

George: It was in, when did we come out here?

Mary: 1939 was when your folks came.

George: Yeah, 1939, my family ...

Mary: That's when they bought ...

George: Settled out here.

Mary: We had to call Helen to make sure we got the right date because I said '39. He said '38. I won out. That won out.

George: Well, '38 is ...

Mary: She said it was the first of the year, in January of '39.

George: When we come up here. When got dragged up here and we went with Tom and looked.

Mary: Looked at the place.

George: This place, yeah.

Gwen: All right, I'm going to start. Are you ready?

George: I guess. Okay.

[00:01:00]

Gwen: This is Gwen Perschbacher. I'm at 129 East Rainbow Blvd. The home of George and Mary Koenig. It's 11/8/2003 and I'm going to have George just tell a little about where he was born and his childhood and then when he came to Salida. Mary will interject when needed, okay?

George: Yes.

Gwen: All right. Go ahead.

George: All right, well, I was born in Blue Springs, Nebraska. We come out here to Salida
[00:02:00] in 1939. While in Blue Springs, my father was a farmer and we lived on a farm there and my mother's health was a little bad. She had a touch of tuberculosis and the doctor told her and my father that she ought to get out of that low altitude and get up to the high altitude. My brother Tom, he was working up at Climax. They were building that store up there and he was working there as an ironworker. When Dad told him what the doctor had said about getting up into the high altitude, he immediately started looking around to see what was available up here.

[00:03:00] Well, here Dad is a farmer all of his life and there was no farmland up here. Just cowboy stuff. He didn't know anything about this dirt farming. Anyway, I brought him up here and we got with Tom and we started looking at property and stuff and nothing looked encouraging to him because he couldn't see any farming going on. We run onto this place here and a fellow by Clark. He had this piece of property here and he had started to developing it. His plan for it, he [00:04:00] was going to put in a trailer park and probably some motel units at that time. Anyway, we talked to him and made a deal. Then we bought the property with the idea that we'd come up here and probably put in a trailer park and that would be the extent of it. That's what we did. We started off, we put in a small trailer park because there was ... The home wasn't even built there. Where the [00:05:00] office is now, that was the home. That was where he was living. He just had started construction on that so we finished that and moved in there in 1939. That's when we first come to Salida. It was pretty rough road. My father being a farmer, why, he knew nothing about business end of it and to get some guidance, why, he talked to a banker down here.

Gwen: Do you remember the banker's name?

George: I was trying to think. It was J. Ford White there then. J. Ford White. He was a banker that we did business with. He was at First National Bank. He was the one [00:06:00] that had talked to us about developing this. As things progressed, of course we come up here from Nebraska and we had no idea what to look for. Some of my dad's relations had a man who was a carpenter. He was down in Nebraska. He was doing carpentry work. He told my father, he says, George, he said, If you want to, he said, I'm not working now. It's getting close to winter time. He said, [00:07:00] if you want me to, I'll come up there and help you build that house and stuff. And whatever he got and he said, all I'll charge you, just your board and room.

Gwen: Oh, wow.

George: He was a bachelor so he moved in with the folks and he started to work. He worked for, oh heck, better than a year and never charged anything. He was a very good carpenter. Very good carpenter. Anyway, as we got the house livable, why, he said, you ought to consider putting some units in here. Tourist business, he said, was something that was coming along and they expected it to develop. [00:08:00] Anyway, the banker J. Ford, he was for it. Of course, Dad had to borrow the money because when he left Nebraska, there'd been some pretty tough years, I guess, and the money was not very much. Anyway, he said, no. He said the bank couldn't loan him anything because he didn't have enough security. Anyway, he run onto a man by the name of Lou Swallow and you know there's a bunch of buildings down there that's got his name on them.

[00:09:00] Lou was a wealthy man and he and his wife were wonderful people. They were living here and anyway, he caught Dad down on the street one day and he got to talking to him and Dad told him. He said, well, what we're planning to do, he said, is go ahead and fix up a little trailer park there so that we can get some revenue coming in. He said, then if we get enough money, well, we'll talk about

[00:10:00] what to do with the rest of this. Anyway, Dad told him that the bank wasn't very kind on wanting to loan any money. Lou Swallow he said, I've got a few dollars, he said, that isn't working. He said, if I can help you out, why, he said, I'll loan you the money. Mr. Swallow is the man that financed him to get started here and he and his wife, they lived here, oh heck, practically all of their lives.

Gwen: Now, was that Sue Hutchinson's parents?

Mary: Yes.

George: Yes. Sure was. Anyway, we got this project underway and we put in a few units. We put in 8 units to start with and this carpenter from Nebraska, he did the work. Of course, I was here and Russ, we were helping him. Russ was still in school and I had graduated back in a place called Minatare, Nebraska. We moved from Blue Springs to Minatare and that's where most of my childhood was spent there in Minatare and we was on the farm there. We come from there up here. Anyway, Russ and I helped this carpenter to build his motel units.

[00:11:00]

Gwen: Was that how Russ got in the carpenter business?

