Overview
1. Background/father was a farmer
2. Migrant workers from Southern Utah, POW, inmates, teenagers
3. Nina’s responsibilities on farm: put boxes together, supervise pickers
4. Lessons learned: love for the land, touch and feel it was real, value of hard work, I could do it meant I could do other things.
5. Reasons why she sold her orchard—too incompatible with residential area
6. Father’s Fruit stand was on State Street where K-Mart is.
7. What Orem was like with orchards
8. Ancestors, first farmers in Orem, what it was like.
10. How she met her husband
11. Harvesting cherries
12. Her duties on the farm

NC: The Provo Bench, or Orem as it is called now, was settled by individual families that came out from Provo, and some that came over from Pleasant Grove, to make the settlement. In the 1800’s it was pretty sparse through here. In the 1900’s it started to grow and it has been growing ever since, especially by leaps and bounds since about 1944, since they built the steel plant down in Vineyard.

MM: Where did you get the book It Happened in Orem?
NC: I bought it when they published it for the centennial. When I was little the whole area, all of Orem was mostly orchards. You would drive up and down State Street and it was just a gravel road and there were orchards on both sides. You didn’t think anything of there not being any homes and stores and people.

MM: Do you mind telling me what year you were born?

NC: In 1928. That is really neat information, and this chapter on agriculture is just wonderful. And then [there is] one on about building the canals and things like that. They did not have any water here at first. We sit up about twenty feet above the rest of the land. So the water did not flow up here. They had to devise some way to get the water up from the river and out on the farms. This tells about that. So without the water there would not have been orchards.

MM: You grew up on an orchard, didn’t you?

NC: Yes. The year I was born was at the front of the Depression. My parents had just built a new home, and it was on a 60-acre plot of land. That is where I was born. It later became the Orem City Hall. There’s a picture of it in this book too. My parents are George and Nina Stratton. This is a picture of the home. Then by 1933 they had lost the home and the farm. They had the Orem City Library in there later. Orem City bought the whole property, and that is where the senior citizen center is and the city center and lots of things. It took 60 acres to do it.

When they lost the 60 acre farm, my parents moved to a little office building on a 160 acre plot on 800 North, it was not crowded there. They planted trees and it was wonderful, but there were not any houses up on 800 North. That was their orchard at that time, one of their orchards. They had another one of 15 acres. As many times as they could they would buy property and plant orchards. My father would ship the fruit to different places in the United States. That’s the way they made a living. He trucked also. He was a truck driver. He would take loads of produce to California and Nebraska and market them.

MM: What sort of crops did your father’s orchards produce?

NC: Mostly peaches, a lot of pears, a lot of apples, some plums, and some apricots. He did not do much with garden row produce, but he did a lot with the trees. When they planted the young orchard, they planted the trees far enough apart so that when they grew up they would not be crowded. The first few years that they had the new trees, they would plant strawberry plants in-between the rows. Sometimes they would plant raspberry bushes in-between the rows too, so we had those to pick. We did a lot of cherries too.

MM: As the trees grew larger, then they just took out the strawberry and raspberry bushes and just concentrated on the trees?

NC: The strawberry and raspberry bushes were shorter-lived than the trees were, so by the time the trees got big enough, their best producing years were passed, so they just plowed them under.
MM: How many employees did your father have?

NC: It varied. Before I was born he had a lot of berry pickers that would come up from southern Utah, and he would house them for the summer on the farm. I don’t know how many he had then. When I was young he would have as many as fifty or sixty pickers working for him, or they would work in the spring and pull weeds and do pruning and things like that to keep things in order. But I can’t give you a definite number.

MM: So from the 160-acre orchard that he owned, and you mentioned another 15-acre orchard, did he purchase any more land?

NC: Yes, he purchased more. He did reduce the 160-acres and turned 100 acres back to the bank. He intensely cultivated the 60 acres that he had left. He bought an orchard on 400 North and State Street in Orem where K-Mart is now, and he ran that for a lot of years. Let’s see, he helped all my brothers buy their orchards too.

MM: How many brothers do you have?

NC: I have four living and one dead [Vern, Herbert, Franklin]

MM: Do you have any sisters?

NC: I have two sisters.

MM: Did your father have any permanent employees that you can recall?

NC: Not that I can recall. He did have some truck drivers who came each summer. But I don’t know what they did in the wintertime. We did have German workers from the Prison of War camp that used to be in Orem. They would come and work in the orchards and in the fields sometimes. They had to be guarded. Sometimes when labor was really, really short Dad would have groups come from the state penitentiary and work on the farm. He did not like us to get real friendly with them.

