

Beth Smith: Well good morning. This is Beth Smith. I'm up at 248 W. 15th Street talking to Bonnie Bondurant. This happens to be March the 15th, 2005. Good morning Bonnie.

Bonnie: Good morning and how are you?

Beth Smith: Just fine. What can you tell us this morning?

Bonnie: Well, I was born in Los Animas, Colorado and I went to school there until I was in the fourth grade. Then, we moved to Elkhart, Kansas where my dad went to work for a chain. I lived there a whole five weeks, I think, and then we moved to Scott City where he stayed for the rest ... This was in 1935 in the Dust Bowl years. If you lived within three blocks from school, you got to go home when one of those dust storms was coming and if you lived farther than that you stayed at school. I lived three blocks away so I got to home once in a while. The grasshoppers would be so thick on the streets that you couldn't hardly walk.
[00:01:00] Then my dad's feet got bad and we came to Canon City where my grandparents were. I went to school from the sixth grade until I graduated from high school in 43 in Canon City.

I spent a year in Denver going to business school. Then, my folks closed up the grocery store we had here for awhile while the boys were all gone to service.

Beth Smith: In Canon City?

Bonnie: No, the one in Salida. We had a store in Canon City too but we closed the one in Salida while the boys were all gone to service because you couldn't get any help. I came home in 1944 to run the grocery store in Salida. I moved up here ... I'd been up here, when we still had the grocery store before it was closed, some but I didn't live here. In early 1945, I moved up here for good and I've been here ever since.

Beth Smith: What was the store called up here?

Bonnie: Oxford's Market.

Beth Smith: Where was it?

[00:02:00]

Bonnie: It was on highway 50. It was a little bitty open air fruit market and wooden one. The first one it burnt down in about December of 1939, it burnt. Christmas time. We decorated it all with a bunch of pine boughs and stuff for Christmas which made it burn easy. As they carried the stuff out when it was burning it froze because the snow was so deep on the ground and it was so cold here so we lost nearly everything. Then we rebuilt it into what it is now. We were there in that building until 1964. Remodeled it a couple of times.

Jenny's lunch was on the corner where the present Oxford's Market, or Food

[00:03:00] Town is now. We bought that land and tore the Jenny's Lunch down and built the new store and moved over there. We closed the one, in where Movie Gallery is now, one night about nine o'clock and opened the next one the next morning at eight. Which was quite a deal because it was about four times as big.

Then we ran it until ... Of course I got married somewhere along the line and then my husband and I ran it until 1981 and then we sold it to the Bowen brothers. They ran it for awhile and then they leased it to Bill Holt and his wife. Then they leased it to Jerry Gold and his wife. Of course now it's closed and we're still trying to rent it for something.

[00:04:00] Movie Gallery. We've rented the place. It was Sears for awhile over where Movie Gallery is. When Bob Meyers ran it. Then we leased it to JC Flicks and then JC Flicks sold out to a bunch in Alabama, which is Movie Gallery and it's still Movie Gallery.

I've been on Christmas Mountain Committee ever since we started putting the first four lights on Christmas Mountain in 89.

Beth Smith: That took a lot of work.

Bonnie: I have never been up there and helped do that. I've been on the money making part of it because it's kind of dangerous up there if you're not equipped for it. It's more of a young person's job instead of my age.

Beth Smith: Absolutely.

[00:05:00] Bonnie: Of course, I'm still on the fourth of July fireworks. My husband helped start that out at the recreation, , at Poncha, where the 4H building is now. They used to have all the fireworks out there and he used to stand there with a red bucket and take the donations as they drove in. It's always been donations that's put up the fireworks. The city did finally give us some money since we moved it to the mountain but before that they didn't.

Beth Smith: What about Christmas Mountain? Was that all volunteer?

Bonnie: That definitely is all volunteer.

Beth Smith: Money too?

Bonnie: Money too. The light bill too. Then when we put it in ... Chris Schirmer worked on it for many years and then he decided that he'd had it. He did it all free and volunteered his help too. He decided that it was getting too much and he was too busy so he decided to quit. He said we really needed to put a lot of the electrical things down underground. We let it be known that we needed about 14 thousand dollars to put a lot of that underground. We were on the radio a couple of times and put it in the paper. You'd be surprised that the local people, I think it was about three weeks we had the 14 thousand dollars to put the

[00:06:00] electrical wires underground. Which makes it a lot easier. Then, after Chris decided he didn't want to do it anymore, Steve Borbas took over from Woodland Motel. He's got it all like a fine science now. He puts it all in little sections that's not near as hard to put up and take down as it used to be.