George: Yeah. Now, it was later on that Russ got in the carpenter business. Anyway, we got these units fixed up and I had to have something that was going to bring me in some money because by the time Dad made the payments on these units, why, he didn't have much to pay any help. Walter, another brother of mine, he had gone to California and he was living in Oakland, California and I was talking to him and he said, well, George, he said, if you're not going to go to school ... I graduated in Nebraska and of course, I couldn't go to college because I didn't have any money to pay for college expenses. Walt says, why don't you come out here? He said, we'll get you a job and he said, and you can get on your own. I went out there and I started working in a Safeway store, \$25 a week. Fortunately, I lived with he and his wife there, which didn't cost me anything.

[00:12:00]

[00:13:00]

Gwen: What year was that, George?

George: That had to be in 1940, I guess, because the war had come along, WWII, and started draft, you know. Anyway, the fellow, what the heck was his name? He had a lumber yard down here. He was on the draft board and Dad was in there and he asked dad. He said, where was I at? He wanted to know why and he said, well, he said, this draft. He's the right age. He said, we're looking for him. Dad called me and he said, they want you if you ever get back here to Colorado, to report to the draft board because they're looking for young fellas. Anyway, you might of heard this, it was 1942, I come back here. I enlisted in the Navy and I put in four and a half years in the Navy.

[00:14:00]

[00:15:00]

My plans were to go back and I was ... When I left there, I was doing ironwork and ironworker paid good wages. Running the family, I had a brother-in-law that was Bill Van Avery. They were living there in Oakland and he as a well thought of ironworker. He said that when I got out of the Navy, if I wanted to come back

[00:16:00] and go back into ironwork, why, he'd help me some. He says, I'll tell you this. He said, I won't have you on any of my jobs. He said, if something were to happen ... Ironwork is pretty risky business and he said, if something happened, why, he said, I don't want the responsibility. Anyway, to make a long story short, when I got out of the Navy, my dad, he had come up with a couple of hernias and the doctor, he was having a rough time trying to take care of the business up here. With that, he was pretty critical. So I said, well, I'll come back when I got out of the Navy. If he still needed me, why, I would stay here and help him out til he'd get an operation and get that taken care of. That's what we did.

[00:17:00]

[00:18:00] When I got back from the Navy, I put in four and half years in the Navy and I spent time up in the Aleutians. I spent 16 months up there. Cold, cold, terrible weather. I come back from there and they give me a 30-day R&R. Rest and recovery leave, that crew did. I come home, I got home and just got settled down and they called and said, you're to report back for duty. Of course, I was still in the Navy and the war was going on. They sent me then up to the South Pacific. From one extreme to the other.

Gwen: Climate-wise.

George: Anyway, I was there and when Japan finally wanted to draw peace terms, why, we were setting up from Sasebo up in the ocean. There was a crew on the ships and we were setting up there waiting for the word because we were going to move troops and equipment and everything in to Sasebo and take over, because it was getting too much. It was dragging out too long. Anyway, we were setting up there when the word come that they had signed a peace treaty. Anyway, I finished my four and half years in Sasebo. Then I come back here to come back home and I really wanted to go back to California to ironwork but my father, he kept talking you know, he couldn't run this. I finally said, well, I would stay here. So I stayed here.

[00:19:00]

[00:20:00]

[00:21:00] Itchy feet. I couldn't stand just sitting here with 8 motel units, you know, and not much else to do. We went down and talked, did some planning and we decided that we would take the trailer park, take that out because at that time, they weren't paying very much. A dollar a night is all you're getting. We went to the banker and talked to him, talked to Mr. Swallow again. He said, go ahead and develop that. We put in some more units up there and we changed ... The place is a store now for the motel. We changed that into a home and then while we were there, we changed that over to an office too. Then we put in a service station in the front there. We put in gas pumps and stuff so that we had the whole works. I stayed and Russ stayed and Russ had gone there and he had gone into the Navy also. He stayed and we both worked there and built that business up there and stayed on that. Russ, he give up the motel and service station. He wasn't too contented with that so he went to carpenter and he went to work for Abe...

[00:22:00]

Mary: Al Klarenbach 00:22:22].

George: Huh?

Mary: Al Klarenbach.

George: Yeah. He start out with Al Klarenbach and then when Al Klarenbach quit, why, Eddie Coachman took over and Russ went to work for him. He stayed and he and Ed Coachman worked together until Ed finally gave it up and then Russ worked for Butala until his health ... He got hurt up at the ski area, so his health [00:23:00] wasn't too good and so he finally had to quit working. Meanwhile, I was more or less running the operation up here and a guy from Texaco, one of the district managers, he come around. We were handling Texaco products up here and he sat down and talked with me and he says, George, you're a young fellow and you seem to be interested in oil business. He said, I've got a little proposition [00:24:00] that I'd like to talk to you about, see if you'd be interested. He told me he'd like me to take over the bulk agency, and handle the gasoline business. He said, you could continue to help at the motel as long as you don't put in full-time there. He said, we'll expect you to make the oil business your number one business. So, I switched and went to work for Texaco as a jobber. I was just running, overseeing, and delivering to brass accounts and stations. We had the one here, and ...

Gwen: Go on ahead.

[00:25:00]

George: This appealed to me. So I talked to my father and I said, Dad, I'm going to give this a shot. He said, okay, go ahead. When was that I started?

Mary: With Texaco?

George: Yeah.

Mary: 1955.

George: 1955.

Gwen: I was wondering, when did you put the station in over there? Do you know what year that was?

George: Yeah, that was in '65.

Gwen: No, I mean the station by the motel. You put it in before ... Was it '65 when that went in?

