

Beth: This is Beth Smith, I'm going to interview Stan Provenza this morning. We're at his home on 1110 D Street in Salida. How are you doing Stan?

Stan: Fine.

Beth: Can you tell us about your family and your life here in Salida?

Stan: Well I was born and raised in Salida on January 7th, 1918. My father's name was Fredrick Provenza, my mother's name is Mary Irene Naples-Provenza, she was born in Lake City. My dad was born in Cleto, Italy. My dad died when I was 10 years old, my sister was four years old, left mother widowed. She seemed to do an excellent job of raising both of us.

Beth: Let's go back to your father. What was his name in Italy, his family name?

Stan: Provenzano.

Beth: Provenzano.

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Stan: It changed to Provenza.

Beth: Good.

Stan: Yeah, and I think he did it for business reasons, he was a tailor, an accomplished tailor. He made a lot of clothes for different people. The railroaders were strong here at that time and he used to make blue serge suits for the conductors and the brakemen, of course. Of course, the firemen and engineers wore coveralls so he wasn't involved in that.

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Then my mother was just a housewife 'til he died, and then she started working. She worked at various places in Salida. She worked at Gilbert's dress shop at one time, and then she worked at the bakery when it was under Mr. Chillas down there. Then my dad had the tailor shop until I was 10 years old. Also, mother did work at Alexander Drug Store for a number of years with Jack Long and Katherine Long. She was able to keep groceries on the table.

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When I first got out of high school, which was in 1936, I went to work in '37 for Ben's Grocery, which Noble recommended to his dad that I go to work for him because he was going to college, he went to DU in Denver. I was there for three years until I went to college down at Colorado College.

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Beth: What was the name of that grocery again?

Stan: Ben's Grocery. Then after about three years there a friend of mine, George Cribari talked me into going back to school and I went to Colorado College where he was. Ironically, when I first graduated from high school I went to

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Regis College in Denver and I was able to spend one day there and I ended up with typhoid pneumonia and had to come home, and was in the hospital for about 30 days. Dr. Fuller was my doctor at that time. Why I lived I have no idea, but I'm still here.

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Beth: Good for you. You went back to Colorado College?

Stan: Yes, my friend George Cribari talked me into going. I think he was a sophomore or junior at that time. He got me started down there. I went for one year and then I went down to Pueblo to attend business college, thinking that I could get back and get a little job on the side rather than working for just my meals with no money involved. In the meantime I went to see the war head, it hadn't started, but they were starting the draft and I decided, at that time, to enlist which was in October of '40. They decided that time that I wasn't tall enough to enter the service.

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Beth: Weren't you lucky?

Stan: Yeah. I went back in February and he said, "I think I'll let you in," February of 1941, 15th of the month. Then I went down, got my basic training, and at Kelly Field, which is out of San Antonio, that was the original Air Corp base at that time, they hadn't changed the name to the Air Force. I was in the Air Corp for all the time that I was in service. I was in just two months shy of five years and spent most of my time in the Mojave Desert. We had what we call a basic training field and I worked in the Air Corp Technical Command, which was we kept track of all the flights and the maintenance on the aircraft. Outside being in the hot weather I had pretty good duty. I never did get overseas. I enjoyed it after I was in a while. I met some real great people at that time, and they were people that had been educated in college, a lot of them, and some of them were mechanics, real accomplished mechanics for the aircraft, we had to keep them flying.

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Beth: You were in the service, then, about five years?

Stan: Almost five years, two months shy of five years.

Beth: Then you came back to Salida?

Stan: No, I came back to Salida and then Noble Binns, my best friend and his wife, myself, went down to old Mexico after being discharged and spent 28 days down there touring the country, having a wonderful time seeing all the various sights in old Mexico. It was quite an education, really, to have gone to all the various places in old Mexico. Mexico City was very colorful, a lot of flowers. There were people selling flowers on the streets all the time and they said it was an insult to buy flowers for the Mexican people down there because they were so cheap, but we thought it was a thrill to get Vanna a bouquet of flowers about every day.

