

## RULON'S STORIES

### A BRIEF HISTORY OF RULON STUCKI

As told to Loretta Adams

December 25, 1976

Rulon Stucki was born October 24, 1900, to John Martin Stucki and Freda Reber Stucki. He was the oldest of seven children: Harvey, Pearl, Voile, Merle, Calvin, and Alta. "My earliest childhood memory," he said, "was when I was about three years old. My father had gone on a two year mission to Switzerland, and we went to Dodges to pick him up when he got off the stage. Dodges was a place that had lakes, and the people of Santa Clara went there to have picnics. It was between the present road to Veyo and Santa Clara. Any way. I remember my father getting off the stage and picking me up in his arms."

As the oldest, Rulon had the responsibility for the other children. When Pearl was two years old, she fell in the irrigation ditch which ran right next to the house and drowned. Although his parents didn't blame him for the death, Rulon felt responsible. It was his job to watch Pearl. One night after he had gone to bed, he saw a little girl standing by the bedside.

"I was as awake as I could be. There was a light, and it looked like she came walking in the door, but there wasn't no door there. She walked right up to the side of my bed, this little girl. Voile was sleeping with me, and I said, 'Voile, what are you doing up? What are you doing up?' And I reached over, and Voile was sleeping with me in the bed. And yet this little girl was standing right at my side looking at me. I called to my parents. Dad said to go to sleep. You're keeping us all awake. I said, 'There's a little girl standing right at the side of my bed, looking at me. It ain't Voile because she is in bed with me.' Finally my mother got up, and as she came through the door with a light, the little girl disappeared. I am sure to this day it was Pearl. What she wanted, what the message was, I don't know. Dad got real rough with me, but there it was. If I was talking to them, I was awake; I wasn't dreaming. I'd reach over to touch her, and she would back away, so I couldn't touch her. I'd reach over and touch Voile, and she was in bed. The little girl left when my mother brought that light in. I think Dad finally realized what it was. At least he knew that in my mind I had seen that baby girl standing there, so he wasn't mad at me then. That drowning was probably on my mind. Maybe Pearl came back to tell me it was okay. She was smiling and looked happy."

"I saved Harvey's life. He fell in that same ditch. Mom was clear over at the end of the lot washing. Harvey was just a baby just learning to walk. That ditch was right against the house. I wasn't strong enough to pull him out, so when he fell in, I went in after him. The water just about pulled me down. I held onto him with one arm and held onto the little bridge with the other hand and yelled at Mom. She came and got him out then. After that, they put a fence around that ditch and eventually moved it."

When Rulon was about eight years old, he was told to go to Littlefield to inform the Ences that one of the Ences in Santa Clara had died. About midnight there was a knock on the door, and John Ence asked Rulon's dad if Rulon could ride to Littlefield. Erza Tobler couldn't go because he had hurt his toe. Littlefield was about a forty mile ride, and in the middle of the night it could be pretty scary for a little boy. He rode Johnny's riding mare, Puss.

"I just kept her on a little jog. I went over the summit, and when I got to Summit Springs where they water their cattle, I could see something white. I didn't know what it was, and I was pretty scared. I could hear a little baaing noise, and my horse kept pulling off to the side and wanted to go back. I had to keep pulling off the road. After I got closer, I could see it was some sheep. That was before sheep really came into that country. I could see the sheep wagon, and I really felt relieved. I got by that and went on down. It started getting light finally, and the sun came up as I rode into Littlefield. Course I had to get there as soon as

possible because in those days they had no way to keep people. They had to keep putting a wet cloth over their face to keep them. I stayed in Littlefield for a couple of hours and had a little breakfast and gave my horse a chance to eat and have a little rest. I went back the same day. That horse was really tired for the next three or four days. She wasn't hardly able to move she was so stiff. I was tired, but then I wasn't as tired as the horse."

"Then along about that same time. I guess I was about twelve, Dad was on a peddling trip to Milford with Ernest Reber, and he sent word for me to take a horse out to Lund. Evidently, there was a spring there that had something poison because they lost quite a few horses, and Dad watered the horses there. One of them must have drunk a little too much because it got a belly ache and died on them. He had an empty load at that time, but it was quite sandy, and they needed another horse to pull them on in. I got on the old work horse and went as far as Washington the first day and camped there. The next day I went to Quicha Paw by Hamilton Fort and camped there. From there I went the old road by Iron Springs to Lund and met Dad. They hitched the horse right up. Course it was better for the horse, but that horse was stiff, too. It wasn't used to going long distances. It was just used to pulling the plow and other things around the farm. That's the horse Dad gave me for a wedding present, Old Bell. She was an old mare when he gave her to me."

