

Oral History of Wesley A. Gray

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U.S. Studies 6th Hour

Mrs. Carter

May 10, 1996

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This oral history is about the life of Wesley A. Gray, he is now fifty-two years old and lives north of Huntington, Utah, he has lived there for about twenty-two years. He was born August 5, 1943 in Auburn, Washington.

(No1an) *What was your family like?*

(Wes) My mother was Jessie Shlach and my father was Walter Gray, my dad came from Kansas originally my mom was the daughter of a logger her mother was the first white child born in Bellvue, Washington. I was the third son of four children, I had two older brothers and a younger sister.

I came home from the hospital in a 1929 Model A truck, I really don't remember that but they told me that's what happened, my grandmothers brother brought mom home from the hospital. I guess dad was workin' or something.

Oh, hehee, I never lived this one down. When Grandma Gray brought Aunt Jere' home, I can still

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remember standing in the kitchen looking in the crib crying telling grandma that was my baby sister that Vance and Glenn could go get their own. I think almost every time I saw Grandma Gray she teased me about that. That was a long time ago I've grown up by now.

I remember once when I was just a little kid I slept with grandma and grandpa every night I'd get out of my crib and go get in bed with them. This one night, grandma said she could always hear me coming because she could always hear the teddy bear come over the side of the crib with a little thump. Then I'd crawl out of the crib grab my teddy bear and go get in bed with them. One night I threw the teddy bear out started down the hall and I got lost, I got behind the door and couldn't find my way out but grandma came and rescued me.

I can remember my Grandpa Shiach he was crippled in a logging accident. His legs were paralyzed he couldn't use 'em, anyway he was on crutches. But that man could cover more ground on crutches than most people could in a car. It seems like it was about two or three times a week he would come get me and we would go for a walk. I was just little I must have been, oh, four or five it was before I went to school. We

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went down along the ditch out and through the valley, he was the ditch commissioner at the time it was his responsibility to make sure all the ditches were clean and everything was running right. He would go down there on his crutches or down the road and it seemed like I always had to run to keep up. It must have been four or five miles around the loop we made. That guy could go any place weather it be up through the woods, down through the fields, or just along the road nothing slowed him down it seemed like he could do any thing.

(NoTan) *Where did you grow up?*

(Wes) I was raised on a little farm in Kent, Washington. We had all the freedoms in life of farm kids. We had chickens 'n pigs 'n cows, the place had originally been a dairy.

I can remember playin' in the barn, and throughout the woods.

(NoTan) *What would you do when you were playin' in the barn?*

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(Wes) Just hide-n-go seek, play in the hay. Back in those days they had loose hay, they didn't have bailed hay. We built houses in the hay, huts in the hay, dig holes in it put boards over it and cover it up so you couldn't find it. Dad really liked it when he fell in it in the winter time.

Always had horses and cows, they were draft horses, BIG, not much for saddle horses nothing like you got now days. Grandpa Gray always had 'em because he had 'em to work. We did have a, a cousin give us a little saddle mare one time, they had bought her at the auction and she had a colt, when the colt was two years old they gave us the mare she was crippled in one foot. Yea, I guess that's actually the first saddle horse we had, but Grandpa Gray broke her to work, he use to use her to cultivate the garden and plow the garden in the spring. Then when Dawna, the girl that gave us the mare, when she left home and they needed a place for the colt she had, she gave him to us. And Grandpa broke him to work. Hum, Crickit was the mare's name, she was lame in one foot. She had a cut tendon or somethin', and she was tamer than heck when you tried to hide her, but you go to catch her and there was nothing wrong with her. Then we got Dusty.. I can't

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remember what happened to Cricket I think we sold Cricket to, or give her to our cousin, and I don't know what he did with her, I guess they sold her. But she was a little old bay mare, she was kind of a nice little mare, what I remember of her, probably uglier than a mud fence. Then we had Dusty, and he was an ignorant son of a gun until you got him so you weren't scared of him and he knew it, and then he was ok. We had him until what, after your mother and I got married so he was what twenty-five or thirty years old when he finally died. But grandpa always kept him in the place up there. He used him to cultivate the garden and plow the garden and he used him to mow hay with.

Until 1956, '55, '54 somewhere in there when grandpa had his heart attack, we used the neighbor's equipment to bail our hay, I think that was the first year we bailed our hay. Then when Uncle Vance and Uncle Glenn got out of high school and we got our jobs we, Uncle Glenn had saved his money and bought a little tractor that's really the, well Grandpa Gray had an old Model A tractor he did a lot of work with but it wasn't much he just pulled the horse equipment with it. Then Uncle Glenn got a little John Deere and that's, when grandpa had his heart attack, that's when we started

bailing and hauling hay that way.

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I remember when, there use to be trees all around our place. And us kids was always tromping around, well when we got your BB guns. (That's another story all in its own.)

