

Ramona Reed

The family's successful business, NORDAM, gives them the opportunity to give back to their community.

Chapter 01 - 1:06

Introduction

Announcer: Our introduction to Ramona Reed begins with a tribute paid by the *Grand Ole Opry* to Ramona in November of 2020.

[recorded voice] Can I be one to take a moment to wish a very happy birthday to a special member of Opry family, Miss Ramona Reed! Ramona was only seventeen when she first sang here at the *Grand Ole Opry*. A year later, she became known as Martha White and made appearances every Friday and Saturday night here at the *Opry*, as part of the Martha White portion of the show. And then every morning, she was on WSM Radio.

[Announcer] Ramona grew up on a farm near Talihina, Oklahoma. And at an early age was singing and yodeling. She went on to sing with many of the country music greats, including Bob Wills and the Texas Playboys. She performed at Cain's Ballroom in Tulsa many times with Bob and sang with Johnnie Lee Wills at county fairs.

Ramona Reed was voted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame in 2009. The induction class included Rocky Frisco and Carrie Underwood.

It's hard to believe she's ninety years old as she tells her story for the oral history website VoicesofOklahoma.com.

Chapter 02 - 8:15

Early Yodeling

John Erling: Well, my name is John Erling, and today's date is November 23, 2020.

So, Ramona, would you state your full name, please?

Ramona Reed: Ramona June Reed Blair.

JB: Okay. And your date of birth?

RR: November 16, 1930.

JB: And so you've just celebrated a birthday? Your present age is?

RR: Oh, gosh, well, you figure it out. [laughing]

JB: [laughing] You know, ah, when we do, when we do oral history, it's given me confidence to ask a woman her age. Ah, but by this time, you should be real proud of the fact that you're ninety years old.

RR: Well, thanks for broadcasting that to everyone. [both laughing]

JB: Where, where, ah, and, uh, I'm recording this in my, the offices of VoicesofOklahoma.com. Where are you, your home, and what town? Where are you?

RR: Uh, I'm living in Clayton, Oklahoma. And that's where I live; I have a home here.

JB: All right.

RR: But I, I was born and raised in Talihina, Oklahoma.

JB: Ah, and that's down in the southeast part of Oklahoma; it's not far from Fort Smith, Arkansas, right?

RR: Ah, yeah, about eighty-five miles or something like that.

JB: Right. Okay, your mother's name and maiden name, where she was born? What she did too as she grew up?

RR: Well, I think my mother was born in Talihina, but she grew up in Fort Smith, Arkansas. Her name was Elena Marie.

JB: And what was she like? Her personality, what was she like?

RR: She was kind of a quiet person, she wasn't as outgoing as my dad was. Maybe she didn't have a chance around him. [laughs]

JB: Oh, yeah. And then your father's name?

RR: Ben Reed.

JB: Okay, and, where did, did he live in that area too? Where did he live growing up?

RR: He, he was born in Arkansas, but he moved to Oklahoma when he was twelve years old, to the Buffalo Valley area. And that he, uh, grew up, you know, from about twelve years old on.

JB: Yeah. What was his personality like?

RR: Oh, he was very outgoing. Everybody loved him and he loved everybody.

JB: And then what did he do for a living?

RR: A little bit of everything. [laughing] And, John, what did he do for a living?

John Blair [her son]: Well, he was a rancher, wasn't he?

RR: He was a rancher.

JB: Farmer.

RR: Farmer.

JB: Made a little moonshine sometimes.

- RR:** Well, we knew that. But made a little moonshine sometimes—that was before my time though. [laughing]
- JB:** [laughing]
- JB:** All right. All right. Did [laughing]—
- JB:** Oh, he made, uh—
- RR:** Oh, he made Walker Fox Hounds.
- JB:** Walker, yeah.
- RR:** I mean, you know, he paid lots of money for his fox hounds.
- JB:** Ah—
- RR:** Walker Fox Hounds, they were all registered.
- JB:** Did either one of them have musical talent?
- RR:** Uh, he did.
- JB:** And what was it, in singing or playing instruments?
- RR:** Um, well, he could sing pretty well. And he could yodel some. And the PTA ladies always wanted him to be in their show every year at Talihina.
- JB:** Hmm [thoughtful sound].
- JB:** Didn't he dance a little bit?
- RR:** Oh, yeah, he danced. Th—they belonged to the, to the, uh, square dance club in Talihina, my folks did. But they'd start clapping and that meant my daddy was supposed to get out and dance.
- JB:** Oh.
- RR:** To their clapping.
- JB:** Okay. Did you become a dancer?
- RR:** No.
- JB:** Yeah.
- RR:** I can two-step.
- JB:** Yeah, right.
- RR:** I took tapping when I was little but I don't tap dance.
- JB:** Yeah, right. So you drew your music, then, from your father, I guess you would say. Is that true?
- RR:** I did. I did.
- JB:** Did you have brothers and sisters?
- RR:** I had one brother who was two years older than me.
- JB:** What, what, what do you fer—feel is your first recollection of doing any singing at all or yodeling? When, when do you think how old you were, maybe?
- RR:** Probably, well, I would sing around, you know, our house and outside. I didn't know the neighbors were listening.
- JB:** [laughs]

