

Oral History - Leroy Nelson and Bob W. Wonder

Interviewer Robert J. Hult

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Okay, this is Bob Hult and today is Wednesday, November the 17th. and we're in the home of Mr. Bob Wonder in Shawnee, Colorado. We also have Mr. Roy Nelson at the table here and we're going to be discussing their experiences here in Park County over the past years.

Okay, Roy, I guess we'll start with you. What is your birth date?

Oh, boy, way back when.

Way back when? That's specific!

I'm 1/19/21.

1921?

Yes.

Okay.

Cuz he's an old guy, though, this guy here.

Where were you actually born?

I was born in the City of Denver, Colorado.

And when did you first come to Park County then?

Nelson: I came to Park County in 19, well not to Park County. I came to Jefferson County, Conifer, in 1950. I bought a ranch over there and I lived there for a number of years. Got the ranching out of my system and wanted to buy a store and I bought the (inaudible) store which is located in Shawnee.

Okay, so you had the Shawnee store. Now, you lived in Shawnee then for?

25 years. Approximately.

Very good. And, Bob, you were born here in Park County?

No, I was born in Denver, actually.

Oh, really? Okay. What year was that?

1918, February the 15th.

Nelson: I told you he was an old timer.

Wonder: Just take it easy, now. We don't want any gunshots in this home. No firing of the gun.

Okay, so you were actually born in Denver. Your parents were then living in Denver at that time?

Wonder: Yes, they were and my mother and father were both from Park County, born and raised in Park County. In fact, my father was born over here, just over the hill in what they call Deer Creek area. They call it the KC Ranch but Roy Romer, our ex-governor, owns the ranch that my grandfather homesteaded in 1874. And it consisted of true homesteads. My grandfather had one and my uncle later on homesteaded beyond him and there was some school property in-between. And, uh, that was in the family until 1951.

Okay. He ranched that whole time?

Yes, is it was in the family and, of course, in the meantime, quite a few members of the family passed away and it left my uncle over there by himself with about a hundred head of cattle. He couldn't feed the cattle himself and do all the necessities and he offered to, he got, I had two brothers and a sister and he offered to, he got us all together and he offered us, if we'd come in with him, that he'd just give us half the ranch right away. Well, nobody wanted to come up here.

This was up Deer Creek Valley?

Yes. And, consequently, he sold it. Not to Romer. It changed hands several times before Roy Romer got it. And my folks lived in Bailey and he moved in with them and they remained down there for quite some time and then my family had certain, well they didn't agree on a lot of things, some problems. So they were not very cordial to one another a good many times over a good many things. But, he felt, my family had never lived on a ranch. We lived across Deer Creek there, homesteaded there for awhile and so he said to my dad, who was a builder and electrician, a little bit of everything else, "If you will go in with me on building a home, I'll pay what you get from somebody else," the day wages, whatever it was, or hourly, "and we'll build that house and I'll buy the material." And so in 1950 they built this place. They cut down the trees and they took them to a sawmill and had the material cut out. There was Prairie Fitzsimmons up at the top of Crow Hill which is now Burland and everything in here is full cut. If it's a 2x4 it is 2x4, see 2x6 is 2x6. It's not planed and such as that. There's not a staple in it, there's a lot of spikes. 500 pounds of iron in this thing keeping it together.

This house is where? Right here? This house right here?

Yes.

Oh, you're in Shawnee. So, this is it? Wow.

So they were here until the mid-60's, at which time they were up in age and so, ultimately, they ended up in Littleton where we had lived prior and, oh, they all passed away. My mother and father and brother and sister are buried in Littleton. My grandfather, my grandmother and my aunt and my uncle are buried over in Pine Junction. There's a cemetery back in there you might not know about. Now, I'm going to do something about that. In fact, yesterday, I went over to Willow Park. As we went through Pine, there's a sign there, Pine Grove Cemetery, that I had never noticed before. I'm going down there and see. It's in Jefferson County, just barely is. Anyway, they're buried there. That's on my father's side. My mother was born in Fairplay in, I don't know that I have it on this sheet. A long time ago. Her parents, her father came

from Kentucky looking for gold. Her mother came from Louisiana looking for a husband, I suppose.

This would be what, the 1880s?

1870s. My grandfather had been involved with livestock, horses primarily. When the mills didn't develop for him, he knew a man by the name of Hill that apparently had money because Hill and my grandfather built what was the McLaughlin Livery. I had Fairplay in this picture of family up there and it is a big building. That was my mother's birthday they had up there. (Inaudible) Anyway, that building would host the first Western Union, the first of a lot of everything and it was in the family until the early 1900's, at which time the price of silver went clear down and everything in Fairplay just kind of went to sleep. So they moved from Fairplay to Rifle, Colorado, and started a boardinghouse there.

Did they sell that property?

I don't know whether they sold it or what happened to it, to tell you the truth. I imagine they did. I know that it was one of the first garages in Fairplay and I was fearful that it would be either burned down or torn down and a fellow by the name of, oh shoot, that owns it now.

Starts with a "D". Dale . . . Fitting.

Fitting, yeah. Dale Fitting. He got a hold of it and had it redone. I don't know (inaudible) but it's fantastic.

He's done several things, several buildings, including the ice cream shop now in town.

He owns that Hand Hotel also, I understand. I don't know if they finished the home there but they were going to build a home there.

Yeah, up toward Alma, I believe.

And she's up there now and involved in the medical, she's a nurse. She's involved in the whatever they have up there now and I'm delighted to have them re-do it. Paint it, put a new roof on it, oh everything. Have you been in it, Roy?

Nelson: Oh, yeah.

Since (inaudible) Fitting has it?

Nelson: Yeah.

That's pleased me a great deal.

That's great.

Wonder: I had offered him this tank up here if he'd just haul it away and he finally got interested in it but he didn't do much so another fellow came by and he was really interested in it so I said well first here first served so the other guy got it.

Nelson: Haven't heard back from him, though, about taking out the rest of it.

No, I waited three years for him to get it out of here and I thought that was long enough. He hasn't stopped here since but I've stopped at his ice cream parlor quite a few times and talked to him.

Now, go back to, you said you were actually born in Denver and at that time your parents were actually living in Littleton?

Wonder: No, no, they were living in Denver. We lived at 438 S. Grant in Denver and my dad worked at the Chemical Works which is now out there by the river, what do they call it now? I can't remember what the name of it is now. (Inaudible) Chemical or something like that. He worked there and then they moved back up here along to Deer Creek.

What year was that roughly?

Well, that would have been about 1920.

So, you were only two years old?

Yeah.

So, you were in Deer Creek so you would be coming up, did you visit your grandfather up at the ranch?

Occasionally.

What was Bailey like at that point in time and the area, Deer Creek area?

Well, it was very busy because they needed building material in Denver and what pulled them up here was the timber and above here (inaudible) Valley in there, there were mines and that's what brought the railroad up here. (Inaudible) the Narrow Gauge. And, what they did, have you been up Deer Creek?

We live up in Deer Creek. We live in Deer Creek Valley Ranches. I hiked up Rosalie Trail on the top. Have you made it to the top of Rosalie Trail?

Okay, that makes a difference. Okay, when you go up, you go as far as you can. There was a mill there, a sawmill, and that was they called the Lower Mill. What they would do is come in, cut timber, make cabins. They always made a combination building which was either, which was a combination of the school and the community center where they had dances, get together and that sort of thing. And they cut timber there. A lot of it, most of it came down here by horse and wagon to the railroad. When that was all cut out they wanted to go on up above to what they called the Upper Mill and did the same thing up there.

Now, this was actually up on the flanks of Rosalie?

Yes. Then in your neighborhood, I was up there, we lived, do you know where the Schomp home is up on Deer Creek?

I'm not sure.

Well, you go up there past where you live and then you come to a big two story house on your right. Well, that was built by Governor Sweet, who was then governor of Colorado.

So, the white farm house on the right hand side?

Yeah.

One of our neighbors, in fact, is a real estate agent, owns that property now and has for some time. It's an historic (inaudible) for sure.

Well, that's where the guy that owned the trash deal here, what was his name? Vivienne sold her fifth wheel to him. Anyway, . . .

So, that was a governor's home originally?

Yes, it was built by Governor Sweet or he had it built and that would have been in the '20's. And, so, we lived, as you go on by there and you come up an upgrade, down to the (inaudible), there's a sign of Romer, that goes down to the Romer ranch and right on along there then there's kind of a Spanish type house. Well, that incline used to be, we called it the subway hill because there was a bridge over the lower part of it and it was quite steep. When that levels off then you come to a road that comes back this way and that's where we homesteaded.

Is that on the right or left hand side?

Right.

So, it's uphill, not in the valley?

When it (inaudible) off. And unless something's happened to it, you go back there to an outcropping about 2 or 3 blocks there's the bedstead, part of the range, part of some other stuff from our home that was burned down by the KKK's.

Really?

Really.

In what year?

1924.

So the KKK was active up here?

They sure were at that time. And they came from there; I'll deviate a little bit from that. And they came from there down to store (inaudible) and he was the grandchild, he was the first white baby born in this part of the country and they were ready to burn a cross down there and McGraw had a connection with the Warden Best at the prison in Canon City, I have pictures of this, and he got Best and the bloodhounds, got them up here and he's gonna take care of these clan people if they burn any more crosses.

Now, why did they target your place?

I never did know. And I never pursued it. My brother pursued it with my uncle and he told him, he said, there's no reason to talk about it. He said it wouldn't prove anything.

So, he wouldn't tell anything.

(Inaudible) in the family commotion. So, that took care of the clan in this part of the county as far as burning crosses and (inaudible) activities concerned. That was about 1924 early '25.

Were there racial issues going on at that time up here?

It was commotions more than racial issues. There weren't any, to my knowledge, anything other than miners and Caucasians around.

There were no Chinese up here, were there? I mean other than Fairplay.

No, not here. Fairplay was blessed with Chinamen. But we weren't and this was going on. At school we had no, not even Mexicans in school up here. At that time, there were a lot of people that would look like they were the Ku Klux Klan but weren't actually. They just had a grudge against someone else. It wasn't a matter of racial or anything at all. It was disagreements. If they had a grudge they would go in the nighttime and put on the makeup and go in a white sheet and burn a cross in front of your house or something. But in this case they actually burned the house down. We got a phonograph about that big, and the single old shot .32 rifle out of the whole mess. That's all we had when we got through that. Then they took up a collection or had a benefit for us down here and we got a lot of new stuff to start again and there were cabins where the store is now over to where the forest ranger station is there in Bailey. Four cabins there. And so, after we got burnt out, we spent the winter in one of those and finished up the school term and we came back from there and we had all this good new stuff and it was all gone. Nothing was left. There was a fellow, hermit, that lived up at the top of Crow Hill. Somebody had seen him in town that day so they went up there and he had cleaned us out. So, we retrieved that and finished the school term.

Did Bailey have a sheriff at that time?

A deputy.

Were they working out of Fairplay then or were they actually stationed in Bailey?

Well, no, there some, I don't know, I would say he was stationed in this area. I know there was (inaudible). He was up at Santa Maria and Doc Bell who you've heard so much about was the sheriff here. Yeah, he was a deputy for a long time before that, though. He lived down by where we lived in Bailey, right next door to us for a long time. My mother needed more credits to keep teaching so we went to Gunnison and she went to school there. We were there for two years and got the credits she needed.

What year is that roughly?

That would have been '25 and '26.

So, you were about eight years old at that point?

Yeah. Then we moved to Pitkin which is back this way, in Carland. You go about 15 miles to your right.

That's in Park County?

No, that's in Gunnison County. Close to Gunnison. It's only 15 miles from Gunnison where you turn to go . . .

Oh, okay, I do remember that. There's a dirt road that leads up to it now, if I remember correctly.

Well, it isn't dirt; it's made out of blacktop.

Oh, okay. I was there 15 years ago, I remember. Okay, I know where (inaudible) now.

We moved up there to a timber camp that they were just opening called Stormer Sawmill that they had just started. And, so we got us all established up there and there were maybe five families and the first year we were up there, number one, they didn't have any ways to keep the roads open and everybody would put their automobiles away at Thanksgiving time but the train came up through there and . . .

It actually went to Pitkin?

Yeah. From Gunnison and through the tunnel, Alpine Tunnel. And that was really our communications and our way in and out.

That's pretty isolated up there and it's cold country, too.

It was cold. They came up there in February. It snowed every day in February. There was eight feet of snow on the level and we're running out of groceries and everything else. They snow shoed into Bailey and told them our fix so it turned out they got us out of there. From Gunnison to Pitkin. We were there for a couple of three years. My mother taught school in Pitkin, my dad worked the timber at the sawmill. Then '29 we went to Denver. Had friends there and were there till about '32. Depression was pretty tough at that time.

What was Denver like during the Depression?

That happened in '29 when it fell but for the next five years it was tough. Bread lines and everything else. It was tough as a boot, I tell ya.

Did your parents find work during that period?

Well, my mother, she did substitute teaching in the little schools. My dad came back up in this country and went to work in the mills, the sawmills. When we came to Littleton, he went over by Crested Butte and worked in the timber over there and then he ultimately came to Littleton and then back up here. So, things were tight up here, too. And they had some welfare. We had a CC camp up here over in Payne Gulch.

What were they doing? What were they working on?

They were doing, building bridges, they were doing rock work, they were doing timber thinning and all that. They had, I can't tell you the exact number, but they had probably 75-100 guys over there, most of them from Texas.

Really? They weren't just local folk, they were from all over?

Yeah. My dad finally went into the CC's and they shipped him to (inaudible).

Really, they did? And they had a camp right here?

That's government, ya know. So, then they, I don't know whether Dower took over Cassell's place up here where the statue is, but during that period, and whoever, I think it was Dower, and Dower's still involved in the estate and so they engaged a lot of people working up there with the buildings and also that statue they put up there.

So, this would have been the early '30s?

It was in the '30s, yeah. Then there was a lady by the name of Mrs. Quarter, richer than rich, I guess she must have been, and she had property up Geneva at Grant. She decided to build a stone castle up there and so they did and that engaged quite a few people.

Now, this is all private work that's being done. It was individually financed?

Oh, yeah, there was not government subsidies or anything on that.

And Santa Maria was the same thing? It was a Catholic church that was financing that?

Well, the Dower Foundation is behind it all. And it's still the Dower Foundation. I talked to those guys about that. Lee and I worked there fishing a little bit (inaudible). That's another story.

Was it originally built as a retreat?

It was, by people by the name of Cassell. No, it was a lodge.

Was it private? Lodge in the sense of a hotel?

Right on the railroad track up there. They would get people from all over the country, I suppose all over the world, up there. And they had a big, I have pictures of it, they had a big lodge up there and then, ultimately, and this was in the '30s, they started bringing up youngsters from Denver disadvantaged from the slums and keeping them up there in the summertime. They brought 'em in there by train.

So, it was a summer camp thing.

It was a summer camp and they had brought up, I suppose, 50-75 children at a lick and kept them up here two weeks at a time. All by train.

Nelson: It's been going on for years.

Wonder: Yes, I think this last year was the first year they haven't had any up there, isn't it, Roy?

Nelson: Yeah. It's a shame.

But Dower is still the Dower Foundation. They tore down the old lodge.

I wonder why?

Well, I don't know. These guys that (inaudible) don't know either. So, there was some income there and then the CC's and the, there was the forest service, put this installation at Bailey at that time. They put another one in at Buffalo.

Where was the CC camp in Bailey? CC means Conservation Corps.

Well, yeah, up Payne Gulch. It's off the old road. Do you know where that is?

Halfway up the hill?

Well, no, you go in right down here by the community center, Hwy 64, and it'll take you back to Bailey. As you go back that way, they've now, you could, I guess, lease government land to build on, so much a year is my understanding of it. And there are

quite a few homes built up there and there wasn't gated at that time. It was open to the public. And I haven't been by there for quite awhile but I think it's gated now. I know it was when John Kincaid was forest ranger here because somebody got knocked out and they looked him up and they let him in up there or let him out, I don't know which way. I don't know anything about that right now. Do you, Roy?

Nelson: No, I don't know. But I know that the government has recently tried to do away with all those houses that were up there and if you had a house there you could continue to use it until the family was occupying it passed away and then it reverted back to the government. The land did. I mean they didn't actually own the land (inaudible).

Wonder: That was called the neighborhood camp and that was run by a Denver group called, I'm trying to think of that lady's name. She and my mother were very good friends. But that had nothing to do with either Geneva and then, Roy, just before you get before Santa Maria, there was another camp to the left back by that little stream that comes out. I can't think of the name of that place.

Nelson: Right. Where they used to shoot the sawmill lumber down that ravine there. But, I can't . . .

Nelson: They used to have a camp there and a guy came up here to my store that went to that camp and he was looking for it. And it was quite interesting. I didn't know there was another camp, but it was on the other side of the road from Santa Maria.

Were these camps, did they have buildings for them to stay in?

Well, they had little cabins. Could hold 4-6 kids in a cabin. But just to house them and they had places where they ate and all that. And entertainment facilities, schooling. The shower room was a separate place to go to take a shower. Each one didn't have any toilet facilities.

Nelson: They were paid, what a dollar or so a day. They were very (inaudible) in the wages.

I don't know what they were paid. But the ones from this neighborhood would walk from there to Bailey one time, and the kids each had a nickel, I think, to buy candy. And they'd string out and walk down there and back. One time, that was they're big outing. But they had swings and did go on hikes and they had some sessions of schooling. They didn't just run wild.

Now when you say kids, what age groups do you think they were in?

Oh, I'd say they would be middle grade school.

Nelson: 10-12. Maybe, 8-12.

Yeah, I'd say middle grade school. 7th, 8th and 9th grade kids. (Inaudible) after they got their feet on the ground.

When you were living in the Deer Creek area, what did you do for school? Where did you have to go?

Wonder: Well, there were many single schools before they put the consolidated school over here where (inaudible) is now. There was one, you know where you go into KC Ranch now? There was one there.

Oh, really? Right off of 43?

Wonder: Yeah, and as you go back this way from KC Ranch, you go a long way and then you make a right and there's an opening there and there's a home and some buildings right in there. There was one there.

These were just one room classic country schools?

Yeah. They were all over the place. There was one in Bailey. There was one in Shawnee. There was one up here along Long Meadow. And they had a teacher that was dedicated for that school season from September to May or June. They taught the whole class. From zero to . . .

And that's what you experienced? That's how you got your elementary education was at those kinds of schools?

That's exactly right. And the teacher, just one teacher, she taught the whole business. Same thing was true with the one (inaudible) up there. When they built that, we had about 30 kids at the most and there were two pretty good sized schools and then there was a big auditorium. And the teachers would live there.

Oh, actually right there?

Well, some did and some didn't. But then they ran a bus from Bailey and the early stands of that thing, I'm talking about the consolidated now. There was another store in Bailey at that time.

Yeah, the one that's there?

Yes, (inaudible). Across where that nursery is.

Right where the nursery is now or?

Well, a little bit this way from there. On that side of the street.

Same street, same side as where the nursery is now.

Wonder: There was another store there. Two story. And the people who owned that and ran it lived upstairs. And their name was Fleming. And he was a (inaudible). He was from (inaudible) Park some place. Bill Fleming. And he had two or three children and he's the one who put that building where the tin shop is now. That was a dance hall, basically.

This is kind of to the left of it or west of that building?

West of that building, yeah.

Has the rounded roof on it?

Yes, that was it. That was the dance hall.

That was the entertainment point back during the '30s and '40s.

Exactly right. We'd dance there in the summer. That was the only place for the school when they opened the store in Bailey. They put on plays there in the wintertime and dances in the summertime and dances in the wintertime.

It actually has a stage?

It did have, yes. And I have some pictures of that.

There's some pictures in the Bailey store. I think it shows the upstairs area of that. It almost looked like a ballroom with the formal stage and everything.

It was. There was a fellow, see there was a lodge in, Kiowa Lodge, in Bailey, like there was here and then one at, what am I trying to say? Barbara Tripp's place. There were three of them. The one at Glen Isle. The one in Glen Isle is the only one that hasn't burned. There was one right down the hill from here and that's why this water tank was out here. It was put in by the railroad. Now, the railroad put in the one, as I understand it, at Kiowa Lodge and the one here. I understand the one at Glen Isle was built by private money. That's my understanding.

Nelson: I think it was Barbara's grandparents. I think they built it. Eastern investors originally built it. Then her grandparents bought the place.

His, Baldwin was their name. I worked for them two summers. Meeting the train, doing baggage, cutting wood and taking people on horseback rides and they were wonderful people.

At Glen Isle?

Glen Isle.

Barbara's a wonderful person. Such a great personality.

Oh, she is. So, the one at Bailey burned down and this one burned down.

Were they arson or was somebody careless?

Wonder. Oh, I think a lot of it was probably, and I'm guessing, but you know many of these fires are started at restaurants through grease in the flues and one thing and another. In fact, we've had (inaudible) down there at the community center where there's a lot of grease in the flues, you know. Or it could be a lit cigarette or arson or . . . we didn't have much with which to fight the darn things. Not like they do now.

Do you remember forest fires in this area as a child?

We had to deal kind of with Doc Bell. This would have been when I was in high school so I would have been 14 or 15. And I finished high school in Deer Creek in 1936. And we were not angels. And there was quite a few of us around here, teenagers, you know. We'd take plates off one automobile and put it on another automobile. Cars mostly had what they called towel lights, park lights. We'd put red lights in there and we'd go on the old road and we'd catch up with a car and sound like a siren and a few things like that and, of course, the sheriff'd get word of that and he'd look us up and say, "Come on guys, take those off." There was no charges made. When the train started a fire coming up through here he'd say, "Come on guys, we got a fire", and we'd all grab a shovel and go help him. So we had a real, real good relationship. Nobody was sent to the reform

school and nobody did anything other than just kind raise hell a little bit. And we skated on the river here.

These ponds were ice ponds originally?

Right down here below, yeah.

That's what they were built for?

Yeah. A fellow by the name of Maddox out of Denver, he built those.

Nelson: Yeah, I'm sure he did. He bought the property and put the ponds in.

Have you seen this film, Engine No. 9?

No.

Oh, man. I'll lend you a copy of that. I've sold over 200 of them. Then Helen, the lady that put it together, passed away and it was copyrighted and I tried to get her step-grandchildren to give me the authority to go ahead and sell them and never ended up with any success there so that's kind of a big thing other than probably people pull our copy of them and I'm not pursuing it, you know. It's not my responsibility.

Who actually put the tape together?

(Inaudible) who was the daughter of McGraw, who in the early days, the pioneers down here that ended up with the store and all that sort of thing. She was a hell raiser. Smarter than a whip. She was a school teacher, too. She was and her mother, well she went to school up here and then when she got through high school she didn't have any to do but get in trouble, so her mother went to Loretta, Sisters of Loretta, and said, "I've got one here and I want you to take her and I want you to straighten her out and I don't want to see her until she's straightened out." And they took her on. And she blossomed in music. She played the organ, I think it was down, I think it was a Denver theatre in those silent films. She had talent coming out of her ears. She was the one who put on these plays down here in the wintertime.

In Bailey?

Yes.

So, this would have been in the '30s?

'30s, yeah.

Now the ice ponds, when were they created?

Get back to that. I would say probably in the, well the train came through here, but before the train, I know they hauled ice out of here up the old road. This new road, where you came in, wasn't here, that was the railroad then. The old road, the one to Bailey was that 64, that's now 64. (Tape is stopped briefly by interviewer.)

Where did we end up?

We were talking about when those ponds were created. You mentioned this tape called The Old Colorado and Southern Narrow Gauge and Engine No. 9 videotape that you're going to lend me.

Exactly. That's gonna give you (inaudible) and a lot of things like that. She was in love with that Narrow Gauge train. When the 8mm movie cameras came out, she got one. (Inaudible) or someplace like that. And she rolled that every chance she got and this tavern, surely some of the pictures I have there's a picture of the tavern, was located where Knotty Pine is, along right in there.

Nelson: It wasn't the Bailey Bar?

No, no. That was by McMillan on over this side of the ravine.

Nelson: Where the filling station is now?

Yeah. It was a, they sold liquor there. The family wouldn't allow, the tavern wouldn't sell liquor.

That's different!

Coffee probably.

Yeah, okay. Sort of like the (inaudible). I'm coffeed out.

Anyway, she had that and she would cater to the railroaders. The train would come up through here in the middle of the night occasionally and all and those guys needed some place to rest and get something to eat. Then on the weekends she would open it up to people from Denver who were just driving through here and serve dinners. And she got this camera and started taking those little 8mm. She had a trunk full of them. Well, she went in the Marines when WWII came along and she took, or came by that, or I don't know if she took it with her or what, but she ended up in California and she put that together. All those little rolls into a big one and she had one that would measure 10 or 12 inches across. She took that and she put it together on this film and she would show it and she would narrate it. She would show it and everybody would stop long enough to look at it. Then I talked to her about why don't you make copies of it or something. Well, when the VCRs came out, she was in Holly Ridge, NC, and Harold Warren, I was up here one weekend or sometime, and Harold Warren came over and he said, "Helen's trying to get a hold of you." and I said, "What does she want?" He said, "I don't know. Why don't you give her a call?" And I did and she wanted me to peddle these films. And, finally, I relented and so she sent me 100 of them.

She had these (inaudible) from the 8mm?

Yes, and she dubbed the, she has sound, everything but color. And as you watch that and you see when we had Bailey day and they had parades and stuff, the way she dubbed some of those marches into that thing, you'd swear to goodness she filmed it and got the sound as it happened.

And that was shot in the mid '30s?

No, it was later '30s. This would have been made in, (inaudible).

Nelson: The original goes back to the late '30s.

Yeah, because you said she left to go to WWII so that would have been late '30s, '39, '40, '41, time frame. So this was made, this video, the original tapes or the original films were shot in the mid to late '30s.

There you go. Filmed from '33 to '37.

Good. What was it like here during WWII?

I wasn't here much of the time.

Really? Where were you?

Well, I was in Denver working when it came out and my folks were here and I was working for the Wholesale Floral, Associated Flower Growers in Denver, when that came out and I signed up for the draft. And I wanted to get in the Navy. I didn't want the Army. So, I started with (inaudible) of the Navy recruiting and my eyes kept me from getting in there for a long time. Well, I finally got my notice from the Selection Board and I had a card to report to Ft. Logan (inaudible) so I would (inaudible). And I went down and I tried to become acquainted with these guys at the recruiting station in Denver and I lived in Denver and I told them, I said, "I've gotta pass this thing." But one of these guys, the time before that I was there, he said, "Why don't you learn how to squint." He said, "Get some letters to sign (inaudible)." And he said, "Learn to squint and eat carrots and try that." So, I did! And I said, "Well, this is my swan song here, I've gotta report to Ft. Logan tomorrow." And I squinted (inaudible).

Yeah, you're near-sighted. Squinting will cause you to see (inaudible).

Stigmatism.

Oh, you had a stigmatism, too?

Yeah. So, I went in the Navy October the 2nd, 1942.

Oh, you were deep into it at that point.

Yeah. And I went to San Diego for the training course. And we'd had some snow, we'd had some cold and the further west we went, the closer to California we went, we started seeing signs of spring and one thing and another. When I got to San Diego, I thought I'd died and gone to heaven. So, I went through boot camp in San Diego and at that time, well always the Navy furnished corpsmen, hospital corpsmen, to the Marines and they were (inaudible) south of the city like crazy. You didn't have much of a choice of what you took. And they assigned me to the medic end of things. So, I went through, of course, school and the whole part in San Diego. And then I was transferred up to the Naval hospital at Oakland.

Were you married at this time?

Yes, I was married.

So, you had a family back here?

Well, my mother and father were here and my wife's family were in Denver and she just had her brother, sister and mother living there.

Where was she, actually, during the time you were in San Diego?

She was with her mother and brother and sister during the war. And then I was assigned to the 13th Naval District, Flight Selection Board. You have to pardon the expression, Fairy Building, in San Francisco. Cut it out, Roy, you don't have to snicker! And, we got

(inaudible) quarters, so I was living in an apartment up on the hill with other military people that were (inaudible) quarters.

In San Francisco?

In San Francisco. And it was just like a civilian going to the office in the morning and coming home in the evening. And I was there for, oh, I don't know, nine months or so and then I was transferred down to San Luis Obispo and this was a pre-flight selection work down there and I was there for probably six or eight months and got notice along with three other guys to report to Long Island, NY, for duty with the hospital. Didn't tell us where. So, we went to Long Island, NY, and it was a hospital group of about 500, I guess. We were going to England or to Europe. And that was in January. And I was, oh, we were assigned to the old WWI British ship to take us over to (inaudible). We weren't aware we were going to Scotland. And that was in January and they had several hundred soldiers on that thing. We were stacked 12 high. We got to the North Pacific and we got in a storm. Everybody got seasick.

The North Pacific because you were coming out of Long Island, NY.

And going to Scotland, but we were going the northern route because we were trying to keep away from the German subs. And they were trying to make us, we was put on with American supplies, of course, to feed (inaudible). And these British were saving those and giving us kidney pie and oranges and stuff like that and they almost had (tape interrupted by ringing of phone) . . . and we went into (inaudible) in a different (inaudible) area and then we went by train. We (inaudible) Scotland, Ireland and ended up near sort of Southampton in England. And this hospital was almost a quarter of a mile and it was built in the 1700's. The walls were 18 inches thick; the ceilings were 25 feet high. The rooms were about 30x30 and we had little beehive fireplaces and they (inaudible).

That was the heat, huh?

That was the heat. There was a little pile of coal out in the back and that was to do us until summer. Well, now this is for patients. Then we had cabins, they were also made of stone, and they also had small fireplaces in them and they had a soapstone pot with a fireplace under it where we built a fire and we'd pour water in there to wash our clothes. And there were four of us and that wasn't too bad. And we pruned a lot of trees that spring, I tell ya. There were big grounds and we cut wood, we (inaudible). Anyway, then those (inaudible) you'd hear them set off, you know.

They were actually sending those B-2's over?

Yeah, you bet they were. And one thing about it is you could hear them, you'd know they were passing ya, but it's the one you didn't hear you was afraid was gonna blow ya outta there. And we did not get the (inaudible) for the Navy that they had anticipated. So they turned that over to the Army in September and brought us back to Norfolk, VA. Gave us 30 days leave. Went back and I was assigned to an LST, a Landing Ship Tank (inaudible).

I'm familiar with the equipment, yeah.

And so we went up to the Great Lakes firing range for gunnery practice in January. Cold, oh my lord, cold. Oh, that was no fun at all. But when we got through there we went over to Seneca, IL, picked up a brand new LST, Landing Ship Tank, and went down the Mississippi in that. We had a pilot crew aboard who was responsible to get us out of there and keep us off the sandbars.

Was that a barge you were on then?

No, we were on the ship.

On the LST?

Yeah, on the Mississippi.

I'll be darned.

The Philippines, Leyte Gulf in the Philippines, on the LST 1120 when the Japs came up. And they immediately invoked a plan of points. There were so many months you were in you got so many points and if you had a certain number, and I don't remember what the count was, you could come home. Come back to the States. And I qualified. So, when I put in for relief from that duty to come back to the States, discharge.

That was '45?

Yeah. And (inaudible) there were three of us came back off of that ship and it served several purposes. I had, when I went in, I was Apprentice Seaman then I worked up to a 1st Class Petty Officer and I had a 2nd Class behind me and a Striker below and that enabled them to move up one notch. And I was ready to come home at that time. And so three of us got off at the same time and came back together. So we made it back. We weren't going to shave till we got back to the States. They couldn't tell us what to do. Well, man, I got to itching (inaudible). So we would shave a little off and shave a little more off. I was three days out of San Francisco (1st tape ends). (Inaudible) was in an aircraft carrier, he was in San Diego, and I called home and they told me he was in San Diego or Los Angeles at a friend's place so I called him and caught the daylight train between San Francisco and Los Angeles and went down, and then he and I came back together. And to here to Denver and then I stayed around Denver, worked at the VA. My plan was to go to work for the government, get 20 years and retire. Well, I got to work at the VA and the routine of the way politics that entered into that, I was there for about three years and said, "Oh, man, this isn't worth it." So, I quit and I got, well, several jobs. Anyway, I ended up in truck transportation and I was with PIA Truck Line for 24 ½ years, in sales and management.

You were living in Denver during this time?

