

Beth: This is Beth Smith and I'm in the Hanks-Pierce (Pierce-Hanks) part of the Methodist Church, interviewing Billie Love from Buena Vista. Billie lives at 31553 North Meadow Way, and she had an illustrious career here in Salida and Buena Vista, so let's listen to some of her stories.

Start with your background. First, is your name really Billie?

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Billie: Well, actually on my birth certificate, it says William.

Beth: Is that right?

Billie: Yes, and I have more trouble with that ... It didn't really cause me any problems until I got a passport, and now they think that they ought to find a man there instead of me. Well, I shouldn't say that actually. When I enrolled at the University of Colorado, they invited me to join the ROTC, which of course at that time was all male, and I had to let them know that no, I really didn't want to belong to the ROTC, and I run into that problem several different times, but as I say, my birth certificate says William. Now, I'm not really sure how that happened, but anyway, I blame it on Bertie Roney. She was the town clerk at the time I was born, and that's where you recorded births, and so I don't know whether she didn't like it that my father told her my name was Billie and she changed it, or what, but at any rate, when I got a birth certificate from the state of Colorado, it says William Jean on it.

Beth: Well, what is your full name, then?

Billie: My full name is Billie Jean.

Beth: When were you born?

Billie: The third of March in 1928.

Beth: You lived in Salida, you were born in Salida?

Billie: I was born in Salida, uh huh (affirmative).

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Beth: Were you born at the hospital or at home?

Billie: No, I was born at home.

Beth: What doctor was that?

Billie: Doctor Fuller was the doctor that took care of my mother, and ...

Beth: Well, tell us something about your mother and dad. What were their names?

Billie: Well, William Allen, but everybody called him Bill. My mother was Loretta Allen, she had been Allen before she married. They were twenty years difference in their ages. Dad always said that he and mother came to Colorado the same year, and that he came as a young man of twenty in 1895, and Mother was born in Pueblo in 1895, so they came to Colorado the same year.

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Beth: Where did your father come from?

Billie: He came from Nodaway County, Missouri, is where his home had been. His father was a brick mason, and he had come to Salida earlier than that, and had purchased the brick yard, which is out ... Or was, when it was a brick yard -

[00:03:00]
Beth: Where was it?

Billie: It was out at the end of D Street, next to where Denoyer's Flower Garden is now, and if you go out there and look around, you can still find some of the old bricks that were burned in there.

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Beth: You go outside this church and you look at the bricks on the wall, they were all made out there in that brick yard.

Billie: Yes, uh huh (affirmative). They were.

Beth: Many, many places in town were made out there.

Billie: Out of those brick, they certainly were.

Beth: When was your father born?

Billie: He was born in 1875.

Beth: Your mother in ...

Billie: 1895.

Beth: '95, all right. When did they get up to Salida?

[00:04:00]
Billie: Well, Dad came in 1895. His dad, his father was already living here, and it's kind of a funny story. My grandfather was one of these people who kind of was a wanderer, and in his early years, he had been in the army, was attached to Custer's regiment, and got sick, so they left him behind when they went to the Little Big Horn, and he was on his way to join them when they found out about the massacre at the Little Big Horn.

Beth: What a stroke of luck!

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Billie: Yeah. My oldest son has the rifle that he carried when he was in the army. Well, when he found out they'd all been killed, he went back to Missouri. I think he was pretty well settled there until sometime in the early 1890's, and I kind of would need to look up the date, and well ... Actually, in 1887, he had taken a

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contract to build a building in Ness City, Kansas, a bank building there. He had moved, and hadn't ... My grandmother hadn't gone with him because my aunt had had to have some surgery on her leg, but as soon as she was able to travel, why, she took six kids and all her ducks and geese and chickens and who knows what, in a wagon and, by herself, and moved to Ness City, Kansas.

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Then when my grandfather decided that he was going to Colorado, she said no she wasn't going with him, and so they got a divorce. He deeded the land in Missouri over to her, and so he was already out here in Salida when my dad came out with him, and my dad started working in the brick laying business with him, and he decided he wanted to do something else. He went over to Cripple Creek. This was in 1896, when smelter was kind of a big boom then, and started working in the mines. One day he had a horrible toothache, and so he left the mine early to go into town to get something done for his toothache, and they had a cave in at the mine, and he was on the list of people who were killed. When he saw that, why, he said that he thought the good Lord was telling him something and so he packed his bag and came back to Salida.

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He started work for the railroad, and was on the Salida to Minturn and he did that until in 1917, they asked him to be the foreman when they built the Smelter Smokestack out here, and so he left the railroad and did that. Then after he had done that, he got a contract to do the Smokestack at Anaconda, Montana for the Anaconda Copper Company. In the meantime, he had married a lady here in Salida.

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Beth: Was he laying bricks on these chimneys?

Billie: I'm sure he was, and my dad, but he was in charge of the crew that was doing it.

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He had married, and he and his first wife had a child who died shortly after she was born, and then his wife died in 1918. He met my mother when he was in Calhan, Colorado building a new schoolhouse for the city of Calhan. My mother was the Latin teacher there, and so they got married in 1920 and lived in Colorado Springs where he had a job then doing the building, and then after he finished that one, they came up here to Salida. After my mother moved up here, and they had family, Dad would never let us go anywhere where he was working. He would go away months at a time on a job, but we always stayed here.

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Beth: Where did you live in Salida?

Billie: 135 Park Avenue.

Beth: Not far from here.

Billie: Just a couple of blocks from here.

Beth: Did you have some brothers and sisters?

Billie: I just had one sister, she was seven years older than me.

Beth: What was her name?

Billie: Luella Jane Allen.

[00:09:00]

Beth: When was she born?

Billie: She was born the 19th of January in 1921.

Beth: Mm-hmm (affirmative). You gals grew up in Salida, went to school here?

Billie: Right, we both graduated from high school here. We both went to the University of Colorado.

Beth: What did you major in up there at the University of Colorado?

Billie: Well, architectural engineering. Back in the day when that was not really a popular thing for girls to do.

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Beth: Absolutely.

Billie: In fact, the University of Colorado, the fall that I started down there, had twenty-one girls in the engine school, and twenty-two hundred men. We were pretty well outnumbered. They didn't even have a bathroom in the engine school for the girls. We had to run over to the library between classes if we needed to use the facilities. Both the teachers were pretty nice to us. There was one who ... Well, the calculus teacher that I had, and he said he did not approve of women engineers, and he would do everything he could to flunk them. I had to have an emergency appendectomy and miss my finals, and so I thought, "Okay, that's it, I'm out of here." When I went to take my ... Went back to school then and took my test, why, he said, "Well, your grades only averaged a B, but if you'd been in class, why, you'd have gotten an A, so I gave it to you anyway." He was one that if you ... He started with wanting to get rid of you, he was pretty fair about it after that.

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Then I had another one who just walked into class, looked at me, and pointed his finger at me and told me to get out, so I did.

Beth: Did you graduate from CU?

Billie: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

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Beth: Then what'd you do?

Billie: For a while, I worked for a construction company. I was married by this time, and I worked for a construction company in Boulder. Then my husband was transferred to Austin, Texas, and for a while I worked for a contractor in Austin. Then when we moved down to Weslaco, the principal of the high school there, or rather the superintendent of schools talked me into coming over there and teaching Math. That's what I did for the rest of my life.

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Beth: Now, you mentioned your husband. Introduce me to him.

Billie: Well, he was born in Denver, mainly grew up in Aspen. We met in school. He was ... He had just gotten out of the army and before he went home, he decided that he'd go out to Boulder and find out about going to school. This was right after World War II, and they were just starting a new semester, and so he just called his dad up and said, "I won't be home. I'm going to school." That's where I met him. He was a civil engineer.

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Beth: What was his full name?

Billie: John Francis Love.

Beth: When was his birthday?

Billie: September the 9th, 1922.

Beth: When were you both married here?

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Billie: In September the 2nd, 1947.

Beth: Well, this is an oral history of Salida in Chaffee County, and I know you've lived here for a long time. Think of some things that you see that have changed from what you grew up with here in Chaffee County.

Billie: I guess because of the fact that even when we didn't live here, we came here all the time, the change hasn't been all that dramatic because I've seen it happen. I'm sure the major thing is that when I lived here, it was a railroad economy. The majority of the people in town, the men worked for the railroad, and of course, the railroad is gone now, and I get amused at the people talking about the old depot, because they're talking about the white one that was right down at the end of F street, and to me the old depot was the old brown and sort of gold colored one that was off over to the side of where the new one was. That's, of course, different.

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Of course, the high school that I went to, which my grandfather built in 1912 burned, and so that building was replaced.

Beth: Where was that high school?

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Billie: It's right where the other one was. From the corner of 10th and D, there was a walkway that went diagonally right into the front of the building. It burned ... I think it was the year ... Early '60s when it burned. I know one time when I was showing my kids around to school, and I was looking for all the trophies that we had won when I was in high school, because Salida was quite a football power back in those days, and we played in the state championship game three of the four years I was in high school. This was before they went into the various classifications of 3A and 4A and so forth.

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[00:15:00] One year, we played Boulder High School for the championship. I can't remember who the other schools were, but they were all the big ... I think Fort Collins was one. They were big schools, not little schools like Salida High School. I was trying to find all those trophies and I couldn't find them, and then I found one large one that had been put in the trophy case to replace the ones that were lost in the fire.

Beth: How about their girls' P.E. at that time? Did you play football too?

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Billie: Well, they had P.E. but it was primarily if you weren't in something else, and I played in the band, and so I didn't ever take P.E.

Beth: What instrument did you play in the band?

Billie: Oh, I played the french horn. Now, at one time, I had tried my hand at the cello, but one day, when my father was letting the dog out, because I was getting my cello out to practice, and I heard him say, "I don't know but what this dog is smarter than most humans," I decided it was time to quit playing the cello, so I gave it up and took up the french horn.

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Beth: How about your classes in high school? What did you enjoy most?

Billie: Math.

Beth: Of course.

Billie: Our math teacher was a little man by the name of Joe Soles, and he was a wonderful teacher. We had what was called an advanced math class, and after we'd been through the regular Algebra and Geometry and so forth, then we could take advanced math. Our final exam in that class was the entrance exam for West Point. When I went to the University of Colorado, I was way heads above most of the fellows in my class because I had had such a good

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background in high school.

[00:17:30] I'd also felt like I'd had a good background in English. Ms. Scott taught the sophomore and senior English, and Ms. Mosgrove taught the junior and freshmen English. Even though I didn't care much for Ms. Scott, she still was a good teacher. You learned a lot from her, even though we weren't very nice to her sometimes. The thing I remember most was one day we went out during lunch hour, we went out to Little River and gathered up a bunch of frogs. We took them back to school and we put them in her desk. Every time she opened a drawer, out jumped a frog, and of course we thought this was pretty hilarious, but I don't think she thought it was quite so funny.

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Beth: Who was your superintendent at that time?

Billie: Dr. Barrett was the superintendent, and Mr. King was the high school principal. I had a tendency to get into a lot of trouble when I was in school. One day we were doing this experiment in Chemistry lab, and it choked me up, brought on my asthma. The only person around to take me home was Dr. Barrett. My mother looked out the front window and she saw him driving up in front of the house with me in the car, and her first reaction was, "Oh, what's she done now that's so bad that the superintendent's bringing her home?"

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My friends always said though, that I was the one who thought up everything for them to do and then they were the ones who got in trouble.

Beth: Even the frogs?

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Billie: Yes. Anyway, I thoroughly enjoyed high school and still keep track of a lot of the people that I graduated from high school with.

Beth: Well now, what about the town at that time when you were growing up?

Billie: Main Street was, of course, where all the businesses were, down on Main Street. Some of them I remember very thoroughly. There was ... Mrs. Gilbert had a dress shop on Main Street. We were in there one day, and we had a teacher in school, Ms. Mitchell ... She was our junior high principal, and she had a tendency to wear the most awful things you could imagine. She always wore long-sleeve dresses with short sleeve sweaters, and she'd wear hats that might at one time have looked really decent, but then she'd do something to them so they wouldn't.

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We were in Mrs. Gilbert's, trying to buy my sister a coat before she went to college, and Ms. Mitchell was in there trying on hats, and mother wasn't really paying too much attention to her, and my sister put on this one coat and she said, "Oh, that looks awful on you." Ms. Mitchell turned around and said, "I know it does, but I'm going to buy it anyway."

[00:20:30] Of course, the old bank. I miss the old bank building that was on 2nd and F Street, where the Pueblo Bank and Trust is now. The drug store's got a different name, but it's still in the same place. It was Alexander's Pharmacy when I was growing up, and we knew the Alexanders quite well. Then there was a place down on F Street. It was officially called the Salida Candy Kitchen, but it was run by a couple of little old Greek fellows, so we always called it the Greeks. They had a big, beautiful fountain out in the front part, with a marble counter and stools and so forth, and then on the other side of the front part was the candy counter, and they always had homemade candies in that. Then back in the back part, they had booze and they had a juke box, and we'd go in there and get Cokes and turn on the juke box, and they let us dance back there. We did some mean things to them, too.

Beth: When did movies come to town?

[00:22:00] Billie: Oh, they were always here. I can't remember when we didn't have a movie theater. The one that's called the Unique now used to be the Salida Theatre. They had cowboy movies on Saturday afternoon, but I didn't like cowboy movies so I didn't go to that. I loved Shirley Temple movies, and my sister would never take me because I would sit and cry, and that embarrassed her, so mother had to go take me to see the Shirley Temple movies. My dad wasn't much of a moviegoer, so we finally convinced him that he really ... Because I don't think he'd seen a movie since they'd even had talkies. I think all he'd ever seen were silent ones. The first one we ever got him to go see, not only had ... Was talking, it was in technicolor, and that was a big thing then. In fact, that was the first technicolor movie to come to the Salida Theater.

[00:23:00] Another thing I remember about the Salida Theater, the Masonic Hall was up over the Salida Theater at that time. The night that I was initiated into Rainbow, this side of 1st Street that was ... The east, down toward the depot, was where all the bars and pool halls and so forth were, and so while we were waiting to go in to be initiated, we looked out the window and bet on the people going down the street as to whether they would go in the bar or not. That kept us entertained.

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Then of course, the Masons built the ... Or bought the old Red Cross Hospital and turned it into a temple, and it was kind of a shock to me when I came back one summer and saw they'd taken off the second story, because we had always had our ... Our meeting room was upstairs on the second floor.

Beth: Of the old hospital?

[00:24:00] Billie: Of the old hospital, uh huh (affirmative). They had a big dining room and a really nice parlor downstairs. Also, the Bushes had an apartment. They were the caretakers for the temple and they had an apartment in the building. That's kind

of one of the changes, too, is that building has changed.

Beth: You've seen the new hospital grow, then, haven't you?

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Billie: Yes, I have, uh huh (affirmative). The original hospital, of course, has been added on to and remodeled, and doesn't even look like the same one. The only thing that looks like the same part is the front porch where you go in, and once you get inside, why, it's completely different. My grandmother was the chief housekeeper at the hospital.

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Beth: What was her name?

Billie: Etta Jane Howland. Her best friend was Mrs. Avery, who was the cook at the hospital, the head cook, and she was Meryl Ann Giles... who's Meryl Ann Giles now, was Meryl Ann France. She was her grandmother, and so of course Meryl Ann's dad worked for the railroad. Since it was a railroad hospital, my both
[00:25:30] grandmother and Mrs. Avery got passes on the railroad, so they would take Meryl Ann and I and go to Denver. That was always a real treat. When we get together now, we still talk about the times we went to Denver with our grandmothers. Yes, I've seen a lot of changes in the hospital, and let's see ... What else?

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Beth: You mentioned Rainbow. Was that a going thing at that time? A lot of people -

Billie: Oh, yes, yeah, that was a big organization when I was growing up.

Beth: It's for girls, but it's also part of the Masonic and the Eastern Star.

Billie: Right, it's the ... Rainbow Assemblies are sponsored by Eastern Star chapters,
[00:26:30] and practically all the girls in high school belonged to Rainbow. Mr. Soles that I mentioned before, he was Mason and he always came to our meetings, and we always appreciated that fact. The Elartons, who lived down here on 3rd Street, they always came too and supported us. The mother advisor when I was in high school was Mrs. Cole, Herb Cole's first wife. She got sick just before I went in as
[00:27:00] worthy advisor and they had to take her to California, and then she was always Aunt Jessie to me, but Jessie Wilson took over the Rainbow Girls thing in the fall.

[00:27:30] She was a staunch member of this church, and of course this church has lots of meaning, as far as I'm concerned. My dad was a good friend of Father Dyer, and he had met him first when they Methodist Conference here in 1895. They became very good friends and Dad always talked about Father Dyer and how he would come and stay at their house when he'd come to Salida. That was ... This
[00:28:00] church is just part of my growing up, and I think one of the things I remember most is Mrs. Young, who put on these lavish productions. She couldn't do anything that was simple.

[00:28:30] I don't even remember anything about what the rest of it was about. All I remember is that I was supposed to be Shirley Temple, and I had these little blue striped overalls that my mother made me, and I came down the aisle of the church singing, "On The Good Ship Lollipop." Then she had this other brainstorm one time and put three silver bells up in the top of the arch over the choir loft. Then she ... I don't know what all else she had, but they were singing this one number and it said something about the angels, and I suddenly appeared above the organ and started ringing the bells as an angel. Then we had this Mother Goose thing and we did it down in the basement. Of course, that was after they remodeled the basement.

Beth: About when did that happen?

[00:29:30] Billie: It was around 1939, I believe. It was kind of toward the end of the Depression, but there were still a lot of men who were out of work, and the Alleys who were ... He was a minister here then, and he and my dad were good friends. They came to our house for dinner practically ever Sunday. They were sitting around talking one day about how we really needed that basement. They decided that the next Sunday, why, Reverend Allen was going to get up in the pulpit and say that on Monday, he and Dad were going to start digging and everybody that wanted to come help them could. The entire addition to the basement, because the basement was pretty small then, but the way they dug it out and so forth, that was all done by hand, just by the men of the church. Then I remember when they finished the basement, we had this great big celebration, and the bishop came.

[00:30:00] [00:30:30] Now, the bishop had just been ... How many years, I'm not sure, but he'd been in China for a number of years, and so first thing that happened was that they had oyster stew and apple pie. My mother made thirty-nine apple pies for that dinner. There were more people who showed up than they thought were coming. Aunt Ollie said, "Well, we can still have stew as long as the water holds out." That was young Ollie Hall, and so it was quite an occasion when the bishop came. He talked too long, other than that, it wasn't too bad.

[00:31:00] [00:31:30] Beth: Well, now, sometime there, the church across the street, the Christian's church caught on fire in the evening.

Billie: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Beth: I don't remember when that was exactly, do you?

Billie: I don't remember exactly, either. I was probably ... Oh, I'd say, probably ten or eleven. It was in the '30s sometime, because I remember coming over here and standing across the street in front of the Baptist Church and watching it burn. My dad did the ... When they rebuilt it, he did the work on it, and ...

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Beth: Well, that night, now, didn't the fire jump across the street to the Methodist Church?

Billie: They were afraid it was going to, but -

Beth: It didn't even do it?

Billie: No, I don't believe that it did. The men were all out here, both here and the Baptist Church with hoses, keeping everything watered down, so that they wouldn't catch on fire.
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Beth: Yeah, fire was quite a danger.

Billie: Oh yes, it was. Another thing, one bishop that we had that came to visit ... Of course, we've got the three churches here on the corner. He said, well, this was the first place he'd ever been that he could use this story. He told about the man that was standing out on the street corner, and there were three churches on the corner, and he was listening to them sing. One was singing, "Will There Be Any Stars In My Crown?" The next one was singing, "No Not One," and the third one was singing, "Oh, That Will Be Glory For Me."
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Beth: They had a sense of humor back then!

Billie: Yes, very. They did have ...

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Beth: Well, do you remember any flu epidemics or diphtheria epidemics that might have happened in the town when you were growing up here?

Billie: The only thing I remember was scarlet fever. When I was a kid, there was quite a ... We had a scarlet fever epidemic, and then of course the polio was also something that everybody was afraid of. They pretty well conquered the diphtheria and things like that by the time I was growing up. The main one I remember ... They quarantined you, back in those days, when you had things like that. The Gruenlers, he was one of our high school football coaches, and they lived down here in one of these places on B Street. There's a row of ... Sort of apartment, like, right across from where the hospital is, and Bobby got the scarlet fever. They quarantined them while Mr. Gruenler was at school, and so he couldn't get back in the house, and he'd go down in the evenings, and he and his wife would talk to each other through the window, but he couldn't go into the house.
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[00:35:00] I don't really even remember anybody that I knew particularly, of having the polio. It was something that everybody thought about, but I can't particularly remember anybody that actually had it.

Beth: Did you swim up at the Hot Springs Pool?

Billie: I remember when they opened it.

Beth: When was that?

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Billie: I think that was in '38 or '39. They brought a troop from the CFNI down in Pueblo that did synchronized swimming, so the first night that they opened the pool, they had this group come in and they did the synchronized swimming. I was always impressed with things like that. Swimming I never got too thrilled about, but the ballet effect of them doing all this in the water, I really remember that. After that was over why they let everybody go and swim, or stick their feet in the water, or whatever you wanted to call it. I definitely remember when they opened the swimming pool.

Beth: Yeah, somebody told me that Franklin Delano Roosevelt was here.

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Billie: Oh, yes, he was. That was in 1936, and my father, being a lifelong democrat, was one of the people that was supposed to be down there at the depot to meet Franklin. My father was one of these people who didn't exactly like to dress up. Weddings and funerals and that was his limit, and so the morning of it, the high school band was going to come down the Main Street of town, and people were going to join the band and come on down to the depot, and so Mother said to Dad, was he going to work that day? He said of course he was going to work that day. He said, "You just go on, I'll meet you down at the depot." She said, "Well now, be sure that you quit in time to come home and get your clothes changed." We get down to the depot, and not too long after we got there, why, here comes my dad. What was my dad wearing? He was wearing his overalls with mortar on his shoes. He just had laid down his trowel and come to the depot.

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We get down there, and the train comes in, and of course, Dad's standing there and he was a good friend of Senator Ed Johnson, and he was on the train with Roosevelt. He saw Dad, and he hollered at him and he said, "Bill, come on up here, I want you to meet Franklin!" My sister was thoroughly embarrassed because my dad was going up there in his overalls. It didn't seem to bother Roosevelt at all.

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Yes, I very vividly remember Roosevelt coming to town. It was when he was running against Alf Landon. He made a whistle stop all across the country, campaigning that year, and so that part I do remember.

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This is kind of off the subject, but one of the things that I remember is the old ice pond that used to be out behind the Albrights' house, which Helen Kaess owns the house now. It belonged to her parents. We used to go out there to ice skate, and Mr. Albright had built this nice little hut with a stove in it, and we could keep warm in there, and I always envisioned that if I only had the

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[00:39:30] opportunity, I could skate like Sonja Henie. I actually was a pretty good ice skater, but we usually played hockey. He kept hockey sticks and pucks there for us, and we'd go out, we'd play hockey and we'd also ... One of our favorites was playing Crack The Whip on the ice, but then I always liked to just go out by myself and practice on my figure skating.

[00:40:00] One time, I was way up at the far end of the pond, and I saw this strip of ice about, oh, three feet or so wide. I decided, well that I would just ... I could see Sonja Henie skating across that strip of ice. There were little pools of water on either side, and she'd be reflected in these pools of water, and it'd be just wonderful. I decided I'd try it too, so I skated around a while until I got up some speed, and then I started across there on one leg with my other leg out behind me, and I got out in the middle of that, and the ice broke, and I fell in.

[00:40:30] Fortunately, that end of the pool wasn't very deep, so that helped. That was where they would cut the ice, and then store it in winter, and so we'd have ice all summer long, because the iceman came around and delivered ice to your house in those days.

Oh, let's see, what else can I think of?

Beth: Well, were you in town during World War II?

Billie: Yes, I was in high school during World War II.

Beth: What did the town do to help the war effort?

[00:41:00] Billie: Well, just a whole lot of things. One of the things I remember was in the high school, because it started the year I was a freshman in high school, and the band was kind of responsible for this, and that was collecting ... Saving stamps, and it cost nine hundred dollars to buy a Jeep, and I forgot ... I've still got the article, [00:41:30] but I think it was forty-one Jeeps that our high school collected enough money to buy. That was one of the things that we did. I can remember all the women making socks and sweaters and everything else, and I think I even knitted a few myself. I think one of the things that I remember the most about it ... [00:42:00] Of course, Pearl Harbor was on a Sunday and we had Methodist Youth Fellowship here that night. After that was over, there were some of us that had gone down town to the Greeks. We were sitting there talking about it and so forth, and Rokie Ferraro, which you've probably seen the Ferraro name in this church, and Rokie said, "It won't be over until we're in it." He was referring to the people who were his age.

[00:42:30] The year I was a senior, our class was really decimated because of all the boys that had joined the service. Of course, that was ... It was the summer after we graduated that the war was over. I personally was very affected by it because my sister's husband was killed, and ...

Beth: Was he a local boy?

[00:43:00]

Billie: No, he was from Las Animas. He was ... Had called up Sunday afternoon and had told us that he was going on a routine flight to Fort Worth. He was stationed down here at the Pueblo Air Force Base. We knew that he was being sent on some kind of a special mission, but we had no idea what it was. The next

[00:43:30]

morning, and we'll never know why, because my dad always turned the radio on and listened to the seven o'clock news. That was part of his ritual. That Monday morning, he didn't turn it on, and it was about nine o'clock when we got the telegram saying he'd been killed. This plane that he was on, they had just brought the B-29s into Pueblo, and they were flying one down to Fort Worth and it blew up in mid-air.

[00:44:00]

My husband, after I got acquainted with him, he had worked on the B-29s down in South America, and he said they got lots of planes in there that had been sabotaged. His feeling was always that that was what had happened. Some farmer down nearby La Junta saw it, he said it was hit by lightning, but the army said no, it wasn't. The planes were designed so that they wouldn't be affected by the lightning. He's buried out here in Fairview Cemetery.

[00:44:30]

We found out that he was supposed to have been on the plane that dropped the first A-bomb, so ...

Beth:

Were there troop trains going through town?

Billie:

All the time.

Beth:

Mm-hmm (affirmative)?

Billie:

[00:45:00]

Mm-hmm (affirmative). We had lots of troop trains coming through. At that time, well, the beginning of the war, when my sister went to college, which was 1938, this was still part of the Depression. The house that we lived in over on Park Avenue ... Dad also owned this house that was down on 1st Street, right across from Laura Crisman lives ... He decided that he could rent the one on 1st Street, or on Park Avenue, easier than he could rent the one down on 1st Street, so we moved down on it. He rented the one on Park Avenue to the Schmids. She was our choir director here at the church, and he was the county agent here. We were living in the 1st Street house when the war first started, and of course, right across the river from the railroad tracks. We had a good view of all the troop trains that came through Salida.

[00:45:30]

[00:46:00]

Beth:

What about Camp Hale? That's not too far up the road.

Billie:

No, it isn't, and there was a USO here in town. There were a lot of fellows from Camp Hale that would come down here on the weekends. Of course, there weren't all that many places to stay in Salida at that time. They had asked the churches if there were people in their congregations that would ... Had extra

[00:46:30]

[00:47:00] rooms that they would let the boys stay when they came down here on the weekends. Since my sister was in college, we had her room, and my mother was always the one who very generously offered her home to anyone. We had a lot of them that stayed with us when they would come here on weekends. In fact, we finally got ... I think there were two or three of them that just automatically stayed with us when they were in town.

[00:47:30] I remember Mother packing Christmas boxes to send to them. Of course, she had to send them way back in September. She very, very carefully would pack everything. She had ... Pudding came in little boxes, about the size of Jello boxes, and so she very carefully took all of the pudding out and packed these pudding boxes with candies, homemade candy that she had made. We shipped them off, and this one fellow was in New Guinea, and we got a letter from him and he was thanking her for all of the things she had sent, and he said, "And we especially enjoyed the pudding." Apparently when she was packing the box, she picked up these little bags of pudding and put in the box, not intending to. He said, "We found a cow and got some milk, and made the pudding," and he said, "It was so good." We always laughed about Mother sending pudding that she really didn't know that she was sending.

[00:48:30] Beth: Yeah, sounds good. Now, Climax was quite a mine for people in this town. Was that already underway when you were here in your high school years?

[00:49:00] Billie: Oh yes, Climax was in operation. I don't remember particularly too many people from Climax that lived here. It was pretty much a company town then, and there was lots of company housing right up at Climax. I guess the thing I remember most about it was my dad had had a heart attack. Of course, he was seventy-seven years old, but he had contracted with the people of Climax to come up there and do some work for them. Everybody begged him not to go, and our neighbors particularly, she always felt bad lately because the last thing she said to him was, "Well, you just go on up there and do that job, and we'll be walking slow behind you when you come back."

[00:49:30] On Monday morning, Dad loaded up his equipment, and they took off for Climax, and they had him back in the hospital in Salida at ten o'clock that morning, and he died the next day. That's what I always remember about Climax, that that was where my dad had his last heart attack.

[00:50:00] Beth: Well, what about FIBArk? You remember FIBArk races on the water?

Billie: They were just starting that. I remember coming up here to visit the folks one time, when ... After I was not living here and they were having the FIBArk races, but that was after I had gone away to school, so I don't have too much association with that particularly.

Beth: When did you return to the valley, then?

[00:50:30]

Billie: Well, as I say, I went to school at the University of Colorado, and then after we graduated, my husband went to work out at the Denver Federal Center. We lived ... We had a little house in Boulder that we had ... Well, my dad and my husband had built the house, so we decided to just stay in Boulder and we were there for four years after we graduated, before we were transferred to Austin, Texas. My folks lived here until Dad died in '52, but my mother and sister lived here until '56, and then they moved away. Even so, we still came back here most of the time. Almost every summer we came back sometime to visit, and so it never really felt like I left here.

[00:51:00]

[00:51:30]

[00:52:00]

The people who lived next door to us, the Stewarts, I don't know whether you knew them or not, but they had lived next door to us. They moved in when I was a baby, and lived there until ... Well, they both ended up out here in the nursing home, and so we always came and visited the Stewarts even after my mother and sister left here. Salida just will always be home, as far as I'm concerned.

Beth: You moved out of Salida to Buena Vista.

Billie: People always ask me why I did that, and I said, "Well, it was quieter."

Beth: Quieter, huh?

[00:52:30]

Billie: The main thing was when we started looking for land, we wanted some place that was out away from town and I didn't really like any of the places that we could find around here. Then, too, Jack and I had camped up at Cottonwood Lake every summer for years, and so we just kind of had developed some ... In fact, actually, I think he probably was liking Buena Vista better than he did Salida. We ended up buying land up in Buena Vista or up in the Game Trail. We had one of the early lots up there. It was several years before we ever built on it, but we did buy a lot up there.

[00:53:00]

Beth: ... What did you build up there?

Billie: I built, in the winter of '97, '98 ... Jack and I had thought we would build us a summer home. That was our original intention, was we were going to build a little summer home up there, and then he had a stroke and it left him totally paralyzed on one side and partially on the other. My brother-in-law talked me out of it. He said I didn't need two houses to take care of. Then I was up here the summer after my husband died ... Actually, I was here because our high school graduating class had its fiftieth reunion, I guess it was, that summer.

[00:53:30]

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After I went back home, and I just got thinking about it and I thought, "Well, Jack and I had planned on going up there, and I think I'd like to do that." I asked my kids what they thought, and they all said, "Oh, go ahead, Mother," and so I

did.

[00:54:30]

Beth: You have a beautiful house up there. We hadn't talked about your kids yet. Did you have a family?

Billie: I have three of them, yes.

Beth: Who are they?

Billie: Allen's my oldest one. Obviously you know why his name's Allen. He was born here in Salida, and then my daughter Susan, and then my younger son, Bill.

[00:55:00]

Beth: When was Allen born?

Billie: In 1948.

Beth: Where is he now?

Billie: He lives in Arvada.

Beth: What's he doing there?

Billie: He's retired, now, but he worked for Coors, in the container plant for a number of years, thirty some-odd. He took his retirement last June. He's having a lot of health problems, so he went ahead and took his retirement.

[00:55:30]

Beth: Your daughter, when was she born?

Billie: Fifty-two.

Beth: Where is she now?

Billie: She's in Albuquerque.

Beth: Is she working, or ...?

Billie: She's the chief of operations for the Corps of Engineers in the Albuquerque district.

Beth: Uh huh(affirmative). Your younger son?

Billie: He lives in New Orleans.

Beth: What's his name?

Billie: Bill.

Beth: He was born when?

Billie: In '55.

Beth: '55, uh huh (affirmative).

[00:56:00]

Billie: He was the only one that was born in Texas. We kid him about that a little bit. All the rest of us were born in Colorado.

Beth: Well, you've given us lots of interesting things about Salida and your life. Thank you very much for helping us out.

[00:56:30]

Billie: I was glad to do it. I will bring you all of that ...