

RUTH MCGLOTHLIN

Interview 111b

November 11, 1987, at home of Ruth McGlothlin in Diboll, Texas

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ABSTRACT: In this interview with Elvia Esteves, Ruth McGlothlin describes her family life growing up in Arkansas as the daughter of a school superintendent. She talks about the Depression, about teaching, about the similarities and differences in school children now and in the past, and about her desires for the future.

Elvia Esteves (hereafter EE): This is Elvia Esteves interviewing Ruth McGlothlin in her home in Diboll, Texas. The day is November 11, 1987. Where were you born?

Ruth McGlothlin (hereafter RM): I was born in San Benito, Texas. My parents were born in Denison, Texas and my father had just graduated from Baylor and my parents married when he was a senior. He graduated in January and then they went to San Benito, he was teaching in San Benito and I was born there that year. All he did was just teach there half a year, then they went back to Ft. Worth, then we went to Arkansas so I only lived there six weeks.

EE: What was it like when you were a child?

RM: Mostly I had a family that was considered well off because my father taught school most of the time and we were considered to be people in the community that were looked up to, my parents were always looked up to, and as far as having money we really didn't have any money anyway because, teachers certainly don't now and they had a lot less then, especially in Arkansas. That's my first memories in Arkansas.

EE: Were times better or worse?

RM: Of course, once I can remember the time when times were pretty good but when we were living in Prairie Grove the times were pretty good. We moved to Waldron when I was five, daddy was superintendent in Waldron and – we moved there in 1928 or '29 and then the Depression hit and times got real hard. I remember one time when I was a little girl my mother, at that time eggs were a nickel a dozen or at most a dime a dozen, steak was \$0.10 a pound. A hundred pounds of sugar was \$2.00, a hundred pounds of flour was \$2.00 but there was no money, people had no money but nothing cost very much. I know one time mother was telling me, she said, "You know, right after the First World War eggs were so high I can remember when I had to pay a nickel a piece for an egg, \$0.60 a dozen." And I said, "You never did buy any, did you?" She said, "Yes, I bought two one time to make a cake." So things were cheap, there wasn't much money. I really never felt deprived but I know there were times when we couldn't afford a telephone. We lived in a

small town and where we lived we did not have running water, there was not city water in Waldron. In the summer we went to Fayetteville and, of course, we always had an apartment in Fayetteville in the summer and there was running water in the back yard. We always had a garden and chickens, a cow; I mean daddy did all that along with being superintendent and driving the school bus and teaching six or eight subjects a day.

EE: What did you do with your parents that you remember best?

RM: I think I remember the things we did most was when we went to Fayetteville in the summer. Daddy was working on his masters degree at the University of Arkansas and mother would use that time, we'd always use daddy's student activity ticket and go to everything they had at the university, they had a big amphitheater, that was built like a Greek theater with tiers down, down the side of a mountain and the stage down at the bottom, we had a lot of musical events there, everything from concerts to old fiddler's contests. Also they had plays and we always went to see the plays and all the things at the university. So I can remember those were more fun than just about anything. However it was always fun to take a trip with my parents, my father is one of those people if we went on a trip every trip was an adventure. If we weren't going but a hundred miles if there was anything that had a sign pointing to it why we would stop. We saw every park, we saw every manufacturing plant; everything was an adventure. We saw everything there was to see while we were on the way.

EE: As a teenager did your parents let you socialize with boys and girls?

RM: My parents were real strict, they didn't allow me to dance, we never had cards in the house and they didn't want me to do anything on Sunday, but there were neighbor children in our block, there were about four or five girls and four or five boys. When I was fourteen we used to ride bicycles at night, get on the handlebars, the boys would pump us up and down to THW Park and we would sit down there and talk, maybe neck a little bit, but our parents certainly didn't know that. There were a few times they told me I couldn't go and I would sneak out the window anyway.

EE: Did you ever get caught?

RM: Oh yes, always. Well, they would ground me a little longer.

EE: What was it like when you first went out on your own?

RM: When I grew up I graduated from high school, went to college half a year and got married so I didn't go out on my own. I went and lived with my husband, so I really didn't go out on my own until I was 48 years old, got a divorce, lived on my own, had my own apartment, own car and my own checking account. Until then I never lived on my own.

EE: What kind of work did you do?

RM: Well, when I was out on my own I was a school teacher, I was a housewife by the time I married for several years, I did take a beauty course and worked in a beauty shop part time, but when we moved to Diboll in 1952 I didn't work any, you know. I was just raising my children, staying home, doing church work and volunteer work and that type of thing. Once my children were grown I went to college got a degree and started teaching.

EE: Are people any different now than what they used to be?

RM: I don't think so; they are just like they have always been. Sometimes I worry, I'm not sure that people now, the younger people, would now how to get by on nothing. The time, during the Depression when there was no money and people learned to get along with very few possessions, sometimes I think it would be real difficult for young people now to do without a car, to do without telephone, to do with just the minimum of everything like we all had to do during that time. But that's just a matter of habit; they haven't had to do so they haven't. I don't know how it would work if they had to get along on nothing, but as far as other thing, I think people are much like they always were. They have always been good people and bad people, most people – there is always some good in some people and some bad in everybody. All the things that happen now happened all the time when I was a child.

EE: What about the younger people?

