

RUTH MCGLOTHLIN

Interview 111a

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Patricia Ordaz, Interviewer

Retyped by Courtney Lawrence

ABSTRACT: In this interview with Patricia Ordaz, Ruth McGlothlin talks about growing up and going to school in Arkansas, where her father was a superintendent during the Depression. She describes her education, her teachers, the teacher's salary, and some of the activities they did in school.

Patricia Ordaz (hereafter PO): This is Patricia Ordaz interviewing Mrs. Ruth McGlothlin. The date is December 10, 1986. Mrs. McGlothlin was born in San Benito, Texas April 8, 1923. Her family name is McGlothlin. What was the name of your school?

Ruth McGlothlin (hereafter RM): When I first started in the first grade I was in Waldron, Arkansas. Before I started in the first grade my father was a school superintendent and he was going to the University of Arkansas. They, at that time instead of student teachers, they had what they called "Lab School." Teachers did their student teaching, or their practice teaching in the lab schools at the university. So before I started in the first grade I went to a lab school at the University of Arkansas. That's where I first started going to school. My father was going to school every summer there, so every summer I went to the lab school as well as going to elementary school in Waldron, Arkansas.

PO: Do you have a recess?

RM: Oh yes, we had recess. Our school was built up, the school was fairly new and everything from the first grade to the twelfth grade was in the same school. It was only a small town, about two thousand population. There was no grass or pavement on the ground. The school was built way up on a hill and it was a clay hill. Our pet past time was to slide down that clay hill, it stained our panties and made all of our mothers real angry, but that was our pet past time at recess, to slide down that clay hill. It was better than any slide, especially if it got kind of wet, we surely were grimy when we got back to class.

PO: Did you have a favorite teacher?

RM: In elementary school I don't remember. I had a sixth grade teacher who read to us every Friday, she would read, I don't even remember her name, but I do know that she read several books by Jean Stratton Porter, and I thought they were the best books I had ever heard. If we had been good all week on Friday afternoon she would spend all afternoon reading. She would read a book in about a month or six weeks, then we would have another book. She also read Uncle Tom's Cabin and several books she read, I think

I enjoyed that almost more than anything. I didn't have very good teachers in elementary school; most of the teachers were not that good. I had some real good teachers at the University in the summer when I was growing up. The teachers up there did a lot of innovative things. I know we did a lot of art work there that we didn't do in elementary school. Oh, I did take piano lessons and I like my piano teacher. I guess I liked Miss Lola the best, she used to come to the school and give piano lessons and I got to get out of class and go to piano lessons. I like that.

PO: What kind of punishment did you get when you got in trouble?

RM: The bigger boys got spankings, but usually you got low grades on your report card, or you had to stay in after school was the main thing, or had to stay in at recess. This was in elementary school. I don't think there was any corporal punishment in elementary school, if there was I wasn't aware of it. I know there wasn't in high, I went to junior and high school in Texarkana and I know there was no corporal punishment allowed in the schools there. So you either stayed in or you got demerits.

PO: Who did you spend your time with in school, during recess?

RM: One of my friends was Viola Aikman and the other was Geraldine Kellum and oh, there were just a whole gang of us that would jump rope, slide down the slides, slide down the clay bank, play hop-scotch, jacks and different things.

PO: How were the schools, I mean – how were they different from the schools now?

RM: My father was a school superintendent and as far as I can tell, our schools then had – the teachers who had teacher training were just as innovative as they are now. Of course, there was no integration and all the children were white children, you know, there were no blacks at all, there weren't even any in the community so it wasn't a question of integrating because there just weren't any blacks who lived there. The children who came in on the bus were usually from out of the county, they were usually poor children and they were not as popular, you know, they were the kind that the ones who lived in town looked down on them some. But, as far as the class work was concerned and, as far as the teachers were concerned we had all the subjects they have now. I think we probably had to master reading and had to master arithmetic a lot younger than they do now because most students were reading well and going to the library and checking out books by the time they got to the third grade. We had our multiplication tables through nine's, through twelve's in the third grade. We did – begin long division in the third grade and started fractions in the fourth grade. And percents, we started sort of a pre-algebra in the seventh, so from the seventh on up it was sort of a pre-algebra type math.

PO: Did you like school?

RM: Yes, school was always easy for me.

PO: Were you an honor student?

RM: I was usually on the honor roll, I usually had one grade that would be lower, something I didn't like and I wouldn't study it very much but I was usually on the honor roll, except maybe sometime I would get "C" in conduct. I was kind of a smart aleck, in fact, my parents didn't really believe in spanking but when I was in the first grade, the only time my father ever spanked me, and I really didn't give him any choice. There wasn't any way around it because I went out to recess when I was in the first grade and the kids said, "Oh, you don't have to do what the teacher says because your dad is superintendent." I went back in class and the teacher told me to do something and I said, "I don't have to do that because my daddy is the superintendent." Well, she took me down to the superintendent's office and that was my one and only spanking that my father ever gave me.

