

Olga Denton

Interviewed by Susan Amero. November 8, 2000



Q. Now, O.K. What is your full name?

A. Olga Haight Crumbbaker Denton.

Q. O.K. And who were your parents?

A. Hilma Augusta Anderson and Lesley Haight.

Q. O.K. And what was your mother's maiden name before she was married?

A. Hilma Augusta Anderson.

Q. O.K. And when were you born?

A. August 31, 1899.

Q. Oh Olga, amazing. And where were you born?

A. In Rossway.

Q. O.K.

A. Digby County.

Q. And how large was your family?

A. We had just the two of us.....my sister and myself.

Q. And were you the oldest or the youngest?

A. Oldest.

Q. O.K. And what did your father do for a living?

A. He was a farmer.

Q. O.K. And what do you remember about your mother's work day?

A. Mother was a professional cook and she learned her cooking in the kitchen of the King's Palace, in Stockholm, Sweden.

Q. Amazing. So what did she have to do there?

A. I couldn't tell ya, except that she learned cooking.

Q. Right. So who...did....do you know of any famous people she would have cooked for?

A. She cooked for the King.

Q. Amazing. O.K. What was a typical school day like for you?

A. Well we were there at nine o'clock in the morning and....

Q. Do you remember how many children were in your classroom?

A. No, I don't remember.

Q. Did you have just one room or many rooms in your school?

A. No, it was a one room school.

Q. Do you remember your teacher's name?

A. Well we had different teachers for different years.

Q. Right. O.K. And did you have to memorize anything when you were in school?

A. Yes, we had to. We were always given something to memorize but I couldn't tell you exactly what.

Q. Right. So how were you disciplined at school?

A. Well, we were taught to mind, obey our teacher.

Q. And what would happen if you didn't obey the teacher?

A. Well, in those days they used a strap.

Q. Right.

A. Or sometimes they stood you in the corner.

Q. O.K. And how were you disciplined at home?

A. Mom and dad deprived us of some special privilege.

Q. Oh yeah.

A. They never switched us.

Q. Well that was nice. So what were your daily chores at home, Olga?

A. Well...usually I just helped...when I was.....old enough to do it....help with the housework.

Q. Right.

A. Washin' dishes and sweeping.

Q. O.K. What was your favorite holiday, when you were a little girl?

A. Christmas.

Q. And what did you like about Christmas so much?

A. Well, I don't know exactly. We did differently then most people do. We celebrated our Christmas on Christmas Eve.

Q. Oh yeah.

A. Because mother was accustomed to going to church on Christmas Day.....in Sweden, they did that and she continued to do so. We opened our gifts on Christmas Eve.

Q. O.K. Did you have any pets when you were a little girl, Olga?

A. We had dogs and cats.

Q. O.K. What was it like at your house when the Sears Catalogue would arrive?

A. When what?

Q. When the Sears Catalogue would come?

A. Oh....we didn't care much about it because we were....we never ordered from them.

Q. O.K. How much spending money did you have as a child?

A. None.

Q. And what was your religion?

A. We were Baptist.

Q. And what were Sundays like in your house when you were growing up?

A. We went to Sunday School and church.

Q. What was your favorite hymn Olga?

A. I don't know that I had any special favorite.

Q. O.K. Did anybody else live in your house, when you were growing up, besides your family?

A. No.

Q. O.K. So what kind of vegetables did you grow and raise yourselves?

A. Everything. Father was a farmer and he raised.....Our cellar basement was full of vegetables that he had raised. Beets, carrots, parsnips, turnips, squash.....oh...beans, peas....everything.

Q. Did he have any animals?

A. Yes. We had yoke of oxen, we had cows, we had cattle, we had horses, pigs, hens and ducks.

Q. O.K. Did you barter for anything?

A. Did you what?

Q. Did you barter for anything? Did you trade any of your vegetables like for fish maybe or....?

A. No.

Q. O.K.

A. Mother used to give us a quarter and send us to the shore and we'd come back with a nice fresh had-dock.

Q. Uh...down the French Shore?

A. No.....to the Bay of Fundy.

Q. Oh yeah. So he....so you would go down and buy the fish from a fisherman?

A. Umhmm.

Q. O.K. So how did electricity change things for you?

A. We didn't have electricity. It wasn't until.....I think after I was married that we had electricity on the side roads.

