

Margaret Pohl Interview
Interviewed by Loren Webb

Date of Interview: May 3, 2000

Participants: Loren Webb (Interviewer)
Margaret Pohl (Interviewee)

Location of Interview: Everett, Washington

[The interview began before the recording started, so the first question of the interview is shown in brackets because it was not on the recording.]

[Webb: What is today's date?]

Pohl: [May] third.

Webb: May 3, 2000.

Pohl: Right.

Webb: We're here in Everett, Washington, with Margaret Pohl, is that right? P-o-h-l.

Pohl: Uh-huh.

Webb: And Margaret, you are the oldest daughter, basically, of Leroy Albert Wilson and, tell me your mother's name again.

Pohl: My mother's name was Marguerite Nelson.

Webb: Tell me how many children did Marguerite and Leroy have together?

Pohl: Two.

Webb: They had two children, and their names?

Pohl: Margaret McFarland Wilson.

Webb: When were you born?

Pohl: I was born June 10, 1928.

Webb: Where were you born?

Pohl: In the Salt Lake City LDS Hospital. And my brother's name is Leroy Albert Wilson, Jr.

Webb: Known as Bert.

Pohl: Known as Bert, and he was born September 9, no, September 16, 1923, in Salt Lake City.

Webb: And how did your mother meet your father, again?

Pohl: I think she was working for the sugar company.

Webb: U&I Sugar Company?

Pohl: Uh-huh. My dad went to the agriculture college. That's the way I remember it.

Webb: At Utah State University, or Utah Agricultural College in Logan at that time?

Pohl: Uh-huh.

Webb: And she was working in Logan? Was she working in Logan at the time?

Pohl: No, I think she was working in Salt Lake City.

Webb: She was in Salt Lake City. And was it true love at first sight? Did they have much of a courtship at that time?

Pohl: I couldn't tell you about that because I don't know. I don't know. My mother was a concert pianist. She studied for ten years. She had a wonderful presence. She sang like Jessie Evans Smith. She had a voice like Jessie Evans Smith.

Webb: Wife of Joseph Fielding Smith?

Pohl: Yes. They both had a lot of presence and a lot of volume in their voices. My mother's father was a millionaire twice in his life, Joseph Nelson. He owned a whole block of Salt Lake City up on 11th Avenue between G and H [Avenues], and his home was right on the corner. And my dad built a home next door. They had a rose garden between the homes. And my grandmother's chicken coop, Margaret's chicken coop, is an apartment now, and you can see all over the valley from there. It is beautiful.

Webb: It is up in the Avenues?

Pohl: Yes. My uncle lived on the corner. His house is still beautiful there today.

Webb: What was his name?

Pohl: His name was Clarence Nelson, my mother's oldest brother. My mother's mother had five children: Clarence and Joseph and Ken, Janet, and my mother, Margaret. And he was a millionaire and owned that whole city block.

Webb: And did they, Marguerite and Leroy were married in the Salt Lake Temple, is that right?

Pohl: Yes.

Webb: Do you remember the date?

Pohl: No, but it's in that genealogy in there.

Webb: Okay. And then what did Leroy do for a living?

Pohl: He sold for New York Life Insurance.

Webb: He did?

Pohl: He sold for New York Life Insurance, and then he would swim out at Beck's Springs and go in the steam room and get these visions of these inventions. He had 500 patents. He had this steam engine and then the counterflow.

Webb: The rotary steam engine, right?

Pohl: And the counter flow—

Webb: Flow device.

Pohl: Water heater, I don't know how many—there were 500 patents he had.

Webb: Okay. And where did he start doing these inventions? He was working as what, a sales consultant for New York Life?

Pohl: Yes, but he had a shop down—Bert could probably tell you better than I where it was at. I remember it. It was, let's see, there is State and Main, then what, Second South or whatever that is over there. He had a block-long factory.

Webb: What was the name of the factory?

Pohl: I don't remember. Counterflow, I think.

