

Hannelore: This is Hannelore Gabriel interviewing Forrest Miller. Today is April 6, 2004. We're conducting the interview at the interviewer's home, 725 G Street. Forrest Miller is my neighbor and he lives at, where do you live?

Miller: 647 G Street.

[00:00:30]

Hannelore: Okay. Well, let's begin. Do you want to tell me where you were born?

Miller: McCook, Nebraska.

Hannelore: What year?

Miller: In 1917.

Hannelore: How long did you live there?

Miller: Six months.

Hannelore: Yeah, and then?

[00:01:00]

Miller: My folks moved to Loveland. Loveland, Colorado, of course, and that's where I grew up.

Hannelore: Your family, what kind of occupation did they have?

Miller: We were on a truck farm. Well, dad was a carpenter too in-between. There was no end to work on that truck farm so we didn't get into any trouble.

[00:01:30]

Hannelore: Where did you go to school?

Miller: At a little school right a half mile, Lake View Country School before the time of consolidation. Came time to go to high school, I went one year and I still owe them the \$35 tuition.

[00:02:00]

Hannelore: For the one year?

Miller: For the one year.

Hannelore: Why did you not continue?

Miller: We couldn't pay it.

Hannelore: Why was that? Why couldn't your family pay it at the time?

Miller: I guess you might say we were just too poor.

Hannelore: Did that have anything to do with the conditions of the time? This was right in the middle of the Depression, was it?

[00:02:30]

Miller: Yes. It was in '31, '32, along in there. Then I worked on the neighbors' farms and all that.

Hannelore: At what age was that?

Miller: I was 15 or 16.

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Hannelore: How much money did you make then?

Miller: Well, sometimes 75 cents a day and worked up to a dollar a day after a while.

Hannelore: Was that the only work you were doing, working on other farms?

Miller: Yes. At that time, yes.

Hannelore: Did you work ...

Miller: I helped my dad in the carpenter business.

[00:03:30]

Hannelore: What kind of carpentry did you do?

Miller: All of it. We started on a house and we built it from top to bottom.

Hannelore: What did you do for fun and play when you were growing up?

[00:04:00]

Miller: Baseball was the thing. Kick the can.

Hannelore: Do you remember anything of your teachers?

Miller: My first teacher was my aunt.

Hannelore: What kind of experience was that, to have your aunt as a teacher?

[00:04:30]

Miller: Well, she didn't let me get away with anything, that's for sure. Then I had other teachers. One of them was named Krebel and Gray.

Hannelore: What were they like?

[00:05:00]

Miller: Pretty good, pretty nice.

Hannelore: What kind of experience was it to go to school in this little school?

Miller: At the beginning, rather frightening.

Hannelore: What made it frightening?

[00:05:30]

Miller: I was a country boy but I got through it. I got through it.

Hannelore: You told a little bit about your dad, you said you did carpentry with him. Tell me something about your mother.

[00:06:00]

Miller: Well, she was busy with five kids. She was a nice woman. She was always working, outside in the garden or canning stuff. I don't know whether we'd had anything to eat if we hadn't grown it on the garden farm.

[00:06:30]

Hannelore: Did you also have chickens or rabbits and ...

Miller: Yeah. We had chicken, we had hogs, we had a milk cow. We did all right, all the essentials. We had a horse.

Hannelore: Was that your transportation?

[00:07:00]

Miller: No. She was a cultivator puller.

Hannelore: Was there a car?

Miller: Yes, we had several Model T's, old wore out pop Model T's. We didn't have additional car till I came back from the Navy.

[00:07:30]

Hannelore: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

Miller: Two brothers and two sisters.

Hannelore: Did they stay on the farm while you were growing up or what were they up to?

[00:08:00]

Miller: Yeah, I'd say so. Yeah. One of my sisters married a neighbor and of course stayed there the rest of her life. The other sister got married and had some kids, naturally. She had some sort of a drug reaction and died. That's been a long

[00:08:30]

[00:09:00] time ago. We never did know what it was and they couldn't tell us at that time what it was. She didn't make it through that.

Hannelore: What was good about this kind of life?

Miller: Well, didn't know any other.

Hannelore: What was bad about it?

