

A Century of Recollections
by
Ruby Elsie Kuns Simmons



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This document has been written to share the family history as described by Ruby Kuns Simmons. The stories that follow span four generations and relate to family members, specific incidents, and little known trivia treasures. As family history, these thoughts and memories are not only meaningful to appreciate and pass on, but significant in understanding where we've come from and who we are. They are presented to you using her thoughts and memories as translated from previously recorded tapes.



Ruby Elsie Kuns, 2 months 6 days

Ruby Elsie Kuns was born on June 14, 1902. She was named after her mother Miriam Elsie and was one of six children. Of the six, one child was lost at childbirth, a brother (Georgie) died at 8 months, and two sisters (Pearl and Ethel) were lost as infants. Ruby was the third child to arrive; her sister Opal came fourth. Although Ruby's father had difficulty accepting the loss of so many offspring, his wife's devout spiritual beliefs provided the family with a strong sense of reason by which they could live and continue despite such hardship. Ruby's mom was called Elsie by her husband, William Addison, and Aunt Miriam by all the nieces and nephews. Her father in turn was known as Uncle Billy by all of the nieces and nephews.

Billy came from Missouri and Elsie from Illinois. After living in Glendale, Arizona and suffering from homesickness and the loss of their first children, they moved back to Illinois where Billy was employed at a machine shop at the time Ruby was born. It was while they were in Illinois that the Fowlers, the owners of the farm in Arizona where Ruby's family had lived and worked, provided the Kuns' with an opportunity. They indicated that if the couple and their baby return to Arizona, they would move to a hotel in Phoenix and turn the farm (about 160 acres) over to them to operate. It was an

interesting arrangement where once a month the Fowlers would leave Phoenix and come to the farm and Elsie would fix dinner. Mrs. Fowler and Ruby's dad would pour over the books... The deal was that anything that had previously existed and continued to be raised on the ranch belonged to the Fowlers. Any new production that the Kuns' developed ranging from calves to chickens and eggs belonged to them. Ruby especially recalls climbing the beautiful big old olive trees that lined the highway for nearly half a mile.

To Ruby, her relationship with Opal when they were children did not really seem like a relationship between sisters due to the significant difference in their ages. She remembers the time when Opal was born... On one particular day her father said to her that he had seen a stork overhead. He claimed that if the stork flew by and noticed a child already in the home, that perhaps it might not stop. He suggested that Ruby go over to a neighbor's house in order to allow the stork to deliver a new baby. According to Ruby (8-years-old and, at that time, a bit too young to learn about the facts of life) that is exactly what happened.



Ruby's sisters, Opal & Pearl

In addition to the happy time when her sister was born, Ruby remembers vividly the sad loss of her brother, Georgie who died while the family was living in Glendale, Arizona. Georgie suffered from a severe fever and a message was sent to Phoenix calling for a doctor. She recalls the heartbreaking image of her mother cradling the tiny child in her arms while sitting next to an open stove; a futile attempt to maintain warmth within the feverish body of her only son. Ruby's father called to her and said, "Ruby, your little brother has a temperature of 106 and he's going to die. You must come in and see your little brother before he dies." She remembers looking at her little brother and trying to forever freeze the image of his face in her memory. Her father told her to remember him always, and she has never forgotten.

Yet another tragedy happened not long after the death of Georgie. Ruby remembers how her family traveled to the California coast to vacation as a way of coping with the recent loss of her brother. Unfortunately, a devastatingly different kind of loss

was just around the corner. While they were gone, their house burned to the ground. Seems the renters left an unattended pot on the stove that caught fire. Again, another instance of the strong faith of Ruby's mother as a definite necessity to pull the family together.

The Imperial Valley was opened up for settlement around 1908-1910. Ruby says her Uncle made more money with his teams of horses than the other men working. They dredged out the first canals near the town of Imperial and later in the Holtville area. The Government had owned the land prior to that time. If you homesteaded on the property you had to make certain improvements to the property over the years. You were then responsible for going into the Government office to justify or "prove up" on the land, that is prove to the Government what you had done to the property.



Aunt Mary, Jesse & Gilbert & Uncle Willard Gillette

Both Billy and Elsie had older sisters who married brothers from the Gillette family. Aunt Rachel, Billy's sister, married Charlie Gillette. Aunt Mary, Elsie's sister, married Willard Gillette. They were all part of a group of early settlers in the Imperial Valley. When they first arrived in the Valley, they brought equipment and were prepared to work building the first dam and inlets to bring water into the area. The Highline canal, where Ruby's family eventually settled, was built quite a while later. Although these first settlers played a significant role in the early development of the area, they scattered over the years as they got jobs in other geographic locations and moved on. The fact that Billy and Elsie both had sisters married to a Gillette is what brought the younger couple

together in the first place. In fact, Ruby says one of the Gillette brothers performed the wedding ceremony when her parents were married. The Gillette families were both rather large so Ruby always had many cousins to play with during her childhood years.

