

HELEN E. PLAMONDON

by

Mary-Lou Smith

For the Rocklin Historical Society Museum

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*Would you state your full name, your age, and your address.*

My name is Helen E. Plamondon. I live at 4184 Oakridge Street, Rocklin, California 95677.

*Okay, and how old are you?*

I was born in 1906 in Rocklin, California.

*What was your father and your mother's name?*

Gust was my father's name and Amelia my mother's name.

*And what was their last name?*

Halonen.

*Tell me a little bit about how they met, did they ever tell you? Perhaps they didn't, but*

Yes, they told me that they met in Massachusetts, not in Boston, but in one of the smaller cities.

*Oh, so your father came over and then mother came over...*

My father came over first, then my mother came over. Then they were set for their lives.

*How many brothers and sisters did you have?*

I had 8 brothers and 2 sisters.

*And where are they now? Are they still alive?*

No, they're not. Yes, they are all gone.

*Tell me a little bit about the schools you attended in Rocklin. Do you remember?*

The schools. I didn't know too much about the schools, but I understand that they were good

You know, I only went to the third or fourth grade.

*What school did you go to?*

I went to Rocklin Elementary.

*And then what did you do after you finished school?*

I didn't finish here. We moved to San Francisco.

*Oh, okay. And then you went to school in San Francisco?*

I went to school in San Francisco and we kept right up with the San Francisco pupils. They thought that we were dumb. They looked at us like we were dull-witted. I won't say that we were brilliant, but we kept right up with them.

*That was wonderful. When did you come back to Rocklin?*

I came back to Rocklin when we both were retired.

*So you were in San Francisco.*

I went to San Francisco and moved to Berkeley and lived in Berkeley, then as I got married and moved to Sacramento and then back to Rocklin again and we retired here.

*How long ago did you retire?*

Let's see. I worked for a hotel for 18 years in Sacramento. I worked there for 18 years and I retired about, the time goes by so fast I can't keep up with it.

*I think you told me before we got on the tape that you retired about 5 years ago.*

That's about right. It seems it should be longer.

*Um hm, it could be longer. Now tell me about your husbands. You told me before we started recording that you had two husbands. The first one was*

Earl.

*And where did you meet Earl?*

I met him in Oakland and I went with him a couple of years because I was working for an automobile agency.

*I see.*

I'm sorry my voice is so noisy, but I can't help it.

*Your voice is fine. So you lived with Earl, you said, until a few years ago. So you had a long marriage, 40 years or...*

Yes, something like that. It was a long marriage.

*And when did you marry him, what date?*

Now there's another one. I have all those papers but they are not here; they are in Berkeley.

*Okay, I think you had mentioned that you were married in 1928. Does that seem right to you?*

Well it does, yes.

*So you lived with Earl until he died. And what kind of occupation did you have in Berkeley, what did Earl do?*

I met him and he was working in the department stores.

*When was it that you did farming? You told me you had some...*

That all was later. He gave up, he quit that job because he was in sales and he didn't like that and he said "We're going back to Rocklin." These people are going to show us how to raise turkeys.

*So when did you come back to Rocklin?*

When we got ready to retire.

*I see. So when you retired you came to Rocklin and what did Earl do?*

He was a turkey grower.

*You raised turkeys. Did you do any farming at all?*

Yes. We had an almond orchard at one time and then we had a big walnut orchard up in Live Oak too. We tried it all.

*So how long would you say you were in Rocklin the second time?*

Up until now. See, I have been living here. I am in caretaker, I have caretakers because at times I can't take care of myself.

*So you have assisted living. You have someone to help you and that's good.*

Yes, that's right.

*So your brothers and sisters, when you went to San Francisco and Berkeley, did they stay in Rocklin?*



No, most all of them, well we all went. We even sold the house here and then it burned down because some tramps got into it. As soon as they figure the house is vacant, then they go for it. I guess they set it on fire. I know my father got the insurance on it.

*But now when your brothers and sisters were older, did they stay in the Rocklin area?*

Yes they did. Of course right now there is not any of them living.

*I see, okay. But they stayed in the Rocklin area. Now let's go back to your schooling. When you were in school and I know that's a long time ago when you were in school in Rocklin.*

*What's your favorite thing that you liked to do in school?*

I used to like to inspect everything to see how it worked. I should have been a boy.