[00:09:30]

Miller: My sister and I were always in trouble one way or another. We'd go back to the irrigation canal, go skinny-dipping and that kind of stuff. We'd have to come home and work.

Hannelore: What were your chores?

[00:10:00]

Miller: Taking care of the hogs and the horse, and milking the cow, feeding the chickens, cleaning the chicken house. There was no end to it.

[00:10:30]

Hannelore: Then at what age did you leave this and where did you go from there?

Miller: I joined the Navy in 1934.

Hannelore: You were ...

Miller: Went to San Diego, got through boot camp. Then got on the Battleship Arizona
[00:11:00] and was there the rest of that kid's cruise that I was on. I got out when I was 21. By that time things had changed quite a bit around.

Hannelore: In what way?

[00:11:30]

Miller: Everybody was a bit better off and meantime my brothers had got to go to high school.

Hannelore: There wasn't enough money in the meantime that your parents could pay for your brothers' high school?

Miller: Well, no, the country school districts consolidated so they got to go. They could go to high school. No tuition.

[00:12:00]

Hannelore: When you were in the Navy, where did you go?

Miller: All over the Pacific Ocean.

Hannelore: What kind of experience was that?

[00:12:30]

Miller: Well, lots of water all around. Yeah, there were some interesting times in the Navy. I didn't like it at first because I was a plain old swabbie cleaning the deck and all that kind of stuff. I decided I was going to do something else so I learned to type and that kind of stuff and got into the supply department and then went on to I became a third class petty officer before I left the ship.

[00:13:00]

Hannelore: How long was that?

[00:13:30]

Miller: I got out of the Navy in October '38, so actually it was almost four years that I was in there. They called it a kid's cruise because we were so young when we went in.

Hannelore: After that?

[00:14:00]

Miller: After that I went back home and worked as electrician, as a carpenter, owned a farm, everything until ...

Hannelore: Were you making good money doing that?

[00:14:30]

Miller: No. No. No, I made I think I ran Rialto Theater in Loveland at \$8 a week. I ran machines for pictures and stuff, 8 bucks a week. Boy, that was right up there.

Hannelore: Was that not enough?

[00:15:00]

Miller: Well, it wasn't really enough but it was that's just the way wages were then. I can't remember how much money I made as a carpenter but it wasn't much.

Hannelore: What were you doing for fun then?

[00:15:30]

Miller: For fun? Duck hunting, pheasant hunting. Didn't really have too much fun. Had a couple of girlfriends in the meantime. They ran off and married somebody else. Then just before the war I met my wife and that was it. That's the way it stayed for 53 years.

[00:16:00]

Hannelore: Where did she grow up? What's her name?

[00:16:30]

Miller: Her name was Bernice Elliott. She grew up in Northern Colorado up around Briggsdale. They did some farming in the valley up there that has become Carter Lake. Their farm got covered up.

[00:17:00]

Hannelore: What happened there during the thirties?

Miller: Well, at the point I am right now it was past the thirties. We were ...

Hannelore: Well, I'm talking about her earlier experiences. You mentioned before something about the dust storms.

[00:17:30]

Miller: Well, yeah. In the thirties it was kind of rough but most of that I was out in the Navy and I didn't experience it. My wife did. She had to wear wet clothes over her face in school. I tell you, it piled up the dirt out there. Over the fence post you couldn't even see the fences.

Hannelore: It must have been a rough experience. How long did that go on?

Miller: Several years.

Hannelore: They were farming too, right?

Miller: Yes, my father-in-law was a dry land farmer.

[00:18:30]

Hannelore: How did it affect the crops?

Miller: It affected the crops all right, blew them away almost every year. They did get a crop now and then and enough to sustain them.

[00:19:00]

Hannelore: Okay. At what point did you come to this area and what brought you here?

Miller: What brought us here, we came to Poncha Springs.

Hannelore: What year or how old were you then?

Miller: Getting real old, that was in '56.

Hannelore: What made you come here?

[00:19:30]

Miller: My brother-in-law and some of his friends formed a little corporation and bought the Poncha Springs Lodge.

Hannelore: What kind of a business was that?

Miller: Restaurant and rooms. There was no lack of work there to do either. We even had a little filling station. That lasted for six years when we went under, you might say. There was just no way at that time. The tourist season ended in August while you had the rest of the year to try to make it through. It didn't pan out at all. It never did pan out. Last guy to own the lodge had it burn down. I don't think anybody ever made any money there. Then of course we moved into

[00:20:00]

[00:20:30]

Salida.

