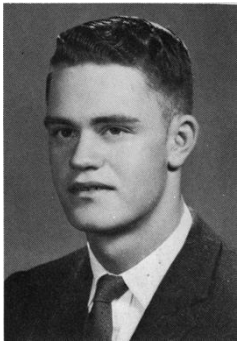




THE WAR BABIES OF WORLAND: ORAL HISTORIES FROM THE CLASS OF 1960



RAY GOTFREDSON

Extended conversation after videotaping

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This transcript expands from the video due to additional conversations.

Good morning. This is **Laine Bailey DeFreece** on August 1, 2022, at 9:30 AM. I'm in Denver, Colorado. Would you share where you are as you are making this recording?

Ray Gotfredson: Sure, I'm in Cedaredge, Colorado, on the Western Slope of Colorado, not too far from the Utah border.

Laine: Would you state your full name?

Ray: Ray Gotfredson.

Laine: Was there another name that you were known by during your days in Worland?

Ray: No.

GOTFREDSONS MOVED TO THERMOPOLIS IN 1937, RINKERS/BINKERS (MOTHER) ARRIVED IN WYOMING IN 1881

Laine: If you weren't born in Worland, how old were you when your family arrived, and when you left Worland?

Ray: My mother's family, the Rinkers, came to the United States from Germany to Pennsylvania, then Virginia, then Kaycee in 1881, a year after Wyoming became a state. My grandparents were married in Kaycee in 1920 and moved to Thermopolis, WY, in late 1920. My mother, Gladys Marie Gotfredson, was born in Thermopolis in 1921. My dad, Willard P. Gotfredson, moved to Thermopolis from South Dakota in 1937 and married Mom in 1938. I started the first grade in Worland, then went to the Red Bank area south of The Sleep, where I went through elementary school. I did not return to Worland until high school in 1956.

Laine: Was it your father's work that brought you to Worland or the schooling situation?

Ray: It was my father's work that brought us to Worland. When I was in Thermopolis, in kindergarten, he drove a truck for an oil company hauling oil. But, then we came to Worland and lived north of Worland while he worked as a farmer.

Laine: Was he a German from the Volga River area like many farmers in Worland?

Ray: I'm Danish, not German. People have asked me why my last name isn't spelled "sen," like the Danes — the Swedes and the Norwegians use "son," like I do. The spelling changed when they went through Ellis Island. They didn't speak English. I think their name originally was spelled Godferdsen.

CHILDHOOD: SIGHTS, SOUNDS, SMELLS

Laine: When you were living in Worland, were you in town, or were you in the countryside?

Ray: We were about seven miles north of Worland on a small farm. When the first grade started, I rode the school bus into Worland to the Watson Building. After the first grade, we moved again.

Laine: What do you remember about the neighborhood of your farm? What are some of the pleasant things you think about as you look back on those years?

Ray: Probably the most vivid was when I used to ride this old workhorse, and I fell off the silly thing and landed on a pile of logs and broke my collarbone. Then when I rode the school bus, there were a couple of girls who were neighbors, and they were older, maybe freshmen in high school, and they were always hugging and kissing on me, which I hated, so I still remember that. But I got over not liking that. [Laughs] It turns out that Cathy [Salzman Gotfredsen] and I rode the same bus, and neither of us remember each other.

Laine: Did you spend much time in town so that you have memories of the downtown Main Street stores?

Ray: Not at that age, I didn't. But I remember when we would go where my grandmother lived in Thermopolis and go to the swimming pool at the Star Plunge.

Laine: You mentioned that you moved to the Ten Sleep area. With Ten Sleep being at the foot of the Big Horn Mountains, I'm sure, the Big Horn Mountains and the ranch country around Ten Sleep that it became part of your memories, too.

Knew Bruce Helmer, whose testimony jailed the Spring Creek Raiders

Ray: Absolutely. Prior to me starting second grade, my folks had a sawmill on the Big Horn Mountains near Onion Gulch. One of my strongest memories was finding arrowheads. Tolman's had an area up on a ridge where they would bring the sheep in. [Dee Dee, or Deanna, Tolman, one of their daughters, was a classmate.] When they would work those sheep, it would stir up the soil, and then I could go out there and find arrowheads until I couldn't find any more. If they brought the sheep back in, their hooves would turn up the soil enough so that I could find a few more arrowheads. That was a big thing. Last I know, my arrowheads were in a green can in my mom's house. They got lost sometime after I left home. One of our neighbors was Bruce Helmer. He was a sheepherder and lived in a sheep wagon on top of a hill. I got very acquainted with him. But he was involved in the sheep and cattle war – the Spring Creek Raid — He was just an eight-year-old boy then, but he remembered that war.