- RR:** And, uh, I found out recently that they would take their chairs—this was after we moved to a, a house, the last house out of town. It was up on a hill. They couldn't see me but they could hear me. So they would take their chairs out in the late afternoons and listen to me singing.
- JB:** Hmm [thoughtful sound]. But you were on a farm, weren't you singing maybe to the, I don't know, to the an—animals, pretending you were on the radio?
- RR:** Oh, oh, yeah. I used to do that, yeah, I would do that. Who told you that?
- JB:** I just did, did my research. [both laughing]
- RR:** Oh, yeah, I used to go outside and sing to whoever wanted to listen or whatever wanted to listen.
- JB:** So you were probably four or five years old, then, when you were already singing?
- RR:** Oh, yes. My parents said I was singing by, yodeling by the time I was walking. They had a record of, record player and they played Jimmie Rogers, the Yodeling Cowboy.
- JB:** Okay.
- RR:** And that was one of the first songs I used.
- JB:** Right. So then your mother, obviously, and your dad, did they encourage you, uh, to, in your singing and yodeling?
- RR:** Well, they didn't push me. I pushed them, "Collect me and go sing." And my mother always went with me though.
- JB:** Was there a, uh, Saturday morning radio program that your mother took you to?
- RR:** Yes, uh, there was in McAlester, Oklahoma, and, uh, a KPMC in McAlister. And I did that every Saturday. I had a little ten-minute show and my music teacher would play piano. She'd play two solos and I would sing three songs. And I was fifteen when I started doing that.
- JB:** Did you ever come to Tulsa, uh, radio stations to audition?
- RR:** I did because of someone, oh, I guess this was in St. Louis—my mother and I were visiting my aunt and someone heard me and said, "This kid can sing. You need to take her to radio stations for auditions."
- You know, everything was live back then.
- JB:** Yep. And so in Tulsa radio, do you remember if it was KVOO or what station you might have auditioned for in Tulsa?
- RR:** Um, KVOO and I think KPUL. And I did sing one time, uh, in Poteau, uh, yeah, Leon McAuliffe was playing. And so he invited me to come and sing in Tulsa with his band, you know, just be a guest.
- JB:** How exciting, and then, again, you're about fifteen years old.
- RR:** Wasn't very old, fifteen or sixteen.
- JB:** Yeah.
- RR:** Yeah, I graduated from high school at sixteen.

- JB:** Oh, was that early for you at sixteen, graduating from high school?
- RR:** Yeah, it was fairly early. Yeah, my brother, he failed a year and I passed two grades in a year and I caught up with him.
- JB:** Oh. [both laughing]
- RR:** So we were from sixth grade on, we were in the same class.
- JB:** Oh, my. When you were in Tulsa, you made some visits to Cain's Ballroom?
- RR:** Oh, yes. I would get my mother to take me out there every day so we could see Johnnie Lee Wills.
- JB:** And you—
- RR:** But Bob had already gone, was already in California then, making movies. But Daddy, my daddy and I went to see *Take Me Back to Oklahoma*, uh, when it came to Talihina. We went to every showing of that movie. That was the one with Bob Wills.
- JB:** So then when you were in Cain's Ballroom, you had to stand there and say, "Man, I'd love to be on that stage"?
- RR:** Yes.

Chapter 03 - 3:44

School in Colorado

- John Erling:** Someone else who did that very same thing was Tommy Allsup. Did you ever meet him or know him?
- Ramona Reed:** Oh, yes, quite well. He, uh, he had a studio in Odessa, Texas.
- JB:** Yep.
- RR:** And I did some recordings out there.
- JB:** Oh, really?
- RR:** He was, he was the best musician, one of the best I've ever known.
- JB:** Hmm (thoughtful sound). We have his interview here on VoicesofOklahoma.com. And, uh, he became a member of Johnnie Lee Wills and All the Boys.
- RR:** I guess so. I didn't know him then. I didn't know him until we were living in Odessa.
- JB:** His age, he was, he was born in 1931, and you were born in 1930, so you guys were about the same age.
- RR:** Uh-huh (affirmative).
- JB:** And then another interview I did was with Curly Lewis, fiddle player. Did you—
- RR:** Yes.
- JB:** . . . did you get around him?

RR: Yes. If we went to Tulsa to play we would always play at Cain's. This was when I was with the Bob Wills Band.

