

Beth Smith: All right. This is Beth Smith. I'm interviewing Dick Robbins this morning in his trailer here, out on County Road 105. We're going to talk about his life in the State of Colorado. Good afternoon, Dick.

Dick Robbins: Yes.

Beth Smith: How are you?

Dick Robbins: Fine, thank you.

Beth Smith: Are you going to talk to us this morning about your life?

Dick Robbins: Okay.

[00:00:30]

Beth Smith: All right. Where did you start? Where were you born?

Dick Robbins: Ralston, Oklahoma. 1926.

Beth Smith: 1926. Were you growing up there?

Dick Robbins: We lived there till '39. Then we went to Durango, or down below Durango, at Allison.

Beth Smith: Allison's where you went to school, right?

[00:01:00]

Dick Robbins: That's where I went to school, yeah.

Beth Smith: You stay around Durango area?

Dick Robbins: I stayed there, and then the War broke out. I went and to take my physical, and I went to the service in '45. That's when I went into service.

Beth Smith: Was it the Army?

Dick Robbins: Army.

Beth Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Where were you stationed?

Dick Robbins: Camp Maxey, Texas.

Beth Smith: Did you go overseas or anything?

[00:01:30]

Dick Robbins: No, I finished the basic. Just as I finished, I was still 18. Then, the war was over, so they was going to send me to Korea. I mean, to Japan. Then a deal

[00:02:00] came out that if I joined the regular Army for a year, I'd get to go home for

30 days, so I came home for 30 days and that's when I met my wife. It was when I was home on leave.

Beth Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative), and her name was?

Dick Robbins: Marie.

Beth Smith: Marie.

Dick Robbins: Marie Miller. But after that leave, I didn't go to Japan. I finished my term in Fort Lewis, Washington, and got out in '46.

[00:02:30]

Beth Smith: You came home again?

Dick Robbins: Came to Durango. Then, I was in the reserve, so they called me in the Korean War.

Beth Smith: Oh my.

Dick Robbins: I went there in '51, and got out in '52. I was gone exactly a year.

Beth Smith: Were you overseas?

[00:03:00]

Dick Robbins: I was in the Korean War, yeah. But me and my wife got married in '46. After I was home, I got married in October of '46. Then, we went to Arizona and lived down there for two years. That's when I was in the reserve. Anyway,

[00:03:30] then after I came home, I was a mechanic in the service, so then I started working for Chevrolet down in Durango. I worked for them for 10 years. Things slacked off and then I went to Leadville and worked for Chevrolet for two years in Leadville. Then in '66, I went to Climax.

Beth Smith: What did you do at Climax?

[00:04:00]

Dick Robbins: I did some mechanic. I worked underground seven years as a slusher mechanic. Then, they opened up the pit in '72, and that's when I went to the open pit, in '72.

Beth Smith: A lot of people don't know what Climax is all about. Can you tell me?

Dick Robbins: Well, molybdenum and it'd get a little gold. There are other minerals, but I don't know just what all that they did get. But the main thing is the molybdenum.
[00:04:30]

Beth Smith: How big a mine was it?

Dick Robbins: Well, there was 3,000 men that worked there.

Beth Smith: That's pretty big. What did they do with molybdenum?

Dick Robbins: It's a steel hardener, and it's also a lubrication. Used in lubrication to make
[00:05:00] graphite, made from molybdenum. But mainly it was a steel hardener.

Beth Smith: How long did you work for Climax?

Dick Robbins: 18 years.

Beth Smith: 18 years. Were you living in Leadville at that time?

Dick Robbins: In '70, it was too high for Marie. She's got polycythemia, so doctor said we
[00:05:30] had to move to lower Kansas. We started to move to Buenie [Buena Vista]. Doctor said, "That's not low enough. You need to go onto Salida," so we came onto Salida. That's where we came. In fact, this trailer has set right here since '70.

Beth Smith: You lived in it all that time?

Dick Robbins: All that time.

Beth Smith: Yeah. You drove back and forth to Climax every day?

Dick Robbins: Yeah. I was carpooled and vans worked. Yeah.

Beth Smith: Was there a lot of people from Salida working there?

[00:06:00]

Dick Robbins: Oh yeah, lots of them. I think half of Climax was Salida. I mean Salida, and Buena Vista, and all over.

Beth Smith: Probably half of Salida was going to Climax, too.

Dick Robbins: Yeah.

Beth Smith: Right. That's good. But Climax closed down in the '80s some time, didn't it?

[00:06:30]

Dick Robbins: They shut us down in '82. But I retired in '83, is when I got my retirement from Climax. There were some that went back to work. It has tried to work two or three times since, but if I hadn't taken my retirement, I'd gotten a little more time. But I thought, "Well, I'm going to take it while I got the chance." I had to take the retirement.

Beth Smith: Good idea. Yeah. You don't think you'll go back up there now if they start again?

[00:07:00]

Dick Robbins: No. I can't even walk, hardly, now, so I won't go back.

Beth Smith: What else have you done in your life?

Dick Robbins: Well, my dad was a sharecropper. We didn't own any land but-

Beth Smith: In Oklahoma?

[00:07:30]

Dick Robbins: In Oklahoma. My dad broke his back the fall that I was born. A Model T ran over and broke his back. They waited 24 hours for him to die, and they said, "Well, he'll be nothing but a vegetable. See what he can do." Where your joints go, they're like this? He could only straighten his legs that much.

[00:08:00]

Beth Smith: But he lived for you, huh?

Dick Robbins: But the County got him a job grating the roads with mules. I don't know just what time. This happened in '26, and I don't know how much later that

[00:08:30] he got the job, but he had mules and he grated roads till '37. He sold the mules and he got a tractor. He and my brothers paid for it in two years, there in Oklahoma, plowing out and stuff like that.

[00:09:00]

But then, our school was caving in. There was a deal came out to send us kids to Ralston. We lived five miles from Ralston. John Crow, the school board, "You sign that, I'll lease that place out from under you." My dad farmed it for 10 years, but that's what he did, so that's when he moved to Colorado.

[00:09:30]

We loaded the tractor and everything. My brother George is the one that stayed with the farm until I went into service, and then he bought the folks out. He farmed it until '54.

Beth Smith: When your dad got to Colorado, was he still a farmer?

[00:10:00]

Dick Robbins: He was still a farmer, yeah.

Beth Smith: Down there by Allison?

Dick Robbins: Yeah. He had a Case tractor. He couldn't use his legs, so he farmed clear up until I went into the service. But then he got to have so much trouble with

[00:10:30] his back that he had to retire. Anyway ... But he lived. In '65, he passed away. My mom passed away in '69.

Beth Smith: You went from Durango, then, to Leadville?

Dick Robbins: Leadville.

[00:11:30]

Beth Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Then finally got down here to Salida. What do you remember about Salida in the early days, when you first got here?

Dick Robbins: I mean, to me it hasn't really changed a whole lot to me as far as people moving and leaving. But my wife passed away. Christmastime this last year is when she passed away. I don't know if you remember her passing away?

[00:12:00]

Beth Smith: I don't remember, huh?

Dick Robbins: But she passed away on my mother's birthday, the day after Christmas.

Beth Smith: Is that right?

Dick Robbins: Here's my wife's memorial picture, if you want to look at it.

[00:12:30]

Beth Smith: Oh, nice. Very nice. Well, have you done anything in Salida like-

Dick Robbins: Well, I worked ... Do you remember Gladys, to go swimming?

Beth Smith: Yes, I remember Gladys.

[00:13:00]

Dick Robbins: Her husband and I, we worked on tractors for four years down in the valley. We worked on farm equipment.

Beth Smith: What town?

Dick Robbins: Huh?

Beth Smith: Near what town?

Dick Robbins: All over the valley. Alamosa, all those towns down there. He worked on the farmers' equipment to keep them going. Then I went to Summitville in ...
[00:13:30] Get my years straight here now. '96 is when I went to Summitville, and I worked for four years in '92 up at Summitville.