Hannelore: First, tell me a little bit more about Poncha Lodge. You were saying that tourists
[00:21:00] were coming. The tourists, were they the main customers?

Miller: Well, no, there were a lot of locals came up there to the restaurant. We put out
a full meal for \$1.35.

Hannelore: It must have always smelled yummy, right?

[00:21:30]

Miller: Yeah. Yeah, I had several good cooks and good waitresses. Some of them are
still around.

Hannelore: What was the work like? What were you specifically doing?

Miller: Well, everything, all the maintenance. Once in a while I even had to wait tables.
[00:22:00] That was kind of sad. Then I had to manage and order supplies. We had a little
souvenir shop and got it stocked up with stuff and sold some of it but didn't
make any money.

[00:22:30]

Hannelore: It sounds like you were working a lot.

Miller: Yes. Yeah, 26 hours a day. Yes.

Hannelore: What were your first impressions when you came to Poncha Springs, of the
area?

Miller: Well, it looked kind of good. It was a good corner there and everything. The
[00:23:00] season had started and people were stopping by. It looked pretty good until
August and the bottom just dropped out of the thing. I think I mentioned that
before, you had to find things to do the rest of the year.

Hannelore: What did you do for the rest of the year?

[00:23:30]

Miller: We did some building around there and built a fireplace in the dining room and
did it during those slack times in the winter. We built a log house adjacent to
[00:24:00] the lodge. It was a nice place to live but it got to where we couldn't pay the bills.

Hannelore: Did you do anything else for income?

[00:24:30]

Miller: No, I don't think so. I had a few moments I was working around there. Had some
neighbors I'd go do their chores when they went South in the winter. Things like
that that didn't amount to anything.

Hannelore: What did you think of the area besides the business? What did you think of the area and the people when you first arrived here?

[00:25:00]

Miller: At first it was okay but Poncha Springs wasn't very much of a town at that time. I was on the city council, city town council at the time. I think all of the people that were on town council at that time have passed on now. The last one was Mable. When was the last time? Anyway, just recently she passed away. That took care of all those people. Let's see, I helped Walter Cupps in his furniture factory make furniture, stuff like that.

Hannelore: Where was the furniture factory?

Miller: It was in behind the ... what's that hotel out there?

Hannelore: Jackson Hotel?

[00:26:30]

Miller: Jackson Hotel. It was behind that. Maybe I'll forget everything pretty soon and everything will be fine.

Hannelore: You're mentioning the Jackson Hotel, was it a big competition then to the Poncha Lodge?

Miller: No, not necessarily. We had a better location. We'd catch all the people coming in from the West and the North. They really weren't doing a whole lot of business at that time. Had a little fire there. I was on the fire department too because they had a fire at the Jackson Hotel.

[00:27:30]

Hannelore: What year was that?

Miller: It was maybe '59.

Hannelore: Did it do a lot of damage?

[00:28:00]

Miller: Not too much there. We had several fires. I can't remember all the names that were involved. Up around the corner there across from the substation, that place that's called the, what, what is it now?

Hannelore: How was the little gas station doing?

[00:28:30]

Miller: The gas station?

Hannelore: Yeah.

Miller: That was a disaster. Yeah, we didn't have too many come in there and of course
[00:29:00] then it didn't make money. It was called, I had a Carter station at that time which Esso finally took it over. No matter what I was doing, I had to run out and take care of them too.

Hanelore: How many people were involved in this business? You said it was your brother and some friends?

Miller: Yes.

Hanelore: How many were there involved?

[00:29:30]

Miller: There must have been half a dozen in that we had formed a little corporation and so forth. They put the money in and I spent it.

Hanelore: Since the business didn't make money, these other people must have had other sources of income or capital?

[00:30:00]

Miller: Yeah. They were doing all right. Ted Jacobs was a stockholder and of course he was doing all right down here at the building and loan stuff. Questions?

Hanelore: Well, after that ...

[00:30:30]

Miller: Keep me going.

Hanelore: That's my job. After that when this business failed then what did you do?

Miller: Moved into Salida.