MM: How much of the labor was provided by migrant workers?

NC: During what period?

MM: I guess any period. Were migrant workers around during the Depression?

NC: Not that I remember. I don’t remember migrant workers. I don’t remember them coming until after the war, really.

MM: When did the migrant workers first appear?

NC: I could not pin point it. A wild guess would be 1946 or 47.
MM: Did any other workers come from a long distance?

NC: I don’t remember exactly about that. I did tell you about berry pickers that came from southern Utah. Also there were a lot of years that we would have to do the harvesting by having young people come from Provo, Pleasant Grove, Springville, and any place. They were young people that wanted to work and help in the harvesting. That was hard.

MM: What was that like?

NC: They did not have any transportation—the young people did not—so we either had to go pick them up or they had to have their parents bring them out. It was hard work for the young people too, because they weren’t from a farm, and they did not really understand how you had to work hard and really sweat to get it done.

MM: When did you work in the orchards?

NC: I can remember when I was about eight years old my father gave me a birthday present and it was a little hammer; it was about that big, and that’s when I first started to work outside. It was my job to put a certain number of berry boxes together with my hammer and the nail and wood that they provided.

MM: That’s cute.

NC: It wasn’t real cute, it was work. But the time I got my quote done, I could play in the hose or wade in the ditch, whatever there was to do. From then on, when I was old enough, I would help transport the pickers and help supervise the pickers. I could supervise before I could drive, mostly in the berry patches, showing them how to pick the berries, or in the cherry orchard showing them how to pick the cherries. And then keeping track of how many they did and how much money they earned. A lot of the time I was my father’s bookkeeper, so I had to do the payroll and work like that. So it was an all around good experience.

MM: How old were you when you started supervising?

NC: About 16.

MM: How did you Father pay his workers?

NC: By check.

MM: Did he pay them by the hour or by the amount that they picked?

NC: Some of them worked by the hour, the men that irrigated or pruned or things like that, but most of the harvesters would pick by the piece and get paid by the piece. Either a case of berries or a bushel of peaches, or a bushel of pears. Cherries he paid by the pound. We had a set of scales, and they knew just how many cherries they picked before they went home.
MM: What do you feel working in an orchard taught you, or owning an orchard taught your Father?

NC: He always had a love for the land and he always felt like it was a real property, something you could hang on to, to touch and feel it was real. It wasn’t like bonds or stocks or something like that. The property was there and it would always be there. That’s the way he felt and I guess he just passed it on to me.

MM: But what did those hard hours of work teach you? How did that shape your character?

NC: I didn’t know any other way to live. But it just taught me the value of hard work, and to know that I could do it, and that I could do other things too, was very comforting to me. I later went to college and got a teaching certificate and taught school for a few years of my life. By that time I was married and my husband, Floyd, and I were orchard owners then.

MM: What orchards did you and your husband own?

NC: We owned 10 acres of the 60 acres that my father had owned on 800 North, and that’s the only property we owned.

MM: What made you decide to sell your orchard?

NC: I guess there were two or three things that made us decide to trade it. We actually traded it for other income property. The homes were building up around us so fast, and the kids that lived in the homes liked to play in the irrigation ditches. Also my husband worried about the kids when he needed to spray. It was just too incompatible with the residential area. Another thing was my husband and I had a fulltime jobs and we were trying to raise a family. We had so few acres that we could not do a lot of heavy work with the machinery. We could not afford to pay for the machinery and to take things to market. We just had to improvise to take things to market, and we used to sell a lot of our big fruit right on 800 North without a fruit stand or anything. We just did it alongside the road, and then they kept pushing the road towards us, so it was hard to sell. We decided it must be time to think about doing something else, so we did.

MM: I know the Strattons have some country stores. Did you ever sell your fruit there, or did you work there?

NC: My father’s fruit stand was down on State Street where K-Mart is, but at that orchard, no. I worked at the fruit stand there a lot. When Floyd and I were doing it we didn’t have a building, we just sold it in front of our property and our house. Our house is still there that my husband and I built on our ten acres. There’s an LDS church over there just west of 600 East, and the home is just east of the church. The church was built on the property that we used to have peaches planted on.

MM: What other changes have happened to the other orchard acres that your father had?
NC: The fifteen acres was one of the first pieces of property that he sold, and it became a subdivision. He named it after my mother, her name was Nina and he named it Ninetta Subdivision. The ten acres where Floyd and I built our home we traded to a developer and he built houses over there, and now there’s just a lot of houses.

MM: Are you the oldest daughter?