Beth Smith: It really is a wonderful thing for Salida.

Bonnie: People have donated some money to pay the light bill. For about two or three years, Pueblo Bank and Trust paid it. Then of course they quit paying it. Which runs to, right now, about a thousand dollars for the month and a little over that it's on. Donations come in.

[00:07:00] The Christmas Mountain committee was around for a long time and we ran the parade of lights too. Of course I've been on the parade of lights board committee ever since it started too and I still am. I was with the bunch that was on the home and garden show this year. We did the interview for the Home and Garden. I was also the parade marshal for Christmas for the parade of lights.

Beth Smith: Well what fun.

Bonnie: And my four year old granddaughter. The lady from the Community First Bank furnished the carriage and the horse. She lives down in Howard.

Beth Smith: That's fun.

Bonnie: My husband was on the city council for 17 years. Then, after he got killed, they decided that I had gone to enough water board meetings and so forth and so on with him that maybe I should be on the city council too. I finally decided that I would do it. I stayed there for eight and a half years and I decided somebody young should have the job.

Beth Smith: What did you accomplish in those eight and a half years.

[00:08:00] Bonnie: We did a lot. We bought the new ladder truck. We did a lot of things if I remember right. It was a congenial bunch. Everybody got along way back then. It wasn't everybody fighting against each other. It was nice.

Beth Smith: Who was the mayor when you were on the council?

Bonnie: Nancy Sanger. Pat Brooks was city administrator. Poor old Pat worked like a dog. She worked lots of hours and didn't get much pay. It's not like now they get the kind of wages they get. Plus Pat didn't get that kind of wages and she worked many, many hours. We didn't have a city planner. We didn't have a lot of things that we do now.

Beth Smith: Is that progress?

Bonnie: Sometimes I wonder.

Beth Smith: Yeah.

[00:09:00]

Bonnie: I have two children. My son lives at Coaldale. Him and I have a rafting, rock climbing, horseback riding business at Coaldale. At Cotopaxi, Colorado.

Beth Smith: Called what?

Bonnie: Called Rock n Row. My daughter lives in Pueblo. My son in law is a retired school teacher from South High. My daughter has done a lot of special ed. She's a special ed teacher. Right now she's not doing anything. I have three granddaughters. Two of them live in Manhattan, Kansas and one of them lives in Greeley. I also have five great grandchildren as of today. The last of this week I'll probably have the sixth one.

Beth Smith: Great.

Bonnie: They all live in Manhattan, Kansas. Which is quite a distance to go every time I go to see the great granddaughters. I have one granddaughter that's only four.

[00:10:00]

Beth Smith: Nice family.

Bonnie: It's grown quite a bit.

Beth Smith: Yes. Let's back up a little bit and tell me more about your beginning years. Where did your family come from?

Bonnie: My mother came from Missouri. A place called Weaubleau. Years ago we had a horse that we had on the race track and we named it Weaubleau. If you ever saw a mispronounced name in your life it was when it was running on the track because nobody could pronounce that Weaubleau. My dad came from Texas originally, but then my grandparents homesteaded in Sweetwater, Oklahoma before they moved to Los Animas, Colorado. In fact, I was down in Sweetwater, Sayre, Oklahoma just about a month ago because I had a cousin that passed away down there. I'm glad they moved to Colorado.

[00:11:00]

Beth Smith: When were you born? What's your birthday?

Bonnie: June 10, 1925.

Beth Smith: You ended up in Canon City.

Bonnie: I lived in Canon City until I graduated from high school then I went to business school. I was going to Kansas because I had a granddaughter had a birthday about that time, but my class had a 60 year reunion last year.

Beth Smith: In Canon City?

Bonnie: In Canon City. Now they put out a little newsletter every other month and list all the things that the different ones in my class have done and how many of them are still alive and so forth.

Beth Smith: Do they do this every year?

[00:12:00]

Bonnie: No, they just started it when the 60th anniversary was.

Beth Smith: Oh. Tell me something about your husband. What was his name?

Bonnie: Richard Bondurant. He was born in ... Well if his parents hadn't of been in Pitkin right about that time, because he was raised ... They lived in Salida but they happened to be in Pitkin when he was born. He was a lifelong member of Salida. His uncle ran a dairy, over just across the little river, for many years. Way back.

[00:13:00] He went to school here. He had two brothers and a sister. No, he had three brothers and a sister. The only one still living is the sister.

Beth Smith: Is she living here in town?

Bonnie: Oh, no. She lives in California with some of her children.

Beth Smith: You two ran Oxford Market.