Webb: But it was, it was somewhere in downtown Salt Lake?

Pohl: Oh, yes.

Webb: Did he quit his New York Life Insurance Business to do this?

Pohl: I have, I don't remember all those things. My dad went to southern Utah when I was five years old.

Webb: Why did he do that?

Pohl: A vision, a dream.

Webb: What kind of dream or vision was it?

Pohl: The vision and the dream was to provide income and jobs for Mormons and bring in, develop the iron fields, to produce a steam car.

Webb: Was that, in his vision, was it to basically to be self-sufficient in case of, you know, maybe the end of the world at that point, or were there—

Pohl: I don't remember him ever talking about that.

Webb: Did it have anything to do with survival, with being self-sufficient?

Pohl: Well, it was a way, there's only about 13 percent of the population that produced jobs for other people, and he was that type of a person.

Webb: How did your mother feel about going down to southern Utah?

Pohl: She didn't like it.

Webb: Why?

Pohl: Because of the polygamy aspect.

Webb: Where did this come in? How did he get involved in polygamy?

Pohl: I don't know. She'd have to tell you, and she's gone. I don't know.

Webb: Did you ever ask her?

Pohl: People believed in it. Well, her grandfather was a polygamist, Archibald McFarland. It was part of the teachings then. He hated it.

Webb: Okay.

Pohl: And he had three wives.

Webb: I know that your father had a patriarchal blessing, and in that patriarchal blessing it said something of the effect that he would be given wives, or something like that, and he took that literally and felt that was—

Pohl: I always felt he'd been better off if he'd never been a Mormon. Now that's just my own personal feeling, because he got involved in all this crap, excuse me. But David O. McKay told him to keep his mouth shut, and he believed in the principle, too. So he was a friend of my dad's.

Webb: Yeah. There are a lot of letters that your father wrote to David O. McKay through the years.

Pohl: Yeah. We're friends.

Webb: I'd give anything to be able to see what David O. McKay's response was to him.

Pohl: Just told him to keep his mouth shut.

Webb: On the principle?

Pohl: Uh-huh. But my grandfather went to prison because of it, McFarland, Archibald McFarland.

Webb: So Leroy Wilson—you don't know how he got involved in plural marriage, but he did, somehow.

Pohl: Yes. My mother hated it.

Webb: It was up in Salt Lake.

Pohl: She knew every one of them, and she hated it.

Webb: And it was in Salt Lake where apparently he got involved with somebody or some other people.

Pohl: Yes. He was born in Sandy, Utah. Oh, no, California, yeah, okay. He was born in California.

Webb: And he was an illegitimate child, is that correct?

Pohl: Right.

Webb: Okay. And my understanding is that he may have been involved with a known polygamist by the name of Nathaniel Baldwin.

Pohl: I don't remember that.

Webb: Does that name ring a bell?

Pohl: Nope.

Webb: Nathaniel Baldwin basically helped provide employment to a lot of Mormon fundamentalists. And that's the theory is that there was some connection between he and your father.

Pohl: Could have been. Do you [know] the man Phil Farns—the one that invented the—

Webb: Philo T. Farnsworth.

Pohl: He knew him.

Webb: He knew Philo. Did he?

Pohl: He knew Philo. He knew, what was the great humanitarian? He was a guest down there at Bull Valley. The man that went to Africa. What was his name? He was world famous.

Webb: Really?

Pohl: Oh, yes.

Webb: The doctor?

Pohl: Yeah.

Webb: Yeah, okay.

Pohl: He told my dad that he had the last outpost in America.

Webb: Oh, what was his name? Okay. Your mother hated plural marriage. Did she, she refused to go to southern Utah. Is that right?

Pohl: Mm-hmm.

Webb: Is that kind of then a break happened?

Pohl: Mm-hmm. Well, she had, we had to be educated and raised. We couldn't be gone down there. So she stayed here and went to work.

