

Oral History Of Erma Christiansen Box
As Told By Erma Christiansen Box

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Introduction: Erma Christiansen Box, who is my great grandma was born in November of 1910 in Emery, Utah at her home. She now lives in Ferron, Utah next door to me. This is an account of her life history, taken on April 26, 1997 at her home.

Grandma, when and where were you born: "I was born in November of 1910, in my home in Emery, we didn't have hospitals near by back then."

Have you lived in any other countries during your life: "I've live in Utah my entire life, except for a few months that me and Grandpa lived in Arizona on the job, and a week or so in Idaho."

What nationality did your family come from: " Well I'm Danish, both my parents are Danish."

What type of job did your father have: " Well most of the jobs people had were sheep herding. I remember when he would get the wagon and take us up on the hill with him."

What is the first house you can remember: "It was in Emery and it had two rooms: one was a bedroom and the other one was a kitchen, the children slept in the attic."

Did you have the convinces of indoor plumbing or electricity: "No we did not have indoor plumbing nor electricity. That didn't come about until I was near sixteen. We ha a two-seater outhouse in the back yard, and it always had a Sears magazine in it to keep us company."

How did your family heat your house: " a coal stove that kept the house pretty warm."

How did your family keep your food cool: " Well we didn't have a fridge but we had a cooler, well anyway we called it a "cooler", It was a metal box with water dripping on it that we kept in the cellar."

Did your family have a telephone: "No"

What was your favorite childhood memory: "I think it was when my mother's family would get together and play the Organ and the fiddle, they liked to make music."

Did you go to church: "Yes, I went every Sunday to the old church in Emery (the one next to the Stake Center). We were all Mormons."

How did you dress when you were a child: " Well we didn't wear pants, we wore dresses all the time. It was a pain when you had to ride the horses out to take hay. In the winter time we always had to wear long, lace, long, long woolen underwear; kind of like long-johns. And we had long stockings and you'd pull up the stockings and shove the underwear down in them and it was all bunchy an ugly. When you got old enough, you rolled your socks down and your underwear up, when you got out of your mother's sight."

Were you in fashion: "Was I in fashion? Well I looked like everybody else if that was fashion, I always had a new dress for Easter and Christmas."

What was your favorite meal: "Potatoes and gravy, and candy. I loved candy and I always snuck around eating it."

Did you ever get any flowers and what were your favorite kind: I never got flowers from a boy until I was married, except for the kind the school boys would pick for us. I loved lilacs and I still do."

Grandma did you have any chores to do: "You bet, as soon as I was old enough to milk a cow I was stuck with that, I had to milk every morning before I left for school."

What were you like as a kid, were you wild: "No, I went to church every Sunday and helped my mother. I don't think my dad would have let me even if I wanted to be. There weren't many wild people when I was young."

How did you get to school: "We walked, it wasn't very far, about ten blocks."

What did you do for fun when you were young: " During the Summer nights we would play on the road. As soon as some one finished their supper, they'd come out on the road and make a call and we'd all come running out. We played run sheep run, hide and go seek, and kick the can. If it was really dark out side we'd build a fire. During the day we'd play ball, like your kick ball."

Did you celebrate Halloween: " Yes, but we didn't go trick or treating, we would get a bunch of girls together and we'd all hold hands and run into the front door of some ones house and out the back. there'd be about fifteen of us. Bu

that was a lot nicer than what the boys would do. They'd tip over outhouses an other nasty boy stuff."

What were some family traditions you remember: "I don't think we were too much for tradition, me and my family. We always had Christmas, all the relatives would come down and we'd eat turkey, and as soon as that was gone, we'd go back home and eat candy until we could die. My mother and dad only let us on Christmas."

Did you have traditions such as Santa Claus: "Not like today, but some secret little elf always came and brought us gifts. Also since we didn't have electricity, our Christmas tree was lit by candles, there was a small wick set inside a tiny candle holder that would hook right on to a limb, one time I was in a very pretty black velvet dress and I was reaching up to light a candle and a candle from underneath burnt a hole in my dress. They were very dangerous I don't know how we ever let anyone light those things. We did not have an Esater bunny, we always made our own baskets and colored eggs, then on Easter Sunday after church, the family would go on a walk and eat a picnic, then the kids would find a hill and roll their eggs down it."

