluff so in the spring of 1911 we arrived in Blanding with our milk cows, household goods. We

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lived in a dobie house a little north east of town, we did not have close neighbors; they were about four blocks away. We had about six horses to take care of besides the milk cows. Mother took them to water every day.

There were lots of Indians around. One day several mounted Indians dashed up to our door and demanded food. Polk a dangerous Indian was their leader. He knew Dad had gone to Bluff with the mail. Mother told them we had no food, Mary told them we had some bread. They took it all. We went to bed without supper. There was no flour to make more bread, and nothing else in the house to eat. Mother asked Mary why she did not keep quiet, Mary said,"you did not tell the truth." The Indian had been rough with Mother when he pushed her out of the door. When Dad came home he was pretty upset about it. He told Mary in a case of that kind, kids should be seen and not heard. He talked to some of his Indian friends. We were not bothered again.

I started to school in Blanding, there were two rooms and two teachers to teach eight grades. The first to fourth grade in one room, fifth to eighth grade

in the other room. There were long home made benches with a shelf for books and a lower bench to sit on. The teacher was a man who threw erasers and chock at any kids that did not pay attention or were noisy. When the erasers and chock started flying around I climbed onto the shelf where the books were and did not appear until the class was dismissed. No kids ever told on me. I only went to school three months, Mary told Mother and Dad the teacher would not miss me because he seldom saw me.

I had rhumatic fever; the folks did not know it and there was no Doctor to tell them. They said I was sickly, puny or had growing pains. They did not know I had a fever almost every afternoon.

I had a good imagination, I looked at pictures and made up my own stories. I memorized the stories I liked best in Mary's school books. Mother helped Mary with her reading and spelling. The spelling was funny to me even then. It went like this, "Mother, ME, me. Mary, ME, you. Mother no it is YOU, you. Mary, YOU, me." I don't remember how it turned out, but she did learn how to spell. When school was out Dad gave up the mail contract and got a job working on the ditch that was being built to bring water from the Blue Mountains to the town of Blanding. He moved his family to the tent village where the construction crew was living in Recapture. I remember the John Johnson family.

We had two tents, Mother cooked in the little tent, we slept in the big tent and us kids played there too. One day we were singing Indian songs and doing Indian dances, or so we thought, when a strange voice joined in. To our astonishment, it was an Indian. We stopped but he made a few more circles imitating our version of Indian singing and dancing. In the doorway of the tent some more Indians were stamping their feet and laughing. The man that was dancing was a friend of Dad's, we knew what a tease he was and we liked him. Johnny and Ada Johnson, Mary, Annie and I were the kids playing in that tent.

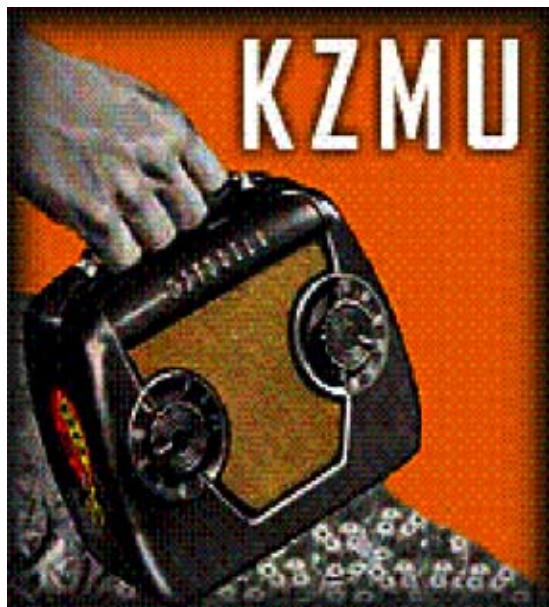
It was about a month later two Navajo trackers showed up and looked all around the tent we were playing in, then some men from Blanding came and they got Dad; he looked around, saddled Nickle, told Mother and Mrs Johnson to keep the kids close the them. Other men stopped work and came into camp, everybody just standing around talking except Dad, the mounted men from Blanding and the Navajos--they all left following the tracks of the man they were hunting. He was crazy and he had spent a lot of time just watching us kids. It was not long before they caught him. They tied him in a buggy and sent him to Provo.

We went to Moab for a visit sometime in August; we did not intend to stay long. Before we reached the Flat Ranches Annie fell out of the buggy and broke her leg. A man passing by sent word to the Doctor to be at the Murphy ranch when we arrived. The Doctor was waiting for us and he put splints on the leg which was broken in two places. That was before plaster casts. There was no moving around with a broken bone before it was healed.

Annie was put to bed in Grandpa's and Grandma Murphy's room. They moved into the big room of the Rock House which was their kitchen and dining room. It was very crowded.

Aunt Pearl was cooking for a sawmill crew on the mountain near Guyzer Pass. Her brothers, Felix and Heber worked there. Felix cut timber Heber, was a freighter. At that time he was hauling the lumber to the railroad in Thompson. I stayed on the mountain with aunt Pearl until school started. She liked to walk, and we picked wild strawberries and flowers, she watched for the freight wagons to come back, then she would cook up something special. Every one

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