Webb: But there were other, there was education down in Cedar City and St. George. There were schools down there.

Pohl: Well, not in Veyo where my dad was up in the mountains, Bull Valley, and there was nothing available there.

Webb: Do you know how he located Bull Valley in the first place, what brought him to that place? Did you ever go visit that place?

Pohl: Oh, I spent my summers there.

Webb: Did you, really?

Pohl: I've washed clothes over the bonfire, and the old Delco washer, and we took cold showers, and my dad braided my hair every day, brushed it and braided it for me, and we slept in bunkers with big lava stones to keep warm.

Webb: Did you feed chickens?

Pohl: We didn't have chickens. We had cows.

Webb: Did you milk cows?

Pohl: I never could learn how to do that.

Webb: But you had milk cows?

Pohl: Oh, yes. My dad would milk them every day.

Webb: Did you have orchards there?

Pohl: Yes, and he grew—

Webb: Did you help harvest anything?

Pohl: No.

Webb: What else did you do to help there during the summer?

Pohl: I just went with Viola [Rasmussen] when she went to do the work at the, the legal work for the assessments, whatever you do. What do you do?

Webb: Mining assessments.

Pohl: Yeah.

Webb: Did you know Leland Rasmussen very well?

Pohl: Yeah, I knew Lee. Dad wanted me to marry him.

Webb: Really? Your dad wanted you to marry Leland?

Pohl: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Webb: As a first wife, or as a plural wife?

Pohl: No. He had been married, and his wife died.

Webb: Okay. That was very short lived.

Pohl: They were very much in love, he and his wife.

Webb: His first wife.

Pohl: She had dropsy. Very pretty lady. And I was a little girl.

Webb: And then he married Viola?

Pohl: Well, I can't tell you what year. But I think that was to cover up for the birth of Aaron.

Webb: And Aaron Rasmussen, in your opinion, was he the biological son of Leroy Albert Wilson?

Pohl: Oh, yeah, no doubt about that.

Webb: And the mother was Viola?

Pohl: Oh, yes.

Webb: Okay.

Pohl: I think Lee was very upset about that, too.

Webb: Do you think that might have been a motive?

Pohl: I think she kind of deceived him there, but that's just—I don't think she—I think she went and married him and then told him.

Webb: Did your mother ever go down to General Steam?

Pohl: Oh, yes. She used to go down there and cook.

Webb: Really?

Pohl: Viola [Ramussen] would leave all the work for her. My mother was an excellent cook.

Webb: So she went down there and helped, too?

Pohl: There were 35 men there at one time, working.

Webb: Wow. So Marguerite did go down. Several summers or during the winter?

Pohl: There was a, one of the fellows—this will make you laugh. John Heinselman, I think, was his name. I used to sit out there and watch them shave and get cleaned up, and I said, why don't you shave that hair. That's terrible. He did, and it hurt.

Webb: Oh, my heck.

Pohl: I was just a snot-nosed kid, you know, about eight years old. [Laughed.]

Webb: Your mother stayed with him until, did you say 1943?

Pohl: Two.

Webb: Nineteen forty-two.

Pohl: In there.

Webb: And right around there, and she divorced him, filed formal papers and divorced him, because of plural marriage?

Pohl: Yes.

Webb: But she still loved him?

Pohl: Oh, I think always, I think so.

Webb: Because she never remarried?

Pohl: No.

Webb: What did she do for the rest of her life from 19—she died in 1973, right?

Pohl: She worked for Alf, was Alf Engen the skier that developed, what's that thing up in the mountains?

Webb: Sundance, I mean Snowbird?

Pohl: No.

Webb: Ski resort?

Pohl: Alta.

Webb: Alta. Alta ski resort.

Pohl: Mm-hmm. She worked for him. Then she was transferred to Hill Field when the war came, so we moved to Ogden.

Webb: And she spent the rest of her life at Ogden working for Hill Air Force Base?

Pohl: Yes.

Webb: Doing what?

