

Interview with
OREN RUESCH

April 10, 1968

**VOICES OF REMEMBRANCE FOUNDATION
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OREN RUESCH

Oren Ruesch was interviewed on April 10, 1968 in St. George, Washington County, Utah by Fielding H. Harris, a representative of the Voices of Remembrance Foundation. He related his personal history of living in various areas of Utah. His wife, Lucy (Graff) Ruesch, also participated.

FH: Would you tell me your full name and your birth date?

OR: I was born in Springdale [Washington County, Utah] on December 29, 1894. My Parents were Godfried and Clara Elizabeth (Hepworth) Ruesch.

FH: What is your full name?

OR: Oren Ruesch.

FH: Can you tell a little bit about your early childhood? What is the first things you can remember?

OR: The first thing that I can remember was when I was about four years old. I was riding a horse from the sorghum mill, down and around through the river to my grandparents' to put the horse in the corral. When we crossed the big ditch she put her head down to drink and I landed in the ditch. [Laughter] I [also] remember when grandfather [Squire] Hepworth [moved to Idaho] and that was when I was about four years old. From then on, my life was an ordinary life. I had fun with my playmates.

FH: What did ordinary mean in those days? Did you have chores to do?

OR: Yes. We always had chores to do.

FH: What was your home life like? What were your chores?

OR: Dad had a small farm and I had to help take care of [the] farm from the time I was big enough to handle a hoe. When I [was] eight or nine years old, I had the milking to do along with my brothers. I was the oldest in my family. I had a happy home.

FH: How many [were] in your family?

OR: There were twelve [children] and I was the oldest.

FH: How many boys and how many girls?

OR: [There were] nine boys and three girls. I had a boyfriend, "Kay" [Kendall] Gifford; that was what I always called him. We were always together whenever it was possible. On Sundays, after church, we would get a crowd together and go out to somebody's place, usually down at my home, and play games and have a lot of fun. Sometimes we would walk to Oak Creek, which was about two miles above Springdale, and play in the barn. They had big barns that were full of hay and were a nice place to play. The old folks there [were] never mad at us that I ever heard about.

When I [was] old enough to begin to work, I carried the [United States] mail from Springdale to La Verkin and Toquerville. [These communities are in Washington County, Utah.] Finally, I found a girlfriend, as things usually go.

FH: How old were you?

OR: I started going with this girl when I was eighteen. She was the same age [as me]. Her name was Alberta Flanigan. Her parents were David A. and Clorinda Malvine (Stout) Flanigan. We [were] married April 15, 1914. We had [to do a] lot of hard work to make life go. [Inaudible] We had eight boys. Our oldest boy [Bertrand Ruesch] has been a bishop. My next two [Lyman Ruesch and Jack Ruesch] have been Sunday school superintendents. My boy here in town, Jack [Ruesch], has been in [the] Mutual [Improvement Association] and is with the [Boy] Scouts [of America] at the present. All of the boys have been pretty well active in The Church [of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.]

FH: How much schooling did you get?

OR: I had an eighth grade education.

FH: Was that about usual in your day?

OR: Yes. That was all of the education I [received]. I went [through] all the grades. I never missed any.

FH: Did you have any physical handicaps growing up? Were you healthy and well?

OR: I was always well. I never ever went to a doctor until I was twenty-four years old. When I was old enough to go to [the] Mutual [Improvement Association], I was put in as the secretary. I had that job until after I was married. I [did] ward teaching with my father when I was old enough. I've been ward teaching ever since.

FH: That is a lot of years to be a ward teacher.

OR: I don't think that I've missed more than two years in that whole time when I wasn't a ward teacher. I've always liked it. Most people whom I have visited have always acted like they were glad to have me come back.

FH: Do you have an outstanding teacher, either at school or at church, [who] you would like to mention?

OR: I had some pretty good ones. My last schoolteacher was her last husband.

FH: Your wife's last husband?

OR: Yes.

LR: [Inaudible] Jonathan McManus.

OR: He was the one who finally got me through the eighth grade! [Laughter] I had some good teachers. I had Robert P. Woodbury. I was just a [youngster] when I was in his school, but he was [a] good [teacher]. Mattie Ruesch, from here, was one of my best [teachers]. Miss Clarissa Cannon was among the best of my teachers. I really enjoyed them. [They were] wonderful. I [can't] tell you what grades I was in when they were my teachers. [Laughter]

FH: [Can you] remember any adventurous experiences when you were young?