JB: Yep.

RR: And so, yeah, I knew Curly.

JB: We have his interview too. When he was eleven he won the Bob Wills Fiddle Contest. And then later on he spent six months with Bob Wills in California. But then he became more identified with Johnnie Lee Wills.

I've interviewed Wanda Jackson. Were you ever around her at all? She's younger.

RR: Not really that much. I remember going to, uh, something, they have Bob Wills Day at the capital, Okla—you know—

JB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RR: . . . in Oklahoma City. And, uh, I remember talking with her then but I never did know her that well.

JB: Yeah.

RR: She was younger than I was.

JB: Yeah.

RR: But I was a fan of hers.

JB: Uh, so you graduate from high school when you're sixteen years old. What year was that?

RR: Nineteen forty-seven.

JB: And then where did you go, what did you do?

RR: I went to college in Denver. Uh, Colorado Women's College.

JB: And why did you go, why, why did you go there?

RR: Well, because, uh, they sent some of their catalogs out and when I read it—I still have that one—uh, uh, I just knew I had to go to that school.

JB: Hmm (thoughtful sound). Did you like it there?

RR: I loved it. And while I was there I was on that, uh, Ted Mick's—*Ted Mack's Original Amateur Hour*; that was the big deal back then.

JB: Yes! Yes, it sure was. How did that audition go with Ted Mack?

RR: Well, I just had to go through a lot of auditions but I got on the show.

JB: So then in 1947, '48?

RR: Yes.

JB: You sang country and western music out there in Denver. Did they really—were they used to hearing country and western music?

RR: Well, not like in Oklahoma and Texas. But they, the girls really liked my singing at my college.

JB: Um-hmm (affirmative).

RR: I would always have to sing at their house meetings.

JB: Oh, yeah. You're probably the only one in the world who yodeled in the Denver Metro Opera House.

- RR:** You know what? I yodeled in places that you would not believe. [both laughing]
In the basement of the Oklahoma's capitol, I've forgotten who had me to yodel there, some, some guy had a newspaper, Eddie Someone, I can't remember his surname now. But I've, you just wouldn't believe all the places.
- JB:** Even in many churches, I'll bet, right?
- RR:** Christ 40 Acres, I used that down here, or pretty close to here. And I used to go out there and sing and yodel.
- JB:** So then you complete your first year of college. I guess that would be 1948.

Chapter 04 - 6:20

Nashville

- John Erling:** Then you decided you wanted to go to Nashville. Tell me about that, that Nashville trip.
- Ramona Reed:** Well, it's almost unbelievable but I kind of bugged my parents to let me go to Nashville. So my mother and I went. And I dressed up in my cowgirl clothes and, um, walked into WSM and somehow, um, Beth Preston was working there, she's a secretary. Anyway, they got me an audition and they asked if I could go on their *Noontime Neighbor Show* that day.
- JB:** Wow.
- RR:** And I did. And would I be, they and got me a spot on the *Opry* for that Saturday night.
- JB:** [laughing]
- RR:** George Morgan was the guest that day when I was on *Noontime Neighbors*.
- JB:** So you thought, *Well, this is really easy*, didn't you then, right? [laughing]
- RR:** Yeah, uh-huh (affirmative).
- JB:** Yeah, I suppose that happened so fast you didn't have time to be nervous.
- RR:** No, I didn't really get nervous back then.
- JB:** Yeah.
- RR:** Very seldom.
- JB:** Yeah, I guess you had some new—
- RR:** I mean, it was so much fun.
- JB:** Yeah.
- RR:** And I loved it so. I couldn't believe I was doing all of that.
- JB:** Did you audition with Zeb Turner and the boys who backed Red Foley?
- RR:** Yes.

JB: And then, didn't they ask you to go on the *Noontime Neighbor Show* at twelve thirty? That was about an hour away, wasn't it?

RR: Yes, uh-huh, um-hmm (affirmatives).

JB: Remember what you sang?

RR: Yes. Probably "I Want to Be a Cowboy's Sweetheart." But I don't know, I use—I'm not sure.

JB: But you, they hired you on the spot. They, the program director was Jack Stapp.

RR: He told me to go—he told me to go back to college and come back the next summer. You know, I was pretty young, figured too young to go on the road. Said, "Go back to college. And, uh, come back next summer."

JB: Yeah, but, but that weekend—

RR: And I did.

JB: . . . that weekend, then you, he put you on the *Grand Ole Opry* on Saturday night.

RR: He did, yes.

JB: You're seventeen years old, are you?

RR: Yes.

JB: And then, so then you had known of Roy A—Acuff, and that must have been—you rehearsed with him, that must have been quite a thrill.

RR: He was very nice, I'd only heard him on the radio and it was a thrill for me to meet him.