Bonnie: When we got married, Dick ran the one. We had a store in Buena Vista, then, which is now the front end of a Jan's Restaurant. My husband ran it and drove back and forth for about a year. I ran the one in Salida. This was after we got married even. Then we sold the one in Buena Vista and then him and I ran this one until 1981 when we sold out.

Beth Smith: When were you married?

Bonnie: I was trying to remember that last night. I think it was 1947.

[00:14:00]

Beth Smith: Where did we get the name Oxford Market?

Bonnie: That's my parent's name originally. I'm an Oxford. We had three stores to start with. We had a little bitty fruit market down on South 9th Street in Canon and then we built the big one out on Main Street in Canon City. Which, when we went out of business down there, we sold. Tore it down and now that's where the Canon City post office is. We were in business down there from probably 1937.

Beth Smith: Until 80 what?

Bonnie: No, we quit down there in 1980. It just got too much. Too hard.

[00:15:00]

Beth Smith: You say your husband was killed. You want to tell us about that?

Bonnie: Well, we'd been up to Denver for the Republican convention and we came home and we went to the ranch at Howard and visited my mother and brother and so forth. They were up there for the day. We went on down to Coaldale, at the ranch we had in Coaldale. The year before a big piece of log had come down in the June floods and washed out the bridge. This time we didn't want the bridge washed out and bothered. They were pulling a tree out of the creek and my son was driving the pickup and he hollered and told his dad to get back out of the way. About that time a chunk about two foot long or three foot long broke off and flew through the air about 20 feet and hit him in the back of the head.

[00:16:00]

We flew him to Pueblo to the neurosurgeon. He was down there for ... I could hold his hand and he'd squeeze my hand and his eyes would move a little until the day of my birthday, the 10th of June. Then, after that, there wasn't anything. I made them do about two more brain scans and there just wasn't anything there. He passed away the 14th of June.

Beth Smith: Sorry to hear that. You came back to Salida and you've been busy ever since.

Bonnie: Oh yeah. I went to work down in Crews-Beggs for awhile. One morning Dick and I were at the spa, country bounty spa, eating breakfast and Mac McVey was in there and he said, "How you getting along?" I said, "Well, I'm getting along fine in the summertime because I can garden but in the winter time it's kind of bad because I haven't got enough to do." I said, "It's getting so bad I think I'll come down and ask you for a job." He said, "Okay." I went to work part time the next day. I stayed there for 19 years.

[00:17:00]

Beth Smith: That's great.

Bonnie: I started out just working part time then pretty soon Mac wanted to know if I wanted to be the men's buyer. Then the next thing Mac passed away and Jane Ferraro and I ended up running it. Joe was still around but then when she left, Jane and I still ran it. Then after Joe passed away, we ran it still for the son that inherited it. It was Joe's son that had inherited it and he lived in Amarillo, Texas. We were still running it when Hightower had already bought the building from Ben Groy. Then he wanted to put his insurance business in there so he told us we would have to move. I offered to buy a building, to rent Joe's son a place, Bill, but he finally decided he wanted to close it up. He took his money and went back to Texas.

[00:18:00]

Beth Smith: We really miss it too.

Bonnie: Yes, we do. A lot of people do. I know they do because we handled everything.

We handled nice clothes and nice things but it's just one of those things. I guess it's called progress. I don't know.

Beth Smith: That's what it's called, all right.

Bonnie: Sometimes it's a pain in the neck but they call it progress.

Beth Smith: Well you've lived here a long time and seen things happen in Salida. What big changes have you seen in the town?

Bonnie:
[00:19:00] I can remember Anschutz. When they tore down the railroad building down at the end of F Street. Anschutz said that he would see the grass grow on F Street in Salida, Colorado. But I've been here a long time and I haven't seen it growing there yet. He tore the railroad ... We wanted to make it a community building or a gift shop or something out of it and he started tearing it down early in the morning. He had the wreckers there tearing it down. Wouldn't let us have it. Of course he was D&RGW Railroad then.

[00:20:00] There's been a lot of ... When we first came out on the highway, about the only place was ... There was a little restaurant down in the other block where Cellular One is. One that was run by Delbert Dale. Just a little bitty one. Koenigs had a little bitty motel. Our block that was Warner Service Station. Then we had our little fruit market thing. Next door was Jenny's Lunch. Across the street where Phillips 66 is now was a little filling station and so forth. There wasn't any motel there. The swimming pool definitely didn't look like it does now. Across from that, which is now the Country Bounty, which was called Skelly Motor Inn. They had a little restaurant in there with, if I remember right, three or four stools. Then Holsworth's built it to a bigger restaurant. Called it The Spa. Of course then Holsworth sold it out to Osborne and then Osborne finally sold it to the people that have it now.