Q. Right.

A. They had electricity down The Neck but we lived on Gulliver's Cove Road. That was-----we had no electricity in there.

Q. O.K. Olga, do you remember what year you got married?

A. Yes. I was married August....my first marriage was August 1, 8.....1923.

Q. O.K. And who did you marry?

A. Charles Crumbaker.

Q. Right. And did you have any children?

A. One son, Leslie

Q. Right. And then you....remarried?

A. He....he died. He was in the U.S. (United States of America) Navy.

Q. Oh yeah.

A. And he died. And....I....later remarried. And I married Curtis Denton from Little River, Nova Scotia.

Q. Right.

A. On.....I've forgotten the.....it was the year 1932.

Q. O.K. Did you have any children from that marriage?

A. No.

Q. So....O.K.....O.K. Ummmm. What can you tell me about bath night when you were a little girl?

A. Bath night?

Q. Yup.

A. We had a.....wash tub that we used to bathe in.

Q. Right.

A. We had to go in the bathroom.

Q. How often would bathe night occur?

A. Once a week.

Q. And who was the doctor when you were growing up?

A. Doctor Morrise.

Q. Doctor Morrise?

A. Morrise. M-o-r-r-i-s-e.

Q. O.K.

A. From Digby.

Q. So how far....oh.. he lived.....I'm sorry. So who delivered the babies in your community?

A. Well, I think probably I was delivered by a.....one of the ladies that....

A. A midwife.

Q. Right. O.K. So what were some home remedies that would have been common when you were a little girl? You know, like if you had a cold, how would your mother take care of it?

A. I don't remember, to tell you the truth.

Q. That's O.K. So how did you take care of your teeth?

A. We brushed them.

Q. With a toothbrush?

A. With a toothbrush.

Q. O.K. How often would you visit a dentist?

A. Never. (laughter)

Q. O.K. When someone died in the community, how was the wake handled?

A. My grandfather was the undertaker. We had the hearse at our house. He...he was a carpenter. He had built the hearse. And...he...took care of everything that an under taker would take care of.

Q. Do you remember your grandfather's name, Olga?

A. Charles Haight.

Q. O.K. O.K. So now I'm going into a set of questions about when you were growing up. O.K.?

Q. So how often did you get to leave your community?

A. Not very often.

Q. And if you did, where would you go?

A. To visit relatives in.... nearby communities.

Q. O.K. And how would you get there?

A. Horse and buggy.

Q. What were the roads like?

A. Miserable.

Q. Right.

A. Mud...mud roads.

Q. Mud road. And who would have to look after the roads?

A. Well the men in the community.

Q. O.K. So what did you expect to do when you grew up?

A. I expected to be a schoolteacher.

Q. And what did you hope to do?

A. What did I what?

Q. What did you hope to do when you grew up?

A. Be a schoolteacher.

Q. And were you a schoolteacher?

A. No, I'm a registered nurse. And I graduated down in Norfolk, Virginia.....eighty years ago.

Q. Imag.....amazing. So how long did it take to get your nurse's certificate?

A. Three years.

Q. And how oft.....how long did you work as a nurse?

A. About seven years.

Q. Did you like....did you enjoy it?

A. Yes.

Q. And where did you work?

A. Right.....I stayed right on at the hospital.

Q. In Digby?

A. No, in Norfolk, Virginia.

Q. O.K. So how long did you live in Virginia?

A. Roughly about seven years.....well yes, roughly about seven years. Three years in training and I was Instructor of Nurses at the hospital, from which I graduated for four years before I married.

