

Beth Smith: This is Beth Smith. I am over at 308 Shavano Avenue in the home of Bob Biglow. He's going to talk for us this afternoon about some oral history in Salida. This is March 12, 2005. How are you doing today, Bob?

Bob Biglow: Well, excellent. Thank you for this particular opportunity. I was born in the Denver and Rio Grande hospital, which is now the Heart of the Rockies hospital on 29 October 1941 to my mother Ruth Sylvia Biglow, and my dad Robert B. Biglow. What is most significant to me about Salida, went through the entire schools system up to about 1960. Graduated from high school, couldn't get out of Salida fast enough. Then with college and army and the Vietnam War and all that hoo-yah and getting married, I finally worked my way back to Salida. Took over land surveying business. The real affinity to me to Salida, has always been connected to the railroad. I'm a railroad nut, I just can't get enough to read about trains and everything that we deal with. I can literally personally trace all the railroad grades around here in Chaffee County, Gunnison County, Park County, Teller County. It's just a real attachment to me.

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[00:02:00] As a young, young man and one of my favorite instances was with respect to the depot of Denver and Rio Grande Western Depot at the end of F street where the cul de sac is today. That particular depot was an art deco style. It was truly a hub of Salida. Not only did the railroad function relative to both freight traffic and passenger traffic, but also the bus terminal was there also. It was just a lively, lively place. My dad was connected with the railroad as well as my grandfather. They worked as machinists in the locomotive shop. Then my dad had an opportunity to get away from that railroad and start a business as an automotive repair person.

[00:03:00] Anyway, there was always this connection with me to that depot. Several of my friends, I'm thinking of Kenny Lytle and Bobby Brazil and Leroy Davis. I just had several friends, and we're anywhere from about 9, 10, 11, 12, 13 years old. We were always hanging around that depot for whatever reason. We did little odd jobs like sweep the floors and the dispatch board that was in that depot. I remember a Logan Brookshire that was a dispatcher and Rip Easter and Ray Lytle and matter of fact, Herb Cole who just passed away functioned as an engineer. They were all in and out of that depot.

[00:04:00] Anyway, this one particular day, I was erasing the dispatch board and I can't remember if it was Jack Burkett or Logan Brookshire that was instructing me as to what to do. One of those gentlemen said to me, h says, "Now look Bobby, let's say we've got the number 3 freight train which just left Salida here about 2 in the afternoon. Then from Pueblo the number 1 passenger was headed to Glenwood Springs and it left Pueblo at about the same time." There was a sighting there at Swissvale where the 2 trains could get by each other. This Brookshire or Burkett I can't remember who, asked me he says, "Now, let's say that 1 of them was just a little late taking on water at Cotopaxi and it looked like they weren't going to quite make that sighting, what would you do as a dispatcher here?" I said, "Well, I was going to go get my brother." They said, "Well, what are you going to get your brother for?" I said, "Well, he's never seen

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a big train wreck before." Anyway, that was just a neat spot, that depot.

[00:06:00] The other thing that I remember from day 1, my mother, who came from North Dakota and was a Gunderson a long Norwegian family, was an excellent skier. My dad didn't have much to do with that. At that point in time, and I think I was about 8 or 9 when this first started. At that very depot on a Saturday morning the train that went to Gunnison over Marshall Pass, was dispatch and in the caboose would be several Salida people carrying their skis. We all got on that caboose at 6 in the morning. Dark, dark, dark, cold. We took that train to the top of Marshall Pass, all piled out of the train and there was a little bit of a depot there. We all gathered together and then we all took off skiing down the road that's somewhat paralleled the railroad track. The road continued all the way down to Mears Junction. That's where I learned how to ski. It was basically cross country skiing and that sort of thing.

[00:07:00] I can remember people like Robert and Chester Kurtz there. There was a nurse McCarty. My mom was a nurse at that time at the Red Cross hospital. Then, at Mears Junction, when we'd get there the train from Alamosa would show up at about 4:00 and then bring us on down to Salida in the caboose again. It was a 12 hour deal, 6 to 6. Just a delightful experience. I started at about 1948 and then the train quit running in about 1954. There were several years there that we did that. Just truly a great experience, which I totally, totally miss. It didn't cost anything. It was absolutely no cost involved. The railroad just gave anybody that wanted to go skiing a ride.

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Beth Smith: Great.

Bob Biglow: Another element connected with that railroad, is with respect to that magnificent steel truss bridge that crossed the Arkansas there by the steam plant. The stone abutments are still there. Why the fathers to be here in Salida allowed the railroad to take that bridge down, I mean we could have left the bridge. We could be used it as a platform for Fibark and everything else that goes on. It wouldn't affected a thing as far as the improvement to the Arkansas River and that river park. That bridge should've stayed. That's just something I'm not going forgive anybody for for a long time. The bridge should've stayed, as well as that depot. We should've bought that from the railroad or fought for it or done something.

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Another element that's gone from Salida that was dear to me as a young, young teenager and actually up through high school was the Salida fish pond that the Frantzhurst family built there at the corner of F Street and 3rd Street. It was a tourist attraction, the fish hatchery kept it with nice great big rainbow trout in it all the time. Just a sweet, sweet attraction to the city of Salida. They built the senior center. The seniors need a place, but that wasn't the place. It still isn't. It's a parking problem, it's a hassle. The fish pond should still be there and that senior center should have been built someplace else.

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Beth Smith: You mentioned your brother. Did you have any other siblings?

Bob Biglow: Just my brother John. He made his way off to New York City; Toledo, Ohio; Kansas City, Missouri; Dallas, Texas. Became the comptroller for JC Penny company. He's lost his affinity for Salida a little bit, but he misses those things too. He wasn't the skier that I was. He's done real well.

Beth Smith: Where did you live here in Salida?

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Bob Biglow: I lived down at 550 East 3rd Street. That's where 3rd Street ends. It comes together at a triangle there. It was Caldwell Street and Park Avenue. Ginny and I still own that house to date. I'm trying to move her down there sometime. Just because the wind doesn't blow, the grass gets greener a month earlier and stays greener a month later.

Beth Smith: Absolutely.

Bob Biglow: It's just a nice part of town. It's a very comfortable old home. It needs the kitchen reworked but that's all.

Beth Smith: Well, that could be done.

Bob Biglow: It's just a good, good place.

Beth Smith: You went through all the schools here in Salida?

Bob Biglow: Went through all the schools.

Beth Smith: When did you graduate?

Bob Biglow: I graduated in 1959.

Beth Smith: Were there any sports you were enjoying besides skiing?

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Bob Biglow: I played a little football, played a little basketball and a little track. I wasn't outstanding in any of those fields. To bring up the basketball, I probably excelled at better than anything. The coach then, Schmidli, had an absolute hard fast rule that if he heard that anybody was going to go skiing, you were off the team. Well every year I got on the basketball team, playing along pretty good. We'd get up to about February and then somebody'd rat on me that I'd been skiing. Off the team I was. We did that 4 years in a row. I saw Schmidli here in town couple of years ago. He lives mostly in Arizona. I told him then I was still a lot better skier than I was a basketball player even today. That's about all.

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Beth Smith: After you graduated from high school here, where'd you go from there?

Bob Biglow: I started out in architecture at Colorado University. Just decided that those

[00:14:00] architects spent way too much time in the office and then I went to Western State College and took up some more skiing. Skied for Schwinn Wick on the cross country team. Really enjoyed Western State. I obtained a degree in mathematics, geology, and another major in physics. I also stalked the wife that I've been married to for 39 years but I caught her eye in the library there and then finally made a move on her after about 6 months.

Beth Smith: What was her name?

Bob Biglow: Her name was Virginia J. McDonald. Anyway, we also had the Vietnam War looming in that point in time. After I graduated from Western State in '65, I applied to Colorado School of Mines for Graduate School and was accepted. I pursued a degree in mining engineering at Colorado School of Mines with a deferment to not be drafted. Immediately after that, I went to work at Climax for American Metals' Climax as a mining engineer. I was underground. By that time I was also a registered land surveyor in Colorado. Climax found out I was a surveyor, so I was surveying the Phipps underground level at Climax and directing the tunnels relative to the direction that the main vein was going. It was an outstanding job. Paid a terrific amount of money. Just a good, good job.

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[00:16:00] The draft board in Salida was really bearing down on top of me. Then I wrangled a job with the bureau of land management in Montana to survey the Blackfoot Indian Reservation boundary where it was common with the Glacier National Park boundary. This place was really in the boonies. Right up next to the Canadian border, all the way down to the Great Northern Railroad where it went through East Glacier Montana. Terrific job, but again the draft board closed in against me. Then I decided, well, Ginny and I should finally get married as one last ditch effort to keep me from going to the army. Well, that worked for about 4 months and the next thing I knew I was in the United States Army.

Beth Smith: Tell me when you were married. When were you married?

Bob Biglow: We were married in 1966, the 1st of October. That's about the time when that job in Montana came to an end and we moved back to Colorado. I had an opportunity, the corps of engineers and the city of Denver were going to build Chatfield Reservoir. This is right in the beginning stages. The land area where most of Chatfield Reservoir was owned by the owner of the Broncos at that time. Phipps. Gerald F. Phipps and the Phipps ranch and the actual Highland Ranch there south of Littleton. I did the survey for the acquisition of that land from that Phipps Ranch so they could build Chatfield Reservoir. At that point in time, that was February of '67 and I was drafted into the United States Army.

Beth Smith: What about your army career? What did you do there?

Bob Biglow: Anyhow, I took off to Fort Leonard Wood. Ended up in the Army engineers basically as basic training and advanced individual training. Then they offered me an opportunity to go to the Army engineer school to become an officer in the corp of engineers. I decided to take advantage of that. It was also at a point

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in time that I decided I was going to take advantage of every school that the United States Army could offer to keep from going to Vietnam. I went to that engineer school. Immediately after graduation from there I was sent to Fort Knox Kentucky and they found out I was a surveyor so I spent most of my time at Fort Knox, which was a year surveying the army reservation boundary where it adjoined the Old Crow Distillery. Fabulous piece of country. Just hill and dale and boonies and excellent job and it just happened.

[00:19:00] Then, we had another opportunity to go to another army school, army sponsored school and they sent me to Ohio State to earn an advanced degree in geodesy. The function of the military at that point in time was for intercontinental ballistic control and they needed these geodesists is which I became to assist in all the calculations of these intercontinental ballistics. I don't even want to think about that, but that's what I did and it was a great school. They sent me to Ohio State. Ohio State went to the Rose Bowl that year and so did we.

Beth Smith: Ah, good.

Bob Biglow: It was fun. Immediately after that school, I applied for the jungle school because  
[00:20:00] it looked like they were getting ready to send me to Vietnam. I decided, "Well, I'll try 1 other school." They gladly sent me to Panama to go to jungle school. Interestingly enough there, the class that I graduated from, the next class behind us Noriega was in that class. The United States sent him through the United States jungle school.

After that, I ended up on orders to Vietnam. I was in the highlands as an army engineer. I commanded an engineer construction company. One of the best experiences in my life. We had to put up with snipers along that jungle trail, but we'd just call in these F4 strikes to saturate it with napalm, no more sniper  
[00:21:00] problem. I managed to keep everybody in my company alive. We returned from there all intact. We built them a pretty good road through that country. I'm just glad I did it. Maybe some day we'll go see how that road's doing.

Then I spent a considerable amount of time in the Army Reserves. I got to work on the Sam Rayburn Reservoir in Texas. I could give a rat jack about Texas, but that was a very pleasant experience. Met some great people. Learned how to bass fish. As far as I'm concerned, that's the only kind of fishing there is is fishing for bass. I also in the Army Reserve duty functioned with the space command  
[00:22:00] center that they were going to build out by Ellicott, Colorado during the Reagan years. We did a lot of lay out foundations, that sort of thing at that point in time. I spent a lot of my reserve time training soldiers to become surveyors.