None of the Swiss were very well-to-do, and they worked hard to make a living. They all worked on the farm or worked for others to help the family make ends meet. Rulon used to work for his grandfather harvesting grain. Old John Stucki had a reputation for making his children work very hard. He also applied the same rule to his grandchildren. Rulon worked from sun up to sun down with little time off for lunch and earned ten cents a day. John Stucki had invented a contraption to help make the harvesting faster and more efficient. He tied a piece of canvas behind a swath board which cut the grain. He would run the horses fast in short spurts. The swath would cut the grain, and it would fall on the canvas. Rulon's job was to run along behind the horses, and when the canvas was full, grab the grain and set it off to one side. Another man would come along and tie it up, and another would load it onto a wagon. When Rulon was older, he earned money working on the road. He was expected to give all the money he earned to his parents. One time he kept enough money back to buy a bridle with a silver bit. It was a beautiful thing, but when he left home to get married, his father wouldn't let him take it. He always felt bad about that because he had earned the bridle with his own money and felt it was his. Another way to earn money was during the cattle roundups in the fall. Johnny Hafen offered a dime for every calf of his the kids could find and bring in. As a result, Johnny's herd "grew considerably."

Christmases were fairly scrimpy by today's standards. One year Rulon's father went out and cut a plain cedar tree and told the kids not to hang their stockings because their presents would be under the tree. It had been a tradition to hang the stockings, so Harvey, who was about four years old, hung his anyway. He got up the next morning, and there was a stick of stove wood in his stocking. Boy, did he ever cry! And Rulon cried for him. Their presents consisted of things and clothes that could be made. They might get a harmonica or a pocket knife, a popcorn ball, story book, just something plain. When they hung their sock, they might get an orange, an apple, or a little sack of candy.

Rulon went to school in a little two room schoolhouse which was which was where June Gubler's house stands today. Since Swiss was spoken in Rulon's house instead of English, the first few years of school were difficult for him. He repeated the third grade. Up to that point

he had all women teachers: Mina Gray Gubler, Cecilia Tobler, and Effie Frei. Then Val and Lee Hafen started teaching the upper grades and took an interest in Rulon and moved him up a grade. He did really well in the fifth grade and didn't have any trouble after that. They started him in sports.

Rulon was really good in basketball and track. He was the fastest runner in town. Harmon Gubler, June's brother, was Rulon's biggest supporter when the town got together for the races on holidays such as New Year's, Christmas, and the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. They used to get together in groups and bet money on the races. Harmon sort of coached Rulon and bet his money on him. He also introduced him to spikes for running. Rulon was better in short races, but he won most of the long races. The long races started up by Edmond Gubler's house (the holler) and ended at the square (the church house). Erza Tobler ran about as well as Rulon, but Rulon always beat him. When Rulon started eighth grade, the family finances were not good, so he was taken out of school to go to work to help the family. The following year, Uncle Will and Ezra Tobler got his parents to let him go to high school. He skipped the 8<sup>th</sup> grade then, rented the attic in Arthur Hafen's house in St. George with Erza and others, and lived there five days a week. They would put up a grub box for a week. Their parents would come and get then on weekends and bring then back. It took an hour by wagon to get from St. George to Santa Clara.

Rulon was active in sports in high school. He played basketball, and his track team went to State that spring. He was entered in the 100 yard dash, the 220, the relay team, the high jump, running broad jump, and the shot put. He set a record at Dixie of 21 feet nine inches in the running broad jump although he didn't place at state. He took 1st place at State in the 100 yard dash, and Steve Wells took 2<sup>nd</sup>. He took 2<sup>nd</sup> place in the 220, and Steve took 1<sup>st</sup>. Then his mother became ill, and Rulon was not able to finish the ninth grade and never went back to school after that. "My mother took sick before I could finish the year, and Dad took me out of school to help. I was sorry, too, cause I sure did love sports. Never was anyone could beat me in a race. Even after I was married and they started the college in St. George, there wasn't one of those college boys could beat me. Finally, Heber Tobler, when he was in college, beat me." There was a sort of resignation mixed with the happiness of being the best when he made this statement. Perhaps he had hopes of other state championships in track had he been able to stay in school. Rulon spent his life loving sports, going to all kinds of ballgames, and watching his son Mac participate. Rulon himself participated even after his marriage, playing on the Santa Clara baseball team.