OR: [Inaudible]

FH: Can you remember any floods or heavy storms [while] living in the area?

OR: Yes. We had one flood that was one of the largest floods that ever had come down the Virgin River to date. [The river] came up [high] and my father went down to the yards that were down on the bank of the river. Around the lower end of our barn, he waded in the water up under his arms. He had to turn the cattle loose so they could get away.

There was a story that took place that night. There was a horse that was in the stable and it was a long, tight stable. That horse got out of his stable. The only hole that was in the stable was where they poked the hay into the manger [and it] was about two feet [tall].

FH: [It was only] about a two-foot square hole?

OR: It was the length of the stable.

FH: Oh, I see.

OR: It was only two feet high [but] the horse got out of that stable that night. He went up to my uncle's place and whinnied. [Two uncles, John and Walter Ruesch, were

neighbors. — Added by J. L. Crawford during editing.] [My uncle] said that he heard him and he thought that it sounded like their saddle horse. They went out [to see] and there he was. He was perfectly dry. The stable that he was in had water six or eight feet deep in it when they got down there. He had to have gone out that hole. There was no other opening in it. The door was still shut and fastened.

Yes, we battled floods all of my life to keep water in ditches. I remember once, I went to work in [Zion National] Park on the second of January. There had been a flood [that came] down and washed the road out. They wanted people to get in there and help [clean it up]. There was a slide [that] came down and shut the river off [and] washed the road away. I [was] on that job for fourteen hours a day. There was ice and water floating down the river. I had to stoop over to roll a rock out to get the water channeled back in where it belonged. Water poured down over my back down over my head, [inaudible] whole lot of others.

I worked on the trails. I helped build the portal to the south entrance of [the Zion National Park] tunnel. I helped build all of the big walls from that tunnel down to the bottom of the canyon. I helped build all of the culverts from where the cable used to be. I don't know if you have been in there and [know where that was]. [I built] from there clear up to the end of the road. I helped build the West Rim Trail, and the East Rim [Trail] too. The East Rim had been made after a fashion, and they ran cattle over it for years. I have had a little experience with the river and the building of the park.

FH: The water of the river was a blessing and sometimes a hazard.

OR: It was terrible. They didn't have a way to build dams to make them stay. Usually every flood that would come would take out the dam. We would have to build it again. I helped build a lot of them.

Like I said, I married this girl who was a very fine woman. We had our ups and downs. The going wasn't always smooth. Work was scarce. We tried to farm and get along the best we could. I've spent several summers working in [the] sawmills. She would go along with me so that we were together. I worked [in] a sawmill for one man, David W. Lemmon, for four or five summers. Then I worked on another one out on Mt. Trumbull [in Arizona] for [Walter] Stout for two summers there, [followed by] two or three summers on Cedar Mountain [Iron County, Utah].

I had one experience when we were working on Mt. Trumbull. We had a boy [Dick Ruesch] who wasn't well when he was born. He had a growth in his throat. We administered to him. He had twenty-four convulsions in one night. He had this growth or something in his throat, we administered to him and he bled. [When it was over], his ears bothered him awfully bad.

When we were out on the mountain, he was two years old. We got up one morning and my wife noticed swelling on the back of his ear. I told my boss, "We have to get this boy to a doctor." [Inaudible] tank and it had a hole in it. The gas had leaked out. There wasn't another car on the mountain. The only thing [available] was a team and wagon. [It] would have been a three-day journey. We said, "We can't wait three days. That [swelling] has to be lanced." We felt his head and there was a soft place on the back of his ear. Brother Stout and his wife and my wife and I went into the house and wrapped up the boy on her lap. Walter [took] a hold of his hands and his wife [took] a hold of his feet. They just held him so that he couldn't move. I had a good sharp pocketknife, I never carried any other kind. This one had a blade about that long.

FH: About three and a half to four inches long.

OR: Yes. I wrapped the knife in cloth so there was only about that much of a blade showing, so that I couldn't make a mistake and injure him. I also used a razor to help cut it. We lanced it and [the swelling] was green when it opened. The stink was terrible. We cleaned it out, [put] a piece of gauze into it, and it never did close up again. It healed like that; only he had ear trouble from then until he died.

