

Interview with Rena DuBose  
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My name is Rena Houston DuBose, and I am 70 plus years old.

Q. You and I have gone to church together for a long time, and I knew that you were a “Maverick,” and I’ve always wondered about the ranch. Can you tell me about growing up on Maverick Ranch?

Well, actually, although I was born in San Antonio and both my mother and father grew up here (in sight of Travis Park), my father used to like to say he was born in the lobby of the Saint Anthony. That was their home at the time. My mother was born around the corner on Broadway. I grew up on the Houston Ranch, not the Maverick. My grandfather bought the Houston Ranch in 1903, and my father went out there when he was 17 and lived there the rest of his life. He bought the ranch from his mother. So I grew up on the Houston Ranch, but my grandmother, Rena Maverick Green, was at the Maverick Ranch right down the road and I spent a lot of time there. In those days, we were not cared for by babysitters; we were taken to our grandmother’s house. And so grandma was my best friend. And that is where Maverick came from. I was there a great deal. I was there any time my parents went out of town.

My father was in the pure bred livestock exporting business, a rare business for those days, that he started in the 20s when he was young. He exported show animals to Central and South America and Liberia. That is what we did at the Houston Ranch. Our ranch was sort of an animal “hotel.” They stopped there to get their shots and were then sent on by ship or air.

Q. How far apart were the ranches?

Not far. Houston Ranch is north of Boerne and Maverick is northwest of Leon Springs. I was there a great deal and loved it. I grew up loving it and later taught a class of children every Saturday about growing up in the country. I learned a lot of things doing that class: like how to make a pickle and how to keep the pick ox out of the vegetable garden.

Q. How large is the Maverick Ranch?

It is large: 900 acres. The Houston was 1500 acres. The Houston ranch has been sold gradually, but the Maverick is still intact.

Q. So what was your earliest memory of growing up on a ranch?

I thought it was perfectly natural. My earliest memory was my goat named Calico Kid. I simply adored him. My mother did not adore him because he ate the ivy off the house, and

he chased my nanny up the stairs! She would beat him with a broom, and I thought that was the funniest thing I ever saw! Anyway, he vanished to Maverick Ranch. One day a terrible man there asked if I knew what I was eating: what a terrible thing to do to a child! I have never forgotten it. But I loved growing up in the country. I was back and forth between the city and the country and I truly had the best of both worlds. Very interesting people came to lunch, all kinds of visitors from Mexico and South America. My father wanted me to learn Spanish, and I took it in school, but I did not learn it until my first job.

I started a kindergarten at the Good Samaritan Center in San Antonio, and I had to learn how to speak Spanish. The children there only spoke Spanish so I had to learn. When I was very young, my father wanted me to learn German because when he moved to the Hill Country, everyone only spoke German. There were lots of Germans in Boerne. I went to country school in Welfare, Texas. It was a one-room school house with wonderful teachers. It was remarkable because many of them had fathers and grandfathers that had taught there as well. There were seven grades there with 12 children. We would walk up to **Waring**, Texas to play baseball, which was four miles away, and then Mr. Loss would pick us up in his Model-T pickup and take us back to Welfare. We also had the privilege of having the Southern Pacific work train parked directly across the highway from the school so we went over every morning for cookies from the kitchen car of the train! We looked forward to when the work train would be coming to Welfare. They were so kind to us. We had interesting experiences like that.

Q. So you were at that school until the 5<sup>th</sup> grade?

Yes, and then I moved into school in Boerne. My father's office was there so it was easier. That was the day before school buses. If I wanted to ride the bus, I would go down to the end of the road at the ranch and flag the bus. For a year during the Second World War, my little brother and I rode the Los Angeles express to school. The driver would get off and put the donkey back in the gate, and I would put my brother on the bus, and away we went! I'm sure the sleepy people who were coming from Los Angeles to Houston wondered what was going on. Funny things like that we had at the ranch. I had a horse from the time I was seven—a couple of them. So that was one of my happy things: to ride my horse every afternoon and look at the sky and follow the clouds. When I was with my grandmother, who was an artist, we would be painting all the time—both here in San Antonio. She was a very interesting person. She was the first woman on the school board in San Antonio, and she was one of the founders of the San Antonio Conservation Society. I would tag along with her to that. So I went to the Mission reconstructions and the Governor's Palace, and I took drawing on the river. It was a wonderful kind of freedom that our children don't have any more. They can't.