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[00:07:30] Mexico City, we went through the Xochimilco Gardens which was really colorful. We were on a little canoe type thing with a built enclosure, and ours was the Santa Maria. As we were traveling along the people that played the guitars and various instruments would come along, and give them a dollar or so and they'd play music for you.

Beth: Sounds like fun.

Stan: We did fly to Acapulco from Mexico City. Went to see Taos where they make all the silver ornaments and face masks and everything like that. That was quite an education, went to Guadalajara, Monterey.

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Beth: Good. You had to go back to work sooner or later.

Stan: Yeah. When I came back I went back to college, Colorado College, and finished up, started in ... Got back in ... It was '46, and then I kept going to school around the clock, I didn't take breaks in the summer. I had the GI bill at that time, which is a break, and finished up in '49. After that I went to work for Metropolitan.

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Beth: Metropolitan?

Stan: The life insurance company.

Beth: In Colorado Springs?

Stan: In Colorado Springs. I left them after about two years and went to work at Ent Air Force Base. With my background I was able to get there.

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Beth: Colorado Springs?

Stan: Yeah. In the meantime Bob Ferraro, which is Jane's husband ...

Beth: Now Jane was your sister, I don't think we introduced her yet.

Stan: Yeah, Jane was my sister. He says, "I've talked to Chuck Furphy who runs the Coke plant and he said that they need someone to come up and be office manager and take care of their books." He says, "Would you consider it?" I came up one weekend and talked with Mrs. Egan who is the owner of the plant, and Charles Furphy was the manager. It was her son-in-law, really, because he was married to Evelyn, her daughter, which is Evelyn Egan. Then I thought it would be a good deal. Jean was reluctant at first, but after she got here she really got to be acquainted and did a lot of things in Salida.

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Beth: When were you two married?

Stan: When were we married? We were married in ... Let's see, June the 5th, 1948.

[00:10:30] Yeah, June 5th, 1948 I think. We were down there for about a year before we moved up here. We moved back up here in 1951. I worked at the Coke plant for almost eight years, then I went to work for Martin Company down in Colorado Springs after they sold the plant. Did I say Colorado Springs? I should correct that, it was in Denver. Martin Company was Martin Marietta at the time. It's Lockheed Martin now, I think.

[00:11:30] After that I had an opportunity after the first of the year, it was ironic that Paula was born December the 28th in 1960. I was not here to witness the birth so Jean never forgave me for that. I says, "Well, President Kennedy was gone when their baby was born," so I says I think that was a good excuse.

[00:12:00] Anyway, Mr. Pierce who had retired from the Department of Revenue knew me from my paying tax for the Coca-Cola plant many times. He had retired from the Department of Revenue and decided that he wanted to work for a while to get his social security. Then he put in enough quarters for social security and he asked me if I would want to take over his accounts.

[00:12:30] I considered it and he worked with me for two years, and then I was able to go ahead and take over the business and then I went for business myself. I had some accounts on the side, bookkeeping accounts, so I was able to maintain the family through the years. After one year I was able to take over the St. Joseph Credit Union.

Beth: That was what year?

Stan: In 1961. It was just shortly after I had moved here, and Charles Turano was haphazardly trying to run it with his Bandbox Cleaning. He said, "Would you want to take that over?" I took it over when it was just barely started. I think they started it in May of the prior year and I took it over in January that ... Or March, I should say, March of 1961.

Beth: How long did you have it?

Stan: I had it from 1961 to 1992.

Beth: That's a while. You're still there.

Stan: Yeah, I'm still there.

Beth: What are you doing now?

[00:13:30]

Stan: I'm on the board. I'm the treasurer of the board at this point but I'm about at the end of my rope, I think.

Beth: I saw your picture in the paper a couple weeks ago. Something about an award.

Stan: Yeah, that was quite a thrill and it was really impromptu and I didn't know it was going to happen.

Beth: Who was giving you the award?