My son John here is asking me if I was the only one from Oklahoma who was on the *Grand Ole Opry*?

John Blair: First one.

RR: The first one. I don't know.

JB: You, you had to be one of the first ones, for sure.

RR: Yeah. Well, I can't think of anybody else who was—

JB: Yeah, again—

RR: . . . on there either . . . from Oklahoma.

JB: Yeah, we're talking about 1948, '49?

RR: Yes.

JB: Right.

RR: Yes, I still can't believe that but it happened, and I can prove all of it. [both laughing]

JB: Yes you can. Um, so then that all happened to you Saturday night. That whole weekend, and—

RR: Yes.

JB: . . . so then didn't you go back—Monday morning what did you do?

RR: Well, I talked to Jack Stapp and I was still just seventeen. And he said I was entirely too young to go on the road, to go back to Oklahoma—to go back to college and come back the next summer.

JB: Is, is that what you did? You went back to college for a year and then came back the next summer?

RR: That's, that's what I did.

JB: And then tell me the good things that happened to you then when you went back.

RR: I went back and, uh, I got a regular job, you know, as a Martha White, being on that show. They changed my name from Ramona Reed to Martha White, so I was Martha White for a while.

JB: And Martha White Flour was the primary sponsor on the *Grand Ole Opry*.

RR: Yes.

JB: And three radio shows.

RR: Yes.

JB: And so—

RR: Yes.

JB: . . . they got to name you Martha White. Wh—wou—

RR: Yes [laughing].

JB: Well, you, you were pretty young and you were making some money here, weren't you?

RR: Not bad.

JB: Do you have any idea—

RR: Pretty good.

JB: You have any idea what kind of money you were making then?

RR: They had to pay you like ten dollars for a scene, but you could do a lot with ten dollars back then. So every time you were on you made ten dollars. I mean, it doesn't sound like much nowadays, but you could do a lot with it back then.

JB: Abso—absolutely. How did your family—

RR: John?

JB: How did your family handle your money? Did they say, "Oh, this is, this is all for you," or "This goes into the family pot"?

RR: Yes.

JB: Or how did they handle your money?

RR: Oh, oh, they gave it all to me.

JB: So then were you, you were able to buy clothes and cars? Or what did you do with that money?

RR: Well, my daddy got me a car before Chri—at Christmastime. They let me go home and, uh, so Daddy got me—this was 19—almost 1950, and he got me a 1950 blue Ford convertible.

JB: Wh—

RR: And it was nice.

JB: What—

RR: And most girls didn't even know how to drive then.

JB: [laughing]

- RR:** I didn't either but I learned.
- JB:** What brand, what, what brand of car, what kind of car was it?
- RR:** Oh, a Ford.
- JB:** A Ford?
- RR:** Uh-huh (affirmative).
- JB:** A 1950, 1950 Ford. Wouldn't you love to have that now?
- RR:** Oh, yeah, it was a nice car. Like I said, most girls didn't even know how to drive.
- JB:** No, but they sure liked to ride with you, didn't they?
- RR:** Oh, yes, yeah.
- JB:** But did that bother you? Nobody knew your real name and they called you Martha and Martha White? But did that, did that bother you?
- RR:** Yeah, it did, but, uh, anyway, it was still nice. You know, it was a job and for a girl it paid pretty well, I guess.
- JB:** Yes. And then you, I understand you shared a dressing room with Minnie Pearl?
- RR:** I did. And I have a picture somewhere. I'm looking at it right now, there weren't any other girls on the *Opry* at that time. I mean, there had been some, and there were some later, but there, there weren't any then.
- JB:** Isn't she the one who had a sale price on her hat all the time?
- RR:** Yes. Um-hmm (affirmative).
- JB:** Did she—
- RR:** She was very nice, you know, she had gone to Ward-Belmont College for Women.
- JB:** Oh.
- RR:** And I'd gone to a girls' school, so we could talk.

Chapter 05 - 4:20

Bought a New Car

- John Erling:** What classes did you take when you were in college?
- Ramona Reed:** Well, I had to take certain ones but, gosh, you're taking me back a long time.
- JB:** Yeah?
- RR:** But, uh, I, I don't know. You, I took a, a history for, I think it was Latin American History or something. I don't know why I took that but I did. [laughing]
- JB:** Yet—
- RR:** English I always liked.
- JB:** You know, you got to admire you because a lot of musicians, once they got into the world of music, there's no way they would have gone to college. But you did.

RR: [laughs]

JB: And you didn't drop out or anything. I mean, you did that for two years. So that, that, young people ought to listen to that.

RR: Well, uh, I, I didn't get much sleep, let's put it like that, back then.

JB: No.

RR: Had to get up real early and go sing early. Because it, you know, it's what, five forty-five in the morning? Now on Sunday morning, we had at six thirty, for a religious program.