Laine: For those in Worland who might be listening and are not familiar with it, would you like to explain just a little bit of what the Spring Creek Raid was?

Ray: It was a feud between the cattlemen and the sheep. The cattlemen didn't want the sheepmen on their ground grazing in the grass, and so there was a real hate between them. It got down to where they got into fights and killed some people over it. There were three killed in the Spring Creek Raid. It was Bruce Helmer's testimony that put those killers in the penitentiary. Laine: Those feelings lasted for several generations, didn't they?

Ray: Oh, yeah, you know, I think there's probably still a little bit of a dispute between them. But if you go up Nowood Creek, you'll see a big sign up there about Spring Creek. It's right alongside the highway. Living up in Onion Gulch had lots of things to do for little kids, I still remember fishing with adults in just a small stream. You would cut a willow stick, put a string on it, and dig up a worm. That's how you fished.

Laine: Then you caught trout?

Ray: Yes. A big one was probably nine inches long, so they were pretty small, but it didn't matter. You just had to catch more of them, so Mom had more to cook.

Old-Time Childhood: Watched a man cut out his bad tooth with a straight razor

Ray: We had laborers there who worked in the sawmill. I do remember one guy – he had a bad tooth, and he needed it treated. It was bothering him enough that he had one of those mirrors that were magnified on one side. He had a dishpan full of water. He took the mirror, a straight razor, and pair of pliers. He sat there and cut that tooth out of his head. and got it out of there. As a little kid, I remember the blood running into that dishpan as he was cutting that tooth out.

Laine: Oh my god!

Ray: Those are little things that stick in your mind. There was no way to get to town. I mean, it was too far away.

IMPACT OF WORLD WAR II

Laine: Many of us had fathers who served in World War II. What do you remember about those years prior to first grade? That could be from 1941 to 1948. Sometimes our fathers' sense of duty but their lengthy years away impacted our lives. Many people had to move, but others stayed right there in Worland. What do you remember about your experiences?

Ray: I don't remember when Dad got home from the Second World War, but he had been injured pretty badly, and so I do remember him vaguely when I was at that age. He started driving trucks hauling oil. He probably suffered from PTSD – we didn't have that word then. I do remember him being in Worland or Thermopolis, and you would see some guy that was really scary to me as a kid, and I'd say, "What's wrong with that man?" Dad would say, "He is shell-shocked."

And my dad would go over and put his arms around the guy. And to me, he was a scary guy, so I would stay away from that man. There was more than one, but Dad would treat them the same. He'd always go over and talk to him.

19TH-CENTURY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL: ONE ROOM, POT-BELLIED STOVE

Laine: Our elementary years were approximately 1948 to 1954. Where did you go to school? **Ray:** I went to school in Worland at the Watson School, but we had to walk over to the Emmett School for music, and you probably did something similar. And then, from the farm north of Worland, we moved to Onion Gulch, which was farther up the Nowood from Ten Sleep. In high school, I moved back to Worland.

Laine: You had some unique experiences in the Ten Sleep schools. Would you like to share that?

Ray: We lived on Redland Place. My dad worked for Richard Redland. My older brother, Jim, and I went to the Red Bank School, which was a very small little school. We would either walk or ride our horses. There was a little lean-to-type shed there, and Dad would all bring in hay and grain and stack it in there. Jim and I would give our horses some hay when we would ride in. Jim and I were asked to come in early and start a fire in the wintertime in that old pot belly stove and get it warm before the teacher came over. We would bring a can of soup, or something like that, for the lady to eat for lunch and set it on the stove and heat it. That was interesting. She lived in a little 18-foot trailer house with no amenities, no electricity, no water, no nothing. So if the lady needed to go to the bathroom, she would go to the outdoor privy like the rest of us. If she wanted to take a bath, she had to drive to Frank and Annie Tolman's house, which would be about a mile.

Laine: That's very different from our teachers today!

Ray: Just to give you an idea of how hard it was for them, we had five teachers in one year. I don't know that we always got the cream of the crop. But, I can say, I had one teacher, Mrs. Erzinger, and she obviously was an English major because that's pretty much all she taught. I got very little of anything else. When it came to math, I really struggled in the later years in school because of how she concentrated on English. But, in a way, that was fantastic. When I started college, I went to Casper College, and I tested out of my English classes without taking any, and then I transferred to Colorado State University, I tested out of those and never took an English class in college. And, I have to say, thanks to her.

Laine: The one-room schoolhouses have benefits too.

Ray: Absolutely, because of my older brother, I got in on his classes too. You can't help but listen to the lessons that they were being given. So you got your lesson plus theirs, so it's beneficial. But I didn't get to finish elementary school at Red Bank. My brother and I were the only two in school for our first two years there. I started in the second grade, and Jim in the fifth grade. Then Frank and Annie Tolman moved nearby with two girls – DeeDee and her older sister Kay — so then there were four of us at the Red Bank School. A few years later, another family moved up the road, and then the school wouldn't hold anymore. So my dad hauled us down to the Big Trails School in the back of a '49 Ford pickup. He put some 2x4s in the corner stakes and stretched canvas over them, so that was our shelter. He only did that one year, and then another rancher up there, Dexter Bush, started driving us in his station wagon. It was a pleasure to be inside of a car!

TEN SLEEP'S BIG TRAILS SCHOOL THROUGH 8TH GRADE

Laine: Were you in Worland for junior high school, as we called it then?

Ray: No, no! I didn't go back to Worland until I was a freshman. I stayed at the Big Trails School through the eighth grade. We had teachers there who would stay there all year. I don't know if you remember Zelda Black. She was our county nurse and used to come up and give us some tick shots. "Pop" Emmett, the superintendent of schools in Washakie County, would periodically come up. He had a big old pocket watch and would give us a hearing test. [His grandson, Rick Williams, was a classmate.]

Laine: Approximately how many students would there be in the class at Big Trails? Did they have combined classes?

Ray: No, we were all in one room, with individual classes for each grade. I would say we had probably, at the highest, probably around seven or eight students in the Big Trails School, and that pretty well filled it up. That Big Trails School got moved. It's in the town of Ten Sleep's museum now. When I go to Ten Sleep, which isn't very often that I get up that way anymore, I always like to go into the Museum and say, "Well, this is the desk that I sat in, and so and so, sat here."

Laine: Was it large enough so that you had school activities, clubs, or organizations?

Ray: No, not at all.

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Laine: The kids who attended, I'm sure everybody had chores to do when they got home.

Ray: Sure, I mean, that's that kind of life. Pretty much everybody probably had a cow to milk. If you were old enough – that was the biggie — you fed the horses, there was always something for the big ones to do. Gathering the eggs was always the worst because it was always after dark, and sometimes you'd reach in, and there'd be a bull snake there in the nest.

WORLAND HIGH SCHOOL: 1956-1960

Laine: And then your family moved into Worland so that you could go to high school.

Ray: Mom was already there. She had bought a little house on Ninth St. Mom years before and had rented it out when we were up at the sawmill. Mom moved back to Worland when Jim started high school. I stayed up on the Big Trails Ranch with my granddad, Bill Gotfredson, until I was ready for high school. Worland was a great place. I had great teachers there. Worland was a good school.

Laine: You made the adjustment from the small schools to a larger high school.

Ray: Yes, you adjust. Of course, my interest was in agriculture because that's what was important to me at that time, so most of my classes –

Laine: That was your background—

Ray: Yes, and so, VoAg [vocational agriculture], was my big thing, and Ray Lowe was our VoAg teacher. I learned a lot of life skills from him. Years later, when I got out of the Navy, he had a lot to do with me choosing my major in college. I went to him and said I was wanting to go to school on the GI bill, and I thought maybe I should become a VoAg teacher. Ray Lowe said, "I don't think so. You said Cathy teaches school, and she's on a nine-month contract. If you're a VoAg teacher, you're on an 11-month contract. Why don't you go into industrial arts? Then you'll both have a nine-month contract." So that's what I did.

Laine: I don't understand why VoAg would take 11 months.

Ray: At that time, VoAg teachers would be in the classroom for nine months, and in the summer, they would travel around to all the kids'

farms and look at their crops and their livestock projects. Ray Lowe was a major, major factor in my life.

Laine: I'm sure there are many in Worland could say the same thing about him.