Stan: The credit union league office presented awards to several people that evening. It's the league office in Denver which presented all these awards.
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Beth: Congratulations.

Stan: Thank you, it was real nice. It was ironic, too, one of the ladies from our chapter here in the valley got an award. She'd been with the credit union for ... I think she said about 30 years.

Beth: Who was that?

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Stan: I believe her name was Donna Martinez, I think. I'm not real certain but I think that was her name. It was a thrill for her, too.

Beth: That's great. You brought your family back to Salida and started working on your own.

Stan: Business for myself. I should go back, too, a ways. I went through high school here, ended high school in '32 and graduated in '36. At that time we, fortunately, had a coach that had graduated from Northwestern and he was a product of Idaho, born in Idaho and-
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Beth: Who was that?

Stan: Coach White, Harold White, Coach Harold A. White. He, ironically, is up at the same college that Fred is teaching now.

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Beth: Where is that?

Stan: At Romney Field, up there in Romney. The coach that was coaching was named Romney at that time, and that's where Coach White got some of the experience in coaching.

Beth: That's at Utah State?

Stan: Yeah, at Utah State University. Then he came back ... He had coached before then he came to Salida in 1931, I think. In '32 he had already won the South Central League, and '33, '34, and '35 he won the state championship for three
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years in a row.

Beth: How did you happen?

Stan: I was on the team, I played halfback at the time and then played quarterback. I was rather small, but he tried to talk me out of it, but I wanted to play so he said, "If you want to play go ahead and play."

Beth: Well you must have been a good player if you got that far in the state.

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Stan: Anyway, we had won the state three times and we were playing everybody at that time, there was no classification, there was only a B and an A and we were in the A. Ours was the South Central League, played Colorado Springs, Canon City, and two Pueblo teams, Central and Centennial, and we played Trinidad. In the finals we played such teams as Wray, Colorado, Loveland, and Grand Junction. They were all big time teams.

[00:17:00] I remember beating Denver the year we would've had, the last year that I was in high school we beat them 25, nothing. We had scored 254 points to our opponent's 25 that year.

Beth: Wow.

Stan: It was quite a thrill to be on that kind of a team.

Beth: Yeah. How did you get to all these games?

Stan: Well, fortunately, some of it by car, and the railroad was really good to us at that time, they'd spin specials and the whole town would get on the train and go on the special train to these various places. Pueblo a few times, Canon. A lot of the personnel, the wives would drive us to some of the games.

Beth: Just like they do now.

Stan: Right. With Grand Junction, of course, we had to take the train there, and Denver we had to take the train. That was real funny, after that last season Coach White ... Of course I think they travel more on that today. We'd traveled 2,500 miles that year and after the season was over he says, "You people are nothing but a bunch of tourists."

Beth: Well, you saw the state, didn't you?

Stan: Sure did.

Beth: Who was superintendent of schools?

[00:18:30]

Stan: Superintendent of schools, at that time, is Hightower. He had an affliction and he was kind of crippled, but he was a superintendent all through high school. L.A. Barrett was our principal at that time. After we graduated a year or so I think Hightower retired and Barrett become the superintendent of schools.

Beth: What did you do in high school besides play football?

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Stan: I took college prep courses. I took all the courses I needed to be able to go to college. Out of my family I was the only one that had graduated. All the rest of my people hadn't been able to graduate.

Beth: From high school?

Stan: From high school, they went to grades most times. They were very adept. My mother was real sharp. She only went to the fourth grade but I think she knew a lot more than I did after I got out of college.

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Beth: That's great.

Stan: Yeah, she's very ... She'd read the Denver Post, I remember, from cover to cover, almost, all the time.

Beth: What grade school did you go to?

Stan: I went to St. Joseph's Catholic School for eight years and I think they started the school in 1921 and I entered in 1924, which was about the third class that had gone through St. Joseph's. I went through all eight grades there and then went into high school in the ninth grade, my freshman year.

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Beth: About how many kids did they have at St. Joseph's School?

Stan: At that time the school, you know where the Grange Building is? That was a Catholic school at that time.