Rulon used to go peddling with his dad out to Pioche and Delmar. "It took us 14 days to complete the trip. There were dirt roads in those days. We had to be very careful when we picked the fruit. You had to know when the sugar had gotten into the peach, but when it was still green enough to travel. You had to look at every peach to make sure there was no disease or water on it. Sometimes if it rained before you got there, it would ruin your whole load. Then you were lucky to pay for your expenses for fourteen days and still come back with twenty or thirty dollars. But if things went right, you could make good money. Those people in those mining towns were hungry for good fruit. You could get \$1.50 or \$2.00 a bushel and sometimes \$3.00. They flocked around you when you drove into town. In fact that's how I earned enough money to get married to my first wife. My dad told me he would give me the money off the load of our Alberta crop. I took that load out and made me enough money to get married and save a little to get started in the peddling business. One time I worried that I might

not make it back. One of my wheels got so worn I stopped and got some black willows and tied it up good. I made it all right and then got a new wheel when I got home. One time my brother Harvey and I went out with a load, and when we came back, we saw that they were putting in a new road between Cedar City and Beryl. We called Dad and asked if we could stay. He said yes, so we stayed for six weeks. Harv drove our team. They put me to work with one of their teams. My job was the finishing. I never had worked on a road before. I had to spread that gravel evenly over the road. I done a good job, too.”

Rulon married Grace Staheli October 18, 1922. His father gave him Old Bell for a wedding present, and Grace had a colt that was about a year old. Rulon built a house in Ivins for about three hundred dollars. He hauled bricks from an old house that was being torn down in St. George all the way to Ivins. Albert Graff and George Tobler worked on the house for him. The roads were sandy, so he could take only a little stuff at a time. It was difficult getting the wagon up the steep hills into and out of Santa Clara, and he had to make many trips. The house had one bedroom, a little kitchen, and a little porch. He also built a nice big barn and a big chicken coop. He said, “The home wasn't much, but the barn sure was nice.”

He traded the house later on for fifteen head of cattle and a cattle permit. That's how he got in the cattle business. He had at the time five or ten cattle of his own and a permit for them. He tells an experience when he was riding one time.

“We were out to Bull Valley riding—Jake Frei, Sam Wittwer, and others. We had our beds all along the wall there in the bunk house, and Jake and Sam were in one bed, and I was right next to Sam in my bed. I could hear Sam doing a lot of snoring and making a gurgling noise. Course he did a lot of snoring anyway. Pretty soon Jake said, 'Sam, wake up; you're snoring. You're keeping us all awake.' There was no response, so he shook him. Then he said, 'Fellows, Sam's dead.' And there I was sleeping right to the side of him. We got up and built a fire. I happened to have the baggage wagon. It was my team and wagon that carried the baggage this time, so it was up to me to haul Sam to Enterprise. We had to phone in from Enterprise to Santa Clara so Bishop Edward Frei, he happened to have a truck, the first truck in Santa Clara, (I don't remember what model it was) could come and get him. They got Sam loaded onto my wagon with all that baggage, and they had his head lying right to the side of me. It was before daylight and was all downhill, and when it got daylight, I looked down, and there was his face right beside me black as the ace of spades. The blood had all gone to his face. And I was so scared and nervous, I nearly went crazy. I'll tell you; that's something I won't forget. Of course, the next night I was down on the Santa Clara Creek with the rest of the cowboys.”

After Rulon traded his house, Grace and he moved to Santa Clara into the old John Ence home. He stored apples and other fruit in the basement and peddled the fruit in the winter time house to house. After Grace's mother died, Rulon and Grace moved in with her father and took care of him until he died. At that time they were building the family home, which still stands. They also bought George Staheli's farm. Rulon was able to pay for the house in one year from the money he made peddling in Kanab. When he first went to Kanab, the depression had just started. He peddled his fruit door to door. He also stopped at the stores to see if they wanted anything. They told him they would take all his produce if he would stop selling door to door, so he did. He made two trips a week in the summer. In the fall he hauled grapes from Washington to Pioche in a Model-T Ford. He said the Italians in Pioche liked to get all the grapes they could. They made wine out of them.

As his business grew in Kanab, he got his brother Harvey and Reed Wittwer to haul produce from California, so he could take it to Kanab. He later decided to haul his own and went in with Clem Gubler. They made deliveries to Kanab, Pioche, and Tropic. Norman and Ensign Gubler were also delivering produce to the same area, so they decided to go in together and form the Southern Utah Produce Company. Later they formed the Rocky Mountain Produce Company with Harvey Stucki and Reed Wittwer. At that time they bought the franchise for the company. Rocky Mountain later combined with Milne Truckline in 1954 to make the produce company what it is today. Rulon was in the trucking business for thirty years. He sold his share in 1951 and continued working for Rocky Mountain as a produce manager and truck driver until 1959. He moved to Las Vegas and got a job as a gardener at the Tropicana Hotel. He worked there for ten years until he retired.