NC: I’m the second daughter, but my father loved my mother’s name so much that he threatened to change my sister’s name if my mother did not have another girl. She had three boys and then she had a girl, then two more boys and then I finally came along.

MM: How many children do you have?

NC: We had four and we lost one—we raised three. Our first one was a boy, our second was a girl, our third one was a boy, and the fourth one was a girl.

MM: Were they ever involved with your orchard that you and your husband owned?

NC: As much as they could they did. In fact, our son bought our home on 800 North, and he still lives there with his family.

MM: What was it like living in Orem when it was just mainly orchards?

NC: It was just family life. That’s all we knew. We’d never been to big cities. Think of how long State Street is and visualize a dozen or at most two dozen homes along there, two dozen buildings, no businesses. Our high school was Lincoln Junior High School and Lincoln Senior High School. My elementary school was the old Sharon School—they have a new one down there now, but the old one was down on State Street. I was in fifth or sixth grade before they changed it to just one grade to a room. We had first and second grade together, second and third together, third and fourth together, and fourth and fifth. Then when I got into sixth we finally had a grade of our own. So there weren’t very many people. The junior high and senior high school were both in the same building. It was down on 800 South. They bused us down there, of course.

The year I graduated from high school—it was 1946—ours was the first class that had one hundred graduates in it. There weren’t a lot of people, there weren’t a lot of kids. That included all of Vineyard, all of Lake View, all of Grandview, and all of the kids from the east bench.

MM: Do you see any specific roles that orchards played in the town?

NC: They were the foundation of the town. That’s the way the early settlers made a living. Well at first they did not make a living that way. First they had to clear the sagebrush off and get it ready to make a living, but as soon as they could they planted orchards. My grandmother homesteaded out here from Provo, and she said that her husband did not think they could make a living out here if they came out. And she said, “other people are doing it. Let’s try.” He was a...
timber man and cut timber, and she was the cook for the timber camp for the first year of their marriage. So when they came to Orem it was really sparsely settled. They worked hard, but they made it.

MM: Is that your maternal or paternal grandmother?

NC: My father’s mother, they were Strattons. They homesteaded, and so they were the first Strattons to plant orchards. There weren’t any orchards here when they came. I’m trying to think now—my grandmother and grandfather were homesteaders, and his father was a homesteader too, so that’s two, three, four generations of Strattons that have been orchard growers, and my brothers have boys that have the Stratton name.

MM: So how many of your relatives still have orchards?

NC: Here in Orem? I’m not sure. I know that Vern’s family has branched out from Orem, and he’ll know all about his orchard expansion. Vern still owns property in Orem. My brother Herbert still has some orchard property in Orem, but mostly that’s it. I think Franklin doesn’t. So half of them still have a little bit of property. They all are good farmers.

MM: I still see pretty orchards just going down 800. The cute Stratton country stores they have.

NC: One of those country stores belongs to a cousin; John D. Stratton that owns that. I think he still owns some orchard property, too.

MM: How did you meet your husband?

NC: I knew him in high school.

MM: Were you high school sweethearts?

NC: No. He did not know who I was. He was two years older than I was. He was the same age as Vern and they knew each other, and when they got back from their missions we got together.

MM: So what is your favorite fruit?

NC: My favorite fruit is peaches, second would be apples, and third pears. You’re talking about eating them, aren’t you? Not growing them?

MM: Yes, but tell me about growing.

NC: My favorite one is cherries to grow.

MM: Why is that? Are they easier?

NC: They are smaller. There is not as much heavy work with them as there was with the big fruit. The big fruit had to be done in bushels, and then it got so they had to done in bins, thirty
pound bins. You had to have a forklift to work with your apples and pears and things like that. I’ve always liked cherries because I could see them and I could do my part with them.

MM: What sort of equipment did you have growing up? You mentioned a forklift with the heavier fruit.

NC: We did not have that when I was growing up; we just had the bushel baskets, flat wagons and the truck to load them on the railroad cars.

MM: Would you wear a sack?

NC: A picking bag. The pickers would work with the bags, and that was one of my special jobs, to check in all the picking bags at night and check them all out and fold them up and make them tidy and neat for the next day’s work. Handing them out, I got to do that.

MM: You had lots of different jobs.

NC: Four, I think. In the fall time after the harvest we would bring in all of the baskets that had been used on the property, and we cleaned them out and made sure they did not have leaves or bad fruit in them. Then we bundled them up in bundles and turned them upside down so they were safe from the weathering of the winter. That was an interesting occupation. It taught me to organize things and to work with things neat, to keep things neat and usable.