

Pioneering Oregon

My name is Margaret Boles Burdine. I am 95 years old and I live in Yakima, Washington.

This is my "True Story," some of it told to Kathryn Hall Bogle, and the rest written by myself some years ago.

When I think of all my hardships and my struggles, I realize there were many valleys of disappointments and the question rises: Is there a reason for serving God? Now I know the answer to that. My strength and faith have come from the Bible and I have reaped a great reward. I am proud of my children. I am comfortable and at peace.

Back in 1920 we were living in a little coast town near Coos Bay in Oregon. My husband and I were raising cattle and hogs for our livelihood. We had thoroughbred Poland China hogs, the most beautiful in five counties. One of them weighed 730 pounds, the nicest hog's I have ever known, for he would lie down and let all of our children sit on him. Through the fall and winter we sold the pigs in small loads. We had never made so much money before and we were pleased with our lot.

Our family numbered seven then. We owned a two-story house in town near the school and a little five room house out in the country.

The children thought the country house was paradise. The land was covered with lovely wild flowers, ferns large and small, and many evergreen trees. There were birds, bees, and butterflies and lots of wild berries. When the tide of the Bay was in, the children could fish, or go in bathing, or go boat riding. They were happy all the time, and so were we.

All this was quite a contrast to what our lives had been in Arkansas where I was born in 1885, and from Muskogee, Oklahoma where Earl Burdine and I lived when we were married.

My husband said he left home when he was 14 years old.

He was the eldest of 11 children and his parents thought he should have stayed and helped the family with the farm because, year after year, the family struggled but could not get out of debt.

Earl got a job and sent money home to his mother to help out the family, but still they stayed in debt. As the years passed, Earl and a younger brother rented some land, batched together, made good crops and paid off their father's debts. Everybody in the family was made proud and happy because of this. Earl was a man of his word, a very faithful worker in the church and he believed in right living. Trouble was, he thought everybody else was the same way.

I went from Arkansas to Oklahoma Territory with my sister and brother in 1906. There was a lot of knotty oak there and my brother worked in the sawmills. I went to keep house for him, but I also taught school there. I had always liked to read and had learned to read from my older sister before I went into regular school at age six. In our school Abe Grey was the teacher and he switched the legs of anybody who did not know the lesson. That way, you learned fast! I liked teaching reading, writing and arithmetic.

Yes, my eyes are blue and my skin is fair. My father was Irish and my mother was part Negro and part Indian. My grandmother was Negro, a slave. My husband was Negro.

That brings up a family joke, about my children's birth certificates, all different, though they had the same parents. Depended on the clerk who issued each certificate, I guess. On five certificates I am listed as white and my husband is listed as a Brown Indian. One child was listed as white and three were listed as Indian. In Marshfield, Oregon I was listed as white, my husband was listed as Brown Indian but that child was described as Negro!

Lets' see now. Where was I? Oh yes, we were living in Oklahoma and started our family there. We had started homesteading and, though we enjoyed the easy mixing and mingling of all homesteading people, the climate was so severe that we could not get ahead. Something always destroyed the crops. We went through some terrible drought years when you could look at a tree standing there and just see the leaves dry up.

The last year we were in Oklahoma a cyclone swept through our property. It picked up our house and turned it completely around.



Mr. and Mrs. Earl W. Burdine and children, L to R: Alfred, Verdell (on lap) and Delores.

(Marshfield, Oregon 1914)



Four of the Burdine girls in 1945: Audrey, Erma Jean, Verdell, and Helen. (Annie not present)



Verdell Burdine Rutherford and Delores Burdine Goodman with their mother, Maggie Burdine. (Photo: Buddy Bogle)

That was enough for me. I had been reading books on the western part of the United States, and Oregon seemed the best selection to me. I had read where a couple could get a homestead in Bend, Oregon, 320 acres of land, live on the land for three years and own it after that. I made up my mind that Oregon was where I wanted to go.

Not so, Earl. "What do you want to go for?" he asked me. I told him again and again. He didn't really

want to homestead anymore, so he said, "I don't think I'll go."

"If you don't go, that's all right with me," I said. "You can stay, but I'm going."

"How can you go? Fare on the train is \$35.00 apiece. What will you do with all these children?"

So many questions and I didn't have the answers. But suddenly I had the determination and I knew the answers would come. And they did.

There was the heap of wood that had been our house. We had no shelter of our own. I looked at it all and the remaining pieces of our furnishings left undamaged by the cyclone, and the solution took shape. I was an early women's liberator, I guess.

I took everything that was whole and ran up and down the street and managed within two days to sell enough to buy seat tickets on the train for all of us. My husband couldn't believe what he was seeing and, up to the hour before the train was to leave, he said he was not going.

Earl was not unkind, so he said he would take me and the children to the station a few miles away and he hitched our two horses to the buggy and loaded us all in. On the way he tried to make me change my mind and I tried to get him to come with us.

We were within yards of the station when I played my final card with my husband. He would have to go with us, I told him, for there on the platform waiting for us was the man who had bought our horses and the buggy we rode in.

And that's how our family came to Bend, Oregon, to Marshfield and later on to Yakima, Washington.

It took us six days and nights to get from Muskogee to Bend. I had packed enough food for us all to eat on the way out so we did not go hungry, but we were all very tired when we arrived in Bend.

The children and I sat on our bags, grips and boxes there at the railroad station until Earl could find a place to take us, at least for the night. We watched him go down the main street until he found a barber shop where he could ask questions about work and a place for us.

Within a few minutes he came back and dangled a key in front of my eyes. It was a key to a little house we could rent for eight dollars a month and it was completely furnished!

We were so excited. What seemed unbelievable was that a man in the barber shop wanted Earl to work for him, starting right then, and the house was available.

We gave thanks to the Lord and move right in.

Continued next week.

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