To Grace and Rulon's union five children were born: Wayne, September 2, 1925; Max, April 4, 1927; Kay, February 4, 1929; JoAnn, January 18, 1933; and Brent, April 24, 1943. The oldest boy, Wayne, was killed in World War II. The rest of the children are all living and are very successful. Rulon and Grace were divorced, and he later married Utahna Anderson.

He met Toni when he was driving truck from St. George to Richfield. They were married April 5, 1947. They had two sons, MacWayne, born June 8, 1948, and Kim, who was born August 5, 1953. All of Rulon's children have brought much joy to him. He has cared for them deeply. His own parents were very strict, so he made up his mind to be more lenient with his own kids. He says, "I never did believe in telling kids what to do. Perhaps I have been too easy on them. I wanted to make it easier for them than I had it. It's hard to know what is the best thing to do, and I haven't always been able to do what's best for them, but I done as good as I could. The kids today have it harder than we did. We didn't have as many choices. We knew what we had to do. There was no question about it. The kids today have more choices than we did, and it's harder for them because they have more decisions to make."

Rulon's favorite clothes are Levis, cowboy shirts, and boots. He loves a good pair of boots. He loved to dance in his younger days. All the young people in Santa Clara would walk to St. George and back just to go to a dance. Rulon was a good dancer and continued enjoying that recreation for as long as he was able. He says his mind is still willing, but his body isn't. He believes in enjoying life and in staying young. "Life is dull, as it is, so a person should enjoy it, even his work. Don't dread work; it never hurt anybody." Rulon has worked hard all his life. Even after he retired from the Tropicana, he worked for Major Riddle as a gardener at the Riddle home even though he was over seventy years old.

He loves people and life. He has always helped people whenever he could. He still stops for hitch hikers and helps people that he can see are in need. He has never said a bad word about anyone. He said, "It doesn't do no good to talk about people. They have their own ways. I follow the old saying, 'If you don't have anything good to say about people, don't say anything at all.' I've always liked people. I never tried to purposely hurt anyone. I didn't always succeed, but I never purposely set out to hurt anyone."

On honesty, he says, "I've probably told a few white lies in my time, but I can't remember any of them. I don't want to. I have always been honest in my dealings with others. I never would cheat a man in business or take anything that wasn't mine. I have always worked for what I got."

Rulon gave to the "down and out" and helped people whenever he could. As a result, he has probably been "on the short end of the deal many times." He would say, "That's all right.

They probably didn't mean to be that way. They probably needed it (money or whatever it was) worse than I did.” His philosophy of life could be summed up as follows: enjoy life, be good to others, be honest, and work hard.

At age seventy-six he lives with Toni in their home on Smoketree Road in Las Vegas. He still enjoys going to sporting events. He visits his children as often as he can and still is “young at heart.”

Postscript: Rulon died the following October and is buried in the cemetery on Lone Mountain and Tenyna in Las Vegas.

The following are Rulon's favorite Swiss songs to sing. The songs are written in German since no one could interpret the Swiss dialect.

“Annie, Annie, nimmst du mich.  
Ich bin ein guter zimmermann.  
Ich werde für dich ein kleines haus bauen.  
Und eine einzaunung in der hof  
in die einzaunung die kannst.  
Eine kleine kuh haben.  
Die kuh wird dir milch geben.  
Die milch wird dir butter geben.  
Die butter wird dir schiere machen.  
Die schmirere wird dir kuchen machen.  
Du kannst die kuchen essen  
aber vergess die messer und die gabeln nicht.”

Annie, Annie will you have me.  
I'm a good carpenter.  
I'll build you a little house  
and a cow corral in the back.  
In the cow corral you can  
have a little cow.  
The cow will give you milk.  
The milk will give you butter.  
The butter will make you grease.  
The grease will make you cakes.  
The cakes you can eat  
but don't forget the knives and forks.”

“Ich habe auf dem hügel gessen  
mit einem kleinem vogel in meine hand.  
Sie haben gesungen, sie sind gerannt  
auf dem hügel, ganz rund.”

“On the hill I was sitting  
with a little bird in my hand.  
They were singing, they were running  
on the hill all around.”