JB: So I guess you then were in Nashville and Martha White for what, a couple of years?

RR: Uh, a little over a year.

JB: So was that all a good time for you, you enjoyed it? And were you there alone? Were you, did your mother, was she there with you?

RR: Uh-huh (affirmative). My mother stayed there with me at first, and then they sent back my brother with me to teach me how to drive that new car. [both laughing] And he stayed with me—

JB: Okay.

RR: . . . for quite a long time.

JB: Any other names that were—that we might know that you interacted with beyond what we've just talked about? Anybody else that you may have been singing with back in those days?

RR: My son said Ernest Tubb. I'm trying to think.

JB: Yeah.

RR: I knew all of them, you know, on Saturday night, I would see all of them and talk to them. And Hank Williams was on too at that time, Hank Williams Sr. I was sitting by his wife sometimes and we'd talk.

JB: And he was real nice, huh?

RR: Yeah.

JB: Did—

RR: Everybody was always pretty nice to me.

JB: You must have pinched yourself many, many times, *I can't believe this is happening to me?*

RR: I don't know, I just took it for granted, I guess, I don't know. [laughs]

JB: [laughs]

RR: You know?

JB: But when you look back on it now, and you've done that many, many times, a—a—aren't you, don't you just marvel at the lucky and fortunate break? But you were good, you were very talented, but you were at the right place at the right time.

RR: I guess I was, when I think back about it.

JB: Did you—did you ever sing religious music?

RR: Well, yeah we had a religious program on Sunday, with the same band. And I here, I used to go out to Christ 40 Acres and sing every year for them.

JB: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

RR: It's like way out in the country.

JB: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

RR: Oh, and I did a gospel album with some of the Texas Playboys.

JB: Oh? That would be fun for you.

RR: Ye—yeah, because every Thursday—someone said it was on Wednesday but it was Thursday, that's the way I remember it—but they did sacred songs, the Bob Wills guys did. In 1984, did an album with a lot of them.

JB: How many children did you have?

RR: I had four.

JB: Okay. Did any of them inherit your musical talent?

RR: John, can you talk to him, just for a bit?

JB: Oh, I was wondering if you and your siblings inherited your mother's ability?

John Blair: Yeah, we all play, play some, a little bit. And, um, and my brother played quite a bit, and then I, I play some, and, uh, my sisters still play in church right now.

JB: Okay.

JB: They play piano in church, I think.

JB: Okay, great. What, did you, did you sing or did you play a guitar or what?

JB: Yeah, we, we all sing and I play fiddle.

JB: Oh?

JB: And, um, and, uh, my sisters play piano. My brother played, uh, guitar and banjo, mandolin.

Chapter 06 - 7:11

Bob Wills

John Erling: Okay, Ramona, then after you spent a year or so in Nashville, then where did you go? You went, went back home again or what?

Ramona Reed: Yes, I, I went back home for a few months in the summer. Then, uh, I was trying to figure out what to do with my career and Dallas, they had a lot of good bands on their radio station, and I thought that might be a good place to go.

So I just drove to Dallas, had some relatives there, and before I knew it, I, uh, anyway, I got in the parade. Bob Wills had just moved to Dallas and they had a big parade downtown. And my, my girlfriend and I, we squeezed into that parade. Uh, and then went out to the ranch house that was brand new. And I met a lot of people.

Well, we wound up riding on the stagecoach with some of the Playboys. My car was a 1950, and this was 1950, so my car wasn't old, but it stalled and, or flooded. And so that's

how we got on that stagecoach with the Playboys. [laughing] And they have a picture of us in Turkey, Texas. If you're ever out there.

JB: And so, okay, so he established the Bob Wills Ranch House in Dallas.

RR: Yes.

JB: So you got on the stagecoach with the Texas Playboys, but then—

RR: Uh-huh (questioning affirmative)?

JB: Then somehow you got on the stage to sing for Bob Wills.

RR: Well, uh, Jack Lloyd was their lead singer and, uh, he and, uh, Bobby Coker, the steel guy, uh, they got me the audition. So, uh, with Bob Wills.

So I went out there and, uh, I had to sing every, about every song I knew. And he would sit there, oh, I don't know, maybe thirty feet away or something like that, and, uh, I couldn't tell if he liked what I was doing or not.

JB: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

RR: And I sang just about every song I knew and he sat there smoking that cigar. But, anyway, when I got through, uh, he came back stage, and, uh, he hired me. He said I was just what he was looking for and I not only sounded but I looked like he wanted a girl singer to look and sound.

JB: My, what a relief. You'd had no idea if he liked you or not until he came back stage.

RR: [laughing] I did not know, believe me, until I went back there. But I just did the best I could.