Hanelore: Why Salida?

Miller: Well, we didn't have money enough to move anywhere else. We'd have been
[00:31:00] glad to go somewhere else but that was it. We moved into Salida, rented a house. Had a great deal to do with the Christian Church at that time, all the time that we lived here.

Hanelore: Yeah, specifically what?

Miller: In the church?

Hanelore: Yeah.

[00:31:30]

Miller: Almost I think I held every position in there at one time or another and finally spent 10 years as treasurer and everything. Then I went to work for Ed Lowry.

[00:32:00]

Hanelore: What kind of business was that?

Miller: Contracting. We built three or four houses in town and a lot of other work. I
[00:32:30] built cabinets for these houses, other houses in the little workshop just north of Snell Lumber Company. I think that's a pottery place now but did a lot of work in there.

Hanelore: During that time how old were your children about? Tell me the names of your children, how many children you had.

[00:33:00]

Miller: Well, yes. We had our oldest girl, Leona, married a local man and went to Denver. That was even before I worked for Ed Lowry. A couple of grandchildren from that deal. The next in line was Danny and he moved to La Junta and went
[00:35:00] to work for NibCo, a company that made all kinds of fittings out of copper. He was there for 17 years. Then would be Anita. After high school, Anita stayed at home about a year and then she went off to Phillips University at Enid, Oklahoma. Ran on to a guy there, they came back to Salida and got married. They have a little girl who's living here right now. She's in her thirties. Anita, Verla. Verla pretty much left home right after high school.

[00:35:30]

Hanelore: You had three children?

Miller: No. We had five children. That'd be Verla, and Lynna, and Mark. Mark is in Broomfield. He stayed around and worked at different things. He worked for
[00:36:00] Culligan, so forth at the time. Then he joined the Navy. That took out four years
[00:36:30] there. Lynna worked over at the hospital in the radiology. Moved to Enid, Oklahoma to St. Mary's and worked there in radiology.

Hanelore: Where were your children going to school?

Miller: Here. Aside from Leona went to Phillips. Well, Anita went to Phillips too. That's where she found her husband.

[00:37:00]

Hanelore: Phillips, is that a town? I don't know.

Miller: No, no, Phillips University.

Hanelore: Okay.

Miller: In Enid, Oklahoma. There's still a Phillips University but it is in Tulsa.

Hanelore: When your children were going to school here, which was the elementary school?

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Miller: Well, started out at the school in Poncha Springs for one year and then consolidation. Then they went to Longfellow, then High School.

[00:38:00]

Hannelore: What kind of schooling was that?

Miller: Just regular. Routine high school. They did all right in high school. Sure did better than I did.

[00:38:30]

Hannelore: After you worked for this construction company in Salida, what else did you do?

Miller: Well, I worked as a contractor myself for about three years and then worked for Mac Bevington at Monarch Crest on Monarch Pass ...

[00:39:00]

Hannelore: Tell me about that.

Miller: ... for 27 years. Ran a gondola. Helped them finish building it and then ran it, managed it and everything for that long a time. Worked in the wintertime at the ski area until it got too much to work at both places so I came into town, worked for the gas company, Shell.

[00:39:30]

Hannelore: While you were working at Monarch, you had to drive in every day, right?

Miller: Yeah, we drove up there every morning.

[00:40:00]

Hannelore: You went with several people?

Miller: Yeah, I'd pick up people on the way up or drive around town and pick them up so we'd have a crew by 8:00 in the morning up there. That meant getting up a little early.

[00:40:30]

Hannelore: How long a work day was that for you and everybody else?

Miller: Well, my work days were probably longer than everybody else. I don't remember exactly how long they worked but you couldn't work too long without paying overtime. I was a manager and I didn't fit in on that. I worked at least 60 hours every week up there. That went on for 27 years.

[00:41:00]

Hannelore: What kind of boss was Mr. Bevington?

[00:41:30]

Miller: Mac was okay, really all right. He was really all right. His brother, Elmo, did the last three years, I think, I was there Elmo bought the tramway from Mac. I

[00:42:00]

worked for Elmo during those years.

Hannelore: Tell me a little bit more about him.

[00:42:30]

Miller: He had an ego that wouldn't stop but he'd done a lot of things around here.

