

Emma Gloria Ralston

By Gloria Jean Ralston Throneberry

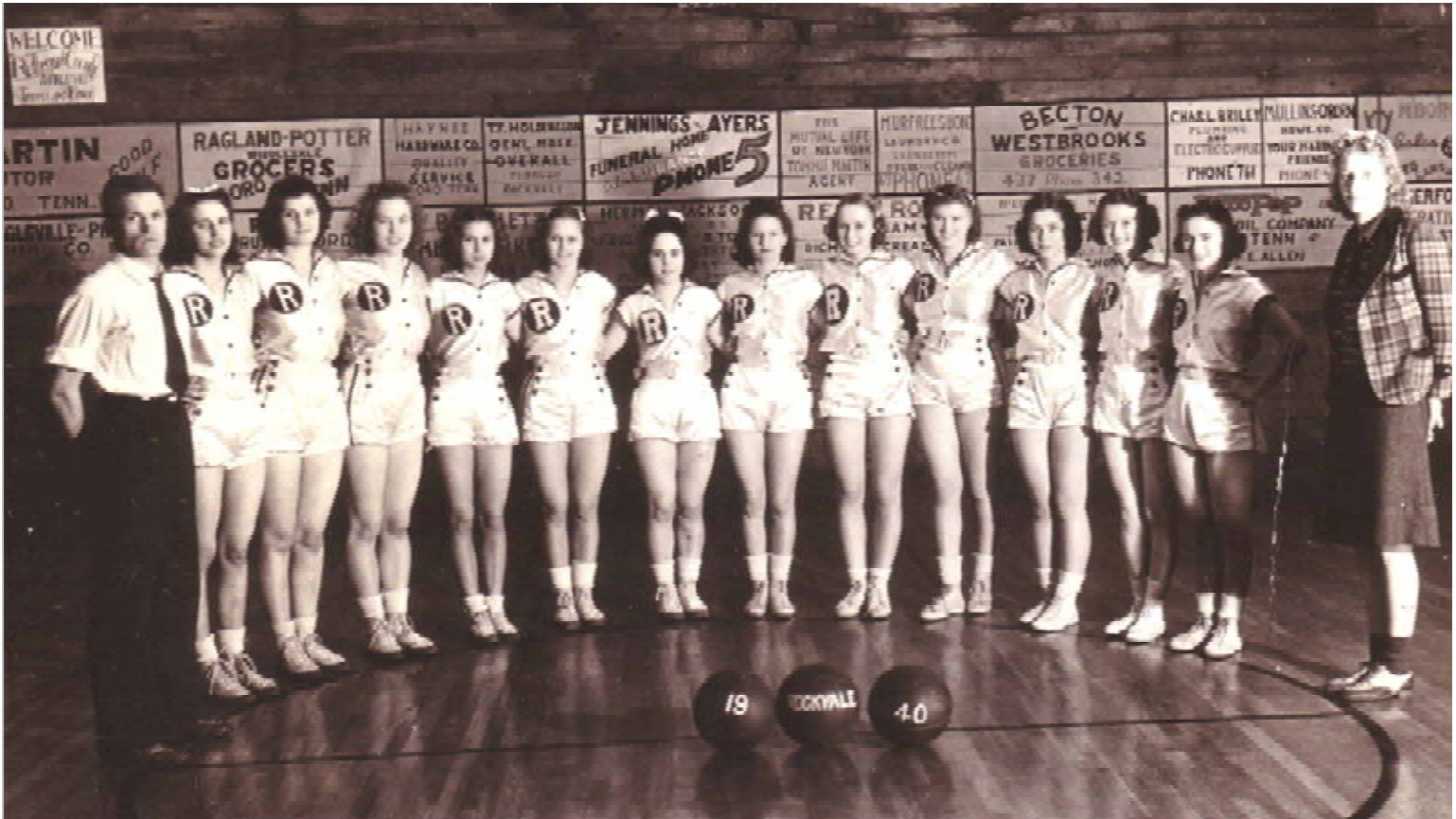


Emma Gloria Ralston as pictured in Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church directory.