Did you sew or make your own clothes: "Yes, my mother always did an we helped. She knew how to sew and had a sewing machine before she got married"

What was soap like when you were young: "Well we had soap like you do today. It was white and it smelled nice. But Grandma made lye soap sometimes for washing other things besides the body. She would use fat from the pig and boil it and make up soap, and boy it stunk."

What were schools like back in your youth: "Pretty much like yours, except all eight grades meet together when I was younger. We learned how to read and write, and we always had paper and pencils, we never used a slate. When you got old enough they would give you a little ink bottle and a pen to use."

How many years of education do you have: "I've only went to the eighth grade, I never attended high school and after that I got married and never wanted to attend college. Back then not many girls went to college because not many girls had jobs that was for the men all the girls got married."

How much did candy and those types of things cost: "Well the first candy bar I can remember seeing was when I worked down at the Cafe, I was about fifteen, and they were a nickel. Babe Ruth bars were very popular back then and they've had Hershey bars for as long as I can remember."

Did you and your friends ever go down town for a drink: "I never bought a pop for myself until Pepsi came out and then we became the Pepsi generation and that's still all I drink today."

What talents did you have: "Well I took piano lessons for a while, but one time I had to play in mutual, and it scared me to death so that was the end of the piano, and I don't know how to play anymore."

What subjects did you like to study: "Well let's see, we had Arithmetic, Penmen Ship, Geography and History, but I loved Arithmetic."

What did you look like as a teenager: "I was the typical, blue-eyed blond. Well not actually blond, but for my family who all had very dark hair I was definitely blond. Probably about the color your hair turns during the Summer. The fad back then was a skinny waste kind of like a "Leave It To Beaver" look alike, but that was more when I was a mother. (Me and my grandmother are the only two in my family with naturally light hair everyone else has very dark brown hair, we don't know where we get it from. Also my grandmother still has blond in her hair and she has never dyed it before.)

Did you ever have a bike: "Heavens no, hardly anyone owned a bike, so when I got married that's the first thing we bought for our children, and I still have that bike." (This bike has three wheels, one large one in the front and two smaller ones in the back, it has a very large round seat that reminds me of a tractor seat and a basket hooked on to the

back that I can sit in. This is the grandchildren's favorite toy, along with the horn attached to the front.)

Did your family own an automobile: "My dad bought a brand new Chev' Sedan it was a 1927 and it had never been used. It cost 1,000 dollars.

Was that a lot back then: "Yes but at that time every one was buying a car. My father had never driven a car before, he went over to Salina bought the car, the salesman, Mr. Bird

took my father around the block in it and showed him how it worked then sent him home over Salina canyon."

What type of movies did you like to see: "The first type of movies I can remember were black-an white westerns. They were silent films so if you were too young to read your mother had to whisper it to you."

Did you go see movies often: "Well they weren't very expensive, only about a nickel or dime, but there wasn't a movie house in Emery so we either had to find a ride, which wasn't easy or miss out and a lot of times we just missed out."

What radio stations did you listen to: "I didn't really listen to any stations until I was married because that's when electricity and money became more abundant. But I liked to listen to KSL, sometimes there was music sometimes they'd have a play on. When I got married we'd go over to the neighbors an listen to Amos and Andy they were famous back then."

Did you every buy anything with your own money that you still have or remember: "Well I bought this very expensive dress. Some people from Richfield came over and they were selling clothes and they set them up in the Cafe I worked in. I feel in love with this one dress that was a rose color and a Ivory. The skirt was rose colored and it was pleated all around. It had a gorgette neck and embrodry on the cuffs and neck. It had a little rose colored jacket and boy it was fancy. It cost me 50 dollars which was outlandish back then.

Which wars can you remember living through: "All of them I guess. World War 1 and 2, Vietnam, Korea."

What were they like: "Like they are now, during world war one, we had to ration everything, kind of the same with world war two, during the Vietnam and Korean wars we didn't really have to save as much. It was really hard to let all the boys go off to war and many girls sent of young husbands."

What kind of weaponry did they use that was different from today: "Well all of them I suppose, but I think the airplanes have changed the most. They had these funny airplanes with two little wings, not like the bomber jets they have to day, but they still used them."