Q. What other great memories do you have about growing up?

I really have a lot of happy memories. After my mother died, my father had a good friend here in San Antonio, so at age 11 I would get on the bus by myself to San Antonio to take

spelling, typing and penmanship classes. Then I would go back to the bus station and be home by 1:30. I was 11 when my mother passed away. So I had that kind of unheard of freedom: a little girl, coming to San Antonio. I learned to type and spell and write. This was in the summer. I also went to summer camp at the YWCA in Welfare. I had more art teachers in my family than in the art department at camp, and I had a better horse, so I was never very interested in camp! We would walk to the river to go swimming. I learned how to tread water standing on a rock. Those things were funny! Then I went to Boerne High School. My father and my wonderful stepmother wanted me to have a year at St. Mary's Hall, and I refused because I was having fun. Now I know that was a mistake because I would have learned how to study. None of us had a clue how to study! How we got through college I don't know. Anyway, we managed. So my parents decided I needed a year of girls' college, so I went to Mills College in Oakland California. I adored it. This wonderful new cosmopolitan setting of San Francisco and Berkeley was just WOW! I never had so much fun. I stayed four years.

Q. Did you have any special traditions on the ranch?

Yes! We always cut our own Christmas tree. I always wondered why my parents had a bucket of water near the tree. Well, of course, it was because after Santa blew his whistle and I came down to the bedroom, they did not want the candles to catch the house on fire. We did not have electricity then. I was seven when we got electricity. Until then we had a gas plant on the ranch, so all the lights were gas lights in the walls. I remember when my stepmother wanted to re-do the kitchen, we had to take all those pipes out of the walls!

Another tradition we had, that my own children also had, was before Easter we always went out and gathered wildflowers and build a nest for the rabbit, and then my parents would have to watch the dogs to make sure they did not eat the chocolate. I had never seen an Easter basket before! My own children followed the tradition of building Easter nests. I remember my daughter coming home crying one time when a house was being built across the street from us and I said "What's wrong?" and she said "Where are we going to get the wildflowers for my Easter nest?" She was very upset. It's a German tradition—not San Antonio.

Q. What about Thanksgiving?

We have a big extended family. Even in the last years when my stepmother was still alive, we still had Christmas at the ranch before we moved it to my house. But we also had a wonderful friend who lived across the highway who was a country electrician. He would come over and drink bourbon with the housekeeper until he could barely see. Then the lights would blow out and he would climb the pole and repair the transformer! Why he was not killed we do not know! We had a huge old wood stove that Papa got rid of as soon as he could. But I thought my stepmother was going to kill him because that is what we would use to finish the Christmas turkey after the lights blew out and to warm the house!

Q. Did you have indoor plumbing?

Yes, always. One time we were having lunch at the Saint Anthony years later and I said to my father, “Did you know that there was an artesian well in the basement of the Saint Anthony?” And Papa looked like, of course, I knew it, because that is why I planted my pecan tree next to it! (He was a gardener.)

Q. Did you have a garden at the Ranch?

Yes, mostly we had fields of flowers. My father loved flowers. One of our big fields was of flowers and we also had a huge asparagus bed. People would come out from town to get it. During the war, our Christmas present to people was a quart of crème and a pound of butter, because we had it and no one else did. They loved that!

Q. Did you learn how to churn butter?

No, but I did learn it when I had those children at the Maverick Ranch. We would take two cars full of children—about 12 kids. I hate to think of it now with no seatbelts. And we would go out to the ranch in the morning, and the children planted gardens, planted pecans and built boats to have a regatta in the creek. You could push your boat with a stick, and we would have a race. They would all go home with bags of pecans, and then we would go fossil hunting and try to find interesting ones. There are huge fossil beds there. They would cook their own lunch. We had a huge cucumber crop one year and the four-year-olds made pickles. I let them cut their own with knives! How could I have let them do such a thing? It was perfectly natural then! One young man that I saw recently who came to St. David’s to enroll his child at school said “I know you!” and it scared me. I thought how did he know me? Well, he was one of the children. He is a very fine veterinarian here in San Antonio. He said, “Do you still make agarita jelly?” We used to go out and beat the bushes to make the jelly. The children did it all! We went out and did it all day. We made soap, and we had interesting people come and help us. We had a great Christmas party in the big house at the Maverick Ranch. Old Mr. Whitworth would play his violin for us. The children would bring their parents out for that. Then we would go out and cut Christmas trees. It was remarkable to see high-heeled, good-looking, “vogue-ish” women dragging Christmas trees across the pasture! I did this with the kids for about five years. That is one of the reasons I am very protective about the Maverick Ranch; I want it to exist for other generations of children.