I had problems with my thumb, couldn't keep it out of my mouth. Grandma Gray tried everything, to keep me from sucking on my thumb. Then when I was in the first grade, this was between the first and second grade. I had worked all summer, picking strawberries to earn me a BB gun, that pot-ticking BB gun cost me six dollars. It's still in there its the one you kids make fun of. But i worked all summer saved the money then went down and picked out my BB gun, and bought it. I hadn't had it one day and Grandma Gray caught me sucking my thumb, and the BB gun got put up, now I can't remember wether it was for a week of what it was, but it got taken away from me, and that's the last time I ever sucked my thumb!! Or, at least let Grandma Gray catch me.

But, at that time all around up there was either old farming country or trees, we would wander through the trees, and spend our days hunting, when we weren't picking beans or working. I can remember the power lines along the road, just lined with swallows. We'd go

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down the road shootin' swallows, we got to be pretty good shoots with those little BB guns.

We always had our work to do to. Grandma and grandpa always heated and cooked with wood and coal. They would always get what they called slab wood, they'd get it in little peaces by great big old truck loads, and they'd just bring it and dump it. Then it was us kidses responsibility to get it stacked up in ricks. we'd stack it up then grandpa would burn it all winter, that's how we heated the house. I can remember when i was a little kid there was a big fire place in the kitchen and grandpa said he was the only one who stayed warm all winter, that was because he was kept busy cutting wood to feed the fire.(Laugh)

(No1an) *What were some of your jobs Tike?*

(Mes)When we were little, I guess we were in the first or second grade, it seams like we were awful little. We'd pick strawberries, Grandma Gray would go with us we all picked strawberries in the spring and summer. Then when we got a little bit older we'd pick beans, you guys don't know how bad it is. They use to have acres and acres and acres of bean fields out

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there, and in those days they were all picked by hand. We would go down and start at first tight and work until five in the afternoon, spending all day picking beans. Then in the eighth or ninth grade we got the job stringing beans. They'd have a wire at the bottom and a wire at the top, then you'd spend all day long bending over bending over facing string up and down around them wires. Talk about getting sick of bending over and standing up. Then we had to hoe and weed the beans out. I remember Glenn and I had weeded a patch of beans that we had weeded, we had went up and down through those. The guy that owned the beans he went back through it and decided that we hadn't weeded'em good enough. That's when Uncle Glenn explained him of what he thought of his job and weeding beans.

Real shortly after that we got a job hauling hay for Mr. Vough, and that was alot of work but it wasn't near as bad as picking beans. When we got finished hauling the hay Mr. Vough said "Now in a week or two I'll have some more hay to haul, so don't get in a hurry to run back and hoe beans." That's when we assured him that he didn't have a thing to worry about. From then on we hauled hay for everybody in the valley but we never did hoe beans again. Man those were some

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long days you would start out at six or seven in the morning then haul hay until about three o'clock when Mr. Vough would go do chores. We'd go home and get something to eat then we would go back after he had finished doing chores then we would haul hay until dark. I can remember one time we went down we had a bunch of old trucks Uncle Vance had an old thirty-seven Ford, Mr. Vough had a forty-seven Ford, then we had two relatively new GMC's they were in the late fifties or mid-fifties. But we were down hauling hay we were about ten miles from Mr. Vough's barn where we had to take the hay and it was getting dark when we started out of the field. Everybody said we gotta get going we don't have any lights on these trucks. So when they hit the highway the lights started coming on, and I was lucky I had the only truck in the whole bunch that didn't have head lights and I had ten miles to drive home. I got right in behind the truck in head of me with the tail lights on it and Mrs. Vough got behind us in the car and that's the only way I got home, with her head lights shining under the truck. Then we'd tarp'em up and unload'em in the morning and start the whole process over again. We had six or seven farmers up there to haul hay for. we did that and milked cows got

us through high school I guess.

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After high school I milked cows for two years.

Then I got a job at Cut a Hay Bar S that brought milking to a screeching halt. I made good money there packing beef. Caring quartered beef on your shoulders I think that was when I was in the best shape of my life was packing beef two and three hundred pounds at a time. We would do it all night long start at about ten o'clock then get off about eight in the morning.

Everybody in the country hated to see us come they said we were terrors, we always thought we were pretty good kids. I remember we went out one night, I had this old dog named Neal, he was a big old yellow dog with no tail, and he loved to fight. We had been some place, when we come back there was a bunch of cows standing along side the road. The Filipinos that lived down the road from us, garden farmers, they always had a bunch of half wild dogs. And a bunch of their dogs were out chasing these cows. Old Neal saw'em out chasing those cows, and he didn't like the dogs he didn't care if they chased the cows or not, he just didn't like the dogs. He went running off the back of that truck at thirty miles an hour, he hit the ground and roled about a half a dozen times and when he came

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up he was still chasing the dogs, it never even slowed him down.

Then after working several years there I got drafted. Then I went in the service, I went to Fort Louis for basic training it seemed like it was either raining or hotter than heck that summer. I went in, in June I was there until the end of July. We were suppose to be doing calnistics and really working the snot out of us, but I must have been in pretty good shape at the time because it never felt like they were doing much to me. I remember one time, somebody had done something one night that they weren't saposse to have done it and the DI got mad at us. Then he marched us up on a big hill behind the camp, and then double timed us for about ten miles around that hill. A lot of times that stuff works pretty good because it gets every body working together. The guys that couldn't keep up, they had a few of them, we'd just move'em into the middle of the company then the guys on each side would get their arms and hold'em up, and almost carry them, so they wouldn't fall out. In our whole company, I think, only one of two guys fell out. But he double timed us clear up over the top of this hill and down to the sound on the other side, chewed us out for twenty

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minutes, and then double timed us back around the mountain back to camp. I felt pretty good I stayed up all the way.

