

Interview of Rufus Stephenson, Author of *From Dixieland to Frisco Bay*

Shirley Chimes
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*Editor's note: Our new *Become a Friend* Coordinator Shirley Chimes was very inspired by the work of Rufus Stephenson ([read intro to his book here](#)) and met up with him on January 16th to find out more about the man behind the books. In the interview below, Rufus Stephenson offers insight into his writing and shares marital wisdom as a man who recently celebrated his 60th wedding anniversary.*

*Question: Why did you decide to write *From Dixieland to Frisco Bay*? What was the inspiration behind it?*

As a kid, I did not have information from my parents about their lives – just story time. I did not want to lose that information about my own life. I did not have a book in mind when I began; it came to me little by little. As I worked on the railroad, I wrote down my memories in a book when I got an idea. I always carried that book. Sometimes, as I was waiting for a train, I would take out my book and write a story. When the train came in, I had to

quit and start up on another day. As experiences happened, I wrote them down, dated them, threw them in a box and left them there. But five years after I retired, I had this thought: "If I don't start now to record my life story, I will never get it done."

I started taking the notes out of the box, separated them by year and started to type them consistently. Finally, I decided I wanted to write a book. The inspiration was to leave something for my children, grandchildren, great grandchildren and family. I enrolled in a community college and took a creative writing class when I was 70 years old.

Question: What is the key message you want to give to your readers?

I wanted my kids, grandkids and great grandkids to know what it was like as I grew up. It was the only way of doing it - showing them the hard and good times.

Question: How did you write the book and how long did it take?

I kept the stories of my life in a box for years. From the time I gathered all my notes together until I had typed it up on my computer, it took about two years.

Question: Who helped you with the book?

After working on the railroad for 43 years, I was asked to go to school to learn how to operate a computer. I was six months away from retiring so I turned it down. But in 1999, my son-in-law found out that I wanted to write a book and convinced me that using the computer was the best way. He gave me a computer for Christmas that year, stayed with me over the weekend and taught me how to use the computer. When he left, he told me to call whenever I needed help. Whenever I would write a section, I let my wife, Joyce, read it and she would give me her suggestions.

Question: Can you tell us about your writing style and why you chose a poetic format to tell your childhood stories?

When I was growing up, I used to talk in rhymes a lot so it seemed like the best way to write it - in poetry.

Why are you writing a fifth autobiography? How did you divide up your life stories between these books?

I took it step-by-step, following my life one segment at a time. The last book is about memories of Joyce and I. It more or less fell in place as I did not have a design in mind. It was like having a conversation and one thing led to another.



Rufus and Joyce

Question: You recently celebrated your 60th wedding anniversary with your wife. Can you reveal the secret to a long-lasting, happy marriage?

We celebrated our 60th anniversary on November 24, 2018. My advice is to always settle arguments immediately. Joyce and I never spent a day apart unless I was fishing or hunting. Then, I called her every day. We always said, "I love you." At night also. We do everyday. We loved each other from the beginning and never had reason to doubt in any way.

Since I retired in May of 2000, every Friday for the last 18 years, we clean the house together and in the evening we have hamburgers and French fries.

We got married when Joyce was not quite 16 and I was 20. I met her dad on the railroad and worked with him. His family was living out of state. He and I were living in the same apartment complex and one day he showed me a picture of his wife, son and daughter. At that time, I was 19.

The one person I was most impressed with was his daughter and I fell in love with her immediately just by looking at her picture. He told me he was working on a deal for them to move from California to Colorado. He was not sure when they would arrive. Finally, in July 1958, they sold their home. On August 25, 1958, I discovered I had to go to national guard training. I was not there when Joyce arrived. When the training was over in August 31st, I got in my car and drove to her home. She was not at home when I arrived but I found her in front of a grocery store. I got permission to take her to the movies that night. Our first date was August 31, 1958. Both of our families were against our marriage – only her dad and her brother supported us. None of my family supported me. For us to get married, I had to get papers notarized in Mississippi because I was not yet 21. We had to go before a Los Angeles county judge to get his permission. My mom, my wife's dad and a Los Angeles judge gave us permission to marry.



Rufus and Joyce many years ago

Question: Where were you married?

In our pastor's home on November 24, 1958, five days from three months of knowing her.

Question: Do you have pictures of that day?

No, there were no cameras available.

Question: How many children, grandchildren and great grandchildren do you have?

We have four daughters, 13 grandkids, 13 great grandkids with one coming next month.



Question: What are the most important values you want to pass on to your children?

More so than anything is the power of God and believing in Jesus Christ as his son and accepting him as their savior.

Question: Are your books on Amazon?

Yes. Here is the link to the first one:
www.amazon.com/Dixieland-Frisco-Rufus-Franklin-Stephenson/dp/144906227X

Question: Can you tell us the titles of your autobiographies?

From Dixieland to Frisco Bay

Walking With My Sunshine

Ghost of Roarke Ridge (MO)

Rufus

I don't have a name for fifth book. It has general information and short, fictional stories. It does not follow the same pattern of the other books. I am hoping to finish it next Spring. Being 80, it does not come easily.