Mary: No. The one in front of the station that your folks ran. That was there before the war.

George: Yeah, but listen. The one that is there now, I had that built.

Gwen: In '65.

[00:26:00]

George: Yeah. I got going with Texaco and of course, they come out and they had this program, you know. They would loan you money at a reasonable rate of interest. I decided that I would go ahead and go into that. Well, when we got this station built up here ... Okay, this one guy that was one of the managers from Texaco, he was there, and he says, George, he said, you got to have more than that one station. He says, you've got to have more business than that, he said. It's true. I was delivering to some other stations, you know, and stuff. He says, let's go out and look for some property. So we did. Went down here and where the one is now, next to the Pizza Hut, there was a vacant lot there, so I bought half of that. The people that owned, or put that Pizza Hut up, they owned the other half. We built that and got that one built. They said, well, you need one out at Poncha. There was this location out there and we went out and dealt for that and put that station in.

[00:28:00]

Buena Vista, why a fella by the name of Bill Needham, an old timer up there, if you remember. He and his wife, they owned that one in downtown there. He was pretty sick and she wanted him to get out of that station, cause she said it was killing him. So anyway, I worked out a deal and I bought the station from them. An interesting part, side journey on this. When I told her that I would buy that station when she got ready to sell, why she says, okay, I'll remember. One afternoon, or one evening I got a phone call. Mrs. Needham was calling and she was on her way down to Denver. She said that Bill was very sick and she was sure that he was going to die. She says, I would like to get you to sign these papers saying that you would buy that station up there right away, because she didn't want to go into court and have to settle this into an estate and everything.

[00:29:00]

So, I said, well, gee. She was on the other side of ... can't think of it, the little town. Anyway, she said, I'd like for you to come down. She says, we'll keep this ambulance here, and keep Bill alive hopefully until you can get down and sign those papers. Because she said, it'll cost me a lot of money if I have to go into inheritance on this. So I got in the car and I drove down and I got down there about 10:30, 11 o'clock at night. Poor old Bill Needham, he was, he was really bad. So we signed the papers and I bought the station there. She took him on down to that hospital.

[00:30:00]

Gwen: Colorado General?

Mary: Frank Joseph?

George: No, it was Swedish hospital.

Gwen: Oh, okay.

[00:31:00]

George: Anyway, she took him down there and turned over a new sheet and here Bill got all right. The deal still went through. Then we decided that I needed a station out on the junction this side of Buena Vista. That's highway 285 and 24. This property right next to that motel, it was for sale, and so I bought that and became part of the Texaco family, which during all the transaction, we tied together, Mary and I. We got married. She become a working partner in this whole operation. She took care of all the books and stuff. Believe me there is a lot of book work with these investments and all that stuff.

[00:32:00]
Gwen: What year did you get married?

George: We got married in, what?

Mary: '47.

George: 47, yeah.

Mary: Three children. We have three children.

George: Yeah. We got married and we have three children. One boy and two girls. The boy, Patrick, he liked the oil business so when he got out of school, he went to college for better than a year. Two years, wasn't it? He come to me and he said, Dad, he said, you know, I still like that oil business. He said, you're just wasting a bunch of money sending me to college because, he said, if you'll let me, I want to go into business with you. So I said, all right. He dropped out of college and got into the oil business because we were running two gas trucks and stuff. He run one and I run the other one, or hired somebody to run it. Anyway, we stayed in the gasoline business. I was with Texaco. Yeah, the two girls, excuse me. Our two daughters are both teachers.

[00:33:00]
Gwen: Carol and ...

Mary: Brenda.

George: Jennifer.

Mary: Brenda.

George: Brenda, not Jennifer. Jennifer, the oldest daughter, her kids are all teachers. She has ...

Mary: No. Jason's a lawyer and you're talking about Brenda.

George: Yeah, Brenda. What'd I say?

Mary: You said Jennifer but Brenda is a teacher and then three of her children are teachers and then she has a boy who is a lawyer.

Gwen: Where do they live?

Mary: Colorado Springs.

George: They live in Colorado Springs. All of them, the whole family. One of them is in Washington but ...

Mary: She's moving back.

[00:35:00]

George: She's moving back to Colorado Springs. Her husband works for Walmart and he's a manager. They sent him up to Washington to take over a store out there. He's been there not quite a year.

Mary: A little over a year. About a year.

George: They called him and said, get your stuff ready. He says, you're coming back to Springs. Walmart is bringing him back to take over the big store down in Colorado Springs. He'd been there before. He went there before they transferred him to Washington. Then Carol, she's still teaching down there in the Springs. Patrick, he's still with me. He's worked ... After 43 years with Texaco, we made a deal that we'd lease the stations to Texaco. We sold the one at Poncha and we sold the one up here but we kept three of them, and we still to this day have three of them. I was with Texaco 43 years when I finally decided to lease it to them and slow down a little, just a few years ago. Meanwhile, Texaco and Shell merged together and they're in the process now of converting everything over to Shell. But of course, we still own those three stations.

[00:36:00]

[00:37:00]

Gwen: George, tell me a little bit about your community activities. I know you've been real active in the community.

George: Okay. Well, after the war, when I come back, one of the first things that happened was, of course I belonged to the American Legion. There was 32 of us Legionnaires, who were veterans. John Held, and we started a drum and bugle corp. It was really a terrific corp. It got to the point where every weekend they were having us make an engagement all over the state and our wives was about ready to kill us, all of us.

[00:38:00]

Gwen: Who all was in that bugle corp?

Mary: Rich Braswell, Eadres Glenn.

George: Oh, geez.

Mary: Barbara Kurtz was there.

George: She was the drum majorette...

Gwen: Director?

Mary: Well, yeah, and John Held, of course.

[00:39:00]

George: Let's see. Eadres Glenn and then Kedric Smith and oh, gosh. A foreign, Mexican boy. Gallegos. We really had a good act of course.

Gwen: Sounds like it.

George: We really did a lot, getting Salida known around the state of Colorado, because we were in competition and we took the championship one year for the state, which was quite a thing.

Mary: You belonged to the Elks.

[00:40:00]

George: Yeah, and then the Elks down here at Salida, why, I joined them and I've completed ... It's been a couple years ago, when I got a 50-year pin from them. But the Masons is the order that I really become very active in. Meanwhile, before this all took place, I belonged, I joined this order, but I was very active in the Chamber of Commerce. Tommy Thompson, I don't know whether you remember him.

Gwen: I remember the name.

George: Yeah. He was a veteran. Of course, he and I was good buddies and stuff. He was the Chamber of Commerce manager down there. They come to him and they was trying to get this South Arkansas Water Conservancy District formed in Pueblo. There was a banker down there and a couple of other prominent business guys. They were pushing, trying to get the government or legislature in Washington to give them a permit, you know, to put this Frying Pan Project on the table and get water set aside for the Arkansas Valley. They wanted representation from the various counties and so they stayed here. Tommy, of course, being the buddy he is, he says, come on, George. So I made a number of trips. I don't know, four, five, six, something like that, back to Washington DC. It was Tommy and I and then three guys from Pueblo that was riding herd on this project. We'd go, flew back to Washington and go in and give the legislator our pitch on this water conservancy district, which we finally got it through after, oh heck, two or three years.

[00:42:00]

Gwen: That was diverting the water from the western slope onto the eastern slope and then down Arkansas River.

George: That's correct.

Gwen: What year was that, do you remember?

George: I don't remember. That was in the early stages there. I put in four and a half years in the Navy and I got out of there in '46, wasn't it? Yeah, I got out of there in '46. It was probably in the '50's, the early '50's that this water project come along. I served on the Board of Directors down there at the Chamber of Commerce as long as Tommy was here, and Pueblo realized that he was too valuable a guy to leave him up here. They thought he could do more for Southern Colorado down in Pueblo, and so they took him away from Salida, which we regretted very much. He was very helpful. He always was as long as he was alive. I also, during the periods of time, there was an opening come on the State Highway Commission. The fellow, the man who was on there, that was an appointed job by the Governor with the approval of the state legislature, the Senate. Governor Love was the Governor at that time. Anyway, my buddies from Pueblo that I'd worked with on the conservancy district, they said, George, we've got another little job for you. They said they wanted me to go down and run for the seat which was vacant.

Mary: On the Highway Commission.

George: So I went down and with their help and everything, I was covering the entire area from Chaffee County going on down the southern part of the state, Trinidad, and then going east, then went to Durango. Of course, we were responsible for the roads all the way along. I went down and talked to the governor, Governor Love, and he was very receptive, and especially with a fellow from Pueblo that was quite a politician, Charlie Bustad. Charlie was the one that was doing the plugging down there. So I got me in there, and the term was four years. I put in four years and I said, four more. So I stayed in there and I was very happy to because we weren't getting any roadwork done in the southern part of the state here at all, to speak of. The guy from Colorado Springs, all he was interested in was Colorado Springs because that was where the big politicians were, you know, in his district. But anyway ...

Gwen: So, George, basically what being on that commission was that you recommended road projects on Highway 50 through-

George: No.

Gwen: No?

George: All of the roads.

Gwen: All of the roads.

George: Yeah.

Mary: All the state highways.

George: All the state highways.

Gwen: Oh, all the state highways.

George: There was 8 of us on the commission covering the whole state. We had to meet
[00:48:00] ... Oh, gee. Of course, we had to cover our districts. There was 8 districts.

Gwen: You had a big district then.

George: Yeah. We'd meet down in Denver at the State Highway Commissioner's building
down there. We had meetings during the week while we're traveling our area.
Then once a month, we got together down in Denver, all of the commissioners,
and ironed out our problems and stuff like that. It was a very rewarding job. It
was very interesting.

Gwen: You were there for 8 years?

George: Yes, mm-hmm (affirmative). Then I got fired because I was the wrong politics.

Gwen: Oh, I see.

[00:49:00]

George: Dick Lamb had followed Love and I come up for reappointment and so I went
down and I didn't hear nothing from Dick Love until it was time for him to make
an announcement, you know. I went down to his office in Denver there, and he
wanted to know what he could do. I said, well, Governor Love, my term is
expiring and I just wondered what your plans are, if you're going to let me
continue on the highway or if you've got other plans. He says, well, George, I
[00:50:00] understand and I realize we've all got politics and we belong to certain
branches. He says, you happen be in the wrong party. He says, you're a
Republican. He said, I'm a Democrat. Then he says, I've got to be true to my
Democrats.

Gwen: He was nice about it then, I guess.

George: Yeah. So he let me go. Then we come along the hospital down here. Of course,
there was a lot of problems down there, a lot of financial problems. No money
and the hospital was in real tough shape. John Peeples, Ted Jacobs, Dr. Hoover
and ...

Mary: Leonardi.

George: Yeah. Then, what the heck was that real estate guy that was down there with
[00:51:00] John Peeples? Anyway, we were, I was still on the board there. That was a tough
one because no money and everything was just going to pot.

Gwen: Was that when it went from Rio Grande to a local hospital?

George: Yes. Yeah, we took it over and went to work on that thing. We had fund drives

stuff and did repairing, what we could afford, as we went along.

Gwen: Do you remember what year that was that they bought the hospital? It was a group of citizens here. Some of them, you mentioned.

[00:52:00]

George: Yeah, I was in on that. We put in as much money as we could. My father, God bless his soul, he was one of the first guys to give them a check for \$1,000. He said he wanted to see that thing get to going. The people were very good on it. They come forward, quite generous, you know. We had to get that thing

[00:53:00] straightened out because they were taking our license away from us and that stuff because we weren't coming up to what the expectations were. One of the things was really alarming in the operating room, in the hospital was, I don't remember how many beds we had right now, or at that time. But, anyway, in the operating room, I went down there. I was in charge of the works in the

[00:54:00] hospital with the manager down there. He took me up there and there was a bucket sitting on a gurney with water. The roof was leaking and coming down there and I said, do you mean you're operating on patients and you've got that leak up there in the roof? He said, we haven't got the money. I'll tell you, we worked like a dog to get money enough to get that roof fixed, you know, and took it from there.

Mary: I can't think of anything else.

Gwen: How long were you on the hospital board? You were a Shriner too and I understand you were at Shriner when Laura Evans offered that business to them, Masonics, the business side, I should say.

Mary: The buildings.

Gwen: Yeah. The building.

George: What year was it when I went into the ...

Mary: You were Master of the Lodge in 19 ... I don't know.

George: 1950. No, not '50. '90.

[00:55:00]

Mary: 1990 is when you were Potentate.

George: Yeah, and Master of the Lodge. Well, let's see. I got 50-year pin 2-3 years ago.

Mary: 50 years. Oh, god.

George: Yeah, 3 years ago. Anyway, I joined the Masonic Order and that was another deal with my buddy Tommy Thompson. We were real close. Real close. He had lived in Leadville, and he joined the Masons up there. When he come down here

[00:56:00] and took over the Chamber job, first thing he did, he hit me. He says, George. He said, I want to get you in the Masons. So I signed the petition and went into the Masons. Soon as I got in there, why I started getting involved in the operation. I was one of these nervous guys that couldn't sit back on the sidelines; I had to be a part of it. I started into the Lodge line. Well, it was a bunch of officers that you had to go through and stuff like that. When I got up to [00:57:00] the top, we had election and I was voted in as the head of the Masonic Order here. I was Master of the Lodge. That morning, the next morning after I had been installed, I got a call, and here was ...

Mary: Laura Evan's daughter.

George: Yeah, Laura Evan's daughter, Sneddon. What the heck is her first name?

Mary: Lucille.

George: Lucille.

Gwen: Lucille Sneddon.

George: Yeah, she says it's Lucille Sneddon. She said, you probably don't know me but I know you. I know of you. She says, I would like to talk to you. I said, what [00:58:00] about? She said, well, I need to get with you and discuss some things with you about my mother. So anyway, I said okay. I got with Lucille, and she said my mother is very bad. First of all she said, my mother owns this hotel and a bunch of these little houses here. She says, you know, they're not very desirable. She [00:59:00] said, it gives Salida a bad name. She said, I belong to the Eastern Star and I know what Masons are and you're the kind of people we admire. She said, what I would like to do, what I want to do ... She says, my mother is in the hospital in Grand Junction and she's not expected to live very much longer. She says, I want her to will the Masons this hotel and you take that over and show them and get started cleaning up this end of town. I said, well, where do I come in? She said, I [01:00:00] want you to get an okay from whoever it is at the Masonic Order that you can receive this hotel down here for the Masons here in Salida. I said, well, I don't know. I said, I'll see.

[01:01:00] So, I went to the Board. On the Board was some real hard-nosed people on there. Dr. Hoover and oh, some very prominent people in town. He said, gee, we don't want to do that. He said, you know, we've got a name that we've got to keep for ourselves, and that wouldn't look very good, us doing that. Well, after we discussed it for a long time, they could see the merits of it. She wanted us to get down there and do what we wanted to, but clean it up and make it respectful, that end of town respectful. So I went to the Board of the Masons and they turned me down. They said no, no, no George, what are you thinking? I went back and told Lucille that they wouldn't take it. She said, well, I'll tell you this. She said, if they don't take it, they're going to get it eventually, because when my mother turns this over to me, I'm going to turn it over to the Masons whether they want it or not.

[01:02:00] Well, we had just 28 of us had joined the Shrine. We was meeting at various places, you know, a restaurant or a club and, you know, just hither skither. With that many Shriners, why, I thought, maybe we could do something with that. So we had a meeting of the Board of the Shrine and well, I said, Lucille told me that there was no indebtedness whatsoever to this property. The tax is paid and it's all free and clear she said, so that's the way it is. Anyway, we got the Board to the Shriners up here. I had to get approval from them in order to do anything on that. Then it had to go to the State Board. We got those guys together and they said, now you're sure we don't have any, that we're not inheriting a bunch of debts? I says, Mrs. Sneddon told me that it was all clear. They said, we could take that building and make it into a club, you know. It would take some work, but we could do that. The members could do that. We didn't need to hire any carpenter or contractors.

[01:03:00]

[01:04:00] So they agreed to it. We took the hotel over and the first thing we did, we got a notice that there was \$6,000 in back taxes. We didn't have any money. So what we did, we got Shriners from around here, got them together and we'd give them a promissory note that if they would contribute \$1,000 each, why, as soon as we got money rolling back, if they wanted to cash that note in, to bring it to the board, and we'd put them on the list. I think there was two people out of the bunch that come and asked for their money back. The rest of them said no. Keep it. Put it into the building. We tore all the inside out, you know and straightened it up and worked like the dickens on there. Anytime you had a little

[01:05:00] time, you'd go down there and work on that building.

Gwen: Did the Shrine get the building that's on, if you were going from F Street toward Buena Vista, is it just the building on the left-hand side of, it'd be the 100 block of Sackett?

George: It's down on Sackett, yeah. It'd be on the left-hand side.

Gwen: But nothing on the right-hand side.

George: No.

Gwen: It's all on the left-hand side.

Mary: The hotel.

George: Yes, it's the old hotel.

Gwen: Do you know what the name of that hotel was?

George: I do not. All I ever heard it called, just Laura Evans' hotel.

Gwen: Place.

George: To show you, or tell you, about this Laura Evans. She was running this house of
[01:06:00] ill-repute, you know, but there was a epidemic of flu, an outbreaking of flu here in Chaffee County in the early days. People were dying, they said, like flies from it. It was really bad. The hospital was full. The doctors had all the nurses they could get out in homes taking care of patients, you know, and stuff. She went to the chairman of the D & RG, since it still belonged to D & RG at that time. She went to them and she said ... I'll tell you. She said, I have some girls that are
[01:07:00] working for me, but she said, I've talked to them but they'll leave their job and go if they can do anything to help. The doctors took those ladies and they would assign them to these homes where there was really a desperate need for medical care all the time, and put those girls in there and never charged a penny. I guess this went along for a long time, many weeks that this flu went on. A lot of people died from it, but she sent those people down there and they stayed until the doctors released them and told them that they could handle it.

Gwen: I've heard a lot of good things about Laura, actually.

[01:08:00]

George: That was it. That was just one of the many things. They said that if somebody
[01:09:00] come into town ... The railroad was going through here you know, and there was a lot of hitchhikers coming into Salida and didn't have any money. She would, if she would see somebody like that, she would take them and feed them and if they needed a place to stay and take a bath to clean up, she'd let them do that and get them on their way. Sure she was running something we didn't approve of but she had a heart of gold. Laura Evans, she died, and Lucille, she was living over in Grand Junction, but I think she died. She was very happy, and thanked us many times for taking ...

Gwen: I bet she did.

George: Starting to clean up that end of town because those rooms and stuff down
there, those apartments, those were all rented out to people, and to decent people, and so, it straightened that end of town out.

Gwen: Is there anything else that you belong to, George?

George: Well ...

[01:10:00]

Mary: You retired in 1995.

George: I of course joined the Shrine and that's a big organization, the Shriners are.
There's two different groups of Shriners. Our group that's Al Kaly and our head temple is in Pueblo, and then Denver, El Jebel. I petitioned the Shrine, got in there. As soon as I got in there, I got put to work, in 1950. Wait, no, 1980.

[01:11:00]

Mary: 1990.

George: 1990, yeah.

Mary: 1990.

George: 1990, I was elected to head of the Shrine for ...

Mary: Al Kaly.

George: Southern Colorado, Al Kaly Temple. That was for a year. It took 7 years to get up there. Of course, I hope that you know what the Shrine is. They are an organization that is dedicated to crippled children.

Mary: And burned.

George: And burned.

Mary: Burned children.

George: We've got 9 hospitals in the United States and Mexico and they're all,
[01:12:00] everything is paid for by the Shriners and the work that we do. We don't charge our patients nothing. We won't take a credit card. We've had people, everyday they come in, they'll say, we've got credit cards and we've got this and that. We don't take nothing from them.

Gwen: I know they do a lot of really good work and I know they've done a lot for some people here in Salida.

George: Yes, and we're still doing it. We have, in our club, we have a local Shrine group,
[01:13:00] a bunch of Shriners. Of course, we have our meetings and stuff down in the hotel. We remodeled that and everything, and so we got a big meeting room there. We got a kitchen and stuff so that once a month, why we have a social down there. We have entertainers and people down for banquets and dinners and stuff. Of course we participate in the parades and all that stuff.

Gwen: Yeah, they do.

George: It's a real charitable group of people, the Shriners are. Our hospitals are all paid
[01:14:00] for by the Shrine people. They're all new. We've rebuilt them. Either put in new ones or completely remodeled everything. They're all brand new with the latest equipment. So, I served on that.

Gwen: Well, there's a couple things I wanted to ask you about, a little bit about some of the business people you might have been associated with. You talked about J. Ford White and Mr. Swallow and ...

George: Dr. Hoover.

Gwen: Dr. Hoover. I'm wondering about some of the businesses that you remember here that aren't here anymore.

George: That aren't here anymore. Hutchinsons, they were here but Swallow, Lou Swallow ...

