

Deen, Burt, Battern, Almeda Gertrude

Melanie Farr's Family Stories

**Melanie Farr
April 12, 1995**

English

Deen Burt Battern, Almeda Gurtrude. May 9, 1911.
Utah. Tape interview. Las Vegas, Nevada.

Ferron,

My Grandma is very lively and fun. Her experience of pioneer days is living in outfit cars and moving around a lot. She was one of the more air head type ladies. She was still like a kid and was pretty inexperienced. Her parents would always call her babe and they always had fun. You know what a boxcar looks like don't you. Well this didn't have the sliding doors but it was just like those box cars but they were called outfit cars and they had a door just like a common ordinary door and they had a chimney on it that a boxcar doesn't have and they had windows in them like a boxcar doesn't have otherwise they are the same thing. They were made of the wood and they had the wheels on it and so there was a whole line of these boxcars but they called them outfit cars. These stories are told by my Grandma.

We lived so close to the railroad tracks, every time a train would come along, I would raise up in bed, it would scare me so. Then I would feel something crawling and I would ask grandpa if there were any bed bugs in there he'd tell, "no there are no bed bugs" and I'd ask, "are you sure? I'm sure I feel something crawling," "no there are no bed bugs," and this went on until about one or two o'clock in the morning and I told him, "honey you have to get up and light a lamp because I'm Sure I feel some bedbugs." So he lit the lamp and the bed bugs were just going like wild fire all over the pillow and we had mashed them with our heads when we were sleeping. They were about as big as a match head and they had an awful odor, they are the most awful stinky things. You could almost tell when you've got them in the house especially after you mash one. They've got just a stinky odor that you know that it wasn't a tic, they look sort of like a tic but you know the smell of them immediately and they're sort of a reddish

color. So we got up and I had welts from one end of my body to the other just big bites and they hadn't touched him. Hadn't given him one bite. Yes they were all on Me!

So we got up and we fixed bacon and egg sandwiches, that's all we had in the house, we didn't have refrigeration or anything.

Anyway the next day we decided to paint the outfit car and this is where my mother and Dad came in. Instead of sending my cedar chest and things we had gotten for our wedding shower presents they decided to bring them up to Hanna to us. So they stopped at the place where I was staying and the Anzworths gave them in the directions and all, but it was a terribly hard place to find, the roads were all winding and there were dirt roads and they didn't have signs or anything like we do now. Anyway all the way mother would murmur,

"if babe isn't living in a place that isn't as nice as she's accustomed to then I'm taking her home"

and daddy would tell her,

"now mother you keep quiet she's a married woman now and she's supposed to do what she wants when it comes to living whatever way she wishes it's her business and don't you say a thing"

and she told him,

"I'll see about that."

Well they continued on their journey and they got lost and they went on and on and on, mother began getting a headache and finally dad told her, "I've got to stop, I'll go over this hill because if we go to far we'll run out of gas and I'd rather run out of gas in the daytime instead of night." So he told her that he would just

drive over the hill and stop for the night. Well they went over the little hill and there was this row of section houses so he knew he was somewhere by a railroad so he talked to the Mexican standing there and asked where the extra gang was and the man told him right down over the hill so when they drove down there, there was this one little lonely light.

So there was this one light shining and so grandpa decided to go to where that light was shining to inquire as to where I lived so he knocked at the door and I whispered "whose there" and he whispered "babe is that you?" and I Yelled, "Oh Max that's dad!" and here we didn't have our outfit car painted or anything. We had left the light on that night so that the bedbugs wouldn't come because they won't come when it's light. My parents had come at just about two o'clock in the morning and so we were asleep when they came and by that time my mother was just sick because she had such a sick headache that a pigsty would have looked good, it didn't make any difference what I was living in, she was so happy to be able to rest, she just fell on the bedmat and that was the end of it. So Max and I slept on the floor just on a quilt and it was much more comfortable than that old bed was because the bed was just a cot to begin with and we didn't have a mattress on it or anything, oh it was just terrible to sleep on, well when the folks brought my stuff up, I had my feather tic and everything we put on it and all.

So the next day my daddy and Max painted the outfit car and you could see those bedbugs go to the other end of the outfit car! And we never did have another bedbug as long as we were in it!

(Must have been something in the paint that they didn't like.) The paint was sort of an aqua, bluish and I had bought some oil cloth to make my curtains and had them fixed cute.