JB: Yes, so what was Bob Wills like? He was such a charismatic man, but what was he like personally, when you were around him?

RR: Well, he was just kind of charismatic even though you'd been working with him. He could still walk into a, a room a lot, you know, to go on stage. He'd usually sit and wait in his car a while and then he'd come on later. It, it was still he had that magnetism or something about him. Everybody said that.

And for some reason, he seemed to like me. Maybe because I could ride a horse too.

JB: [laughing]

RR: They had three of their horses out there in the, in the ranch house, um-hmm (affirmative).

JB: Where you—

RR: And I would go out and ride sometimes.

JB: And you yodeled for him too, I suppose?

RR: Oh, of course. Bob likes yodeling. And, uh, I've been called the Yodeler's Yodeler by another girl yodeler, so I thought that was a real compliment.

JB: Did you travel with Bob Wills?

RR: Oh, yes I did!

JB: And did that for how—

RR: I had a ride up front, uh-huh (affirmative). I rode up front. I couldn't go to the back, to the back, I couldn't sit back where the boys were. I had my special place up front, unless we were rehearsing a song or something.

JB: Did he tell you to kick off your shoes?

RR: Oh, yeah. Yeah, that's when I was auditioning. My feet were hurting, I had on high heels, and I finally kicked them off, and I think he liked that.

JB: You keep that part of the act? Did you, did, when he was, during the, during the show? Didn't you say—

RR: Yeah, yeah. If I had on high heels, I did. Of course, I had a uniform after I started working with them—I wore boots, you know, and, uh.

JB: Okay. So what part of the country were you traveling with him, with Bob Wills?

RR: Well, he always said that he really liked, uh, you know, the Kansas and the Texas and the Oklahoma, Arkansas, I mean, certain places. But then I went on tour with them to California—

JB: Wow.

RR: . . . and Hollywood. I have some pictures of, of me in Hollywood. And one of the Eldon Shamblin—have you ever, did you ever meet him?

JB: No, I didn't.

RR: Well, he was, he was kind of—you've heard of him though probably.

JB: Yeah.

RR: The, the band manager and guitar player and his, uh, his wife, she drove out there because they had lived there and they took a girl my age. So she and I went walking around Hollywood. And I thought I was in heaven walking around.

JB: Okay, again, this is 1950, '51, in there?

RR: Yes.

JB: And you're about eighteen years old, at this point, I guess, right?

RR: Something like that [laughing]. No, I wasn't twenty yet.

JB: But then you must have, you, you, you must have come to Tulsa and performed with him in Cain's Ballroom?

RR: Oh, many times, yeah, but not then, not until after I started singing with Bob. I had not sung at Cain's.

JB: But you did come to Tulsa many times at Cain's Ballroom with Bob Wills?

RR: Yes.

JB: You remember some of the names of the Texas Playboys?

RR: Yeah, of course, Bobby Coker was so nice to me. And that's why I still like him and stay in touch.

John Blair: He's still living.

RR: And he's still living. And I talked to him just recently. And, uh, Jack Lloyd was the lead singer then. And Eldon and Rub—Eldon Shamblin and his wife, Ruby, they remain friends of mine. And also my friend Jim, they were friends of his.

The piano player is Peter Elkins. Yeah, he's, they were all very nice, and they . . . Paul, the drummer, yeah, I used to still see him in Turkey, Texas, and places.

JB: Well, it was, uh, quite a thrill, an end, to be at Cain's Ballroom with Bob Wills and the place was packed. And here you were from Talihina, Oklahoma.

RR: Yes, from that little town on down south and then 58, to be exact. [laughing]

Chapter 07 - 6:30

Ramona Yodels

John Erling: Did you meet Johnnie Lee Wills, Bob's brother?

Ramona Reed: Yes, at a rodeo. Yeah, they were playing out near Claremore. And so I wasn't bashful about going up and to ask if I could sing with someone.

So they let me sing with them there.

JB: Oh?

RR: At the parade and then later on. And they, he invited me to come be on the radio show.

JB: So you, you did sing with Johnnie Lee Wills on certain shows?

RR: Well, I, not that many, but I did some, you know, at rodeos that he was playing. Before I had met Bob.

JB: They, they were two different kind of people though, weren't they? Bob was maybe outgoing and Johnnie wasn't? Or what would be the difference between the two?

RR: I would say that Johnnie Lee was the friendlier of the two, but someone else might tell you different there.

JB: Bob was more standoffish, maybe?

RR: Well, he was such a, you know, a, a famous person that he just, he couldn't stop and visit with everybody. And Johnnie Lee did.

JB: Yeah.

RR: And somehow I noticed that, which I admired, you know, Johnnie Lee for.

JB: Uh, you recorded some songs with, uh, Bob Wills.