Ruby's parents lived a frugal life while in Arizona and managed to save a small amount by trading products from the farm. Those savings are what helped them make their next move. When Ruby was 10, the Kuns family followed in the footsteps of the Gillette's and moved from Glendale, Arizona to the Imperial Valley to own land. While waiting for the occupants of a ranch located north of Holtville to vacate the property, her parents took possession of a small country store located not far from the Mexican border owned by Ruby's Uncle Willard. Willard owned a number of these country stores in various locations around the Holtville area. These stores were not only busy with people coming and going, but subject to robbery. Ruby distinctly remembers one night while residing in the tent house adjoining the backside of the store, one of the customers leaning a shotgun against the counter. The gun slipped and went off. Ruby and her mother were startled by the sound of a loud BANG! Ruby's father immediately ran back and shouted to his wife, "It's OK Elsie, everything is OK, OK!" and he began to laugh so his wife wouldn't worry. Overall, their residence and operation of the store lasted for only a couple of months during that first summer in the Imperial Valley and in the fall the family moved north of Holtville and Ruby attended the Eastside school. Uncle Willard eventually lost all of his country stores as a result of the recession.



Ruby's first Imperial Valley Home, Uncle Willard's Store

It's while living behind that store that Ruby remembers an experience where her sister was injured. She describes the tent house as having two double beds. Her parents slept in one bed and Ruby and Opal slept in the other. The kitchen had an uneven dirt floor and Opal's highchair was placed too close to the oven. The highchair tipped over one day and Opal's cheek was burned on the hot oven door. Ruby remembers vividly what happened next, "I remember Mama and Papa taking turns walking with her on the shady side of the store. They walked and she cried and cried."

Ruby's mother, Elsie, would make the clothes necessary for her girls. Ruby relates a specific story where she described for her mother exactly the kind of dress she was dreaming of, "with a centerpiece down the front and tape on each side". Her mother made the perfect dress and Ruby says she remembers it as being her favorite. When speaking about her childhood, Ruby says she remembers being quite close with her mother. Interestingly, she doesn't remember having toys or even a doll as a child, but says the hours were filled with playing outdoors. In fact, Ruby remembers a lot of freedom while on the ranch in Arizona. She says she could practically go wherever and do whatever she pleased.



Ruby & Opal

About the time that Ruby's grandfather's (her mother's father) estate was being settled back in Illinois, the Highline Canal was being completed and the adjacent land opened up for farming in the Imperial Valley. The family settled about a mile away from the Highline. They moved there and became landowners when the canal was first established and the high desert was initially cultivated.

In Ruby's first year on the Highline, she attended eighth grade in a nearby school. The next year a school bus route was started and Ruby rode to high school in Holtville. According to Ruby, the school "bus" was really just a family car used for transporting the kids to class. This was at a point in time that much of the ground between the Highline and Holtville was barren and had yet to be developed (with leveling and irrigation). The 10-mile bus ride provided an opportunity for many of the kids to become like a familiar family. Ruby recalls that the roads between Holtville and the Highline were a mixture of good and bad. One particular stretch of road was quite alkaline (salty and slippery) and on one particular morning the bus driver lost control and the bus tipped over. Ironically, although the kids got muddy, no one was hurt. Another bus was sent to retrieve the children.

Holtville was quite a busy town at that time. In fact, even bigger than it is now. Even then, earthquakes were a problem. As a result, many of the buildings that were two stories tall back then no longer exist today. Ruby's father had a grocery store of his own on the south side of the park, facing the park. It's from her father's store that she recalls a time where she got in serious trouble and learned a very valuable lesson: "I remember bragging to my friends on the way home from school that everything in this store belongs to my father and I can go help myself to the candy if I want to...", so she did. She walked in, with her girlfriends wide-eyed at the door, and traipsed behind the candy counter to help herself to the candy. What Ruby didn't realize was that, in addition to her friends, her father's eyes were watching too. She remembers him saying to her, "Listen, don't you ever do that again!"