Q. So then you married and you moved here?

A. No. We were....my husband was in the....

Q. Officer.

A. Officer in the U.S. (United States) Navy.

Q. Right.

A. And we.....we were ordered to Brooklyn, New York.

Q. O.K. O.K. As a teenager, what kinds of things did you do for fun?

A. We just made our own fun. Played games and made mud pies and.....

Q. O.K. Did you have any movie idols when you were growing up, Olga?

A. No, we never heard of such things.

Q. What kind of music did you like?

A. Well we had.....all we had was organ music. Old....old parlor organs.

Q. Right.

A. We used to gather on Sunday afternoon, sing hymns.

Q. O.K. What kind of sports did you enjoy?

A. Ice skating in the winter..... and in the summer there wasn't much of anything.

Q. O.K. Olga, what do you remember about dating?

A. Nothing special.

Q. O.K. How far did you go in school?

A. Grade ten.

Q. And why did you leave school?

A. To go in training.

Q. O.K. And how old were you when you left school?

A. Well.....I have to stop and think. I was about seventeen when I went in training. so I'd be about seventeen, I guess.

Q. O.K. So Olga, once you left high school, then did you move to the States to become a nurse?

A. Yes....I left school to go into training.

Q. I see. So did you go down to the States by yourself?

A. No, I went with a friend.

Q. So, do you know her name? Do you remember her name?

A. Mrs. Tilley. T-i-l-l-e-y.

Q. And she was from here?

A. No, she was from South Norfolk, Virginia.

Q. O.K.

A. And she was a registered nurse.

Q. So how did you meet your husband? Your first husband? You said that he was in.....

A. Norfolk.

Q. Right. So how did you meet him?

A. Well I....I have to stop and think. I was....it was a miracle really. I was at.....some....I think it was a dance. And I was up.....talking with the.....who ever was in charge. It was more or less a personal affair.

Q. Right.

A. And I turned around and looked and here was this young man coming in the door, and our eyes met, as if we sort of saw each other at the same time. And he went to the desk and he asked the lady, at the desk, if she would give, if she would introduce him to that blond, who just left. He wanted to dance....we were at a dance. He wanted to dance with her.

Q. So it must have been pretty magical, was it?

A. Yes, it was.

Q. So...O.K. then. What do you remember about your wedding?

A. Nothing special.

Q. Were your mother and father at the wedding?

A. No. We were married.....in church...down in Norfolk, at Union-Mason Street, Baptist Church.

Q. Right.

A. And we just had a few of my friends, from the hospital.

Q. So where did you live after you got married?

A. Well first, we lived in Norfolk for a short time, then, as I said, he was in the service, and he was ordered to Brooklyn, New York.

Q. O.K. So how much did your first home cost?

A. We never had a home. We rented.

Q. Alright. O.K. Can you tell me about a....some of the things you had to do as a nurse, Olga? When you first got your job?

A. Well, we did everything. Nursing was, as I remember it, much better in our day, than it is today.

Q. Right.

A. First of all, we were taught to be ladies, to lower our voices, talk quietly to our patients, and put ourselves in the patient's place, and handle her accordingly.

Q. So you must have enjoyed your job as a nurse, did ya?

A. I certainly did.

Q. O.K. Do you remember how much money you got paid at that job?

A. Well the first....job that I took, I had a hundred and fifty dollars a month, plus of course I had my board, lodging and laundry.

Q. Do you know how much you had to pay for your board, back then?

A. I didn't have to pay any board.

Q. O.K. And do you remember how much tax you had to pay?

A. No.

Q. No? O.K. O.K. What do you remember about wartime?

A. Not too much.

Q. O.K. Do you remember anything about the Depression?

A. Yes, I raised my family, in the States, during the Depression. This was....was my second husband. We had, my son and he had been married before and his wife died. We had two of his children so there was five of us, three children and two adults. And I said "Bad as the Depression was, it was better than times today."

Q. Right. So can you tell me, how did people help each other out, in days gone by, that's different from today?

A. They helped everybody. We....that's one thing about my life, I said my early childhood, neighbors helped neighbors. And my father was a very gifted person, he was the...mother used to say he was...strong enough that if he took hold of his ox's horn, he could break it off, but if he put his hand on you, it was just like silk. And if people were sick, they always sent for Les Haight.