Beth: Oh, I see.

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Stan: We had eight grades, they had two grades in each room, four rooms. I remember Sister Mary, at that time, was our principal. They gave us a lot of basic background to be able to handle high school.

Beth: You bet. About when did they build the school down there by the Catholic church?

Stan: I think that was built in 1952, I think. I'm not real certain on that but they had to drive ... Father Gallagher was here at the time and he got us started, and

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then the Grange had picked up the building and transported it up on the Mesa where it is right now.

Beth: Oh, I see.

Stan: Then the school used to sit on where the parking area is now at the Catholic church there. The Catholic church was built around 1910, the new church.
[00:21:30] Because they used to have church in the old school. The school building was our Catholic church at one time.

[00:22:00] Father Gallagher got the idea that we better have a new school which, at that time, we were full. Father Gallagher, before him Father Gillick was the pastor and they used to have to turn children away. We had about 180 children there, and that was about the capacity. Then we used to have to turn children away. Then it got to the point where they couldn't afford it, really. That's why they discontinued it, the tuition would've been exorbitant, there wasn't a lot of people be able to handle it.

Beth: Yeah, that's right.

Stan: Jane and myself both went through Catholic school here, and then she
[00:22:30] graduated in 1942. Let's see, '42 I think. She was six years difference between me and herself, so that would've been right, from '36 to '42. Yeah.

Beth: Well you were not here during the war, you don't know what Salida acted like during that time.

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Stan: Yes, I came home on a few furloughs. Mother said they got by pretty well on the food stamps, and they had the ration. She was able to get by real well with ... She had family living with her, my grandmother and my uncles and aunts lived with us, so that was a break for my mother. Ernest, my one uncle,
[00:23:30] became a tailor and then he moved to Colorado Springs while we were still down there. Uncle George, my uncle, was a railroader. He was a brakeman on the railroad. Of course mother worked at various places, then she sold Avon
[00:24:00] for a while. My grandmother, ironically, she said, "I want to live to see someone in my family graduate from high school." I graduated in '36, May 25th, and she died in August of '36.

Beth: She got her wish anyway, didn't she?

Stan: Yeah.

Beth: Good.

Stan: Quite a lady, and she was a tiny lady. Her husband died when he was real
[00:24:30] young, 42. He had miner's lung disease. I think he was 42 when he died. Pete was his name.

Beth: What was he mining?

Stan: He was mining in Lake City, I think that was a combination of ores, gold, and silver, that sort of thing, copper and zinc. Then they moved to Salida and he died when mother was 10 years old, and my grandmother was left with all five children. It was quite a chore for her, too.

Beth: Yes, at that time. Right.

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Stan: That's why the children had to drop out of school, they just couldn't afford to go. Mother worked at Lewis' candy kitchen for several years when she was a young lady. Learned how to make all kinds of candy, she was a real good candy baker, I remember. Fudge and divinity and all the various kinds. That is kind of the background of the family.

[00:25:30] Then Teresa married a railroader who worked on the ... Ethel married Nick Kesserich, Millan Kesserich's sibling in that family. Millan and John, I don't know if you remember John or not.

Beth: I don't remember John but ...

Stan: He's in Bozeman. He was at the dinner.

Beth: Oh, he was?

Stan: Yeah. He was sitting at the very far end of the table.

[00:26:00]

Beth: Is there anything, especially, about the town organization? You told us about the church. Any other organizations you were in?

Stan: I should go back a ways. I do remember the time the town was real thriving all through the war and even though there was a depression it seemed like they seemed to get along. What happened is the engineers came in here and they built the highway over Monarch, and they improved the highway from Canon City to here. I was here working at the grocery store for a while while all those engineers were here, which was a plus for the are.

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[00:27:00] The CC clamps and WPA were all instrumental in boosting the town too. They built the swimming pool and the golf club, the WPA did. They had an awful lot of clothing stores in Salida when I was growing up, and even during the time that I was gone. They had Murdock's and Doveton's and Crews-Beggs and McDonald's, that was a clothing store at that time, where the old public service building used to be, where there's an antique place there now.

[00:27:30] The town complemented the railroad and the mines around here. There was

a lot of farming, too, at the time here in Salida. I remember when I was working at Ben's Grocery a lot of the farmers would come in with their different vegetables and things they had grown and trade it off on groceries, I think, lots of times.

[00:28:00] There was a lot of farming around here. We had lettuce sheds at one time and we grew an awful lot of lettuce here in Buena Vista. They used to crate all the lettuce in crates and put them on freight cars and ship them out of here. The lettuce sheds were about where the trail is now off of ... Behind Safeway there.

Beth: So they could load them up on the train.

Stan: Yeah. That's correct.

Beth: How'd they keep them cool?

[00:28:30] Stan: They iced them with ice. We had an icehouse here in Salida and we sold an awful lot of ice to various places here in Salida. The icehouse was out there on highway 50, almost where High Country Bank is now, I think. Salida was, even though it was depression, it seemed like we were able to survive pretty well.

Beth: Was there every a Ku Klux Klan in Salida?

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Stan: There was a Ku Klux Klan, sure enough. They were real strong. I remember as a small boy they would parade up and down the street in their clothes, whatever they wore, with the masks on. They would go up Tenderfoot and they would burn the cross quite often. In fact, I remember sitting on the porch with my neighbor next door, George Smith, and we'd be sitting there and say, "Well, they're burning the cross now." It was right about where the S is. They were pretty strong here at one time. There was a conflict at one time with the Knights of Columbus and them, I think the Knights had some pretty tough guys and I think that simmered them down a little bit.

Beth: Oh, that's interesting.

Stan: Yeah.

Beth: What was their main ideal? What were they trying to get across?

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Stan: They were against the colored people, and the Catholics, and the Italians, and the Slovaks, and anybody that was against them, I think. Irish also. The town was divided at that time. We had the west side, which was the west side of F Street and the east side which was the east side of Salida. I remember as a young boy that they had two baseball teams, the east side and the west side.

They would play each other.

[00:30:30] I was exposed to a lot of things. They used to have the House of David which were the bearded baseball players, would travel the country and they'd come to Salida and play the team. We called them the White Elephants which was a colored team, of course they didn't make the big leagues, of course they wouldn't let colored people in at that time, you know how that was. They used to put on a show for us, they really, really did.

[00:31:00] Babe Zaharis Dickerson came through here with the White Elephants and she played right field, I'll never forget. She played golf, she's quite a golf player. She looked more like a man and she played like a man too. She was a real good ball player. Actually, the White Elephants, I'll never forget, played the local team one night, we were out there. The White Elephants, they were playing the Salida team and they called everybody in. Just the pitcher and catcher were there and he struck out everybody.

Beth: Who was that pitcher, you know?

Stan: I don't remember who the pitcher was, but I know he was a colored man. He was really something.

Beth: Did you play baseball as well as football?

[00:32:00] Stan: Yeah, we didn't play baseball at the time we played softball, which was fast pitch. I played that, then at Colorado College I played for the fraternity down there which is the Cappa Sig, and we won the championship down there that year. Ironically, I was playing against one of my old team mates, was Al Ritchie. He was pitching against us and I knew his weakness and after a while I bunted him several times and he said, "Gosh darn you Provenza."

Beth: You knew him too well.

Stan: Yeah, I knew him too well. Good guy, though. We had a lot of fun. He was with the Independence and I happened to join a fraternity which was great at that time because I got my meals for \$30 a month at that time.

Beth: Wow.

[00:33:00] Stan: We had our dinner and our lunch meal. We didn't have breakfast, but dinner we had to dress formal all the time. We had a German lady who was named Cookie, we called her Cookie, Haynes is her last name. Mother Howe was our house mother.

Beth: You lived at the frat house?