Yes.

Your wife was there?

My wife was there and she had contracted breast cancer and she passed away there. But I stayed with the company until it was taken over by a holding company and they ran all of us old-timers off. Took our retirement away from us and took out bankruptcy ultimately. So, that was the end of that. But I had, my first wife died, and I was single for

about three years and I couldn't stand that lonesomeness, by myself. Remarried and that lasted 32 years.

Second marriage?

Yeah.

Wow.

And that ended up in divorce and the idea was we, we had a beautiful home in Longmont on the lake and our plan was, we had a condo in Arizona and we had this place and the plan was we were going to spend the summers here and the winters in Arizona and sell the place in Longmont. Well, my ex got to where she didn't want any part of that, so we split. In the meantime, I fell off the roof and ended up in the hospital for 21 days. Hospitals for two months. And she went to Arizona and I came up here.

And what year was that that you came back to Park County?

It would have been 13 years ago, now. (Inaudible)

In the early '90s then?

Yeah. I've been happy up here. I've never been sorry that I came back up here. And I had bought this place from my brother and sister and then I had to spend a bunch to get her name off of the deeds but I did and she was happy in Arizona and I was happy up here. She passed away a year and a half ago. So, that wasted a lot of film for ya but my daughter will be happy to have a copy of it, maybe.

We'll make a copy of these tapes. I'm not sure how long it'll take. The last cycle I did this, it took several months but we'll definitely get you the tape.

I'm gonna live forever to Roy's chagrin! Now, do you want to go back and pick up where we left off on this other thing?

Well, I don't want to take up too much time. Roy, I wanted to get a little of your conversation, also.

Nelson. Well, I don't have a lot. I came here 25 years ago and I really don't know a lot. I mean I didn't experience a lot of, I've heard people talk about a lot of things that happened in Park County.

Now, they call you "The Mayor". How'd you get that title here?

Well, it was self-assumed.

Oh! Well, that's good.

Wonder: It saves a lot of time on elections, ya know?

Yeah, we don't have elections. We just have to assume. And then people started calling me The Mayor because they'd come into the store and they'd think that I govern this area, but I don't. Only I govern what goes on in the store a little bit but not really. Not fully on that point, either.

Well, you kind of preside over informal gatherings at the store every morning.

Yeah, we really take with everybody that comes along.

Wonder: Well, you experienced it (inaudible). Keep them coming and they'll talk about ya. You don't dare miss a meeting or they'll talk about ya.

They'll come in and want to use the restroom, why we tell you, of course, now we rest in those chairs, any of the chairs that you (inaudible).

How long have you been doing that?

Nelson. Well, my wife, she ran a real store there and she had milk and eggs and all the necessities of life. She used to even buy cheese and cut it up, big chunks of cheese and cut it up into small pieces and sell cheese. A lot of stuff in there. And we sold a lot of antiques out of there, too, of course.

Where did you come from to get into Park County?

Well, we had a ranch over in Conifer, in the Conifer area. Five miles down Pleasant Park Road. We did that thing and we raised the kids over there. When they graduated from high school, I kind of always wanted to run a store so I had a lot of, my father-in-law passed away and he had a lot of antiques and junk, collectibles, so we sold a lot of collectibles and junk in there and antiques in that store.

When you moved here you bought the store right away?

Yes, we bought it in 1978 and moved over here in '79. We were down there, holding down the fort there ever since.

Well, it seems it's kind of the social section or social center of Shawnee.

Because of the location of the post office, of course, everybody shows up there and we got in the habit of showing up there every morning and raising hell with Bob.

Wonder: And I'm the senior individual and they don't show me any respect at all. I keep telling them, "Let's show a little respect to your seniors."

Seniors, yeah.

Wonder: I'm entitled to a little respect.

None whatsoever?

Wonder: Not from that that bunch.

It's a tough group?

Wonder: I kind of like it, though.

I get the impression it's a very laid back environment and everybody pretty much takes care of everybody else.

Bob keeps telling us that we're never gonna catch him, and we don't. Lee (inaudible) is 84 and Bob is 86, now. And I'm 83, so we . . .

Wonder: We're a senior group.

Seniors of the group.

Well, you've been in the county roughly 25 years. Let me ask you both the same question. What is the biggest change since you've been here which was '78, Roy?

Influx of people, of course.

Just the gross number of people coming in?

When I moved here in '78 why the highway, you'd see a car now and then. Now, it's almost constant highway traffic and it's because people have moved here and, of course, they're moving around. The influx of people is just tremendous since I moved here and that's only been the last 25 years.

How do you feel about that? Is that something that's good?

Well, it's good in certain respects. It's bad in regard to traffic. Hwy 43 is just a terrible road anymore. Hwy 285 you have to wait to get on it anymore. It's bad in that respect but, of course, they call it progress but sometimes I think it's regression.

They're putting another stoplight on 285 just east of the existing light at 43.

Yes, that's another thing that's, the first stoplight that they put in Park County, I was pretty discouraged when I saw that go in. Of course, it's an absolute necessary thing.

Bob, what do you see? You've been here a lot longer. What do you see as the biggest change that occurred over the period you've known Park County?

Well, I notice exactly the same as Roy does. I notice some people, I don't know, I think they kind of look at us as, oh, just kind of old folks hanging in there, ya know.

Nelson: Fogies. I'd call us fogies.

