



Interview Summary and Index – Verl O’Brien

Interviewee: Verl O’Brien

Interviewer: Susan Dillon

Date: March 30, 2015

Location: At his residence in Salt Lake City, UT

Summary

Verl O’Brien shares his memories of growing up after moving into 1568 Roosevelt Avenue at age 12 in 1941. He talks extensively about The Gully from Harrison Avenue at 16 and 17th East down to 1700 South. He remembers camping and cooking meals, building windmills in the stream, playing baseball, making and flying rubber-powered airplanes off the mountain and carving dugouts in the hillside. He talks about other kids in The Gully including getting kicked out by older boys from the Harvard Avenue area.

Verl describes the areas east and west of The Gully. The east side was rural with a few farm houses, fruit trees, and riding stables which were popular with soldiers during WWII. On the west side wild sego lilies grew in vacant lots. A bus line ran down 1500 East to downtown. Uintah school was in a different location. Vacant lots of Roosevelt Avenue were built in following the end of the War. Boys tried out soap box derby cars on 1300 South and in winter sled down 1300 South and Harrison Avenue.

Verl talks about the shops at 15th and 15th. He remembers generous 10 cent ice cream cones at Paramount Milk Depot dished up by friends who worked there and recalls collecting clothes hangers in the neighborhood to sell to the owner of the cleaners to make money to buy soda at Pat’s where comic books were read. He also mentions Emigration Market and Fernwoods at 13th and 17th.

Vern tells about different ways of getting to and from Irving Jr. High and East High and taunting the guards when passing by the prison on 2100 South. Commenting on demographics, he notes that the local population was mostly LDS but this began to change with the population explosion after WWII.

Verl notes bad air quality resulting from stoker coal burning furnaces and recalls his mother attempting to filter the air inside the house by covering vents with white



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cheesecloth which then blackened. He also tells about the icebox that the family had before buying their home in 1941 and getting a refrigerator.

Verl says that his father was able to buy the house with a FHA loan. He was concerned about making the monthly house payment of \$32.50 and approached Verl about helping out with earnings from mowing lawns.

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Time	Brief description
00:00:00	Introduction
00:00:29	Family home. 1568 Roosevelt. Moved in January 1941, age 12. Many vacant lots along street.
00:01:10	The Gully and Pat's at 15th and 15th. The Gully was the highlight. Hung out at Pat's place, bought party pack bottle of pop for 10 cents and looked at free comics. Most of the time went to the Gully. Life Scout. Camped in the Gully with Doug Kimball, Dan Rymund?, Jerry Dean, Boyd Holding, Harv German, Dave Bean. Built windmills in the stream. Skied when snow came. Tom Robinson.
00:04:26	Beyond the Gully. Undeveloped. 160 subscribers to <i>Deseret News</i> between 1300 South and 1700 South and 1500 East to the mountains; even fewer <i>Salt Lake Tribune</i> subscribers. A few houses, fruit farms, riding stables at today's Wasatch Boulevard.
00:06:24	Gully activities. Played baseball, ran track. Flew rubber-powered airplanes off the mountain, age 15-16. Seldom saw people in the Gully, so considered it our territory and told others so. Carved dugouts in the hillside. Universal playground year round.
00:08:33	Other kids in the Gully. Invited kids from Wasatch Ward to play there. Kicked out a couple of times by older boys from Harvard Avenue area when age 12. No trouble after age 15-16.
00:10:35	Postwar development on Roosevelt. Worked on straightening dents in car during WWI with no complaints about noise. When the War ended ended, all vacant lots were built in. Within 7 or 8 years everything changed. Changes began after graduation in 1946.
00:12:54	Animal life in the Gully. Tells about coyotes and snakes in the Gully. Digresses to bumps and bruises from playing there.
00:14:42	Wild area in the Gully. Says activities were restricted to wild area away from Wooten's orchard in the Gully. Defines wild area as 1600 /1700 East



