

Beth: This is Beth Smith. I'm talking today with Flora Harrison. We're at her home at 114 E 4th St. Good afternoon, Flora. How are you?

Flora: Hi, Beth. How are you?

Beth: Good. What can you tell us about Salida in the early days?

Flora: Well, I don't guess I go back as far as you think I do.

Beth: That's all right.

Flora: I came here in 1952, but I'd like to tell you about the first time I saw Salida. We were living in Denver and my husband, who liked to go turkey hunting, was going to go turkey hunting down by Pagosa Springs. We had a pair of toddlers at the time and one still in diapers. When we were coming across Trout Creek Pass, we stopped to stretch our legs and there's the diapers.

[00:01:00] We drove to the nearest town that was to our route and that was Salida. There was a freight company here, Motorways, Rio Grande Motorways, and we put the diapers on the Rio Grande Motorways and got them back up to the babysitter and went on about our turkey hunt. Got there a day late, didn't know it, didn't get a turkey. That's all right.

I don't know what other times I was "through" Salida. Everybody says they went "through" Salida. One of the times we were here, we were coming from Grand Junction to Kansas. My husband had elderly parents in Kansas and business interests, so we were always going to Hutchinson, Kansas. He was testing Grand Junction as a possible place to move from Denver, where we were living.

We got through about the top of the pass and they had a giant snow slide. We were up there for ten hours. We came down and went to the motel at the head of F Street with the welcome letters "Steam Heated Rainbow Motel". In those days, there weren't all that many motels in Salida.

[00:02:00] There was that and it was one of the major ones and the Costella one over on 291, close to the river. I don't know what other ones, but that was my introduction to where Salida was when Robert started fussing about he couldn't stand the city any longer. This was about 1950. In 1952, having purchased a place out in Adobe Park ... Do you know Adobe Park, Beth?

Beth: Yeah.

Flora: As a location? All right. We moved there on June 15th. I had brought a start of every little plant I had in my Denver yard. I nearly wore myself out. We had no idea that the soil was two inches deep on top of downeys, flood plain rocks along the Arkansas River, because we were quite up from the river. That's how we got to going in Salida. We came to church.

[00:03:00] We had always been Methodists and we came down to the Methodist church. First Sunday, we were here. Got there early because we were accustomed to have to spend so much time driving to the downtown church and finding a parking place. That was an interesting thing. That doesn't happen these days at the Methodist church, which in spite of having built a parking lot and in spite of the churches ... There's four churches right around there ... Having their parking lots, it's still difficult to park on Sunday morning.

That's one of the big differences you see in Salida. I think that when I think about the changes over the years, transportation is the number one thing. In those days, they still had a train that went into Denver and/or you could go up to Glenwood Springs and take a night and stay in a hotel and splash in the pool up there and come back by train. Quite a nice outing.

[00:04:00] I don't know what year the train discontinued, but when I was a PTA president, which I believe was 1958, they sent me to Denver on the train, I remember. It was just the thing you did and it was handy. One time, there was rumors the train was going to be quitting. At that time, I was working with Bluebirds. The other mothers and I got together and the children were put on the train with the mothers and went up to Buena Vista and came back by bus. Now there's no bus like that.

[00:05:00] In those days, you could ride the train as I've said to Denver or north where you either went on to the west or back over to Denver. You could ride a bus that came up from the Alamosa area and went through South Park to Denver. It was really quite a scenic way and a easy way. It was when Continental Buses had the slogan "Let us do the driving." If you happened to get up there in a ground blizzard and you were sitting in the bus above the blizzard, you would say, "Oh, they're doing the driving for me." It was very nice.

There was also bus service between Grand Junction and Pueblo then. Now if we want a bus, once a day we can go to Pueblo or once a day we can come back from Pueblo and same for Grand Junction. Buses connect Grand Junction to Pueblo. In those days, there was a taxi. I think for many of us in this elderly age group, I'm eighty-three ... Not having a taxi available is one of the worst things.

We have a rather formal arrangement with the Chaffee County Transportation, but you have to have it in advance and you have to go to certain places. You can't just say, "Hey, I'm over at Safeway and need a ride home." You can't do it that way anymore. I would say the changes that's happened in this town, this area in fifty years, are largely the services as far as transportation goes.

[00:06:00] One of the other things you would think in just driving around town is, and you had slept through fifty years, is "What happened to all of the vacant lots?" When we came here, we looked around and there were a couple three new houses up on the mesa, a couple three in town. By and large, it looked like it was the town that just had slept from 1900 on.

By now, it has grown far beyond its seams. We've always found the people friendly here. My husband came home in July. We moved here in June. He came home from town in July and he said, "More people spoke to me on the street this morning than I even know in Denver." We found it delightful to be here.