[00:43:00] Lived up at the lake ranch when he was here, rest of the time in Omaha. Had a brewery there. Excuse me.

Hannelore: Go ahead, you just wanted to say something?

Miller: Not sure what I was going to say.

Hannelore: Do you remember any other people that stand out that you were working with?

Miller: I do but I can't recall the names right now.

[00:43:30]

Hannelore: Besides working, did you do anything else up there? Have some fun? Did you go skiing yourself?

Miller: No. No, no, no. I picked up too many people with broken legs up there, I

[00:44:00] wouldn't go and break mine.

Hannelore: What happened to the people with the broken legs?

Miller: Well, they brought them down to the patrol office and went to the hospital if they had to and that kind of stuff. There was quite a bit of it. There probably still is, I don't know.

[00:44:30]

Hannelore: In the gondolas, what kind of people would use them?

Miller: Tourists. We had a good tourist business for a number of years until the rafting business came in and then they would check with their kids and say, "Do you

[00:45:00] always chose the rafting so our business went down. It's still running. Jim Littrell

[00:45:30] owns it and is still running it. It was also in the hands of the ski area for quite a while after Elmo left.

Hannelore: In which way is it different now, the Monarch Ski Area, from when it was when you were working there?

Miller: All the difference in the world. First went up there it was just a rope tow and a, tell me it's quit, and a Palmer lift and a, I would call it a lift, T bar. That's all that

[00:46:00] was there. I was there while we built two of the new lifts. The old lift there was
[00:46:30] always something wrong with it.

Hannelore: You were involved in the actual building?

[00:47:00]

Miller: Yes. Yes, and I went back to New York and went through a seminar there at the Heron. The Heron built the gondola. What's the name of the one that built the lifts at the ski area? Not much help, am I?

[00:47:30]

Hannelore: You are a great help.

Miller: It might come to me after a while. I'm going to let you know.

Hannelore: That's okay, you're doing great. Tell me more about the people who used the gondolas since that's what you did a lot. What was that like?

[00:48:00]

Miller: It was kind of fun because there's always somebody new coming in. There were some who lived here who'd all bring in their guests up but there were people from everywhere, all over, some from Europe and other places. Most of them ordinary tourists who came by and happened to see it there and they stopped and rode the gondola. A nice ride, could see a long ways from at the top.

[00:48:30]

Hannelore: Did everything always go smoothly?

[00:49:00]

Miller: No. No. We had problems, we had a lot of lightning problems which knocked out the power. We had an auxiliary engine we had to start up and bring the people down with the auxiliary motor. Or we went up in a Jeep on a back road up there and picked them up and brought them down.

[00:49:30]

Hannelore: Did anybody ever fall out of the gondola?

Miller: No, and it's a wonder they didn't because some people could figure out how to open that door. They'd be coming in the upper channel there with the door hanging open. Made you wonder.

Hannelore: Did anybody ever get left behind?

[00:50:00]

Miller: Yes.

Hannelore: Well, let's hear about it.

Miller: Yes. One night we closed down, the people from on top had come down the hill and we closed down. We're ready to go home when a lady came up and she said, "Have you seen my husband?" There he was sitting up the Tower Two just enjoying the scenery, never stuck his head out, said anything or done anything. Anyway, we had to start back up again and bring him down, which was lucky. I think that would have been terrible to have left somebody up there overnight.

[00:50:30]

Hannelore: Would have been a cold experience.

[00:51:00]

Miller: Yeah. Well ...

Hannelore: Talking of cold, what was it like to work there in ...

Miller: Well, it was always cold up on top, fairly cool. Then some real cold days, real cold, snow and that kind of stuff.

Hannelore: You managed to keep warm?

[00:51:30]

Miller: Yeah, had to dress warm. I remember some of the new kids that wanted to work out there and stopped by and get them and send them back in the house for more clothes because I knew they'd freeze to death up there. Well, that's just a ...

[00:52:00]

Hannelore: Did you have any encounters with bears and mountain lions up there?