FH: How old was he at that time?

OR: [He was] two years old. He died at [age] eleven.

FH: I see.

OR: Another [fellow] came out on the mountain after a load of lumber. He had his front-load wagon loaded and was going to pull a back wagon. He had a four-horse outfit. He [was] down guiding the shoe over the winch on the front wagon [and] he missed the winch. His horse pulled it [and] he broke his collarbone. He was eighty-miles from nowhere. [Laughter] Walter Stout and I took him to the house and we set his shoulder and bound him up [with] tape. He stayed there until we [went] home so he could get his outfit home. We had two other fellows that had quinsy or throat trouble and we lanced both of their throats.

FH: [That] sounds like quinsy. [Quinsy is a painful pus-filled inflammation of the tonsils, usually caused by a complication in tonsillitis.]

OR: Anybody who had it couldn't breathe. [Inaudible] One of my boys, laid [Ruesch], who is next to the youngest [of those] that [are] alive, was living in Virgin. [He] was walking around on stilts. He attempted to kick a hoop off from the gate out in front so he could get out. He missed it, tipped over backwards, and broke his wrist. I set his wrist and told him I was going to take him to the doctor. He said, "No. I don't want to go to the doctor. You and Uncle Alma [Flanigan] can administer to me." We set it and when he took [off] the splints he was getting along [well].

He went out to a party one night, the girls pushed him over, and broke it again. I said, "This spells a trip to the doctor." He said, "No. I won't go to the doctor." He was eight or ten years old. I said, "This is going to hurt this time." I got a pushstick board, and [the wrist] was bent down like that. I [found] a pretty stiff board and put it along that one wooden bend, and another one of the other side. I said, "We're going to have to do this up good and tight," and we did. He is alright.

FH: That was sure something.

OR: I have had both of my wrists broken. [Laughter] We had an old fellow in Springdale who set [one of] my wrists. For the other one, I went to a doctor but it is not straight.

FH: The old man fixed it better than the one the doctor did!

OR: Yes. My wife and I built our home in Virgin up on the hillside. We stayed there [inaudible].

FH: Tell about building your home. Did you do most of the work? How did you get it built?

OR: My wife and I and the boys did all of it.

FH: What materials did you use?

OR: Lumber.

FH: Did you get the lumber locally? Where did it come from?

OR: I made it myself.

FH: You made your own lumber? You sawed the trees down?

OR: Yes. I owned a sawmill. I sawed the lumber for the home. I worked for a fellow [in] a shingle mill to get my shingles. [For] part of the lumber that was put into the house, I worked for Walter Stout, and [received] lumber for [my pay]. I was sick. I had an operation on my back, and while I was in the hospital with that, I had a terrible condition with my stomach. The doctor thought that I had ulcers, but the day before I left the hospital they took more x-rays. There were no ulcers. I [have] had trouble with my stomach from then on until now. [Laughter] That was in 1950.

I went to Salt Lake [City, Salt Lake County, Utah] to have another operation, gland trouble. I couldn't get out and work like I had [before]. That ditch in Virgin,

the canal we called it, could break without any help. [Laughter] The last day [of] work that I ever did on that canal was on a Sunday. I went up a ditch and it was broken. I knew it was before I found it. [Laughter] I worked and stopped it with the water in [the ditch].

FH: How big of a stream was [it]? [Was it] a large one?

OR: It was [water that] was in the North Creek. I don't know whether you have been up on Kolob [that] way or not. It wasn't too big of a stream, but it was too big to try to stop with a shovel.

FH: Was it about three or four second-feet of water?

OR: I don't know. It was bigger than the streams [that] we have around town, probably four or five times [bigger].

In my time, I have worked a little in the church. I was a ward clerk for about two or three years and a Sunday school superintendent.

FH: Where were you a ward clerk?

OR: In Virgin.

FH: Where were you a Sunday school superintendent?

OR: In Virgin.

FH: [The] same place.

OR: I was an MIA [Mutual Improvement Association] superintendent in Virgin and in Springdale. I was a counselor to others who were superintendents. I was on a stake mission for two and a half years.

FH: Where did you do the most of your missionary work?

OR: In Virgin.

FH: Right there in Virgin?

OR: Yes.