Beth: Tell me what your husband did.

Flora: My husband came down here expecting to be a consulting gas engineer. He called on all of the utilities. Not many of them realized that he really could do them some help. The man who was down at the county clerk's office named Joe McDonough said to him, "Bob, why don't you get a transit? I'm the only surveyor around here and I'm working full-time. You'll find that you can pay for it within the year."

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He looked around and found a used transit for nine hundred dollars and he said, "Wow, it's been a long time since Joe has bought a transit." It did pay for itself. We built up quite a large survey business over the years. He also did what he intended to do: gas engineering. His boss from up at Denver ... He had been in the gas test labs for Public Service in Denver.

[00:08:00]

His boss from up there called him up one day and he says, "Hey, Bob. They've had an explosion and fire down at Alamosa. The insurance company wants me to come down and I told them I could send you. You're a lot closer." He went down there and got himself very dirty exploring the thing, crawling under the floor and finding that they had left some paint solvents down there, which had taken off. It was not the gas company's fault. He also did a good presentation in court and from then on, he was in high demand for explosion and gas of all types, investigations. He had a multiple state area he served.

Beth: What was your job? What did you do?

Flora: I'm a graduate nurse. I was put down on the mortgage sheet as an asset because I could work over at the hospital part-time. I have always worked weekends so that the children could be babysat by dad. I used to work over there and because I'm from a prestigious sounding school, not because I had the experience you needed in a small hospital, I was appointed an assistant to the superintendent of nurses for awhile, director of nurses ...

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The real director of nurses was Miss Vogelsburg. I used to say, "I'm Vog for the day" when I filled in for her. Matilda Vogelsburg ... Working two times a week, sometimes it's a little overpowering to see a lot of blood and sadness. It was kind of getting to me. My husband said, "Why don't you come to work for me?" I went to work for him and I said, "At least you may not get any pay, but you got a nice boss."

I went to work in the survey office and after many years, I took the surveyor's exams ... Being the first woman in Colorado to take the surveyor's exams, I hold the distinction of being the first woman surveyor in the state. I immediately

retired and went into a refresher class for nursing and I worked around nursing homes since for quite a few years.

[00:10:00] One of the things that I have missed in these more late years are the marching bands from the schools that used to take part and then there used to be a band concert in the little alpine park. The band concert stage is gone from there now, but over by the river where there used to be just nothing but grass and trees, there's quite a nice playground area now, a fence for the toddlers.

[00:11:00] There's a newly refurbished band shell and seating, but all of us have been delighted to have the rockscaping made into an amphitheater-type seating along the river. Over the years, we've seen the FIBArk celebration change a little bit ... It used to be very much more international. The Rotary Club and other groups would sponsor somebody from Germany or some place to come here ... Long enough for the races.

All of the business were expected to pitch in and help. Our office girls went down and helped score the slalom races. I learned a little about how the slalom races are scored that summer. I was noticing in the fifty year ago, I think it was ... Yeah, fifty year ago paper the other day that they're needing entries for the FIBArk parade. They already had twenty signed up. Those people were making floats.

[00:12:00] Now we don't have people make floats as much as they used to. The telephone girls used to get together someplace. Everybody had to have a shelter in case it rained to stuff paper napkins and wire to make all of these floats. It was really quite interesting to see a parade in those days ... Beth, I think that's all I know.

Beth: That's all you know.

Flora: Got some questions?

Beth: Yes. I was wondering where you came from. You moved here about the 1950s?

Flora: I moved here in 1952. We moved here from Denver. We came here from Denver because the traffic was getting so bad in Denver. People that live in Denver longer than that will laugh quite loudly.

Beth: Look what it is up there now.

[00:13:00] Flora: We moved to Denver for a reason. That was that Robert was in the University of Kansas School of Electrical Engineering at the time the war broke out and his orders were to stay with that. When he graduated, then he went in through OCS and then he went to New Jersey to be at the Signal Corps headquarters for training. In those days, every electrical engineer graduated, "every", and went to work at Schenectady, New York for General Electric.

We were living there in New Jersey and were just agog at how crowded things

were and how many signs you saw along the road and what New York was like and everything. After he'd been in Germany and his time was time to come and settle down with his wife and one child, we said, "What is it? Are we working to live or living to work? If you want to live to work, we could be in Schenectady. If you just want to get some money so you can live, go where you want to."

[00:14:00] He'd always wanted to be in Colorado because his folks used to come out for the summers to Beulah, Colorado. He was able to find a job with Public Service just right after the war and that brought us to Denver. One time we went camping and I guess we had nine days off. I had dirty fingernails for eight days and we were going back. He was saying, "Oh, dear. I have to go back to that traffic, that town."