Pohl: We lived together. She was just a clerk out in the hangers.

Webb: Did she keep up any correspondence with Leroy after 1943?

Pohl: I don't know.

Webb: You don't know if you have any letters or anything like that after that?

Pohl: I don't know; I really don't. But I imagine, I don't know. I don't think they were enemies.

Webb: Did they stay on fairly good terms at that point.

Pohl: Albert Schweitzer was his friend.

Webb: Albert Schweitzer. Oh, my heavens. Wow.

Pohl: And he visited Bull Valley, and he said it was the last outpost in America. And he could see my father's vision.

Webb: And do you feel like your father's vision was fulfilled, or was he basically robbed of that when he was killed?

Pohl: Yeah, no, it wasn't fulfilled.

Webb: Who do you think killed Leroy Wilson?

Pohl: [Unclear.]

Webb: Tom Holland?

Pohl: Tom Holland.

Webb: Tom Holland, or do you think there was a possibility that Leland Rasmussen killed him?

Pohl: No, never, never, never, never, never, never. Tom Holland.

Webb: Tom Holland.

Pohl: No, I'd trust Lee forever.

Webb: What was Tom Holland's real motive for that? Why would he want to kill?

Pohl: I think he was paid by big money, and he tried to take 14 miles of the uranium.

Webb: He tried to take what?

Pohl: Fourteen miles of the uranium.

Webb: What do you mean, 14 miles?

Pohl: Bert can tell you about that.

Webb: Tried to take, what do you mean, 14 miles?

Pohl: Confiscate it, get it in his name.

Webb: Oh, okay, so get some known uranium that was over there in Kane County?

Pohl: I think they took his, my dad's drawings of how to process uranium, the power plant. I think they stole that when they murdered him.

Webb: Wow. Do you know what happened to the mining—

Pohl: Lee wrote a letter to *Time* Magazine. It was wonderful.

Webb: Lee did? Leland did? He wrote a letter to the editor of *Time* magazine about what?

Pohl: What had happened.

Webb: Do you have a copy of that letter?

Pohl: Somewhere. Who knows. I don't have it.

Webb: It's whatever is out there is out there.

Pohl: I mean I don't know where that letter would be. I don't know if Burt's got it intact. Aaron might have it. It was a wonderful article he wrote in defense of my dad.

Webb: Have you had any contact with any of the members of the family since the last 10 years, mostly through—

Pohl: Oh, Claire and I talk all the time.

Webb: Yeah, she's a neat person.

Pohl: Mm-hmm. Her mother went to her death, Claire tells me, believing in plural marriage.

Webb: That's my understanding.

Pohl: And that she was going to be there with them. Viola came to me in spirit after she died and told me she was sorry.

Webb: Really?

Pohl: Oh, yeah. I could feel—it's not so much that you see them, it's you feel their essence. You know it's them.

Webb: Yeah.

Pohl: Yes, she did. And I told Aaron [Rasmussen]. I called and told him, and he said he believed that.

Webb: You knew that she died just about a year ago?

Pohl: Yeah. Claire told me. So I called Aaron and asked him how he felt about it. And then she came here to me, and I felt her essence, and told me she was sorry.

Webb: For what?

Pohl: For living plural marriage and doing what she did to our family.

Webb: What did she do to your family?

Pohl: Well, Bert never liked her, and she lived with my dad. Anybody that got anything, she got it. I've never got anything.

Webb: What do you mean, she got it?

Pohl: She drove a Mercedes.

Webb: You're talking about the estate?

Pohl: Yeah.

Webb: After his death.

Pohl: She didn't share anything with us, any of us.

Webb: So everybody was basically left out of [unclear].

Pohl: Uh-huh.

Webb: In your opinion and so on.

Pohl: Uh-huh.

Webb: Okay.

Pohl: Well, I don't have anything.

Webb: Okay. Margaret, I'm really glad I got to talk to you. I've got to run to catch a [recording ended].