RM: No. They are pretty much the same, the drugs may be a little different and birth control may be a little different, there may be a little more freedom, sexual freedom, probably not as much as people think because when I was growing up there were certainly a lot more sexual activity than the adults knew about at that time, and there was more drinking and even some – well, I was in junior college in Texarkana, Texas in 1940 and I never did but I know the kids would talk about they had reefers to smoke over there which was marijuana cigarettes, and that was in 1940.

EE: If you could go back and live your life over what would you change?

RM: I think one of the main things I would do that I didn't do is I would keep track of old friends. I've let old friends go and there are people that I think about that I wish I had written and stayed in contact with them. But I've always been a poor letter writer. I move and leave friends and I wish I had stayed in contact, especially with girlfriends that I knew in high school, I think it is important to have a group of friends that go way back. That's one of the reasons why I enjoy Mrs. Maynard so much now, because we go back to 1950 together.

EE: About the Depression, what were you doing, what kind of work?

RM: I wasn't working, I was in school. My father was a school superintendent and when we moved to Waldron he moved there with a magnificent salary of \$250.00 a month and that was a pretty good salary. But the Depression hit Arkansas state government and it

went bankrupt so all state funds were cut off. Well, that \$250.00, half of it was from the state and half of it local, so immediately his salary was cut to \$125.00, but it had to be paid out of local funds and the only way the local funds could be collected was from property taxes and Scott County was a very poor county, the only thing they had there was one lumber mill and the lumber mill had a commissary. The teachers did not get their salaries, daddy didn't get a salary, he got time warrants which, eventually, I suppose, paid off at the full rate, that he could discount them at the bank for about a tenth and I hear mother say many times that there were several years that they had less than \$300.00 per year in cash.

EE: Do you remember much about Hoover?

RM: I can remember one time hearing a radio address by Hoover. I don't remember what it was about. I remember the people saying "That is the President of the United States, that's Mr. Hoover speaking," and I can remember hearing his voice on the radio. That was probably when I was six.

EE: Did your town have a CCC?

RM: Yes, we lived in Waldron, Arkansas and the county was mostly national forests and in the national forest they had these logging roads and the CCC camp was somewhere out close to town, not too far out and I know they worked on these logging roads, they built bridges across some of the little creeks, some of them cemented the bottom of them so you could fork the creeks, they didn't actually build bridges up, some of them they put material down so you could drive across them a lot of the creeks.

EE: What about a WPA?

RM: Yes, everybody laughed at the WPA workers, everybody tried to hide it if anybody in their family had to go on relief, they called it, and everybody laughed at these men, all they ever did was lean on their shovels, they said they never did anything. I'm sure that there were a lot of them that did work and it did give them the chance to at least feed their families. In addition to the WPA the canning kitchens where women could work and they canned up all the surplus food and then they put that out for people for relief for people that didn't have food. And there was a sewing room, too, some women were working in those. I'll swear I don't think they made anything. If they were paid anything it was probably not over \$5.00 or \$10.00 a week at the very most.

EE: Do you think a depression can happen again?

RM: Yes, I surely do, what goes up should come down. The Depression was a worldwide thing. As you know, our money situation is all interrelated more now than it was then. I think it is very likely that we are going to have one eventually. There are a lot of – the government has a lot of programs now to keep it from being as bad probably, however, with this big national debt that we have now, the national debt, is so very big, I don't know if the government will be able to prop it up, if we have a depression, because the

only way before that we got through was the government spent an awful lot of money, they went in debt during the depression in order to get people jobs in order to keep relief type jobs. With our debt the way it is, it is going to be very difficult for the government to bail the people out.

EE: Right now, do you think America is running well?

RM: I think right now there is too much emphasis placed on war, on national defense, I think defense for our country, the best defense we can have is education, the people, children, take care of the people. I don't think you build a good defense by building a lot of guns and a lot of things to kill people with and to sell them all over the world and to spread them all over the world. So to me, our government, the main debt, if from war debt and that seems to me to be totally out of line, all the money that is being spent on military weapons, the weapons and the military in general. To me, this is the dangerous thing, this huge build up of atomic weapons and ballistic missiles, etc.

EE: Have you done everything in your life that you wanted or planned to do?

RM: Well, there are several things I want to do, I don't really like to travel so much but there are some places I want to see. I really want to learn Spanish and I'm still working on learning Spanish and the rate I am going it will take me another couple of years to learn enough to be able to say "Hello" without being scared to death. But, once I do that I want to go down and live in Mexico. But one thing I've always wanted to do that I have never done is go to New England in the fall, see the trees in New England in the fall. I'm planning on going next fall, hope my daughters will go with me. Whether they do or not I decided, okay, next year I'm going to New England the last week in September and the first week in October whether they go or not.

EE: So you have plans for yourself?

RM: Yes, sure.

EE: It doesn't bother you that you are 64?

RM: No, it doesn't bother me that I am 64, the only thing that bothers me is that I'm afraid I will live longer than I want to live. My father is 89 and is relatively healthy. My mother died when she was 82, both of my grandparents were in their 80's when they died, really I don't want to live beyond 80, that's long enough.

EE: You look like you have quite a few years left.

RM: I know it and I'm afraid I'm too healthy to go by the time I am ready to go but I'm really planning on about fifteen more years, I really planning on living fifteen more years.

EE: What advice could you give to young people that would help them to live a better life?

RM: Well, when you look back on your life, so often what you regret are the things you didn't do, not the things you did do, so if you have a dream and it is something you really want to do I would suggest doing it. Don't let parents or your friends or poverty or circumstances prevent you from going after what you really like to do, dream big and then pursue it, you may not ever make it but dream and try for it.

EE: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW