

# Jeri Russell

## United States of America



**Interviewer:** Do you want to introduce yourself?

**Jeri:** Jeri Russell, I was Jeri Scale before I was married. I was born and raised in Utah. I've lived here most of my life. We lived in Canada for a couple of years after having some kids and came back. But, Utah born and bred.

**Interviewer:** What city you were born in? And what were the first few years of your life like?

**Jeri:** I was born in Salt Lake at the LDS hospital. I have an older brother 18 months older than me, and then I have two younger sisters. It was idyllic. I had a wonderful home life, we did trips and activities. I was a little strange in my neighborhood because my mom worked. I was born in 1951, and most moms were home moms- They stayed home. So it was a little odd that my mom worked full time. And then my dad had two jobs, at least. But it was great!

**Interviewer:** What was your mom's job?

**Jeri:** Both of them worked for the government. My dad worked at the post office and my mom worked at the Veterans Hospital. They dictated surgical notes to her and she transcribed.

**Interviewer:** What's the story behind your name?

**Jeri:** Well, it's very interesting. I was my mom's first girl, and she was in the hospital reading the Reader's Digest and came upon my name, which is 'Jerilyn,' and she said, 'Good enough.' It's not a family name, I don't know that anybody else in my family ever got that name.

**Interviewer:** What traditions have been passed on in your family?

**Jeri:** There's always holiday traditions. My favorite is Thanksgiving. To get together with all the family and, of course, have all normal things. We have a tradition of going on vacations, mostly when I was a youngster. We went on road trips quite often. And they were close by, like California, Arizona, and places in Utah. My grandparents were from Southern Utah so we were down there quite a bit. Outdoorsy- we hiked and rode horses. It was a great life!

**Interviewer:** When and why have you felt the most alone and most connected?

**Jeri:** When I'm most connected, is when my brother and my sisters and their families get together. It's just relaxed. I go back to my childhood and we can laugh at all those things again. It all comes back and I feel very free. Most alone when I just feel misunderstood. It comes sometimes and it's hard to get that feeling back. When we moved to Canada without my family that was a little hard. I had to build another community, another little family up there. But it's good, it stretches you.

**Interviewer:** Why did you decide to move to Canada?

**Jeri:** It was, my husband's job that took us there. It was when I had a baby, and a one-year-old, and a two-and-a-half-year-old. We drove two cars up there in the middle of winter and I guess

that's what was a little lonely. It was 40 below and froze every house plan I babied all the way up there. And we had to figure out, with your little ones, where even a grocery store is, or how you can maneuver around the city, but you have to.

**Interviewer:** What city was it?

**Jeri:** Calgary. Just straight north.

**Interviewer:** What's your favorite holiday food memory?

**Jeri:** Oh, probably goes back to Thanksgiving again. Food memories are great for me because every holiday has great food. So that's hard... I love Thanksgiving, but I don't like turkey. I like everything but Turkey, so we usually do ribs with all the stuffing and everything. The other one is probably July 4th and July 24th- The picnics and going up the canyon and just the simple food.

**Interviewer:** What objects tell the story of your life?

**Jeri:** If I was gonna give my kids something to remember me by, it would be my favorite books. I love to read. So I have some of those, and I would love for them to have those and remember me. I sewed when I was young, and I've kept some of my mom's things, and I've saved some of my things. So some of those memories of growing up in the 70s and sewing my own clothes, and having my own looks. So those kinds of things would remind them of me. I'm a pretty 'Cleaner-outer' - I get rid of stuff. But those are a few things I think.

**Interviewer:** You lived in Canada for a while, what would you say is something unique about Utah that you won't find in other places?

**Jeri:** I've lived here most of my life, so it's hard to know. Well, the LDS church makes it very unique I think. And it made it a little bit hard to move away. When I moved to Canada, it really did open my eyes- it was very diverse there. It was so fun and interesting to get to know a whole different city and how it ran and how our lives were the same and how they were different. The government's a little the same and different. I think Utah, especially when I was growing up, was quite closed-minded. Mostly when I traveled it was in Utah and it was with my family, so I love that there was more there. Our neighbors were very diverse, and our kids had friends across the street. One was old enough to go to kindergarten there and to bring home their friends and to see the differences was crazy. I didn't get married until I was 27, so I should have been aware, but I really wasn't- I was in a pretty good bubble.

**Interviewer:** How are you and your parents different and alike?

**Jeri:** My parents are from a little teeny town in Southern Utah- they're third cousins- so they were very isolated. I think they really had to push to make a success of their life, and they wanted more. They worked really, really hard. They're very hard workers. I got a little cushy, you know, a little entitled I think. You would think that I would learn that work ethic from them. And to a certain extent, I did. But, I think they grew up and knew they had to push. I grew up and just enjoyed what they had. Yeah, I should have learned more from them. They did not talk to us

about a lot of things. We would go on a road trip and they would talk to themselves and the kids would play, but we did not learn. We did not have a lot of adult conversation. And with me growing up, I wanted my kids to be involved in all the conversations- 'I noticed this, I noticed that', 'What are you seeing? What are you doing?' So we were involved. I think in our family we had a lot more physical hugging and talking about our emotions than my parents did.

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes and dreams for the future?

**Jeri:** My husband just retired. We just moved to a new neighborhood and I'm really, really enjoying serving and getting to know my little area. I am loving that. Once I find my spot I like to dig in and be comfortable- He likes to travel so we do some of that- But I just like my little safe space. I like to get to know my neighbors and have some friends there. It's pretty simple.

**Interviewer:** What do you think was the biggest difference between living in Utah and living in Canada?

**Jeri:** The difference was way colder there. They don't care, it just doesn't matter to them. The government. I thought was interesting to live in a place you think is not that different, but it was. The health care was different. My husband's working up there was very different than working down here with all the rules and things. And it was much more diverse.

**Interviewer:** Where in Salt Lake County do you live right now?

**Jeri:** We live in Murray now. We moved from Sandy, where we raised our kids. We were there for 45 years. I grew up in Holiday. So very tight-knit all the way around.

**Interviewer:** During that time, how have you seen the State, as a whole, change?

**Jeri:** That's a good question. When I went to college, I did live in Southern Utah, in Cedar City. It was the hippie movement and it was the first time that I've moved out and been afraid for the country, been afraid for our state. It was unsettling to me, and it seemed like almost anything could happen. I didn't feel centered anymore because of the movement that was going on. And maybe that was a lot of freedom and I'm used to rules, but that was scary. And now I see that again. To me, it's almost the same feeling I had, only way more. It makes me afraid. It makes me anxious. It makes me mad. It makes me want to be more tolerant and it makes me want other people to be more tolerant. To be able to talk back and forth- I feel like a lot of that's gone. A lot of that back and forth is gone and it makes me angry.

**Interviewer:** What are your hopes for your community? How do you want your community to improve?

**Jeri:** Oh, I hadn't thought about that. I moved from a neighborhood where we had sidewalks and friends and neighbors that watch out after each other. We had old people and young people. It was a little cocoon that felt wonderful. And to move to Murray, I'm in a condo. I mean, it's a very nice place with really nice neighbors, but everybody goes into the garage, shuts the door, and goes out the garage, shuts the door. And it's way harder to feel that community. But it does

happen, you just have to work way harder at it. I took it for granted there and here it takes a lot. You really have to put yourself out. I feel like I've made some really, really wonderful friends and a lot of back and forth. Everybody has each other's back. But yeah, it's a whole different community, it's a whole different feel.

**Interviewer:** What does 'being welcoming' mean to you?

**Jeri:** I see some neighbors that are welcoming and some that aren't. It's quite different. Some that will open their garage and not look up. I'm one that just walks by and says, 'Hey' to everybody, and 'How you doing?' and you strike up a little conversation if you can. And some really don't like that. So welcoming means a lot to me- Just those little things just to say, 'Hey,' and 'How you doing? Where are you living? Are you okay? Whatcha doin? I have a couple of neighbors that watch out when we go back and forth. I do feel very, very welcomed there, but it took some effort to get out there first. I think they had forgotten it was really nice.

**Interviewer:** You mentioned before that Utah was closed-minded. Are there some areas where you are seeing change and more diversity?

**Jeri:** It's its way changed. Like I said, when I was growing the community was very tight and really sweet. They watched out after each other. We played night games. All the kids knew each other. The moms would feed the kids after school. Like I said my mom worked, so they took care of us. It was a very tight community, but not a diverse community. In this little community, I've been there about two and a half years, I have a really good friend from Russia, one from Ukraine, one from Mexico. I just feel like I've kind of gathered this cool, interesting little group. It really enriches me, and I think it does them too. To get together and play games, to camp, to do those kinds of things with new eyes, and with new ears. It's something I wouldn't have done before. So the move has been good. There's so much diversity out there that I don't see and I'm not involved in. But in my little community, I see a lot. It's interesting because they're very welcoming to me. It just warms your heart to be very welcoming.

**Interviewer:** Have you been to any other country outside of the U.S. and Canada?

**Jeri:** Mexico. We went to Europe and visited quite a few countries there- Budapest, Iceland. Spain in a couple of months. Now that my husband's retiring, and we have bigger chunks of time, it is fun to get out.

**Interviewer:** Do you speak any other languages?

**Jeri:** No. Tried and tried, but no.

**Interviewer:** Since you've been moving and meeting people from different places, are there little things that you take away from each interaction with new groups of people?

**Interviewer:** We use the phrase 'American Dream' a lot, does that mean something special to you?

**Jeri:** I think it does. Like I say I am discouraged lately, discouraged, but not hopeless. To me, it is acceptance. The dream is to have everybody come and share what you have. To be a part of us and we a part of you. Learn from each other. But it breaks my heart a little to see how hard it is for people to come. I feel like we have so much here, so much land, so much good, so many people, so many jobs. We have so much here that when people say, 'That's enough, we're not letting anyone in,' it breaks my heart. We have it, everybody should have it. If they want it they should have, they should have a chance. The dream for me is an open and accepting society. I know that there are problems that come with that, there are problems with everything that's big in government, but there are ways. If you have a problem, you solve it. That's the dream for me- For everybody to be part of this. There are plenty of pieces of pie for everybody.

**Interviewer:** Do you have any advice for this group?

**Jeri:** I don't. You've got way more advice than me. I've felt sheltered and like it's so nice to have people come and share what you have. I just think this is so cool to start in high school. I don't have the advice, I'm the last one to give advice. I think when you get to the end of your life and look back, the one thing that you want to ask is, 'Did I do what made me grow as a person and be happy?' Do what makes you happy. Do what brings you joy. If it's not giving you joy, find something else.