Ray: Yes, I think almost everybody that knew that man.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES: STATE-WIDE FFA JUDGING COMPETITIONS

Laine: When you were in high school, did you have time to participate in any clubs or organizations? What was your life like once you got to Worland?

Ray: Well, really, FFA [Future Farmers of America] was my big thing, being on the judging team and traveling around the state to different judgings. We were judging livestock and actually learning about how you keep books on your livestock – how much you fed them, how much they gained — so you would learn how to make it profitable to raise sheep or pigs and how to judge good ones from bad ones, and poultry the same way. So VoAg was my biggest thing, and the activities there.

Laine: And the animals that you were judging, were they from farms or ranches, or were they animals that the youth have raised?

Ray: They were from other ranches or farms throughout the state. If you went to Powell or someplace, there'd be pens for sheep or steers. So that's what you did, you judged them. And then you gave oral reasons why you placed this one above that one — that part was better than a speech class because it taught you to think on your feet without anything in your hand. When I took speech at Casper College, he said, "Here, it's yours," and just walked out.

Laine: Is there anything else you want to add about your high school memories?

YOUTH ACTIVITIES: DRAGGING MAIN BACKWARDS

Ray: At night, we always had to drag Main, of course, and, of course, Main Street was really wide, so we used to race backwards. [Chuckles] There were not too many people there at night, so those are things we will always remember.

Laine: You dragged Main backwards?! Who did you race against?

Ray: Whoever showed up. Larry Swing and Loreny Laird — those are two who popped into my head right away.

Note: More details later about dragging Main

WHAT DO YOU WISH WE'D KNOWN THEN?

Laine: Most of us in our class of 1960 have turned 80, and because of the Covid pandemic, we had to postpone two of our 60th reunions, and, finally, we got together in person in May 2022. But we talked about our time together through the two years of delays – we've had emails and Zoom and telephone calls. And our phone calls have been about things like having operators to make the calls and when television arrived.

These oral histories are our chance to look back and consider how the experience of growing up in Worland and In Ten Sleep created the most impact on your life – you've explained some of that – the influence of agriculture and your choice of industrial arts as a college major. Have you been doing anything in your livelihood that you dreamed about as a young person when you were in school?

Ray: No, I'm glad that I grew up under those conditions that I did. It makes you appreciate what you have – you don't take anything for granted. I think, in some ways, it made me a better person to grow up under those conditions.

On reflecting back, we didn't know this at the time, but, you know, we had the internment camp that was at Heart Mountain, we didn't know about that. So it was interesting at our reunion to have made a field trip to visit the center. So it's interesting to me to have grown up in Worland, and now, knowing that that happened there and our folks did not tell us about that, and why, I don't know. I think it was an embarrassment, and they didn't want to talk about it. Laine: Cathy, you may have a few follow-up questions.

YOUTH ACTIVITIES: DRAGGING MAIN

Cathy Healy: I wonder if you could explain what it means to “drag Main.” [Ray laughs.] We [classmates] all know, but in 2050, they're not going to have a clue.

Ray: You don't think?! [Laughs] I don't know – you just got in your cars, and you drove up and down Main Street throughout the whole evening. You

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would meet other people as they're in their cars, and the next thing you know, you're probably having a little drag race going on.

Cathy: What's a drag race? And where would you drag?

Ray: Right on Main Street. We'd start at one end and see who could get to the other end fastest between the two cars. And then we would try it backwards.

Cathy: Backwards?!

Ray: Sure.

Ray: 9, 10, or 11 o'clock.

Cathy: What parts of Main Street would we drag Main on? Where did it start? Where did it end?

Ray: Basically, from down by the railroad tracks. We always made a U-turn right there, and then the other end of it would be. I don't remember now, but there used to be a little place where you could get a good hamburger or a malted milkshake. Do you know the name of that?

Cathy: Wilson's Drive-In? Right before the bridge over the canal.

Ray: Yes, right there.

Cathy: So dragging Main wouldn't even have gone to Fifteenth Street.

Ray: No. We always turned around right there at the canal.

Cathy: When do you suppose whoever — the City Council, the parents — stopped kids from dragging Main — because you can't turn a U by the railroad tracks anymore.

Ray: Well, I don't know why not, if nobody else is around, you just do it.

Cathy: Hmmm. I don't know. When we tried dragging Main at our reunion, nobody knew what to do by the railroad tracks when we couldn't do the U-turn. So that was kind of the end of it.