What was it like to live through the Great Depression: "Well I had just gotten married and didn't really feel the affects of it until after I was married. Nobody could get a job

anywhere no matter how trained you were there just wasn't jobs to be had."

How old were you when the Depression hit: "Well let's see the stock market crashed in '29 so I would of had to of been 19."

What major changes happened from then to now: "I'd say electricity, that brought about the Radio, T.V., Refrigerators, and all those convinces I use now, also the thing I likes most about it was we didn't have to use a hand held washer anymore, or ring out our clothes through the ringer which took about ten minutes for each piece My family bought a washer and dryer which was the best thing we ever bought."

Were you glad you were born then or do you wish you could have been born now with all of the modern convinces: "I'm glad I was born then, because I've seen many changes and inventions which has been fascinating to watch. All you'll ever see probably is the technology change. I've went from pioneers to now. My mother and father rode to the Manti temple, which took about a day back then, in a horse and wagon, now almost everyone has a car."

Do you remember your first date, was it with Grandpa Box: "I don't remember going on a first date I don't ever think I did. I didn't date much during high school because my other always needed my help, and back in those days we were very obedient."

When did you get married: "The spring of '30 in April, to tell you the truth I can't remember the date anymore, I'm getting old and things like that I just can't remember anymore."

Where did you meet Grandpa Box: "Well when I stayed home from high school to help my mother I got a job at the Cafe, I decided to go back to school my Senior year, I bought myself a pair of brown penny loafers with the money I had earned from the Cafe on the first day of school I came home with my shoes muddy and my dad was mad that I hadn't taken care of my nice shoes that had costed so much. It made me very mad because I had stayed home to help my mother, and had bought the shoes with my own money that I decided to leave and I went to Salt Lake to find a job."

What was his first job: "He was the manager of the nursing home here in Ferron, and he did that for many years until political parties that controlled the county changed and he was layed off for a time, he then did odds and ends for jobs, he was really good with his hands, he was a great carpenter. Later when the kids were grown up we bought a nursing home in Cedar and ran that for a time." (My dad remembers going to visit them and riding the electric chair hooked on to the railing of the stair case up, and down, I didn't know those really existed.)

Where did you live when you were first married: "At first we lived in Salt Lake, but when Varian got the job at the nursing home, we moved to Ferron."

What was your first home like, and where was it: "Our first home was a chicken coop a few blocks up from your house. It had two rooms that Grandpa fixed up and we lived that way for a while, gradually Grandpa built more and more on, by adding a cellar in the back and he also started to dig out a basement, we also finished one more bedroom. We lived there until the kids were grown and we moved down to Cedar to run the nursing home there. When we moved back to Ferron. We bought a double wide trailer, and moved it to a piece of land closer into town and I've lived there since."

How many children did you have: "We had four daughters; Joyce, JoAnn, Connie and Mary. I think it's just a thing in this family to have all girls, look at your dad he has five, Varian should feel lucky he only had four, we don't even have that many boy grandkids."

Where do all your children live now: "Joyce my oldest daughter, and her husband Orvel live in Morre, JoAnn and Dean live in Ferron, Connie lives in Salt Lake, and Mary and Gary live in Oregon."

How many Grandchildren, Great Granchildren and Great,Great Grandchildren do you have: "I have twelve grandchildren, Cynthia, Kern, Blake, Dixie, Varian, Teresa, Shane, Betsy, Dustin, Anthony, Tammy, and Byron. Seventeen great grandchildren; McCall, You, Mckenzie, Kisty, Natasha, Nate,

Nicole, Eric, Kristen, Danielle, Samantha, Nikki, Tony, K.C., Lori, Brooklyn, and Korin, one ^{great-}great grandchild Ridge Neilson, and one on the way."

What do you think your greatest accomplishment as a mother was: "Well I look at all of my daughters families and I guess it would be that I raised them right with manners and respect that they could have such nice families and husbands."

What can you remember most about being a mother: "Trying to keep all four girls clean while living in a two bedroom home. I was such a stickler for cleanliness, so when any of the children got dirty I would have to wash them immediately, I could not stand to have dirt anywhere, It must have been very annoying to my children that there mom wouldn't even let them play in the sand box for more than two minutes without coming to wipe their faces and hands."