Mary: You already talked about him.

[01:15:00]

George: He was very active. He did a lot. He had a lot of money but he did a lot of things for Salida. Oh, gosh. It'll take me a little while. I'll do some thinking on that and I'll give you a call, who some of the prominent people were.

Gwen: Mary, do you have anything you would like to interject here?

Mary: Well, we retired in January of 1998. We've been enjoying a few trips.

Gwen: You did retire then.

Mary: Mm-hmm (affirmative), finally. Then we have traveled quite a little bit and gone abroad. Then when we were in Spain a couple of years ago, George fell and hit his head. We ended up in Germany for about a month in the hospital, where he ended up with a blood clot on the brain. He overcome all of that and he's doing very well now. Now we're in a process of, we're going to sell our home here on 129 East Rainbow Blvd. in Salida and we're going to build 28 condominiums down in the pasture and we'll live in one of those. That's our big deal right now that we're working on.

[01:16:00]

Gwen: What was the address of this, where the store and the filling station and the motel, what was that address? Do you remember?

Mary: The station up there is 101 West Rainbow Blvd. and then when you come down past the motel, then that goes to East Rainbow Blvd. Our house is at 129 East Rainbow Blvd.

[01:17:00]

Gwen: This was a pretty big parcel of land when your father originally bought it.

Mary: Yeah.

George: Yeah, about 13 acres there.

Gwen: Now, a couple other things. You mentioned a Sasabo or someone in Japan that ... Or a place you were stationed in Japan the last of the war. Do you know how to spell that?

George: S-A-S-A-B-O, Sasabo.

Gwen: Okay, and then there was a Klarenbach?

Mary: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Gwen: How do you spell that?

George: K ...

Mary: L-A-R-E-N-B-A-C-H.

Gwen: B-E-C-H, okay.

Mary: Remember they had this great big house over here that burned, on F Street? He
[01:18:00] was a contractor. He built a lot of homes around and he built and owned a lot of houses here in Salida.

George: Al Klarenbach.

Gwen: Oh, it was the one that's across from what used to be the Greeley Gas.

George: Yeah.

Mary: Mm-hmm (affirmative), yeah. Across over there, that big grey house. It burned. She was real active in Eastern Star and a very smart lady.

Gwen: Well, I really thank both of you. This has been most enlightening and interesting to me.

George: Let me tell you one other thing.

Gwen: All right. Go right ahead.

George: When I got on the Highway Commission, why, of course, I had to have votes to
[01:19:00] get on there. In campaigning, the people around here that knew me, they said, now George, we're expecting to get something done up here because our road conditions were in horrible shape. Well, to make a long story short, I started in on that. Charlie Shumate was the head engineer for the state of Colorado, on the Highway Department. Charlie and I was super friends. Anyway, Charlie, he turned to me, he said, I know, George, that you've got a lot of obligations to fulfill to get the votes on this Board. Now, let's get into those and work on them as we go along. So my first proposal was Rainbow Blvd. Here it was a dirt road.

[01:20:00]

Gwen: I was going to ask you if it wasn't a dirt road.

George: Yeah, it was a dirt road. It was in terrible shape. So anyway, to make a long story short, my buddies on the Highway Commission, we had a terrific bunch of guys on there. Stuck together. If you had something that was wrong or that you needed an extra push on, why, take it up before the Board and then they would

[01:21:00] go along. Anyway, they said, well, let's put that on the agenda and we'll get that on next year's work. So we started construction on this Rainbow Blvd. Of course, moving dirt and everything, there was a lot of dirt and filth around. People, ever so many of them, instead of being happy about seeing progress and getting something nice, ever so many of them ...

Gwen: Upset about it?

George: Just raised Cain. We couldn't go into a restaurant and sit down and eat without somebody chewing us out, what a mess I was making of everything. That was one of the sides that wasn't very happy.

Gwen: Was that when they made it wider?

Mary: Yeah, when they put in 4 lanes.

George: Down through town.

Mary: Made 4 lanes.

[01:22:00]

George: It used to go down through town and pulled it out of there. Also, I've been the head of the Masonic order here in Salida and my buddies, not many of them, had it for the end. I didn't ever go through the chairs on the Elks because I was too involved with the Masons. Our boys enjoyed working on public stuff and being a part. Right now, there's one other thing. The South Arkansas Fire Protection District, Woody Bennett and I are the ones that got that formed.

Gwen: What did you say?

George: Woody Bennett.

Gwen: Woody Bennett.

[01:23:00]

George: He was the fire chief. How this come about, the City Council in Pueblo, they had a fire down there and they ... It was out of the city limits. It was across the road, out of the city limits. They went to it and while they were there, there was another fire and of course, the people living in the city, they got up in arms about that and they said there'd be no more. So the City Council here in Salida, they said, well, this is the way it's going to be here in Salida. If you're in city limits, you'll be covered with fire protection. If you're across the highway, you're out. You don't have no right and we're not going to take care of you.

[01:24:00]

My dad, he got scared with all the investments, you know, and everything. We went down before the City Council, Dad and I, and talked to them and said, isn't there something that we can do to protect ourselves? Well, we're getting something organized so that we will have some protection and not lose

[01:25:00] everything that we've got. They said, well, we will take care of you if you show us that you are making an effort, working on this to get some protection of your own. Woody Bennett, I talked to him, the Fire Chief, and I said Woody ... Our proposition was, I said, would you help me and let's see if we can get a district going here. At first, we tried to organize the rest of the county into South Arkansas, or into a fire district and to go for a vote of the people. They voted it down.