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	and Harrison down to 1700 South. Mentions Cannon house at Kensington, springs with edible watercress.
00:18:15	Activities outside the Gully. Tried out [soap] box derby cars on 1300 South. Sled on 1300 E 1300 South and Harrison Avenue. Streets blocked by city. Glorious for 12 to 14 year old boys.
00:20:07	More on the Gully. Tells about cooking meals down by the stream, how the dugouts in the hillside were constructed and their size. Describes construction of windmills and impact of rain swollen creek on their creations.
00:24:24	Outside of the Gully. [East] of gully farm area north of 1700 South. Sunflower filled fields. Farm houses with corrals. Some brick homes. Fruit stands on 2300 South. Riding stables attracted soldiers but stopped after the War. [West of gully] wild sego lilies grew in vacant lots. Bus down 1500 South to town. Uintah School in different place with soccer field to its east.
00:29:39	15th and 15th stores. [West side] Drugstore, OP Skaggs, beauty shops, Safeway. Friends made 25 cents/hour working in grocery stores. [East side] Paramount Milk Depot with generous 10 cent ice cream cones made by friends working there. Pat's place for magazines and soda water. Cleaner. Service station.
00:31:17	Con't. Rang doorbells to collect clothes hangers to sell to cleaners and earn money to patronize Pat's. Bought 2 litre bottle of Clido club soda, sat in booths, and read Marvel comics. Sent to Paramount Milk Depot to buy milk at 7 or 8 cents a quart. 15 th and 15 th was a center of fun from 1941-46. Barbershop around corner of Emerson.
00:34:40	Irving Jr. High. School boundary Roosevelt avenue. Had to go to Irving Jr. High in Sugar House in 1942. Tells of boys and girls walking to school separately along stream through Westminster College. Alice Schmidt Cannon. Recalls sometime walking home past prison on 2100 South and taunting the guards.
00:38:54	East High and modes of transportation. Rode bus, walked, and hitch hiked to school. Sometimes took trolley to town after school. Trolley did not come into the neighborhood, only buses.
00:41:28	Demographics. Mostly LDS. Population explosion followed WWII when wartime immigrants decided to stay. Fort Kearns,. Alta Ski Resort (1938), Hill Air Force Base. 15 to 20 percent of high school students were not involved with LDS Church.
00:44:10	Air quality. Air was bad. House heated with coal furnace. Tells about how stoker furnace worked, shoveling coal every night as 12 or 13 year old, and



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	smoke filling house. Inversions were greater than today. Taunted by neighbor boy, Ray Rutherford, who had a gas furnace and did not have to shovel coal.
00:49:36	Refrigeration. Talks about using an ice box before 1941. Digresses to comment on FHA housing loan and making \$32.50 monthly payment for his father at United Savings and Loan. Returns to getting a new refrigerator in 1941.
00:52:20	More on air quality. Furnace smoked up the house outside and inside. Mother covered vents with white cheesecloth. Came out black when changed weekly. Tells about a man who chose to work in mine instead of going to war and died from carbon dust.
00:54:50	Occupancy of family home. Family lived in home for about 75 years. Laments remodel by new owners.
00:56:00	FHA loan and purchase of family home. Explains purpose and how FHA loan worked. Enabled parents to buy first home. Relates concern of father about going from \$20 monthly rent to \$32.50 house payment. Approached by father about possibility of helping out with payment from his lawn mowing income.
01:01:18	Final memories. Marvelous childhood for boys. Boys and girls did not want to mix. Emerson and 1700 East was always a dirt corner. Lou Bowen, a scout leader, owned Emigration Market. Fernwoods across the street sold coke and ice cream.
01:04:49	Con't. Wife Karen grew up on Emerson Avenue but didn't get to know her until drafted for Korean War. Attended Wasatch Ward. Building doomed for lack of parking.
01:09:24	Con't. Wooten's estate at upper end of Kensington. Boys played on swing set at John Cannon's house.
01:12:11	End time