*You mean you liked to take things apart?*

Yes, sometimes I would take them. I decided I was going to feed the birds some day and I took milk and bread and mashed it. One of those little birds had hatched out in the tree and I fed them. I think I killed them!

*How about your, I had a thought here, your house. Where was your house, your family house in Rocklin?*

It was on Winding Way.

*On Winding Way? What's there now, do you know?*

It's there now. Some people, it has a lot of shrubbery around it now.

*I thought you said it burned down.*

Well that was another one. This is one that they bought the land, 6 acres, and they built another house.

*Oh, I think I understand now. The Winding Way house was the house that you lived in with Earl, right?*

No, no, that's the family home.

*Oh, that's the family home on Winding Way. Okay.*

He and I had another place in Antelope and Live Oak. I traveled around. I didn't go very far, but we'd get ourselves into a jam, you know, with a lot of work. But we learned. We learned that way.

*When you were little, and this is again going way back, what were the advantages of having a lot of brothers and sisters? Were there any advantages at all?*

Well I think so. Some people say "How on earth did you manage?" I'm of Finnish descent and I am very proud of it. We had a lot of things in Rocklin and Berkeley and around here and they all of course my brother, I mean my father wanted to know how things were. They would come here and get themselves a quarry because that was the going thing, and that was during the gold rush days too. See a lot of this stuff I would never remember, but my oldest sister Evelyn Johnson, she would be close to 100, and she remembered all that. And I said "Why didn't you write it down?" She said, "Oh, I thought you could do that."

*Okay, so there were advantages. You always had someone to play with certainly.*

Oh, they were too old for us. There were 21 years' difference between the oldest and the youngest. In other words, she had two families.

*She had two families.*

My mother was married the second time.

*Okay, so she had all the girls, all the boys?*

Well she had them and Evelyn was the first girl. So that's way down the line. When she first went to school, of course she was raised and learned the Finnish language first and she had

never been to school and when they took her to school she just left them and started running on to the school house and said, "Oh, I'm in school, I'm in school."

*That was Evelyn. She sound like she...*

Then when lunch time came she went home.

*That's wonderful. So you all learned Finnish first.*

Oh yes, I speak it now.

*Say something in Finnish.*

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*What does that mean?*

Good day.

*That's wonderful. What kind of organizations did they have for the Finnish people?*

We had that Finnish lodge. I have to think of the name of it. It is in Finn, so I probably won't think of it. The Finnish Brotherhood and the Sisterhood. I don't belong to that, but I might as well because they are always asking me questions, but there are other people here that know more than I do. They are all getting older and they are going, so they are leaving us all the work to do.

*Okay, well now we know about when you were a child. How about when you were older and you came back to Rocklin to farm, remember with Earl? What was it like in Rocklin in those days?*

Well, we didn't live in Rocklin, we lived in Antelope, a little distant. Our first house was a great big farmhouse and I enjoyed it. I fixed it up and my husband and the workmen, we had to have people work for us, and the workmen would help me if I said I wanted this. My husband was good at organizing things too, so he did a little carpentry. We bought the house and it was a little bit run down and we had painters in there and everything to fix it up for us.

*And at that time when you lived in Antelope, did you work at the Sacramento Inn?*

No, I had to leave that. That was the difference between Rocklin and the Sacramento Inn. There were a lot of miles in between there. We wanted together into the country out of the city, that's what we wanted.

*Then when you married the second time and married that gentleman, you were retired, right, you no longer worked? That was John.*

I worked for a while and then it was time to quit.

*And what did John do?*

John was in the service for a while. He was an ex-Marine and he got, is it the Gold Star? Or Silver Star, I don't know.

He got that because I found the box up there that it was in, but I didn't find the pin. I think it's a pin.

*Let's see, John came from where before he came to Rocklin? Or Antelope or wherever it is?*

John was in the Marines, but that was in the First World War though.

*And he came from back East, you said, so where did he come from, John.*

John was born in Rocklin.

*How about Earl? Didn't he come from ...*

Earl was my first husband. He was born in St. Louis, Missouri.

*And John didn't come from Wisconsin, I thought you...*

No, the other husband came from Wisconsin. John.

*Was from Rocklin.*



No, he came from Wisconsin out here and I met him here.

*You met him here in Antelope, or in Rocklin.*

No, he wasn't born in Rocklin, he was born in Missouri, St. Louis.