Gwen: Oh, dear.

George: So we worked like the dickens to get people out and it was a good turnout, but they was afraid of the money it was going to cost. We decided, well ...

[01:26:00] Somebody recommended. It was the Fire Chief from Englewood, who was a relation to Woody Bennett. He said, you guys are trying to take off too big a piece of that pie. He said, back up, and he said, just annex, take the outlying area of the city and figure out how many people that you think you can have with the equipment that you're going to have. Then form a district out there then as time goes by, why, you extend it. So we did that. We went around and hit everybody within a three-mile area and got them to sign this petition. Of

[01:27:00] course, a hundred percent. So the South Arkansas Fire Protection District was formed there. We was able to generate enough money from the people going into the district that we ordered a new fire truck. It come out of New York. A beautiful red fire truck. Boy, everybody was really proud and happy about it. But that's how we got started.

Gwen: What year was that?

George: That was in '63 or '65, something like that. It was way back.

Mary: He was made president of South Arkansas Fire Protection District at that time. He's been the president ever since.

George: I'm still president.

Mary: They meet at least once a month.

Gwen: Oh, my.

[01:28:00] George: The equipment we got down there, that used to be a Skelly Service Station and we bought that building and remodeled it and we've got 4 trucks, 2 new ones that we just bought in the last couple years.

Gwen: Now, what station did you say that was?

George: Right on the corner. Right next to the First Street Café.

Gwen: Oh, okay.

Mary: A long time ago, it was Skelly. A long time ago.

George: Where the City Hall is. That belongs to the city. Then one bay there, we own South Ark, bought the rest of that property there and remodeled it, spent many dollars on there to fix it up and all of our equipment is paid for and the building is in beautiful shape.
[01:29:00]

Gwen: You've had a busy life, George.

George: Enjoyed every bit of it.

Gwen: Well, thank you again. I don't want to wear you out. You may not want me to come back. Do you have anything else, Mary?

Mary: No. No, that's all.

George: People in Salida have been nice to work with. Of course, there's ups and downs but most of it was all uphill going. It was easy going. Very accommodating. We tried to make a good name for us and with Mary's help and working together, why, it was successful, thank gosh.
[01:30:00]

Gwen: Mary, who were you before you were married?

Mary: I was a Brooks.

Gwen: Have you lived here all your life?

Mary: No. I came after I graduated from business college in Paris, Texas. I came here and kept books for Stapleton Chevrolet. That's where we met. He came in and made a down payment on a new car.

George: That was when I had some money because I got out of the Navy and I had ...

Mary: Had a little money. Paid cash for that new car. Anyway, I worked there and then we went together a couple years and got married and been working every since.

Gwen: You have 3 children and how many grandchildren?

George: We have 3 children.

Gwen: Three children.

George: Two girls and a boy.

Mary: And we've got 7 grandchildren.

Gwen: Seven grandchildren.

[01:31:00]

Mary: And 3 great.

Gwen: Three great-grandchildren. Oh, okay. Well, again, I thank you. I really appreciate it.

George: I'm glad to do it.

Mary: Yeah.

George: I'm glad to do it.

Mary: Hope we didn't bore you too much.

Gwen: Oh, gosh, are you kidding? This has been wonderful.

George: I didn't intend to ...

Mary: He did get wound up.

Gwen: Well, that's what I like.

George: You know the history about the Shrine building down there now.

Gwen: Well, as I say, I really had wondered about that.

Mary: Where did you come from?

George: Laurence Campton, he and I are the oldest ...

Gwen: Oh, that's right.

Mary: George, did you throw that away?

George: What?

[01:32:00]

Mary: I put that picture of you and Laurence up on the shelf. Anyway, they are the only two original members of the Shrine still living and they just received their 50-year pins a few months ago.

Gwen: That's the A-L ...

Mary: A-L, and then capital K-A-L-Y. Al Kaly.

George: This is called the Monarch Shrine club.

Gwen: Monarch Shrine Club.

[01:33:00]

George: We just had a clinic here last month and there was 5 kids that showed up. What we do is if they've got a child that's got a disability or is sick and stuff, bring them in and we'll send them to the hospital or ...

Mary: Evaluate them here.

George: In the hospital in Salt Lake City. Unless if it's a severe burn and stuff like that, they'll either go to Galveston or San Francisco. Those expenses are all covered by us.

Mary: They pay their transportation for the child and one adult.

Gwen: That's what I was thinking.

[01:34:00]

George: There's a company. I can't tell you the name of it now. Hold on, I've got it written down. He's got a private plane and they're working the whole state of Colorado, for the Shriners. They'll fly them to wherever they've got to go.

Mary: Free of charge.

George: Fly them and bring them back. It don't cost them nothing.

Gwen: Oh, that's wonderful.

Mary: Yeah, it's a good thing. You've seen a lot of stuff in your day, being a nurse. Were you born and raised in Buena Vista?

Gwen: No. I'm from Kansas.

Mary: Oh, you're a Kansas gal.

Gwen: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Mary: Okay. I'm an Okie.

Gwen: I was thinking that you were from Oklahoma but I wasn't sure about that.