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School House Fire

Suzanne Taggart

suzanne.taggart7@gmail.com

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Duane George Chadwick
North Logan, Utah
November 14, 2018

School House Fire

Personal Experience Narrative

Informant: Duane George Chadwick is my maternal grandfather. He was born in La Grande, Oregon in the year 1925. His parents moved to Weiser, Idaho when he was very young and purchased a farm. Their home did not have running water or electricity until he was 14 years old. Many of his memorable stories happened on and around his family's farm.

Context: My grandfather currently lives in North Logan, Utah. He has always been a great story teller. Often, when he tells his stories, they are told so vividly that I can easily imagine what it was like to live on his family's farm, far away from civilization. He really loves his parents and siblings and has great respect for them. This is obvious, as he tells his stories which are filled with love for his family and the past. They were not wealthy farmers, but their intelligence and hard work made their home life very rich. Many people of all ages, have heard and enjoyed my grandpa's stories. He has told his stories at various church activities, the Lyric Theater, at Utah State University, as well as other venues. His stories kept his audiences captivated as he accompanied his memories with musical renditions on his musical saw, harmonica, guitar, and piano. Now, that he is on the brink of 94 years old, he usually tells his stories to his family. His descendants gather together and enjoy him sharing his memories from his colorful and powerful past.

Text: We lived eight miles out of town on a farm and our school was a one room school house, with a traditional school house bell on top of the building that would ring and be heard for a mile away and tell people, "You've got to get going or you'll be late for school." And so on. Each year before school started, we needed to go clean up the yard. There was no grass growing, there was no water, except what rain came and so the grass grew and then died in the fall. When we went back to school in the fall it was full of cheat grass and weeds, tumble weeds mostly and we had to go clean the school yard. So, my dad and I went up there and mowed the weeds and then raked them into piles and as we got them raked, we set a match to them to get rid of the weeds and the very first pile we lit a match to was right next to the barn, this wasn't

too smart, I guess. Anyway, the minute the weeds caught fire, a miniature cyclone developed right in the middle of the fire and scattered the burning tumble weeds in all directions. The tumble weeds jumped through the fence and caught the dry pasture of our neighbors on fire. Moments later the barn was on fire, then it caught the coal house which was full of winters coal and then it burned to the wall of the brick school where it died. We had to build a new barn and coal shed. Thankfully, the school house was untouched.

Texture: Grandpa was in his favorite brown chair and he was very relaxed. He tells his stories like they happened yesterday. I could tell by his demeanor that this was a very frightening experience to him and his father.

Suzanne Olya Taggart
Utah State University
ENGL 2210
Lynne McNeill
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