I said, "Well, we can do one step further. We can go someplace and you can dig ditches. You don't have to be an engineer." He started being very serious about looking at maps of Colorado and he came up with Salida and took his little drawing compass and said, "Look here at how many places there are to fish in fifty miles." He came down here and got so busy he could hardly fish.

Beth: Do you fish, too?

Flora: No. I was always ... Had to have a license. He was very careful about that because I helped the children and he didn't want to have to pay any fines for my not having a license if I had a worm in one hand.

Beth: Well, tell me about your family.

[00:15:00]

Flora: My family? My direct descendants are two children, the one who was in diapers at the time we had to send the diapers back by Rio Grande and the one that was born in New Jersey during the war. The older one is a boy and he went to law school up at Denver ...

Beth: What's his name?

Flora: David Harrison. David went through law school and his specialty is water. I don't know exactly why. He early on discovered the nature conservancy, but that's his main thing ... Both as recreation ... He supports them as a volunteer, but he also is hired by them. He thinks he has perhaps one of the best of lives. He gets expense paid trips to Brazil to study dams and has this year gone to China for the same reason once. He has a wife and they have four children between them ... His, hers, and theirs kind.

[00:16:00]

My daughter is a local person and married a local boy. She married into the Post family, which is an old time family here. Tenny Post. She became a medical technologist. I used to say, "What do you want to be?" She'd say, "I don't know, but I'm not going to be a nurse and I'm not going to be a teacher." She did candy stripe.

[00:17:00] Candy stripe is volunteers for school age children in ... Hospital and nursing settings. I don't even know if they have the organization anymore. They had little red and white striped dresses and they'd go and talk to people. She enjoyed that, but one day she came home and she said, "My old friend died." Some lady she'd been talking to every week, so that didn't encourage her any more to go into nursing, either. They have two local children and two local grandchildren.

Beth: Great. What did Tenny do? What's she doing at the hospital now?

Flora: Tenny was a laboratory technologist. As of the end of last calendar year, she and her husband, Leonard Post, who was working as an investigator out of the DA's office, retired in their upper fifties and have a pickup camper, a boat, and plans to knock around for three years at the least. If they want to, "they'll get part-time jobs".

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Beth: Good. What about organizations here in Salida? What have you joined beside the Methodist church?

Flora: Well, I've worked with children ... At one time, I was simultaneously a Sunday school teacher, a 4-H leader, a Campfire leader ... I think that's all, but I have worked with children ... Well, and a grandmother. I, at one time was a camp nurse up in Maine, which I enjoyed. One of my last things ... I've not lived in Salida continuously because I had the good fortune to travel around a bit and live maybe two weeks, maybe two years in other locations. I call it my ten towns in ten years, but it took eleven.

Beth: I think you've been doing a lot of traveling now, haven't you? You're still going.

[00:19:00]

Flora: I'm still fortunate in being able to go. I have macular degeneration, which means that I cannot see too well. I am also the oldest of eight children and my sisters, one being thirteen years younger and one twenty three years younger, I have to call them and say, "I need a seeing eye sister." I also have a brother that'll do this, a couple of them. I have somebody to get me there without getting lost.

Beth: Good. Taking care of you.

Flora: Yep.

Beth: You're still getting a chance to travel.

Flora: Right. Thanks to other people. Yes. I find that people are real friendly and helpful and I think maybe Salida even more so than other places.

Beth: I'm sure.

Flora: It's a great place.

Beth: Always good to come home to Salida, isn't it?

Flora: [00:20:00] Right. One time when I had been my favorite town practically of my ten, Savannah, Georgia ... When I'd take the trash out after dark, my friend would stand on the balcony to be sure I made it to the trash barrel and back. When I came back here and was living over on West 1st, there's a rather small alleyway that I had to go to get back to where my garbage was, I'd be going through there and I'd say, "Isn't that neat to be back in Salida? I don't even have to worry about going back to the garbage after dark."

Beth: Good.

Flora: Any other questions, Beth?

Beth: Well, have you got anything else you want to tell me?

Flora: I don't know if you can read that. I just wrote it rather rapidly.

Beth: Well, I think you've done a great job for me, Flora.

Flora: Okay. Thank you.

Beth: Anything else you want to say?

Flora: I hope that you can get out and get some of those people who were born here. There are some in this town.

Beth: Yes.

Flora: I ate ... With one today at the senior citizen ... I know there are some.

[00:21:00]

Beth: I know there are, too. Well, thank you very much. We'll talk to you later.

Flora: Hopefully off the tape.