



Living History Interview Example #2

Please Note: This is an actual student example used by permission. I have changed the names to respect privacy.

Deborah Hastings, English 102, 8:30 class

Interview with Roberta Baker

April 18, 2008

Roberta Baker

Roberta Baker was born in 1921 in South Carolina. She was the only girl in a family of six boys, but she loved her brothers dearly. Now, one may think that being the only girl she would be treated delicately or might even be a bit spoiled. However, Roberta assures me that she was the independent one; it was her youngest brother Paul who everyone spoiled because he was the “sweet baby.” When she was a young child, Roberta’s father worked for many years with the railroad. It seems he was a union organizer, beloved by the men for protecting them and fighting for their rights but not so adored by railroad management who used to harass him regularly. The pressure mounted over the years and the family finally decided to leave South Carolina and move to Wenatchee, Washington where they worked in the apple orchards.

Roberta learned to pick and pack apples along with the best of them. As with most folks who work with food crops, she got to eat her fill of apples. She never tired of their sweet, fresh taste or the smell of apples on her hands. Sadly, a few years after their arrival her father fell seriously ill with pneumonia; he passed away just before she entered high school. Her older brothers and mother worked hard to make ends meet and keep the family together. It was very difficult to be so young and in a new place without her father to guide and support her.

Roberta met and became smitten with her future husband, Julius Baker, just before he joined

the Marines. Julius served at Guadalcanal, which Roberta described as very dangerous posting. While waiting for her sweetheart to return to her safely, Roberta worked in San Diego at a dry-shred cabbage packing plant. She loved her work there, the boss was funny and kind, and the work was important to the war effort. The workers filled 5-gallon cans with dry-shredded cabbage that were sent overseas to be reconstituted in various recipes for the men and women in the armed forces. Roberta says that cabbage is exceptionally high in nutrients, vitamins and minerals, while being low in fat, which makes it a great food choice for feeding the armed forces. She has many fond memories of her time at the cabbage packing plant including visiting with the other women and learning lots of new things.

Due to some serious health issues Roberta lost two babies, and was only able to have one child before having her tubes tied. Her doctor felt that the surgery was necessary as her life would have been at risk had she endured another pregnancy. Alice, their daughter, was a very cherished child. So, for many years while Julius worked at the Bunker Hill mine in Kellogg, Idaho—a job he adored, Roberta was completely engaged in “keeping a happy home” and raising their daughter Alice.

Some of Roberta’s favorite family activities were camping, fishing and hunting. When she and her husband were young and hearty, they tent camped. As they grew older and had more money, they slowly upgraded their equipment until in her words “we were just as comfy when camping as we were at home.” A favorite story she shared with me was the year that she bagged a *really* big elk while her husband went empty-handed all season. She says she loved to remind him of the year she got a big one and he missed out.

This paragraph is especially for Roberta, at whose specific request I am taking literary license to add a bit of “extra spice” to her story. On one very notable hunting trip the Baker family encountered one of the Northwest region’s legendary creatures, the illusive Sasquatch. It happened as the family was lolling about camp playing a bit of Canasta— Roberta was winning as usual, when out of the dense green forest loped a giant, bushy and very impressive Big Foot. The Bakers were so

surprised that their Canasta cards flew out of their hands and ended up scattered about the table. Roberta, Alice, and her husband backed up slowly in order to avoid exciting the burly visitor. The huge creature wandered about camp, sniffing and touching various objects while they watched in amazement. As the Sasquatch left their campsite it picked up a Canasta card and ambled slowly out of camp where he or she, it was rather hard to tell with all that fur, quickly disappeared into the pine forest. The Bakers never mentioned the incident to anyone as they were concerned people would think they were crazy or worse – sensationalists.

The Bakers loved to travel and explore new places. On one of their trips to Mexico, Roberta bought an adorable little purse that looks just like a small, furry brown and white dog. Packed away for a few years and recently rediscovered, I got to meet Poncho as he sat on a blanket in Roberta's lap at the Royal Plaza Retirement Community. I have to say he was quite well behaved and sat without incident for our entire interview. His leash lay across Roberta's arm, but he never pulled or tugged at it, even when I petted him. Roberta says he enjoys visitors immensely, but really needs to retire soon. So, in the not too far distant future, it is likely that Poncho will go live with one of her "lovely grandchildren." Roberta was funny, sweet and interesting. It was a joy to spend time chatting with Roberta learning about her life history.