Stan: No, I didn't live in the frat house. I'd opt out of that, I didn't want to get

[00:33:30] involved with fraternities that way. Going back to ... I should've... it's a little bit late. I was president of my senior class at high school here. Had offices, treasurer one year, secretary another year in the lower grades. I was an officer, not paid though.

Beth: Of course they're not paid. There's been reunions almost every year and
[00:34:00] you've been at the head of that most of the time.

Stan: We had our class of '36, in 1965 we started our reunions and we had them every five years up until 2000. Every five years we would have a reunion and pretty much all the class would come. Of course, as we got older and people started passing away, that put the hiatus to it. We don't know if we'll have it
[00:34:30] this year. I doubt it because I think there's only half a dozen of us left or so, some of them are not capable of being able to travel either. Goes by the wayside, but it was a thrill to see all those people.

Beth: Yeah. You learn a lot about them.

Stan: Our class was a talented class. We had four doctors come out of it, Dr.
[00:35:00] Larimer, which is a doctor here, his son became a doctor, went to Northwestern. Ed Brisnehan became a veterinarian. Leo Snyder became a dentist. Homer Towne became an ophthalmologist, the eye doctor.

Beth: These were all in your class?

Stan: Uh-huh (affirmative). There was only 57 in our class when we graduated.
[00:35:30] Started with around 100 and some but depression years just took people out of here. We had a small class but they were very close.

Beth: They kept close after they got out of school.

Stan: Yeah, we sure did. They were so close knit I just couldn't wait to get back to a reunion here every five years.

Beth: Oh, good. Do you remember anything about the flu epidemic back in ...

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Stan: No, I was born at that time, and mother ... Fortunately another family came down with the flu, but she knew a lot of people that passed away with the flu in 1918. It was pretty prominent here, in fact there was a lot of quarantine at that time. Mother remembers a lot of the people that had died from it. It was all over the country, wasn't it? I think it-

[00:36:30]

Beth: You bet it was, mm-hmm (affirmative).

Stan: It seems like Salida has changed its appearance in the last 10 years, or 12. I don't know. We don't have the stores and the places we used to have,

[00:37:00] individual owners of various little stores, grocery stores and whatnot. Safeway and Walmart has taken over the show I think.

Beth: Right? Or else run down to Colorado Springs and buy a dress or whatever you need.

Stan: That's right, yeah, we can't buy any men's clothes here at all to speak of, which is kind of sad for us. I wished we could get something in here but ...

Beth: All in the name of progress.

Stan: Yeah. I think we have all of the arts here anymore. We've gotten to be more like an Aspen town than just a small town community.

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Beth: Inherently different.

Stan: Yeah.

Beth: Maybe we're not so needy to earn a living now we can spend a little time on arts and buy some things like that for our house.

Stan: That's true. I think they do pretty well. I don't know for sure but I think some of them do pretty well.

Beth: Very interesting.

[00:38:00]

Stan: Yeah. There's been an awful lot of change in the last 60, 70 years in Salida, I guess, whatever you want to hear. I think Salida was formed in 1886, wasn't it?

Beth: About that.

Stan: Really the railroad started down at Wellsville, that's where they ... in Howard, that's where they started to set up the railroad and then they moved up in the Cleora area. Then they moved it up here at the center of town.

[00:38:30]

Beth: That was where Salida was, Cleora.

Stan: Yeah. Salida is a little bit lopsided as far as east and west and north and south goes. The railroad changed the appearance of the town when they formed it because then all the businesses moved in that direction to ...

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Beth: Can you blame them?

Stan: No, that's right.

Beth: That's where the business was.

Stan: For the business, right. Gosh. It's a good little town. I know I raised all my children here, I was happy for that. Fred was the only one that was born in Colorado Springs when we were still living there. He's married to your wonderful daughter. Have two bright children, I think.

[00:39:30]

Beth: Anything else?

Stan: Not that I can think of, Beth.

Beth: All right, we'll turn it off then.

Stan: You think we've done pretty good?

Beth: Yeah. You did a good job.

Stan: Well I hope so.

Beth: Yeah.