*Now you lived with John until he died and you were retired.*

Now what I'm doing is, I had a brother named John and my husband was John, and I think there is a little mix-up there.

*Let's clear it up then. You told me that Earl came from St. Louis, Missouri and John came from Wisconsin, is that right?*

Right.

*Okay, we got it right now. When you were retired with John, what did you folks do? Anything at all? Did you work at all? You were retired, but did you do anything.*

We were living on an almond orchard where you still have your work cut out for you in the fall and in the spring. Fall especially, that's when you harvest.

*What kind of special things or experiences or events do you remember in Rocklin?*

Well I remember, let's see I was married, no I wasn't either, I was going with Earl when my father was killed. He was murdered.

*Oh, no.*

We were living here in Rocklin and been here too long, but I remember that so plain. My doorbell rang and Evelyn of course being the oldest and everything, she went to the door and the postman gave her a telegram and it said on there, "Gust Halonen found dead on the prairies of Montana." Well, how he got there was his brother lived in Minnesota and see then the house had burned and that's why he went to St. Louis, I mean he didn't go to St. Louis, he went to Montana. He said, "While I'm at it, I'm going to see my brother in Minnesota." I don't know how far, I forget. Anyway they had seen him on the train that night and he was playing cards with two gentlemen. I presume they were, but they weren't. And they notified us and of course Mother went all to pieces and Evelyn she started to cry and I suppose I cried too, but I was only about 12 years old.

*Okay, and so Mother had all these children still at home. How did she manage?*

Well, she always hired some of the girls that came from Finland for help because they all washed clothes and ironed clothes. We had one cottage for the boys. They had their drums and everything up. They were in the main house.

*How did she support you then?*

Well after Dad died, of course it was different. They all had different jobs already.

*All the older ones had jobs so they all helped.*

Oh, yes.

*They were all still living at home?*

Not all of them. One brother was living in San Francisco. He had gotten married and he had his own home. And another one was married, I guess he was married first, no he was married second, and he had his own home.

*But they still helped.*

Yes, they all helped.

*Well I am a little confused. You said you went up to the third grade in Rocklin and then went to San Francisco and Berkeley, but you must have come back to Rocklin because you were 12 years old, you said, when you found out your dad died.*

No, we went to school in San Francisco.

*I see, but were you living in San Francisco then of course?*

Sure. We moved there. That's when the war was on and we were living in San Francisco.

*And so when you found out about your dad being murdered you were in San Francisco.*

That's right. Yes, I guess he had been playing cards and they had seen them together and that's all they could find out from the little Indian boy because a lot of Indians live in these back woods. I'm losing my memory.

*You're doing fine.*

I write it all down and then I find I don't like it.

*Well, a lot of us would like to remove some of the things in our past lives too! Okay, so they probably robbed your dad, do you have any idea?*

Yes, they did. They robbed him. He had that check on him from the house burning and he had that with him in case he needed money. This has been a long time ago. But they never found out who killed him, but they brought his body out and he is buried here in Rocklin.

*Now did they cash the check, whoever took it?*

No, they didn't.

*They couldn't cash the check, okay.*

Do you know where it came from? It was wintertime so he had long johns on and he had it pinned to his underwear.

*I'll be darned.*

He was smart. Then again they were not very knowledgeable about cashing checks. Even I have to think once in a while.

*Now you mentioned that you worked at the Sacramento Inn. You also mentioned you worked in San Francisco. What kind of jobs besides...*

I didn't work in San Francisco, I was too young.

*Okay, how about Berkeley.*

Berkeley, yes. I worked for a car company.

*What did you do for the car company?*

And I worked for the telephone company. I could go out and get myself a job and if I didn't like it then I went and got another one. I always had success at that.

*Okay, so you worked for a car company, then you worked for the telephone company, and then what else?*

And then when I got married we went on the ranch. Then we raised turkeys and we had almonds and we had plums, but not all at one time.

*No. And then you worked for the Sacramento Inn. What did you do at the Sacramento Inn?*

I had 7 girls that worked the switchboard. We had a lot of rooms for some people in the offices and I was head of that and then I also worked, so we had 7:00 to 3:00, 3:00 to 11:00, 11:00 to 7:00.

*Different shifts, right?*

Yes.

*What is your fondest memory? You have told me a very tragic thing that happened in San Francisco, but what are your memories about Rocklin? Can you tell me anything at all? Things you did as a kid that were fun, or things that you did when you returned.*

I was born about 2 weeks after the earthquake in 1906. That earthquake I think was in April, wasn't it?