You asked me about how schools were different, the one thing that was very different was there was just no money at that time, this was in the middle of the Depression, I started to school in 1928 and by 1930, by the time I was in the second grade, Arkansas was bankrupt. There were no state funds for the Arkansas school. Arkansas, I don't think, if they furnished textbooks for students it is very recent, because they didn't all the time I was in school. Students had to buy their own textbooks and the students had no money, everyone was so poor at the time. The counties had to pay all the school expenses out of the county funds. In Scott County where Waldron was, was one of the poorest counties in Arkansas. So my father, as superintendent of the school started with a salary of \$250.00 a month. When the Depression hit that was cut to \$125.00 a month and then he was paid in time warrants that if he got any money out of them at all he only got 50% and there were two or three years that, in money, he only got \$300.00 a year for teaching. There was part of the time that they had tuition children had to pay tuition to get in school. There were no state funds, not enough county funds so students had to pay tuition. Teachers did not have to have a degree and they could be certified by the county school superintendent. The county school superintendent would see some poor girl who had just gotten out of high school and her family needed the money so he would certify her as a schoolteacher and she was the one who was doing the teaching. We had, I think, three teachers in our school and they were all high school teachers, there were three teachers who had bachelors degree, my father was the only one with a masters degree. There were about half of the elementary teachers who had as much as two years of college but most had none. So this is, I suppose, the main difference in the schools that had little money. There was, of course, no lunch programs, children who lived in the country brought their lunch, or if you lived in town you walked home at noon.

PO: What would you do?

RM: Well, I only lived three blocks from school so I would walk home; we always had dinner at home. Even though the teachers weren't qualified well, you know from your experience here, some of our high school girls made good teachers. We had some good teachers, they had a lot of native ability and a lot of native intelligence but, as far as an educational background, they really didn't have it. So, I suppose, that was probably the main difference. Waldron was a little town and some of the differences in the town and the community, we lived in a house that we rented from the banker and we had no indoor plumbing, we had an outdoor toilet, we had a well on the back porch but it was a well, we

drew well water. We always had a cow and a garden, chickens. You know, it was a big lot so we always had a cow. Living was very inexpensive. I remember one time eggs were \$0.10 a dozen if you bought them at the store but there was always somebody who could give you eggs for less than that. I know mother was talking about the time right after she and my father married, they were in school in Waco and she said that eggs were a nickel a piece, that would be \$0.60 a dozen. She said, "Well, I bought two and made a cake with them." I couldn't imagine anybody paying a nickel for one egg.

PO: Did you ever stop going to school because of the Depression?

RM: Our school was shorter; they would have to cut it off after about eight months, eight months was as far as it could run. They would usually run six months and then they would have tuition for a couple of months in order to be able to keep it going another two months. But daddy always managed to keep it going eight months. We had a pretty complete school year but I know there were schools that didn't go the full time and there were a lot of absenteeism. Children, especially the ones out in the country, parents would have them out a lot during September to gather crops and a lot out in the spring to plant the crops. We had a lot of absenteeism but since it didn't cut into state funds nobody at school seemed to mind. We also had as many as fifty students in our elementary school classes.

PO: Fifty? Is that all?

RM: Fifty in a class.

PO: In one class?

RM: Now the state mandates no more than twenty-five, I believe, or twenty or sixteen, something and that seems like an awful lot even now.

END OF SIDE ONE

RM: There were some children who came in on the bus from out south of Texarkana and they were always telling stories about panthers in the woods, and out south of Texarkana is Falk and Falk is where that movie was made about the monster, what was that movie that was on, it was some kind of a horror film about a monster that was seen out in the woods near Falk, Arkansas.

PO: Big Foot?

RM: Big Foot, yes, something like that. Anyway the children who lived out there were always telling tales about panthers out there and how panthers would come up and sneak the people off and kidnap them. They were always telling stories about panthers. The teachers in school used to say, "Aw, go on, you're joking." My father explained it to me, he said "Well, you know the reason they tell all those stories, don't you? The woods out

there are full of bootleggers and if they can scare people off with these panther stories then they don't go bothering your still."

PO: That's a good one.

RM: So, when they came out with this movie about the monster of Falk, well, I figured the bootleggers have another tale going.

PO: Oh, you thought it was them?

RM: Sure, I figured it was, don't you? I remember the first lie I told. I had gotten a doll for Christmas, I was three years old and I got this doll for Christmas and you bent it over and it cried "Mama, mama," you know. Well, I could feel inside and feel something hard, so I took it up under the house and got a pair of scissors and cut it out. When I cut it out there was a little old box and I'd turn it over and it would say "Mama," but I had torn that doll up so what could I do? I took it under the house and buried it. Then I told my mother I lost it. I didn't know what happened to it, somebody must have stolen it.

PO: And you left it there always?

RM: Yes, I performed the operation, I found the crier and I buried the evidence and then I lied about it and felt guilty about it for years.

END OF INTERVIEW