Ray: If I'd been in the lead for our parade, I'd have made the U-turn anyway. It's easier to beg for forgiveness... But we were dragging Main at night back then, so it didn't matter, and we had only one cop, Connie Thomas, and you knew where he was. [All three laugh.]

AFTER-SCHOOL JOBS: DRIVING A SCHOOL BUS

Laine: Ray, when you were in high school, did you have any kind of job besides going to school?

Ray: Yes, I drove a school bus during my junior and senior years. The first year my bus route ran out by Winchester, about 16 miles south on the highway going to Thermopolis. My senior year, my bus route was a little shorter. I drove south on the same highway to the Gooseberry Creek cutoff. Those were the two longest routes that we had. That was an after-school thing that the farm boys did, probably because they started driving farm trucks when they were really young, so by the time they got to high school, they were fairly experienced in driving larger vehicles.

We did have to take a test to drive. Bill Barnett, the highway patrolman, would take us out in one of the school buses. He would tell us what to do, where, so that's how – I mean, if you didn't fail – that's how you got your job. I believe it paid \$65 a month.

Laine: That was good money. Girls were making 50 cents an hour, sometimes \$1 babysitting. Who was in charge of that program? Was it a teacher, or was it a school administrator? Do you remember, and how you were chosen to be a driver?

Ray: No, we had what we call the bus boss, and he was actually the mechanic, but he also disciplined you if he felt like you were doing something wrong. But, of course, don't you imagine that the school administration and maybe the school board got involved in authorizing kids to drive the buses? But we had such a good driving record that they really could not do away with the program for driving. We really did have a wonderful record. We had no accidents for years. It was a good program, \$65 a month it was – that was good money.

Laine: Gooseberry is quite a distance. Do you remember how long it would take you to make that route?

Ray: No. I don't recall now how long it was, how long it took, but I would guess it would probably have taken a couple of hours to go one way because you're having to make quite a few stops. We drove down into the people's houses into the farmland. We didn't drop the kids off at the lane. We took them right to their door steps. It did take quite a while, but I can't really come up with a time.

Laine: But I'm sure that in the wintertime, it would be dark by the time you got back.

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Ray: Yes, that was a pretty long route, and the first one out to Winchester was quite a way – 16 miles – And our speed level, when we were loaded, was 35 miles an hour. When you're empty coming back to the bus barn, it was 45 miles per hour. That was slow.

Laine: That was a lot of responsibility for a young person to handle.

Ray: Yes, but they stepped up to the plate and then they'd grow.

Cathy: I have a question – what time would you have to get up in the morning to go get the school bus and start driving it?

Ray: I'm going to guess that probably you would get there about six. Carl Dierks was the bus boss, so he was always there to open the door. Of course, if you were leaving earliest, you had to make sure to park your bus close to the garage door so you wouldn't be stuck behind other buses and have to wait for them. We cleaned the buses ourselves. Carl did all the maintenance on them, but every time we got back to the barn, we were required to sweep them out and keep them clean on the inside.

Cathy: Would you walk over to the bus barn, or did you have a car by then or a pickup, or something else?

Ray: I walked because it wasn't that far from our house. I did have a car by then, because, like I was saying, we were paid \$65 a month for driving the bus. My car payment was \$60, so I had five dollars for gas. That was enough to fill the gas tank. What was gas then, 20, 25 cents a gallon?

Cathy: What about the other farm kids? Because that would be kind of a distance for them to drive into town to get to their bus.

Ray: They drove in from their farms and parked them there close to the Watson School Building where the Pepsi plant is now. There was a big parking area which was part of the playground. That's where the kids would park their cars and jump into their buses.

Laine: How did you control the kids on the buses?

Ray: Oh, you know, for the most part, kids get along with other kids pretty well, and so I don't remember ever having a discipline problem at all. I don't remember any of the other drivers ever having a discipline problem. Every once in a while, you would have to holler at them, to tell them to sit down, that they couldn't be walking around, but, you know, you'd get them housebroke, and they'd be all right.

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Laine: Any more questions, Cathy?

Cathy: No

WASHAKIE MUSEUM: THANK YOU FOR BEING INTERVIEWED

Ray: It's been fun.

Laine: Ray, thank you so much for sharing your reflection on looking back and the wisdom you have imparted to the listeners, and to future generations through the Washakie Museum. We thank you so much and thank you, Cathy.

Ray: Thanks, girls, it has been a pleasure. Worland was a great place to grow up, wasn't it.