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We moved, they had told us we were going to move and told us to not build a fire in the stove and that we could have our lamps lit if we wanted to but it had to be on the wall so we just left the lamp on the wall. That's the kind they were, they were wall lamps, they had a shield on the back so they wouldn't burn the wall or anything and it used coal oil or kerosine (you could use either one.) Grandpa and I would sit in the doorway and an engine would come along and it would hook on to these outfit cars. At first we sat in the doorway and we'd hang our feet out the door and sing. Then we'd stop in Laramy, Wyoming and of course by this time we were in bed and sound asleep and it came to a sudden stop and the only way we knew anything had happened was that our bed was out in the middle of the floor and we didn't know it at all till morning. But we'd hang our feet out the door and we'd sing and have more fun.

Then when we went through Bushnal, Nebraska my mother happened to see me and she almost followed that train right down the tracks, we lived about a block from the tracks and Mark Whillie happened to

be there and stopped her and he told her, "now honey she's all right, she's happier where she is then she was at home" so we ended up in Chapel, Nebraska.

I went down and bought some concord grapes, 3 big baskets, I was going to make jelly, well I didn't know one thing about making jelly and I cleaned all those things and when you make jelly you are only supposed to make small batches at a time, never great big huge batches. Well, I had that in such a mess that even mother told me that she wouldn't try to make jelly out of it and so she told me to can it up as grape juice. So I did just that and I had put in the closet and forgotten about it. I didn't know you had to process it or anything like that so when they moved the outfit cars and we finally opened the doors, it smelled like a winery. The lids had been opened and it had spilled on to the floor and it had fermented and there was just a little bit in the jars and so I guess I just gave that to dad for Christmas or something. It was sure awful stuff. I don't even think it tasted good.

We didn't want to pay any rent when we moved to Bushnal and I told Max if we can get a house on the railroad, that we should do it so we didn't have to pay rent so he agreed and asked George Snook if we could live in the little house but what it was, was a commissary and it had a little peak in the roof for a ventilator because in the commissary there would always be fruits and vegetables and things in it.

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Every once and a while I would get kind of homesick and I'd think, "am I homesick for home or am I just homesick for Max?" because he'd be out on the gang all day and there were 80 Negroes on the gang and one white woman that was in the cook shop along with her husband and I was the only other woman and she was too busy to have anything much to do with me and I didn't want to go over there anyway very much and so I'd think I believe I'm just homesick for Max and so I'd take all the dishes out of the box and put them back in and by the time I'd cleaned and worked on that why then it would be time for Max to get home and I'd be just fine as soon as he'd come home, I wasn't homesick really for my folks, I was just homesick for him. Well when he'd come in I would hide. And you know in one big room just like this where would you hide that a person 6 feet tall couldn't find you, you know anybody with half an eye could see you so I'd hide down at the end or I'd hide someplace and he'd look and look all over that place and then pretty soon when he'd get kinda close to me I'd jump up and I'd shout BOO! and he'd act so scared! and we'd just have so much fun! Then we'd take

a little walk at night or something and we'd just have fun. There was a Greek boss and he had a greek man that came to help him. He was a carpenter by trade and he cooked for this main boss and he always had coffee and cookies for me and ate at ten o'clock in the morning and he would tell me if I was in trouble of any kind to just lean on his shoulder and cry and he was just like an old father, he was in his 60's, well in his 60's. He was hired out as a crumb boss and he would go to each one of the outfit cars and put the wood in the box and clean up the box. He came down to my house one time and he exclaimed, "You don't have a table" and I replied, "no we just eat off of a box" and he told me that he would make me a table. So he went to the cook shop and got some armor style boxes that meet had come in and he made a table for me then it all warped. So he took it and put it together again because I guess he realized it would do that because it was green wood and I still have that table to this day. Then he made a little shelf for my cosmetics that went on the side of the wall and I would put my lipstick on it and stuff.

I had trouble with mice when we lived there and I wasn't very tidy when we first learned that I didn't leave my things on the floor especially silk or wool. Maxes wool socks or my silk things. We had more rayon than silk but I did have some nice, silk, real silk hoes that had cost 2 dollars and those mice would chew on anything silk or wool they would just eat to pieces clear up to the lial part on the top. But if I'd put them on the chair they'd never get up on the chair but if they were on the floor it was too bad so I learned in a hurry to pick up my things. We never did get

rid of the mice, they would always get into things.