Q. Were there other houses on the ranch?

Yes, there are three stone houses that were built by Ernst Altgelt, who was the founder of Comfort, Texas and King William in San Antonio. He and his wife and one of his sons are buried at the Maverick Ranch. He also built the first county school house. It is still there and has to be “re-chinked” periodically. The big house was a two-story ranch house. One time when my grandmother and her children had gone to New England to visit her sister, there was a fire. It burned all of the big house except the rock walls. My Great Aunt Lucy

Maverick put it back together—never as it once was. It lost a lot of things. Now the big house is one enormous room that opens on a terrace, which is the old foundation. It has a fountain in the wall, and Lucy made stone rivers to water the flower beds from the fountain. It is quite wonderful. There are a bed and bath attached to it. It is on the National Historic Registry. Absolutely! Trying to save old properties.

There is an Obert Cemetery as well as the Altgelt Cemetery. The Obert Cemetery was a stage stop in the early days, and the last Indian raid was out there. The big house has some big windows up high. We always said that was to stick your gun out; I don't know if that's true, but it's a fine story! There have been lots of parties out there. For many years at the end of school, the teachers and staff from St. David's School would go out there for picnics.

Q. Where did you go to church as a girl?

St. Helena's in Boerne. The rule in Boerne was on Good Friday, if you went to church you had to get the priest to sign a card that the principal sent with you. Otherwise you stayed in school. It's a little different now!

Q. Anything else about growing up on the ranch?

I had so much freedom. When I was at St. David's we would take the children on a bus because many of them had never been on a city bus. We would drive around the block sometimes or maybe drive to the Tea Garden at Brackenridge Park.

Q. How many years did you teach at St. David's?

Only 30 years. I was the headmistress for 30 years. I started at Good Samaritan, where I volunteered to teach art until 1958. Then I went to Inman Christian Center in the middle of the Alazan-Apache Courts; that was an incredible experience. I loved every minute of it! Then I went back to St. David's. Then my children were born.

Q. Do you still go out to the ranch?

I go out frequently. I have a house in Castroville that my husband and I bought about seven years ago before his death. It is tiny, built of old river rocks held together by big Cyprus logs. It is a historic house I didn't put that!] and goes down to the river. It is in the city of Castroville. I go there frequently. It is quiet. I hear chickens and donkeys and the church bell.

As for the ranch, well, first of all the Houston Ranch has been sold. We have a very small bit of property there. The Maverick Ranch I go to see my cousins, but mostly they come to see me. The Ranch is still there, but they are building houses all around it which is very scary to me. It's very scary because my aunt and uncle have worked very hard to keep the golden-cheeked warbler, to keep wildlife, very purebred longhorns, and cattle, and animals and stray dogs, and the Fromme Farm that is attached to the Maverick Ranch. Mr. Fromme worked it every day of his life, and they built the stonework to the spring that they

own together. We hope they preserve the ranch. Parks & Wildlife and Texas Fish & Game have been there and the head of Texas Wildlife Preservation. We have had press conferences, and we are trying hard to preserve it. The dream is to have it as a nature preserve. There are hiking trails, and it is a wonderful thing worth saving. Of course, we have all grown up in the shadow of the San Antonio Conservation Society, and that is what it is all about. We are trying to do some scrapbooks. My cousin wants me to help with the archives for the Maverick sisters who owned the Ranch. They were all strong women with a wonderful sense of history and preservation. Grandmother was the head of women's suffrage in Texas! It is an interesting family that I am privileged to be a part of.

Growing up on a ranch was a special privilege. In my senior year of college when my friends and I got back from Christmas break and were sitting around talking about who got engaged and who was going to Europe, they asked me about my favorite present. I said we got central heat at the ranch! They looked at me like I was crazy and said what did you have before? And I said, "Well, Papa built fires!" Not camp fires but in a fire place! It's been an interesting life.