Q. Very, very amazing.

A. He was kindly and knew how to do everything.

Q. O.K. Do you remember anything about the Poor Farm?

A. I just remember there was a Poor Farm.

Q. O.K. Umm.....Can you....can you describe, you lived in Rossway, you say, or Roxville?

A. Rossway.

Q. Rossway. So can you describe what Rossway looked like when you were a little girl. Was there any stores or things like that?

A. We had one Country Store.

Q. Do you know what it was called?

A. Charles Denton. It was just a grocery store.

Q. Right. O. K. And what did it look like inside that store?

A. Well, like all the country stores looked then. They had a little bit of everything and not much of anything.

Q. Yeah. O.K. So did you belong to any organizations like the Rebeccahs or anything like that?

A. No.

Q. O.K. And when would people get together for a good time?

A. Well, first of all we had a village hall, and Saturday nights we used to have card parties, in the winter and summer.

Q. O.K. What kind of cards did they play?

A. I can't remember....I never played.

Q. Like 45's or....?

A. Something like 45's.

Q. O.K. And would we..... a lot of people would go to that?

A. Well quite a number.

Q. O.K. O.K. Do you ummm.....how superstitious were people when you were growing up?

A. I don't remember.

Q. O.K. Ummm....what is the worse weather you can remember?

A. I don't remember. (laughter)

Q. O.K. That's alright. Do you know anything about any shipwrecks in the area, Olga?

A. Well the only thing I know is that....what we used to call Broad Cove.

Q. Right.

A. The name was changed to Culloden, because the steamship The Culloden, went ashore there. Culloden was quite near us.

Q. Right. Do you remember roughly when that was?

A. No, I don't.

Q. O.K. Ummm....do you know how many people were lost on that ship?

A. I don't know.

Q. O.K. Do you....what ghost stories can you remember from when you were little?

A. We didn't tell ghost stories.

Q. O.K.

A. We weren't allowed to.

Q. Ummm...do you remember Maud Lewis?

A. Well not as a child, no.

Q. Did you ever meet her?

A. I saw her once. The dirtiest person you ever saw in your life.

Q. She was?

A. Filthy dirty.

Q. She was?

A. Lived in that hut that later was moved. I think to Halifax. I was...this was after I had grown up. I went to see....the hut...the ait was on Digby Neck, you know. I went in to see her. The dirtiest, filthy place you ever saw in your life. And she was filthy dirty.

Q. But, was she a happy person, do you know?

A. She must have been.

Q. O.K. So how would you compare life today, to....to....to...when in days gone by?

A. They were much happier in days gone by. Happier and.... more worth while.

Q. And Olga, what do you think about the children of today, compared to the children of yesterday?

A. There's just no comparison. The children today have everything and they had nothing. We had nothing but we had everything.

Q. And what about the values of children today?

A. We had....we had...today. When we were growing up we no money. Nobody had any. So we didn't know we had none.

Q. Right.

A. Today, they have....all they think about is money, money, money.

Q. So, Olga, is there anything else you'd like to tell me?

A. No, I don't think there's anything special.

Q. Did you ever get to go to Sweden?

A. No, but my son did, and he went to visit the King's Palace. The kitchen of the King's Palace, where his grandmother learned her cooking.

Q. Right.

A. And he said she's still registered there. Not as Hilma Anderson but as Hilma Anders Dotter.

Q. Amazing. So is your son still living today, Olga?

A. Yes, he lives in Needham, Massachusetts.

Q. Do you get to see him very often?

A. He has a home here in Digby. He was here all summer.

Q. O.K.Ummm....Olga, where you live, down in Rossway, was there a big lake by where you lived?

A. No, but there was in Sandy Cove. Where I lived in Sandy Cove before I came here

Q. Right.

A. I had the only house on the lake.

Q. And....do you remember anything about a story about there suppose to be a sturgeon (a type of fish) in that lake?

A. Well, you're talking about the lake in Sandy Cove.

Q. Right.

A. Yes, there was suppose to have been.

Q. Did you ever see it?

A. No.

Q. So...you know anything about that lake? What was the name of the lake?

A. No name. It was just called The Lake.

Q. O.K.

A. My house is still there.

Q. Right. I've seen your house. Umhmm.O.K. Olga, I think I'm gonna..... shut down.