Fogies. But really, it's a whole different set up. We have a store like Bailey, a well-stocked store. We have the Loaf 'n Jug over the hill, as you know. We have Conifer and you can't afford really to do business here with these merchants because of the price of things. You've probably experienced that. Yet you can't go to Conifer for a loaf of bread and now I see that some of these or one of these that's been elected wants to open a store in Bailey. Well, what kind of a store are we gonna have? (Inaudible) have one over there by Aspen Park. They're excavating over there (inaudible). It's taken years to do it but it's finally coming. But, basically, there's not a lot of difference. We used to have entertainment. We made our own entertainment at that time, however, this time we have Senior Coalition, we help them. In those days, it was kind of freelance.

You just did your own because that was the only alternative.

People would shop for one another or if you're going to town would you pick up this or that.

Nelson: People would actually walk from the Deer Creek area over the mountain and dance in that dance hall that's in my building down there.

Wonder. My father and uncle walked from that ranch over there through the Slaughterhouse over here, dance all night and walk back. Well, my uncle rode a horse because he liked horses. My dad didn't like horses so he walked.

That's a pretty good hike!

About nine miles.

Yeah. That's to the Slaughterhouse Gulch.

Can't even go through there, now, from this side. I guess they get through for a certain distance.

Nelson: Yeah, you can get a little bit in from the other side but not good access. They blocked off all the accesses and I objected to that. There's 40 acres of nice forest between here and Grant that's almost inaccessible and I object to that strenuously. And in those days, it was pretty much open to (inaudible), ya know?

We had a burn off over here just a couple of years ago.

Nelson: It burnt up!

What you mean, the Snaking Fire?

Yeah.

Yeah, unfortunately, it was kids from the high school, apparently, that started it.

Nelson: It was a bad thing.

Yeah, it was a bad thing, is right. We could have lost Glen Isle. There's a gentleman that lives off of Crow Hill, you mentioned his name earlier?

Harold Warren.

Harold Warren. It came within a couple hundred yards of his place.

Nelson: I've got to get up to see him.

I interviewed him more than a year ago, now. It was just about six or eight months after the fire and it was literally within sight of his place.

Nelson: It was within sight of everybody's place.

It went over the hill, all the way down, almost to that, the old road. Crow Gulch Road.

That horseshoe there. That's where Harold lives so, yeah, that made us nervous because that was the year we moved into Deer Creek Valley. We were finishing a home at that point in time and it really made us nervous. Several of our contractors were very nervous because they were living in the area and they took off, of course, because they were concerned about their homes. But, yeah, I guess, there's always been a concern about fire in this region.

Well, and you know though, and I don't want to interrupt (inaudible), if you stop and think of the equipment we have now and compared to then, we had shoveler and that's about all. We're much, much more prepared for it. But when it gets into the tops of these trees and high winds, it's . . . excuse me, Roy, go ahead.

Nelson: Well, my place burned, actually. It was in the early '70s.

Here in Shawnee?

Yes. I mean this end of the building burned off of that building, the ah, what I call Building B, the second one this way. It actually burned the top all off of that. A fellow by the name of Fay purchased that property and rebuilt that all back in there. Put all new drywall and, of course, it was plaster, the old finish was all plaster and now it's all drywall. And he lowered the ceilings and did other things.

What year was that?

I believe in the '70s, early '70s, because he bought it in '75. No, I guess Fay bought it before '75 because he spent five years rebuilding that.

Wonder: Oh, he spent a lot of money on that, too. He sure did.

Well, I have a lot of material. I really appreciate spending some time with you guys.

Wonder: Well, you're welcome.

You obviously have a lot of experiences. That's the thing I've found in doing these recordings is that there's a whole lifetime of experiences.

Wonder: Well, I apologize for going after my own life, here, because there was some . . .

Nelson: Well, it's a good recording, though, because Harold Warren, I hope you did record a lot of Harold because Harold Warren is the historian of Park County.

He has documents, he has artifacts and that's why I'd be so concerned if that place were to be burned down because it would be irreplaceable the things he's collected over the years.

Nelson: Absolutely. I hope that you got a good recording of everything that he told you.

I got a good recording but, you know, I could have doubled it with the amount of history and exposure he has to this area.

Nelson: He's got the proof.

Oh, absolutely, and he's so knowledgeable and he's right on top of these things.

Wonder: I think he's still pretty mentally alert.

Absolutely. I would just like to see some way that the things that he has in that home preserved. It would be a shame to lose that.

Wonder: I think it's the only copy of some of them.

Oh, yeah. He has historic surveys, all kinds of documents, all kinds of artifacts, that go back to when the Indians ran around out here.

Wonder: You know, my mother wrote for The Flume from the time we came up here in the mid-'30s until the '60s, every week. Black Canyon Items.

Really? So they actually had an office in Black Canyon? (Inaudible) or was it always out of Fairplay?

Out of Fairplay. She would mail them after she would write them up. And when she lost her eyesight, Lenora Warren went down, she'd type for Mom, and send them up there.

A lot of things have gone on here. I guess that's one of the reasons they want to have these tapes made because historic oral is really great history. A lot of experiences that people had. It'd be a shame to lose it all.

Nelson: My daughter keeps saying, "Dad, why don't you put this stuff on tape or write it in longhand?" I just don't do anything about it unless somebody like yourself (inaudible).

Wonder: This is a good thing here, absolutely. Best thing in the world.

Well, I'm gonna wrap it up then and several things; first off, I do want to get back to you guys, probably yet this week. First I want to look at this and I, then I will get that back to you at that time. I'll probably just come back to the store. You guys are always there on weekdays?

Wonder: I'll have to take a look at my calendar.

Nelson: Not unless Bob, he's courting a lady and he's out of town a lot.

I see. Well, that's a priority. (Tape ends.)