Winter nights were cold in 1940, but the temperature inside the gymnasium was “hot” when Rockvale High School played Eagleville High School in basketball. The spirited rivalry that existed between these two teams brought out folks from both communities to cheer for their home team. Emma Gloria Woodson played the position of forward for the Rockvale Rockets girls’ team, while in the stands cheering for the Eagleville Eagles was an Eagleville High School alumnus named Eugene Ralston. Emma Gloria recalls that during the years that she played high school basketball, the playing court was divided into three sections with each team having two forwards on one end of the court, two guards on the other end and two centers in the middle of the court. Guards and forwards usually passed the basketball from one end of the court to the other through the centers. Before she graduated, this style of play was changed to a court with two sections. Then, girls’ team consisted of three guards on one end of the court and three forwards on the other end. The three forwards were the only players who could score points.

Playing basketball was a natural for Emma Gloria. Born the middle child of nine children to parents Louise and Jimmy D. Woodson, she learned to play all types of sports with her brothers and sisters. Not only did her eight siblings provide plenty of sports competition, living near the Woodson clan were the Farris boys.

The Farris family had ten boys and they were Emma Gloria’s double first cousins (brother and sister married brother and sister). Times were hard and daily chores were a priority for the Woodson family, but Emma Gloria recalls that playing softball, baseball, basketball, catching lightning bugs, playing kick-the-can, etc. were happy times during their childhood years.



1940 Rockvale High School Girls Basketball Team (L-R): Coach Robert Baskins, Nora Mae Smotherman Crick, Bennie Mae Lamb Taylor (deceased), Emma G Woodson Ralston, Gerry Smotherman James, Frances Vaughn, Cloris Sharber Thomas (deceased), Dorothy Faulkner Tucker, Emalyn Jackson Pinkerton, My Lamb Price, Wenzola Insell Gould (deceased), Martha Williams Lowe, Elaine Covington Martin (deceased), and Manager Lucy Tucker (deceased).



Emma Gloria and Eugene pictured in front of Eagleville Lumber Co. in July 1984.

Before she graduated from Rockvale High School in 1941, Emma Gloria met Eugene (Gene) Ralston. Prior to meeting him, she had known his late brother Herman, who had been killed in a motorcycle accident in 1939. She recalls that she and Eugene first met and talked at a baseball game at Rockvale in 1940. Eugene rode his motorcycle to the game and invited her to go riding with him. Knowing her mother would not approve, she declined. Years later she admitted that she did not ride with him that day, but, she did ride a motorcycle with him on other occasions while they were dating. Whether her mother ever found out—well—probably so!!

Eugene Ralston and Emma Gloria Woodson were married December 26, 1941. Pearl Harbor had been attacked December 7 of that year and Eugene was called for military duty March 1942. He was with the 101st Airborne Division of the United States Army and was stationed at various military bases in the U. S. Emma Gloria went with him to as many of his assigned bases as possible. From Fort Bragg, North Carolina in September 1943, Eugene was deployed to Europe where World War II was raging. He was with the 101st Airborne when they landed D DAY + 2 or June 8, 1944 on the beaches of Normandy, France. While serving with the 101st Airborne during WWII, he was in England, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany.

When Eugene was deployed overseas, Emma Gloria returned home to Tennessee and in December 1943 their first child, Gloria Jean, was born. Eugene did not return to the United States until September 1945. The war was over. Other than photos sent to him, he did not see his daughter until she was almost two years old. Emma Gloria often tells that Gloria

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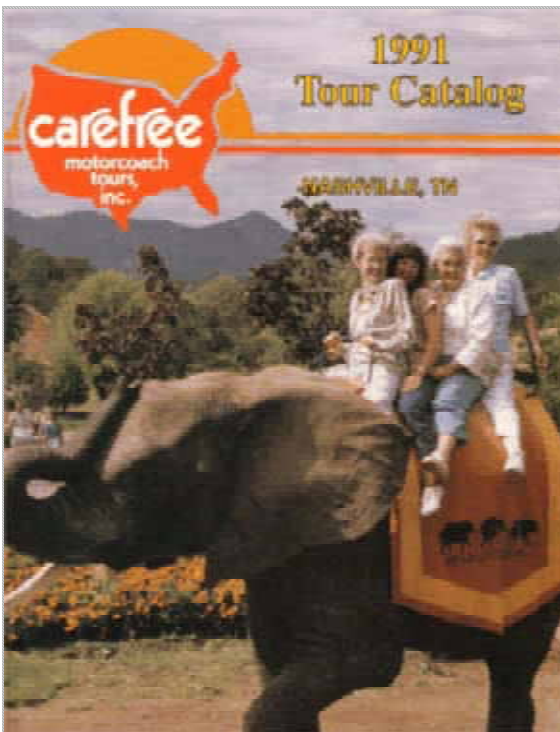
Jean asked her one day after Eugene had been home for about two weeks, “Mama, when is that man going home?” Needless to say, Eugene’s coming home to stay was quite an adjustment for both father and daughter. War causes hardships and difficult times for families whether it was 1945 or today.

