

Ann Riordan Interview Wallace Stegner Documentary

Interviewer-John Howe

Ann, tell me about Juanita Crawford. Who was she and how would you describe her?

Ann Riordan

Juanita Crawford was my mother and she was a beautiful, beautiful, sophisticated lady. She was very proud of her home. She kept a beautiful home--clean, meticulous. She had lots of friends, bridge clubs, worked in the yard, worked in the house and she loved, loved her children and she seemed to be, as I remember as a child, very happy.

Interviewer-John Howe

How did she describe Salt Lake City of the 1920's?

Ann Riordan

The 1920's and all the hubbub that was going on during that period of time, there was a lot of drinking, a lot of partying. I think her fondest memory really, or memories, were her times at the University. There was a fairly large group of friends that did things together, they went out together all together and nobody really paired off except on occasion and I think they called themselves Bohemians in that time period. But they always also attended dances at Saltair; it was a time of partying and having a good time together.

Interviewer-John Howe

How did Wallace Stegner come into Juanita Crawford's life?

Ann Riordan

Wallace Stegner was part of the group that I spoke of. They were intellectuals, this group. They wrote, they danced; they shared their writings with each other. My mother was a poet. I have several of her pieces that she's written and so they would meet together and drink, of course, and share their material that they'd all been working on. He was very special to her, so I think that was the beginning of their love affair.

Interviewer-John Howe

What did she say about Wallace Stegner? How did she describe Wallace Stegner?

Ann Riordan

He was perfect. He was beautiful, he was intellectual. She adored the things he wrote. She knew that he would eventually be a very important writer. I think it scared her a little bit. I think my mother had a feeling of inadequacy in terms of Wally Stegner. Her writing wasn't as good as his of course but she was mad for him, madly in love.

Interviewer-John Howe

There are some photographs of the two of them at Fish Lake. What did Fish Lake mean to them?

Ann Riordan

They would go to Fish Lake with a group usually, but sometimes with only another couples and it was like their getaway place. It was their romantic honeymoon type place where they could be alone and they spent many long hours there and overnight. I think she was very much in love with him and she thought he was very much in love with her.

Interviewer-John Howe

Were they engaged?

Ann Riordan

Yes, they were engaged and it was around the end of the '20's. He had graduated from the university and the arrangement that they had promised each other – he was going off to graduate school and she was going to wait for him because she had a teaching job. My mother taught English. So the arrangement was that they would correspond (unfortunately I don't have those letters) and she would simply wait until he returned and then they were going to be married.

Interviewer-John Howe

How did your father Marvin Broberg fit into this?

Ann Riordan

Marvin Broberg, who is my father, was part of this group. He had a beautiful singing voice. In fact both my mother and father are featured in Wally Stegner's book *Recapitulation*. My mother was known as 'Nola' in that book. So you get a sense of their relationship if you read the book *Recapitulation*. I think my father had his eye on my mother for a long time and he was a "salesman", (and I'm using that in quotes) and as soon as Wally Stegner was out of the picture, he decided to move in on my mother. He was an incredibly charming man, very handsome with blonde curly hair, funny, major drinker, of course, but they all were then and I think he swept her off her feet and I think with her feeling inadequate about not being up to snuff so to speak to Wally's level, I think she fell in love with him. There was also a consideration of having children. My mother wanted children and Wally Stegner wasn't interested in doing that, at least not at that time.

Interviewer-John Howe

Biographer Jackson Benson describes a mysterious visitor to Juanita's house much later and speculates it might have been Wallace Stegner. Did that actually happen?

Ann Riordan

There was an incident later in my mother's life at one of the junctures when my parents had separated. I was in the 9th grade and my mother was teaching at Horace Mann, the school that I attended, and one night we were in a duplex – my mother and I were living in a duplex and the doorbell rang and I answered the door. The man said "I am Wally Stegner and I'm a friend of your mother's, could I see her?" and I said, "Of course, come in", and my mother was terribly taken aback by seeing him in the living room and they greeted each other. I can't remember the conversation, but she was very anxious to get rid of me and sent me to bed. So I went towards my bedroom, but I was very curious because, of course, I knew who Wally Stegner was, I'd heard about him, I mean since I was a young child. So I tiptoed back closer to the living room so I could spy if you will. He had taken her in his arms and they were kissing and my mother said something like, "We shouldn't do this" and I felt like I was a voyeur and I was embarrassed and so I went back to my room and went to bed. As I thought about it later, my brother had been killed a few years before this incident and perhaps he had come to see her because of the death of my brother. He said he was in town for a short time. But I know the way she talked about him as she got older that he was the love of her life and I think she regretted immensely that she didn't marry him. Her own marriage was not doing well.

Interviewer-John Howe

Benson also talks about a book signing where your father and Wallace Stegner met and evidently they greeted each other very normally.

Ann Riordan

There was a book signing at the University of Utah in Kingsbury Hall and my dad asked me (this is when he was getting older, my mother had died, in fact she had just barely passed away) and he said “I would like to go and listen to Wally speak”. After it was over there was a huge line of people wanting to greet Wally Stegner, I said, “Oh dad, let’s not wait,” he said, “I have to talk to him.” So he waited and I decided not to go down and wait with him. I had a feeling he wanted to say some things to Wally and so he waited and they hugged each other, shook each other’s hand and my dad wanted to tell him that mother had died and I don’t know what the conversation was but my father felt very happy about it after it was over.

Interviewer-John Howe

You talked about it just a little bit but tell me again that you thought that Wally was actually Juanita’s love of her life.

Ann Riordan

Wallace Stegner was the love of my mother’s life. I knew this when my parents began to have marital problems. My father was unfaithful to my mother and she could never forgive him and it happened right after my brother was born so it wasn’t too long into their marriage before the breakdown started and she talked about him more and more – Wally. She wrote poems about her disappointment in her own marriage and how my father had taken her life in a sense. She blamed him for everything. I feel that Wally Stegner really couldn’t have been as successful had he married my mother because my mother was a high-maintenance woman. He needed a wife that would support his work and my mother wasn’t emotionally capable of doing that, but she loved him till the day she died.