Ruby's father and the grocery wagon

It was around this time when Ruby and her family purchased their first automobile. She tells the story of traveling to Los Angeles with her mother and father to buy a Ford Model T. Her father received his first lesson in driving from the dealership. Upon their trip home they encountered a steep incline at the Torrey Pines grade north of San Diego. Ruby's mother was so concerned in the reliability of the car and its' driver that she got out of the vehicle and walked up the hill. Meantime, Ruby and her father drove the car up the grade and met her mother at the top.

Her best friend at the time was her schoolmate, Agnes Norrish. Agnes was the daughter of the town's only judge. Much to the judge's chagrin, both Ruby and Agnes would sometimes slip into the courtroom when he was presiding. Ruby and Agnes remained life long friends.

Goodrich Simmons was born and raised in West Virginia and moved west to Los Angeles to be with family. He eventually migrated to the Imperial Valley to work on a farm. It was around that time that Ruby lived near the Highline canal. It was while living on the farm near the canal that she met Goodrich when she was 17 or 18 years old. They first met at a social gathering held at the local school. Ruby tells a story of riding home from the event in a wagon with Goodrich and a female teacher. At the time Ruby

believed that Goodie had eyes for the teacher, never dreaming that she, herself, was the focus of his interest!

Sensitive about being so much older than Ruby, Goodrich, 32, was a farmer out in the Highline area and worked on a farm 4-5 miles north of the Kuns'. The family who owned the land where he worked had gone on a long trip (in a new kind of car called a Rio) and left him in charge of the farm as a foreman. He was living with the other farm employees raising crops like alfalfa for hay and grain. The ranch had one of the earliest tractors. One of the problems with tractors back then was the fact that they would sometimes hit a soft spot on the ground, the wheels would spin, and the tractor would overturn. Goodrich created a voltage switch so that if this occurred the circuit would break and the tractor would stop.

The summers were hard on Ruby's mother and her father would take the family to San Diego, find a little apartment and escape the heat. One summer when Ruby's family was in San Diego, Goodrich and his niece stopped by after visiting his relatives in Bell. While Ruby and her mom were in the kitchen preparing dinner, (unbeknownst to Ruby) Goodrich asked Ruby's dad for permission to marry his daughter. Ruby's father gave his conditional approval, that is, she would have to finish high school and if her feelings for him had not changed by that time then the marriage would be allowed. Her father also insisted that Ruby be able to date other young men during her last year of high school.



Young Ruby

Ruby does actually admit to one other man in her life when she was younger. She says she always suspected that the young driver of their school bus (which was really just a family car and not a real bus) was suffering from a crush. Every time he pulled into her driveway to pick her up for school, his little sister would get out of the front seat and into the back to allow Ruby to sit up front with the driver. Even with such special treatment, Ruby's heart truly belonged only to Goodrich. The pair dated for more than a year before they married.

Ruby was married the day after her 19th birthday in 1921 and left the Imperial Valley shortly thereafter. They were married at 8:00 in the morning, had breakfast immediately and left for a honeymoon in San Diego. They stayed in San Diego for 2 or 3 days and then went up to the town of Bell, California where they lived for a short time.

After leaving the town of Bell, Ruby and Goodie settled in Huntington Park, California. Ruby's parents eventually left the Imperial Valley as well and moved to the community of Lynwood to be near the younger couple. Goodrich was working at that time for his brother-in-law, Dr. Klipstein, in real estate. The Klipstein's went back to stay in Virginia and Goodrich had a great deal of difficulty communicating between the East coast and Los Angeles... it simply took too long to get the answers he needed to work. He switched jobs and went to work in the service department of a car dealership in Huntington Park. Eventually he became a salesman at the dealership. He sensed that harder economic times were on the way and decided he needed to make a change. He had a baby on the way and wanted to find a job that paid better and was considered steady and dependable. Goodrich turned his eye towards police work.

Their first child, Bettie Wilson, was born on December 30, 1922 in Huntington Park. Ruby and Goodie had purchased a small house with the help of his sister, Bess. Bess and her husband lived only five or six blocks away. They also helped the young couple to buy furniture and relocate. The house was located on Saturn Avenue and had one bedroom and one bath. It was in that house that the twins, Goodrich and Willie, were born on January 6, 1926. Bettie Wilson says that she remembers when the twins arrived home from the hospital and how she slept on the rollaway sofa near the dining alcove. She says she would lie awake and listen to the grownups talk and feel like she was in the middle of everything.