Now that the war was over, Eugene and Emma Gloria settled into their first home. With the help of family, neighbors, and friends they built a house across the road from Eugene’s parents on the Mt. Pleasant Road (ironically located between Eagleville and Rockvale) and he along with his father farmed and milked cows. Emma Gloria was a housewife who helped with the farming. In August 1949, they were blessed with another daughter, Judith Ann. Attending church at Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church, the annual Rockvale Fourth of July Picnic, the Ralston Reunion, and yes, those Rockvale High School vs Eagleville High School basketball games were routine activities for the Ralston family.



Emma Gloria and Eugene in Hawaii in 1982.

Eagleville Lumber Company opened in 1956 in “downtown Eagleville.” This was a new venture for Eugene and Emma Gloria. This venture lasted 28 years. The store not only provided the family with their income, it afforded them the opportunity of working together, making life-long friendships and an incredible amount of memories. Emma Gloria recalls the good times spent with regular store visitors like Arch Bell, Joe McCord, Russell Puckett, John Edward Turner, Vernell Underwood, and Dot Johns (just to name a few). Then, there was Joann Shelton who would stop in on her way to Marshall’s Grocery to get her snack. She still remembers that Joe Snell, Russell Puckett and Eugene would go every morning to get their mail at the Post Office and talk to Postmaster Harry Patillo. And everyone that remembers Eagleville Lumber Company remembers Robert Dyer as he sat in the back doorway of the store and enjoyed his tobacco.



This photo of Emma Gloria and Edna (the back two) riding atop an elephant appeared on the cover of a 1991 tour catalog.

While Emma Gloria’s life has had many good times, she has endured profoundly sad times as well. In August 1965, the unthinkable happened. At the age of 16, daughter Judith Ann suffered a cerebral aneurysm and died suddenly. Though life was never quite the same, Eugene and Emma Gloria’s faith and love carried them through this tragedy.

Their older daughter, Gloria Jean, was now married to Dwight Throneberry and in 1971 their first grandchild, Gina, was born. In 1973, Dwight and Gloria Jean moved to Eagleville from Franklin and in 1975 another granddaughter, Dawn, was born. Having their daughter and her family living nearby, Eugene and Emma Gloria continued to work at Eagleville Lumber Company until 1984. Then in May 1985, Eugene died from lung cancer at the age of 67.

Her life now changed forever, Emma Gloria’s strong faith and determination led her to new and different adventures. Before Eugene died, they had traveled to Hawaii and had taken several trips within the United States. They had planned to travel more after they retired. Now she must travel alone, or so she thought. Undoubtedly, God had other plans for her. About this time, longtime Eagleville resident Edna Jackson retired and she too was interested in traveling. The two began traveling together and Emma Gloria and Edna were perfect travel companions. During their years of traveling, they visited most every state (some more than once), Canada,

and Europe.

As she has for the past 60 years, Emma Gloria faithfully attends Mt. Pleasant Baptist Church where she has been everybody's Sunday School teacher at some time or other. She is an active member of the Rockvale Family and Friends Club. She still gets her hair done at Joyce's Beauty Shop at 10:30 every Friday morning as she has done for the past 34 years, and she is still a great cook – just ask her son-in-law.

It has been a long time since those cold winter nights when Rockvale High School and Eagleville High School squared off on the basketball court. However, Emma Gloria still has strong ties to both Rockvale and Eagleville. She now lives in the Rockvale community while daughter Gloria Jean and son-in-law Dwight live in the Eagleville community. Her two granddaughters, Gina and Dawn, reside in Nashville and Smyrna respectively.

Emma Gloria has shown courage, strength, compassion, and a tremendous amount of faith throughout her life. She has been a pillar of strength for her family, a faithful member and worker in her church and a loyal supporter of her community. Life is about change and Emma Gloria has always been strong and adapted to life's changes with the grace and dignity that is God given.