RR: Yes, MGM, I have the record in my house, my son had it framed and it's in my living room. And it's, uh, "I'm Tired of Living This Lie."

JB: And then "Little Girl, Little Girl," you recorded?

RR: "Little Girl, Little Girl," yeah, it's on the back of that.

JB: I went on YouTube and I was able to bring you up and when you were singing, uh, that song "I'm Tired of Living This Life"—I heard you sing that yesterday when I was getting ready for this. It was fun to hear you sing.

RR: Oh.

JB: And how good you were. But there you are on—

RR: Oh.

JB: . . . what we now know as YouTube. And, and, uh, you can hear yourself sing. I'm sure you've done that already.

RR: [laughing] Well, the only thing, you know I'm my own worst critic, as so many people are, I think, entertainers are. Yeah, that was really a big thrill for me, to get to record that with them.

JB: Did you do many, just record yodeling records?

RR: No, I didn't. I did "I Betcha' My Heart," you know, it had been done before by Laura Lee and she really did a great job on it. Mine was a little different. You know, there's yodeling and there's yodeling and it's different. But unless you're a yodeler you may not notice that. [laughing]

JB: Are, are you able to do a little yodeling now?

RR: Well, yo-de-lay-e-o, yo-de-lay-e-o, yo-de-lay-o-e, yo-de-lay-e, yo-de-lo-o-p. Did you hear that?

JB: I sure did.

RR: [laughing]

JB: That was fun. You know, you, you are so fortunate. I know you don't want me to tell anybody that you're ninety years old.

RR: Oh, my gosh, well, you already have, haven't you? Uh-huh (questioning affirmative)?

JB: Right. But, but your voice is so strong and when you just did that, that takes strength to be able to yodel. That is pretty amazing, hey, amazing!

RR: Oh, well, thank you. [both laughing]

JB: Wow.

RR: Wait, you don't ever quit, I mean, you got to practice, keep it up.

JB: Do you do any singing, I mean, for yourself now, to kind of keep your voice strong? Do you, do you sing?

RR: I do go outside and sing. I live out in the country.

JB: Yeah?

RR: And, uh, so I like to go outside late in the afternoons and sing.

JB: Can you hear a little sing—just, one song, I mean, not a whole song, you don't have to, but kind of do a little verse of some song that you'd like to do here?

RR: Okay, I'm trying to think what song, uh, would be best. I know so many.

JB: Okay.

RR: "Why, could I cry, over you, dear, when you never cry over me? You wanna take without giving, that's why our hearts disagree, because our dream was a prison, but from now on, you'll be free. Why, should I cry, over yooooouu, when you never cry over me?"

That's not my best.

JB: [lots of clapping] Hey, we're all, we're all applauding here for you. That was fun.

RR: [laughing] Oh, well, thank you.

JB: That was fun, thank you, thank you so much. How many years did you travel with Bob Wills?

RR: Well, I have to say, off and on for about twenty years. I didn't travel with them that long, like two years to start with. And then for special occasions. And I did the, the deal in, uh, in Nashville, you know, they had every year. He wanted me to go and sing with them. They were playing for fanfare. I think it was fanfare, something they were having down there.

So that was fun to go do that again. And, uh, because everybody in your audience, they were all famous. That was, well, that's all they had in the audience, other than people.

JB: Hmm (thoughtful sound).

RR: I don't think I'm famous but we had, the people were in the audience. [laughing]

JB: Yeah. Uh, when Bob was in the twilight of his career, he called you, didn't he? He wanted you to go back into the RCA Studios in Nashville?

RR: Yes. Uh-huh (affirmative).

JB: And you recorded two songs: "I Betcha' My Heart I Love You," and "Don't Send Him Back to Me."

RR: Yes. But Rusty McDonald wrote, "Don't Send Him Back to Me," I think. I'm, I think I'm right on that.

Chapter 08 - 6:46

Grand Ole Opry Tribute

John Erling: I think it's a good story how you met your husband. Can you tell us that story?

Ramona Reed: Oh, yes, uh, I was home, uh, my brother was go—getting ready to go to Korea, the war was on then. And, uh, I wanted to come home and see him. So I was out driving with my girlfriend and we drove through the streets of Clayton, which is twenty-five miles from my hometown. And I saw this good-looking guy standing out in front of this restaurant and I did a double-take.

So when I got back to town, someone was flagging me down and said, "There's a soldier that wants to meet you here." Said, "He just got back from Korea and your brother just left for there."

So I went in to meet him—and that was my husband.

JB: And his name?

RR: Jim Blair.

JB: Jim Blair. He'd just been in Korea, hadn't he?

RR: Yes, uh-huh (affirmative), he'd just gotten back from Korea.

JB: Yeah, yeah, that's a great story too.