*You're right. I think it was April 12<sup>th</sup>, but I'm not sure. Okay. Something like that, right? And then you were born 2 weeks after the earthquake.*

Let's see, the 26<sup>th</sup>, that would make it about right.

*Yes, you were born then. That's about right.*

My sister Elena and I were born on the same day, three years apart.

*Do you remember your parents telling you anything about the earthquake, whether or not it was...*

Oh yes. My mother felt it. She said, "Oh, we felt it and it was bad and we were scared." They felt it up here from San Francisco. That was tragic. There were more that died from the fire I guess. I read up on that every once in a while. I get the book and I like to read it.

*Well, the gas pipes split and then the fires just went all over, huh?*



They did, and I think they lost some people too, quite a few.

*That's right. Did your family tell you anything else that you remember about the earthquake.*

Not too much. I knew that we had an earthquake. I used to listen to my folks talk. They said "You're nosy." I said, "That's all right. I'm trying to figure myself out." I wondered how you could live in Rocklin, of course it wasn't this big and that wasn't out this far. This was all just natural pine. But I wondered how big does this town go, and I thought just as far as I could see. I had a great imagination. Evelyn says, "Helen, where do you get that?" And even now I tell my younger sister, I haven't seen her in a long time and I can't seem to find her, but I think there's something wrong up here. Well, you know as the years go by and I haven't seen them and the girls were very close. But Elena was the youngest one and we were more of an age. Evelyn was about 6 years older and there was only 3 between us. But I took her down into the quarry hole. There was a ledge there where they had cut out. Those quarry holes were deep. In the wintertime they get full of water. They do because there is a natural spring is giving water all the time.

*You were brave and adventuresome.*

Oh, I never told anybody, I never told Evelyn that I took her down there.

*Did you ever swim in the quarry hole?*

Swim? Yes. I wasn't allowed in the quarry holes. I went there and took her down. There was a ladder on this kind of a shelf there because a drunk had gone by there and fallen into the quarry hole, but he fell on that ledge and didn't get hurt very bad. I can't remember. He fell at night. He came home and he was drunk and he went past our quarry and he fell in on that ledge. So then I decided it was time to take my sister on that ledge and the ladder was there, but it wasn't steep down in there because it was a big ledge of granite. The ladder was there so I thought it was supposed to be used for climbing down. I got her down there I remember, and going back up, I don't know how old I was, but I said "You keep going and I'll hold your rear end with my hands while you go" and I got her up and I breathed a sigh of relief. I kept that to myself.

*I can understand. You would have gotten in big trouble.*

When I got up, as young as I was, I was scared to death.

*Did your parents discipline you? Did they spank you or put you in the corner or do anything at all like that?*

They never did no spanking, no matter when Father spoke, but when Mother spoke you better listen.

*So nobody got punished because...*

No, I kept quite. See, Dad took care of the boys because the boys were all over the area. The youngest, Elmer was the last boy and he was about 18 months older than I am.

*But your mother just married the one time, right?*

One time. Then she died just before I married Earl. She died and we kept the home and...

*How old was she?*

She was 55. But I remember pretty well. See all that is in my head, I haven't got it written down.

*What did your mother die of?*

Heart trouble. That's what I have.

*You have heart trouble? Me too.*

*You have heart trouble? Me too.*

You do?

Yes, I do.

I have heart failure.

*Congestive heart failure, right. So what are you taking for that?*

I take I don't know the names of these heart pills, but I take two different kinds. Then I take about 9 different pills during the day, some for this and some for that, and the main one is for the heart. But I take several, even take, in case you feel a heart seizure coming on, take an aspirin. That was in the paper even. So I take one every day.

*You have had congestive heart disease. How long?*

Well I've had it. See I've had a goiter and right now this is forming. That's where the goiter was. When they operated they took out half of my goiter. And that's why this is here. And of course I've been heavier and now I'm so thin, but it doesn't seem to hurt me being thin, only makes me a lot weaker. We have these boys that come because I'm in a care place. These boys come and somebody picked me up and put me in my wheelchair. In fact they had it out for a day I think. I forget as I go along.

*Well, I don't think you forget very much because this has been wonderful and I thank you so much.*

*This is just grand.*

Well, Evelyn said when I ought to put that down in writing and I said "You should have been doing it."