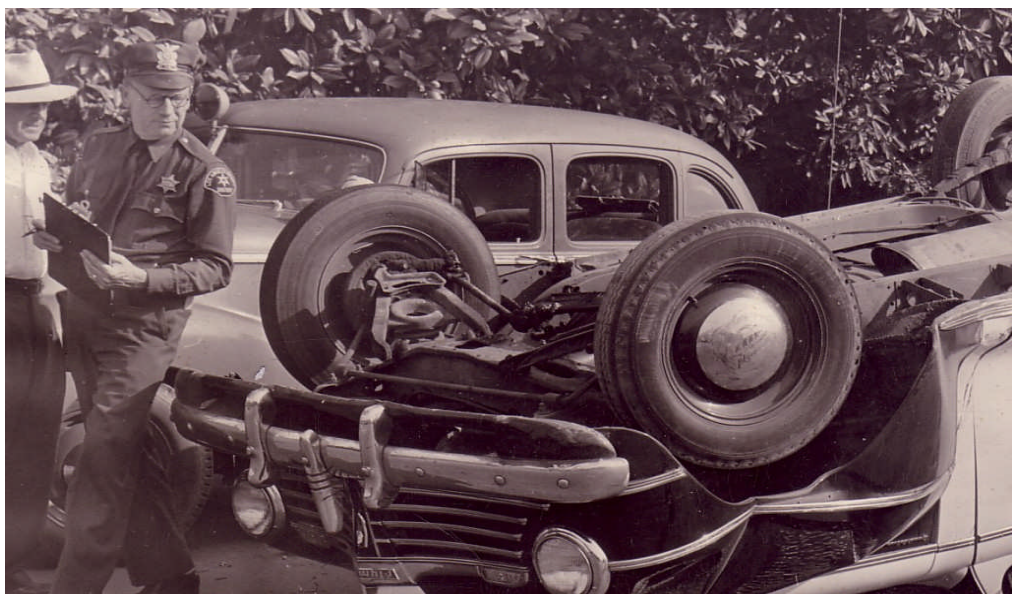


Bettie Wilson, Goodrich & William

This all occurred during the extremely difficult economic times of the great depression. By this time Goodrich was working for the Huntington Park police department but found that politics played a large role in his actual job description. While working for the city, he would find himself doing jobs ranging from police work to

driving a gravel truck. After 2-3 years on the job, his frustration with the city led him to the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department.

His first year with the county was spent in the jail at the top of the hill in downtown Los Angeles. In all, he dedicated 20 years to the sheriff's department, which includes the time he was released to serve in the Navy. His various jobs in law enforcement often required he work late night hours. Since Ruby's mother never liked being alone under any circumstance, Ruby's father assumed his daughter would have the same fears about solitude. He told his son-in-law, "You'll never get Ruby to stay alone at night." Those words made Ruby all the more determined. As a result, Goodie's late hours were never a problem for Ruby or the family.



Ruby's husband, Goodrich, at work

Goodrich's training was on the job. He sometimes worked a beat on the streets of Huntington Park and other times in a car with a partner. He conducted investigations and responded to calls. Initially there was a point of time when it was impossible to communicate from a moving vehicle. The officers had to stop and find a telephone to report in. It was considered a breakthrough in catching criminals when you no longer had to stop to communicate. The children especially appreciated when police radios became part of the equipment package. Bettie Wilson remembers the excitement of sitting in the sheriff's car listening for her father's car number to be called to the scene of a crime.

Ruby claims that during those years she and Goodrich were often very "in tune" with one another. There was a night when Goodrich was out in the patrol car when they apprehended a man who had escaped from the county hospital. He was suffering from Leprosy. Goodrich sat with the man in the back seat of the patrol car and put a blanket around him until they were finally able to return the patient back to the medical facility. Late that night (actually early the next morning) when Goodrich returned home, Ruby ran

up and expressed her relief that he was home safely because she had had a horrible dream... a dream that her husband had leprosy.

Ruby also tells the story of the night when Goodie and his partner were trying to capture a suspect inside a two-story house. From the top of the stairs on the second floor the alleged thief announced, "I am up here. I've got a gun and you can't come after me." Ruby says that Goodrich responded by saying, "Oh, yes I CAN come after you and I WILL one step at a time"... and he did. Ruby says Goodrich walked right up the stairs and cuffed the suspect. She says her husband was definitely a man of courage.

The twins were just starting first grade when the family moved to Sierra Madre. They hoped to escape the cold and fog found closer to the ocean. While in Sierra Madre living on Baldwin Avenue, the family became acquainted a man who was a caretaker of a cabin located on the Mount Wilson trail. In exchange for fixing up the property, he charged them only \$20 per year for the use of the cabin. The family spent many hours, days, and weekends creating fond memories in the mountains. With Goodrich in the sheriff's office, the owner thought the cabin would be protected. The forest service felt that having people at the cabin would offer protection as well. The family used the cabin for four to five years. When they moved to a larger house on Montecito Avenue the time necessary to visit the cabin became scarce.