Do you regret doing or not doing anything in your life: "No, the only thing I really regret is not going to high school, not just for the learning, but for the social part too. I know that all you kids go for these days, but I miss never going to a Junior prom or hanging out with my friends. It seems like I skipped from Elementary into motherhood."

What have you liked most about being a grandma: "I love my family to be all near to me, and except for Mary, Gary and their children your all right here."

Do you have any memorable stories to tell me: "I'll tell you about when your grandma got married. She was sixteen, and your grandpa was in the service so he was about twenty-one. She fell in love with him and came and asked if she could marry him, well I naturally said no, young girls at that time were getting married around the age of nineteen to twenty-one. I also wanted her to go to high school and have the experiences and education that I never did. But JoAnn had fallen in love with Dean and the ring he had given her, it was probably the latest talk with all her and her friends. So me and grandpa consented. Your grandpa has proven to be the best man she could have married. He always comes down when I need him is excellent to JoAnn and a great Grandfather. Huh?"

Was grandpa in the Military, did he get drafted during a war: "No we were very lucky grandpa never got drafted for some odd reason, so he was there to help support us during the war, so I never had to go to work like many women, which I was very thankful for."

What did you like best about grandpa: "His heart he was the most loving man I've ever met. He had a love in his heart for everyone and little kids adored, which was quite the opposite of me because everyone was scared of my cleanliness. He also could do just about anything with his hands. One time your dad had an outlandish three day party while Dean and JoAnn were gone, well during this party the head board to your grandma and grandpa's bed was broken, so

Kern called grandpa and they made a new one before your grandma and grandpa got home. Since your grandpa never had any sons him and Kern were very close, in fact your father wanted to change his last name to Box to carry on the family name, and he thought very seriously about it too.

Do you have any family living close to you: "Yes my sister Euphima lives next door and uncle Merlin lives in Emery the rest of my brother and sisters, four brothers and five sisters, live in Salt Lake or up around there.

How often do you have reunions: "Well every may we go meet down on Justesen flat, that's the Christiansen side, and there are about close to one hundred and fifty people there. Each year a family takes a turn being in charge last year was our families turn to run the show. Family reunion time is my funnest time of the year, for a widow who lives alone seeing all your brothers and sisters again and their families really makes me feel happy."

My grandmother is a very special person to me though she can't remember much anymore learning about her life history was very interesting.

She has always been a second grandma who lived just down the block. I wish I would have done this interview sooner so I could have written down all the stories she has told me over the years, that she can't remember now.

There are many experiences I remember with my grandma that I will tell my children, like going down to grandmas to

make oatmeal apricot preserves cookies. Or like cleaning her house with her which is already spotless, I have never vacuumed a floor that I haven't heard any dirt pick up, except for at my grandmas. She is so clean that she cleans her house before we go to help her clean her house so it's clean when we get there. Or like the time she got out all of the empty medicine bottles out of her cabinet so me and my cousin Betsy could play Pharmacy. Grandma always had apples at her house because she had an orchard in her back yard. We would make apple sauce together and have it half eaten by the time we were ready to bottle it.

My grandma has taught me many things in life such as: always treat your elders with respect, she lives a kind of old-fashioned life style, and treating adults with dignity was always something you did you never sasssed or disobeyed you parents. She has also taught me to be grateful for everything, because she lived during the great depression my grandma learned to save and make use of everything they had, now little things like elastic bands cardboard boxes, or clothes that do not fit are saved and organized for a later use.

My grandma has started a tradition of making every girl who is going to get married a quilt, so a few years ago the family decided to make my grandma a quilt we each cross stiched our hands on a quilt box, wrote our names and then put them all together, that is her most prized possession. I

hope by the time I get married my grandma will still be able to make me a quilt.

My grandma has always been a special person in my life and will be forever. She can always make me happy no matter what, and the little things she does are what make her so special, like calling me after a hard day at school and asking me if I would like to come over for fresh baked brownies. Also like inviting all of her friends over on prom night and having me come over so they can ow! and ah! over my dress.

I hope someday I can look back on my life like my grandma nd have no regrets, but accomplished many things. I hope my grandma is around for a little longer, so I can finish the rest of this legacy.