Then after we left there I got orders to go to Fort Sam Huston Texas for medical training. We took combat medics training down there and they taught us all the basic medical stuff for First Aid and treatment of wounds, plus we had more advanced training there for combat. Then after we finished that we go orders to go to Vietnam. So we spent Twelve months I glorious south east Asia. Where I was assigned to the first air cavalry, Second of the Seventh Headquarters division. That was Custers old unit, of course we were in it at different times. But when I was in it they had traded their horses for helicopters. They'd fly us out and drop us off, we'd walk around and eat picnic lunches for three or four days. Usually they would bring us out one hot meal every day. That was the good thing about the Cav', you either got a hot dinner or a hot breakfast.

Some of those pilots were incredible they could land those helicopters any place.

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While I was in Vietnam I was wounded twice. When I was wounded, oh, the second time I guess, when I was hit in the leg so bad. We were back to a first division hospital, there were only three from the first Cav' that were there, and the rest was all first division. They had what they called Doughnut Dollies they were just girls that came in and would talk to the guys, and give'em candy, books, and what ever the Sundry Packs had in'em. That's where I got hung up on Louis L'Amour. The first Louis L'Amour book I read came in a Sundry Pack. We'd walk around through the jungle all day reading Louis L'Amour books. A sundry Pack had cigarettes, candy bars, and books in them. They'd just give you something to read something to do. But they had Hershey's, what do you call it, ummmm, Jungle Bars. They looked like they'd been wrapped in the Second World War, they were all white but when you hadn't had any candy in a long time they tasted pretty good.

We'd go around, while we were over there, there was myself, another lieutenant, and a sergeant, and an artillery lieutenant, forward observer, decided we were going to burn up Vietnam. We would take any thing that would burn and set it on fire. We had the artillery

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officer, the guy that was with us. He'd spot artillery rounds and he had a map, and every time we would start a fire he'd mark it on the map in black, and in these sundry packs I was telling you about a minute ago they'd have cigarettes and stuff in them for the guys that smoked. And they had Kent cigarettes and nobody

liked Kent cigarettes. Nobody would smoke 'em so we took these Kent cigarettes and a book of matches, light the cigaret and tuck it across the back of these books of matches, and then just through it down along the trail as you were walking then five minutes later the cigaret would burn into the book of matches, light the matches and then set the brush on fire. This worked pretty good because we were never around when the fire started. We set up one night on a river and we heard gun fire just down the river from us, at least it sounded like gun fire. The company commander... I mean it was close, our company commander was a captain who had come up through the ranks, he was a pretty squared away guy he knew what was going on he was a good officer, he took good care of us. But he called in for confirmation of this fire fight so close to us, so we could go help or what ever it was. They called him back and said that there were no other units in our

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area there was no body in a fire fight. Well it turned out to be bamboo popping in a fire, the water inside the stalks would expand and explode sounding just like a gun. When they figured out what was going on, we were sitting over there eating our dinner minding our own business. When all of the sudden we hear the captain yell for us Lutenant Heath Sergeant Gray come here. What had happened is we had set a bunch of stuff on fire and the bamboo was burning and exploding. Well when it started exploding he knew exactly who had set us on fire, but by the next day it was all gone. Then that Easter, it was Easter Sunday not to long after that, and they had the chaplain flew in and gave an Easter service. Well I wasn't active in any church then, so while everybody else was at church services. I and the Lutenant walked around

the area we were in and set it on fire. Then the fire got a "little" carried away. And the old chaplain I'll never forget, he was standing there doing his Easter sermon and he kept looking over his shoulder watching the fire get closer. By the time the helicopters came in to pick us up that Sunday ,they were moving us, by the time the helicopters came in and the last guys were getting on they say the fire was ticking there boots, I

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mean it was right on there tails when they left. And we flew back over there about a week later and that fire was still burning. We had a lot of fun over there, that's the only thing wrong with combat duty like that is ninety-eight percent boredom and two percent sheer terror.

As long as you weren't in a fire fight I mean it was terrible, but if you did happen to get unlucky enough to get in a fire fight, I mean every body was just scared to death just terrified, and you looked for the deepest hole or the biggest thing you could find to hide behind. We got to the point where we could dig holes with our eye lashes. I was in the rear one time and they had a bunch of new guys come into the company they were processing their medical records and stuff. We were giving'em a little advice as old GI's did to new GI's and I said "Theres one thing I want you to remember," I said "you never button your shirt." This one kid looked at me and he says "Why, you get to hot?" I said "No you get closer to the ground that way."

Then I got transferred to the rear after spending six months in the field. Spent another six months in the rear then I got sent home. Then when I got home I started working again for Cut-A-Hay Bar S, then a year

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or so later I met your mother, got married, and moved
to Utah then you little brats started showing up.