*The Simmons Family with Aunt Bess & Uncle Billie
On Montecito Avenue*

Ruby remembers the war years as being very hard. During this time things were rationed. On certain days were you allowed to buy only certain items. Other days there was nothing. Sometimes bread was rationed and it was especially hard to get white bread. Butter was also strictly rationed, but margarine was easier to get. Gasoline and tires were also subject to rationing. Ruby would save the grease in her kitchen after frying bacon. The grease was then taken and donated to the butcher shop to be used in the production of nitroglycerin.

It was just prior to the war that Ruby began to go back to school hoping to one day, perhaps, get a degree. Goodrich was very supportive of her endeavor. Ruby went to Pasadena City College for about one year. She became acquainted with the teachers and did some writing but the war brought an early end to her college career. When war broke out she joined the ranks of many women who went to work outside the home. For a time, Ruby worked in a machine shop called Grayson Manufacturing Company. She then changed jobs and worked at another location closer to her home in Sierra Madre called Hawk's Machine Shop. It was during that time that she learned to operate a lathe and a milling machine. She says she became particularly skilled with a drill press and made parts specifically for airplane wings. Not only was she good at the job, she really liked it, too! She worked nights in the machine shop while Goodrich worked nights for the Sheriff's office. Contrary to the accepted practice of women in the workplace today, the women in the machine shop were not always welcomed by their male counterparts. Many men did not like the women working at night or doing what they considered to be "men's work". In fact, Ruby remembers a police guard often on patrol at the shops who employed women to protect them while working after dark. It wasn't long before Goodrich decided to enlist in the Navy, and as a result, Ruby worked less at the machine shops and stayed closer to home.



Ruby's War-time Machine Shop

Ruby says she went with Goodrich when he received his papers to enlist. She remembers being with him in an auditorium located on the top floor of a building in downtown LA. She says it was very hard to be there while Goodrich read the oath of office to the enlisting officer who states *Support the U.S. Government above everything else*. Ruby says, "It was quite difficult to accept that when you go into the service it's as if you have no family and you have no home." Although it sounded so terrible to her at the time, she says she realized it had to be that way. After Goodrich was sworn in, he was escorted downstairs away from Ruby and taken directly to the Navy base in San Diego for basic training. She, in turn, got into their car and drove home alone. She says it was a difficult thing to experience. Goodrich felt that if the older men would do their duty, the younger boys would not have to go. However, it wasn't much later that the twins enlisted in the Army. Having all three men in the service at the same time was difficult for Ruby. As she says, "That's a hard thing for a mother to face". Her prayers were answered when, at the end of the war, the three men returned safely home.

In later years Goodrich and Ruby moved from Sierra Madre to Solana Beach. They had a beautiful home that overlooked the ocean and provided many happy memories. It's during her years in Solana Beach that Ruby took up the hobby of painting. She took art classes but also enjoyed simply going into the countryside to paint scenes on her own. Ruby says she especially enjoys painting because she likes having the control to make a picture look any way she desires. Her favorite painting partners were her sister, Opal, and long-time friend, Dora Nuffer. In addition to her painting, Ruby loves to write and has authored countless poems and verses.



Ruby & Goodrich

In the mid-1960's Ruby and Goodrich returned to the Imperial Valley where their son, William (Willie), lived with his family. Ruby and Goodie lived in an apartment on Brighton Manor next to the old Presbyterian Church. Goodrich died in 1969 and Ruby has missed him every day since his death. During the more than 30 years that have followed she has been active in many church and civic organizations including Eastern Star. She has formed long and lasting friendships throughout the Imperial Valley and also across the country with the many people she met during her exciting travels around the world. Her trips include Russia, South America, the Galapagos Islands and numerous excursions to the beautiful state of Alaska. Many of those vacations she enjoyed in the company of her sister, Opal. The two spent many years living only a few miles apart and maintained a close sisterly relationship. That bond is still strong despite Opal's death in 1993.

In addition to her three children, Ruby has nine grandchildren and 23 great-grandchildren. Like most people, she has had her share of high notes and heartbreaks. But through it all she has always maintained an admirable attitude and a basic love for life and family. Not long ago, Ruby's son Willie found a piece of paper on her desk where she had written these simple words that say it all... "I'm too blessed to be stressed".