I see you were selected as a member of the Pioneers of Country Music by the Country Music Association of the *Grand Ole Opry*. Nice honor.

RR: Yes it was.

JB: And in 2009, you were inducted in the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame with Carrie Underwood and Rocky Frisco.

RR: Yes. And Tommy Allsup played the band, all for the induction.

JB: How about that? Did they celebrate, observe your seventieth anniversary of your time on the *Grand Ole Opry*, and your ninetieth birthday? Did they have a tribute to you?

RR: Well, yes, yeah, last week. I stayed up to listen to it.

JB: Ah, you know, people—

John Blair: I have a recording of the *Opry's* tribute, if you'd like to hear that.

RR: Did you hear my disc?

JB: I heard on my—

RR: It's the recording of *Opry's* tribute. Have you heard that?

JB: No I haven't. Is it—

JB: If you want I can play it here. We'll see if it comes across.

JB: All right.

[recording] Well, tonight we want to take a moment to wish a very happy birthday to a special member of our *Opry* family—Miss Ramona Reed! Ramona was only seventeen when she first sang here at the *Grand Ole Opry*. A year later, she became known as Martha White and made appearances every Friday and Saturday night here at the *Opry* as part of the Martha White portion of the show. And then every morning, she was on WSM Radio.

Well, it wasn't long before she was touring with Bob Wills and His Texas Playboys. In 2009, Ramona was inducted into the Oklahoma Music Hall of Fame, right beside Carrie Underwood.

Well, tonight, Ramona is in southeast Oklahoma. She is still singing and yodeling. And on Monday, she will celebrate her ninetieth birthday. Ramona, happy birthday from your friends and family here at the *Grand Ole Opry*.

JB: Oh, that—

RR: Did you hear that?

JB: Oh, I did. And it came through clear. John, thank you for playing that for us, that was wonderful.

RR: [laughing]

JB: That was, that was, that was great, you, that you did that. It was fun to hear. That had to

make you feel good and your entire family as well. Congratulations.

RR: It did, it did. I can't believe all these things happened to me.

JB: Yeah.

RR: And they're still happening.

JB: You lived a wonderful, wonderful life. You've set a good example for other young people, in particular for young girls, to fight for what you want, to be aggressive, be bold. What would you say, do you say to young people who are interested in music or anything? What, what do you say to them, advice?

RR: Well, always be true to yourself, and, uh, do the best you can, and have high morals.

JB: Yeah, that's good advice. How would you like to be remembered?

RR: As someone who loves to sing and loves to yodel and loves life and just had a great life.

JB: Yeah. People say, ask you, "Well, how do you, what did you do to live to be ninety years old? What do you tell them?"

RR: Well, I never did smoke or drink. [laughing]

JB: Like coffee.

RR: Lots of coffee, yeah. I always had ?? and I don't know, I'm just me.

JB: And I could add to that, probably, I mean, this, you have a positive, seem to have a positive outlook and a positive way about you, and that has to go a long way in living a long life. Some people are negative, negative all the time and it wears on them, but you seem to be on the happy side of life.

RR: Yeah. Thank you very much for that.

JB: Yes.

RR: Yeah. Well, I've had a good life, I'm thankful.

JB: Well, I want to—

RR: For that.

JB: I want to thank you for sharing your story here with Voices of Oklahoma. And so as there, as we say goodbye, uh, let's just have you, just a verse of a song that you'd say goodbye with.

RR: Uh.

JB: I don't know what that would be, if you think of one, or John can think of one that would be kind of a nice little parting—

RR: John, what do you think I need to sing?

JB: Why don't you do a yodel?

RR: Well, at least I'm known for my yodeling but I, you know, but I sing other songs too.

JB: Yep.

RR: But "Yo-de-lay-e-o, yo-de-lu, yo-de-lay-yo-de-yo-du-lo-u, yo-du-o-yo-de-le-o, yo-de-lay-uuuu."

JB: Oh, that was great. That was great. [both laughing]

RR: Okay.

JB: I just, I wish I could have met you in person and at, my, you make me want to meet you. I wish we could have done this in person, but you did a great job on the phone. And the—

RR: Oh, thank you.

JB: . . . the phone line was good. And to you, John, thank you so much for helping me set this thing up, I appreciate it very much.

JB: You're welcome.

JB: Right. So thank you, Ramona. God bless you and a happy Thanksgiving.

RR: Thank you. Thank you for having me on. I loved it.

JB: All right. Goodbye.

RR: Eh, bye.

JB: [laughing]

Chapter 09 - 0:33

Conclusion

Announcer: This oral history presentation is made possible through the support of our generous foundation-funders. We encourage you to join them by making your donation, which will allow us to record future stories. Students, teachers, and librarians are using this website for research and the general public is listening every day to these great Oklahomans share their life experience.

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