Miller: No mountain lions but bears, yes. Yes, we did. They kept getting into our trash cans and knocking them over. Even though we chained them down they still got into them. They got up on the roof of the lodge, tore off some shingles. Don't know what would have happened if one of them had gotten in there. We got rid of the bears by getting rid of the trash cans. As long as there wasn't any garbage. We had a garbage truck, put everything in that garbage truck, a van, and we just used it as garbage. Of course they couldn't get in there. When they couldn't get any food, well, they kind of went away. Big, black ones, ran onto them a few coming down the hill going home at night. Didn't actually run into them but there was one time when somebody did. They ran into this bear. Because they just stepped beside the road and suddenly just dash across and if you happened to be driving by you had a close shave, just like the deer.

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[00:54:30] I had a deer hit me one time right in the side door and it's a new pickup too and had to get that fixed up. Had to be careful when you're driving.

Hannelore: For all these, did you say it was 26 years or 27 years?

Miller: Twenty seven years.

Hannelore: Yeah, you didn't have an accident in the snow there besides the deer?

[00:55:00]

Miller: No. No, I drove up there without any kind of an accident all that time.

Hannelore: Good driver.

Miller: It wasn't a good road either at times. It would be snowy and slick and visibility

poor and that kind of stuff.

[00:55:30]

Hannelore: Living in Salida, since you first came here you've lived here for quite a while, what do you feel are the changes? How is Salida different now than when it was when you first came here?

Miller:

[00:56:00]

Well, when we first came it was a railroad town. A lot of people worked for the railroad and trains going by every day all day. I liked to go down to the railroad yards and watch them and that kind of stuff. That was kind of fun. Go down there now you won't see anything. Of course they were bringing in limestone from Monarch Quarry on the train. They would then gather it all together and take it down to where, where was, it was Florence, I think, where they made sheet rock. Population was around 5,000 people and it still isn't that much within the city limits. Maybe it's gone over that by now but the area around Salida has been built up to where there's quite a few people living here now compared to when we came.

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Hannelore: Do you think the people who live here now are different from the people then, 50 years ago?

[00:58:00]

Miller:

A lot of retired people have moved to Salida. I don't think there was too much of that at that time but now there's a lot of retired people in here. They aren't much different than anybody else. Some of them go away and go South in the wintertime. There are other people who've lived here a long time who do the same thing.

[00:58:30]

Hannelore: What kind of a place is it to live Salida?

[00:59:00]

Miller:

I think it's a wonderful place to live provided you've got a retirement fund and all that kind of stuff. I think it's a little harder to make a living here than now because there's nothing going on except cattle and agriculture. There was more mining when we first came here than there is now. Several mines have been closed down. There's a big fluorspar mine above Poncha there and they went on strike so they just closed it, went somewhere else and got their fluorspar.

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[01:00:30]

Hannelore: Why don't you tell us about your clock repair?

Miller:

[01:01:00]

Well, that started out as a hobby quite a long time ago. I repair clocks. I'm not fully equipped to build parts and that kind of stuff but it's been fun to repair clocks. It's not as much fun anymore. My fingers don't work very good. Then once in a while I get a clock like Hannelore's here that just almost can't be repaired.

Hannelore: You're having fun with it, right?

Miller: Yes.

[01:01:30]

Hannelore: You are a so multi-talented and capable and I'm sure with all these questions I haven't even scratched the surface. What else can you do and did you do? Did you repair anything else or did you build anything else?

[01:02:00]

Miller: Yes. I repaired sewing machines for a while, which was kind of fun. Anything to keep my head above water, I'd do it. All the work around home has kept me busy for the last few year and I hardly can do that anymore. If I happen to get down on the floor I can't get up. I think that's fairly common for older people. I hate to say that, older people. I'm not very talkative this morning.

Hannelore: You are. You're doing great.

[01:04:00]

Miller: I can't bring any of that stuff to mind. I can't remember a lot of names, that's the thing.

Hannelore: Well, is there anything else that I should have asked you or any good stories that you want to tell?

[01:04:30]

Miller: No, and I don't have any bad ones either. There probably are. There are probably some not bad ones but there probably are some good stories that I just can't bring to mind right now.

[01:05:00]

Hannelore: Well, then maybe we're just finished, right?

Miller: Well, okay.

Hannelore: I want to thank you so very much. You've been so helpful. On behalf of the Historical Society and the Salida Library who are sponsoring this project, the Oral History Project, thank you so much.

Miller: Okay, thank you.

[01:05:30]

Hannelore: All right. We did 65 minutes so ...