FH: Were there quite a few people there who didn't belong to the church at that time?

OR: No. There were only two men and a woman and they were still Catholics when we left there. [Laughter] I worked in the temple as a night watchman and cleaning

up for a year and a half. I had a stroke and had to leave there. I couldn't carry it on.

[The] last year my wife [was] sick. She never was well or really healthy. She [was] sick and went to a clinic in Salt Lake [City] to find out what was the trouble. They never did tell her anything. She came back down here, and we were

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[END OF RECORDING ONE.]

OR: — in law, Jack's wife. They live up the street here. She went back to see the doctor and said, "My mother-in-law is really sick and it is [strange] that you can't find out what is the matter." She told him how she was acting. He said, "You bring her back. We will x-ray her and see if we can find something." They did. Her liver was hard and it was cancer. When the doctor took her in to operate on her, he said, "I just don't feel good about this at all." But she wanted to be operated on; she wanted to find out what was wrong if she could. I took her in. She was operated on the third of August and on the seventh, she died.

[There is a] good story about her that I would like to tell. She was in Flagstaff [Arizona] and her feet always bothered her by burning. While there, [her feet were burning] to where she just couldn't hardly stand it. She couldn't keep her feet in bed at all, winter or summer. One day we went to church and she had one of my little grandsons take a note she had written to the bishop. He wrote on the note, "Meet me in the foyer [when] the meeting is [over]." We [did and] talked with the bishop. He said, "Come to my office in the morning at twelve o'clock." She had prayed and prayed that she could be guided to something that would help. Always the answer came back, "Talk to your bishop." She went down to his office [the] next Monday morning. She said, "I hated to bother you. I know you are a [very] busy man." He said, "My people are my first consideration." She told him that she had been to doctors and none of them could tell her what was wrong. They all would tell her that she checked out perfect, as far as they could tell. [The bishop] said, "You have tried all the doctors that you could find. Now, why can't we try the Lord's way? You write to all of your children and ask them to fast and pray and we will fast and pray, too. We will be [out] to your place next Sunday." After church was over, the bishop and one of his counselors came and administered to her. We knew it was [the] nerves in her feet that were bothering her. The bishop was [inaudible] in the sealing of the anointing. His counselor did the anointing. That night her feet never burned. She only had it [happen] once in a great while. This was a Christmas time [in] 1960.

FH: What was the bishop's name?

OR: [Rhoten].

FH: Bishop [Nello Rhoten].

OR: I can't think of his first name.

FH: Which ward? Where was this?

OR: [It was the] Flagstaff Ward. He was one of the best bishops that I ever knew. She was healed of that. She didn't die with her feet burning. They had the Flagstaff Ward and the East Flagstaff Ward.

FH: That was the proper way to approach it, wasn't it?

OR: It was. We had done everything that we could for her. I never figured that I would outlive her but she has been dead for nearly two years. I married her [alluding to Lucy (Graff) McManus Ruesch seated next to him] one year after she died. It was August 5, 1967. She has to put up with me now. [Laughter]

FH: From what I hear, she is not unhappy about that!

OR: I hope you isn't. I'm not!

LR: She isn't.

OR: Like her, I have a testimony of this gospel. I know it is true. I have never seen Christ, I have never seen any angels, but I have had enough experience through my use of the priesthood that it has to be true. I have administered to my children and to my wife. She was sick one night and wanted to be administered to. I said, "I don't know who I would go and get at this time of night." She said, "You can do it." So I did and she went to sleep and slept the rest of the night. I have administered to my children when they were burning up with fever. It would go away just like that, so I know there is something to it. I have worked in the church all of my life. I guess that is about all I can think of.

FH: Is there any kind of counsel or advice that a man of your experience would like to pass on now to those who come after you? What would you counsel your descendants to do if you could tell them what you feel after all this experience?

OR: I [had] my boys all together the day that we buried their mother. I told them, "There isn't a thing in the world that would please your mother more than [for you] to do all of the work that you can in the church." They have all been church workers, every one of them. I lost one boy at eighteen, one at eleven, and our last baby that was born to us was only two weeks old [when he died]. We had eight boys. That would be my advice to my [children] and to anybody else's [children]; live the gospel and do a better job of it than I did.

[END OF RECORDING TWO. END OF INTERVIEW.]