Beth Smith: When did you return to Salida?

Bob Biglow: We returned here to Salida in 1972. I just immediately started a land surveying business. Haven't looked back since.

Beth Smith: Where's the business located?

Bob Biglow: The business is located at 3rd and E Street right downtown. It's also located in a facility that my father and my grandfather initially built. They were also connected with Guy Hall who was the Texaco consignee. They built that structure in 1935. Between my mom and my brother and when my dad passed away I was fortunate enough to get my hand and possession on that structure. It's just a fabulous building and a great office and actually exists as a play pen for me.

Beth Smith: You've been surveying in this area every since?

Bob Biglow: I actually started surveying when I was in high school, 1958. That's a pretty good stretch. The future is just unbelievably bright. Matter of fact, the Climax mine is going to open again this summer under the ownership of Phelps Dodge and we have a contract to do the volume control on the open pit.

Beth Smith: Tell me what Climax does.

Bob Biglow: Well, it's one of the world's largest molybdenum producers. Molybdenum is used in the steel business to strengthen steel. The reason that a razor blade like in a Gillette Good News blade, that cheap tin that it's made of, the reason it stays sharp is because of the molybdenum in it. The price of molybdenum here since October has basically doubled every month. That's why they're going to open that mine again.

Beth Smith: When did they start back there? Climax.

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Bob Biglow: Climax basically started during World War II just to provide iron steel strengthening material for building tanks and battleships and whatever.

Beth Smith: I know of many people from Salida used to go up to Climax to go to work. Must have really been moving along for a while.

Bob Biglow: There were 3,000 employees employed at Climax in 1966 when I worked there as a mining engineer. The mine never slept. It had 3 shifts going on all the time.

Beth Smith: What else have you done in Chaffee County?

Bob Biglow: I've been on the city of Salida planning commission for a quarter of a century plus 2 years. It's a fight every time we have a meeting. Somebody has to hang in there.

Beth Smith: That's the way we get things done.

Bob Biglow: That's true. That's true. I don't win every time, but at least they know I'm there.

Beth Smith: Any other organization in town that you've been active in?

Bob Biglow: No, no I haven't.

Beth Smith: Keep busy?

Bob Biglow: Just keep busy.

Beth Smith: Can you think of any characters around town that made you laugh, made you cry?

Bob Biglow: Elmo Bevington I consider a long time very good friend and he was good for Salida and the area and the ski area and just good for life in general. I really enjoyed him.

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Beth Smith: Somebody told me the other day that you had something to do with Christmas Mountain.

Bob Biglow: When they first started out with Christmas Mountain, they used a spotlight pattern up there and it just didn't hack it. John Bayuk and Nancy Sanger and I was involved there. Matter of fact, I suggested to them, I said, "What you need is if you can imagine a Christmas cookie, the shape of a Christmas cookie and let's just lay that out on that mountain." I says, "You're going to need some surveying to do that because the mountain isn't uniform and I think I can figure it out for you." Myself and Chris Kennedy and another surveyor from Crested Butte by the name of Ed Benner and we went to work on configuring that Christmas Mountain shape. The original shape had a tree trunk on it which I still think needs to be added, but I think we were fairly successful in getting the shape correct.

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Beth Smith: You did a good job.

Bob Biglow: We did that from the parking lot in the bank with an electronic laser measuring device. It did work out. That mountain's a scramble. That did work out good.

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Beth Smith: Did you and Ginny ever have any children?

Bob Biglow: We have 1 daughter, Rebecca who I'm of the opinion is the smartest person on the face of the earth. Just proves that practically every conversation I have with her. She's a graduate geologist. She's an engineering geologist licensed in the state of California. She's also a hydrologist, but she decided she wants to become an architect and she's in the University of Oregon studying architecture now. She'll be a good architect.

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Beth Smith: I bet she will. Anything else you want to bring up for that tape? Well, you've had

a wonderful life here in Salida and I thank you for taking time to talk to our oral history project.

Bob Biglow: My pleasure.