Beth Smith: Highway 50 doesn't look like that now.

Bonnie:
[00:21:00] No it doesn't. All those motels that are along there weren't there way back then. Koenigs was there. Up at the swimming pool there was four little cabins that people used to come from all over and stay in in the summer time and take the hot bath. In fact, we rented one of them when we first got married for a couple of months because our house wasn't ready to move in to. We moved to the house that's over there on 231 W 15th from the place at Coaldale. We lived there until we moved into this house. Eddie Coachmen built this house.

Beth Smith: About what year did you move into this place?

Bonnie: 63.

Beth Smith: Beautiful home.

Bonnie: Thank you.

Beth Smith: You've lived here all the time.

Bonnie: I've lived here all the time. Eddie Coachmen built it. It was one of the last ones that Eddie Coachmen built. I kept telling him I wanted to be sure he built my house before he quit. We walked many days trying to figure out how to get a good view of the mountains from every window and so far we still have it.

[00:22:00]

Beth Smith: That's why you're sitting at a little bit of an angle on your lot here.

Bonnie: Yes, that's exactly why. I had six lots, which there's days that I think it's far too many, but anyhow, most the time I like it.

Beth Smith: You mentioned gardening. Is that one of your hobbies?

Bonnie: It is to a certain extent. I don't get much time at it now since we run the rafting office and then we're busy in the summertime, so I don't get to do that. I do still do my own yard. I have a riding lawn mower and I do mow my own lawn. Of course I have a sprinkling system that waters it.

Beth Smith: Can you think of any outstanding events in Salida? For instance, World War II. How did Salida treat things like that?

[00:23:00]

Bonnie: World War II I wasn't here much until the tail end of it because I was still going to school in Canon City. Of course Dick was in the service.

Beth Smith: Where was he stationed in the service?

Bonnie: He was stationed in Utah, to start with, and then in Fort Benning in Georgia. He never did go overseas because he got hurt at camp so he never did go overseas. His two brothers both did. The ones that lived here.

Beth Smith: How did Salida celebrate World War II?

Bonnie: It must have been kind of quiet because I don't remember much about it really. I remember when Kennedy got killed it was quite a shocker and everybody in town was just kind of shocked. I do remember that. I don't remember anything exciting that Salida had going on for when World War II ended or not.

[00:24:00]

Beth Smith: The railroads had a big part in growth of Salida.

Bonnie: Oh yeah. Years and years ago, the railroad used to take, the train, to the ballgames and so forth. Now then, of course, they don't do that. The railroad was a big thing way back then. After Climax was a big thing because there's a lot of people that lived in Salida that worked at Climax and made big money. When

Climax closed down, a lot of people had to leave because they couldn't get a job. It hurt the community, I know, greatly.

Beth Smith: You don't work anymore now.

Bonnie: Only at the rafting company in the summertime.

Beth Smith: Oh yeah, keeps you busy.

[00:25:00]

Bonnie: I help cook the lunches that we serve on our all day trips and I also drive the van that hauls the rafters and rafts.

Beth Smith: Sounds like fun.

Bonnie: It's different.

Beth Smith: You're on the library board.

Bonnie: I'm on the library board. I'm on the Salida housing board. Although I don't have business in Salida, I still go to merchants every meeting.

Beth Smith: You must enjoy it.

Bonnie: I enjoy the merchants and I still work with them quite a lot. I also go to focus group meeting which is part of the merchants.

Beth Smith: The town is all excited about building a new hospital. Where do you stand on that?

Bonnie: I don't know. I realize that we probably do need it. I don't know much about it. I know that our building is old. I sure don't want to see it leave Salida.

[00:26:00]
Beth Smith: Where would you put it?

Bonnie: I don't really know. I know there's some land up behind, somebody told me, up behind where the medical building is, but I don't know. I brought up the ballpark but I find that they can't have the ballpark because it has to go for a vote to the people. I thought a good place for it would be over where the soccer fields are. A ball diamond. But no, so I don't know. I'd like to see maybe assisted living where the old hospital is if they quit using it because we've been wanting an assisted living here for quite some time. It would be very good because a lot of people have to go someplace else.

Beth Smith: It's hard on families.

Bonnie: Yeah.

[00:27:00]

Beth Smith: You've got good ideas yet. Don't retire forever. We need you.

Bonnie: I try to work at it.

Beth Smith: Well, can you think of anything else?

Bonnie: No I sure can't this morning.

Beth Smith: You've done a good job. Thank you very much Bonnie.

Bonnie: Thank you Beth.