[00:14:00]

Beth Smith: Tell me what Summitville was.

Dick Robbins: It's a gold mine, open pits, just like Climax.

Beth Smith: Where is it?

Dick Robbins: You know where South Fork is?

Beth Smith: Yeah.

Dick Robbins: Go out toward Wolf Creek. You go 10 miles toward Wolf Creek, and then it turns up the road. It's clear up to the timberline.

Beth Smith: Did you live here at that time? Travel that far?

[00:14:30]

Dick Robbins: No, my sister lived in Del Norte. I stayed with her. Then, I came home on weekends and stuff like that.

Beth Smith: Yeah, right. You were a gold miner?

Dick Robbins: Yeah. All I done was worked on the equipment. I didn't do mining.

[00:15:00]

Beth Smith: But they wouldn't have done any mining without your equipment, would they? What about hunting and fishing around here? Do a lot of that?

Dick Robbins: I've hunted all my life. Still hunt. I go with the family. Marie's dad and I, we hunted down there in Durango 22 years. We got an elk every year. In fact, we just lived on the wild meat. We lived in the same house, her folks for 10 years down in Durango until I went to Leadville. I fish whenever I can. The family's coming down the 4th to go fishing, camp out.

[00:15:30]

[00:16:00]

Beth Smith: Good.

Dick Robbins: The fourth.

Beth Smith: That'll be good. Were there any organizations around town here that you were interested in? Elks or churches or anything like that that you worked with?

Dick Robbins: I go to Church of God. I've been there 22 years.

[00:16:30]

Beth Smith: That's good. Maybe you can think of some different kinds of characters around town that you remembered?

Dick Robbins: Fred, you know the one that you talked with there at the last?

Beth Smith: Oh yeah? Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dick Robbins: He's my nephew. He married my niece.

Beth Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

[00:17:00]

Dick Robbins: He married my sis's daughter. She lives in Spencer, Iowa, is where she and Hazel lives.

Beth Smith: Well, if you've been 22 years at the Church of God, you must have started around here. You were in on the beginning.
[00:17:30]

Dick Robbins: Well, I was FourSquare before I went.

Beth Smith: Is there much of a congregation around here?

Dick Robbins: Is it?

Beth Smith: Do you have much of a congregation?

Dick Robbins: Oh, yeah. We have a good congregation. Yeah.

Beth Smith: How long has it been here?

Dick Robbins: For years.

Beth Smith: Forever, huh?

[00:18:00]

Dick Robbins: In fact, Fred's mother, she passed away about four years ago. She was an old-timer, and she was a good prayer warrior in that church.

Beth Smith: Well, anything else you can tell me about living in Salida?

[00:18:30]

Dick Robbins: Not a whole lot except my daughter graduated here.

Beth Smith: At Salida High School?

Dick Robbins: Yeah.

Beth Smith: What year was that?

[00:19:00]

Dick Robbins: Well, ten years from '63. '72 or something like that. I don't remember the exact thing.

Beth Smith: Did your son go to school here, too?

Dick Robbins: No. He was in Durango, and he graduated in Leadville. He's 54.

[00:19:30]

Beth Smith: I see. How about things like all of the Fibark activity? That's going to be this weekend. Did you ever do that?

Dick Robbins: No. The Robbins kids do. David.

Beth Smith: They come back here to do that?

Dick Robbins: Well, they're all still here. I mean, David's working here. He graduated two years ago, but he's working here. David's working here. Nathan, he's going to go to ... His daughter goes to the Vineyard up here. There was some ...
[00:20:00]
[00:20:30] Do you know David Murphy? His mother's crippled. But for four years, there's a group that does Christian plays.

Beth Smith: Oh, okay. Yes.

Dick Robbins: That's what he does. That's what Nathan's going to do in September. He's going to join that group.

Beth Smith: Oh, that's good.

Dick Robbins: Go back to Missouri somewhere.

Beth Smith: They travel all over the country?

Dick Robbins: They travel all over the country.

Beth Smith: Putting on religious plays like that?

[00:21:00]

Dick Robbins: Yeah.

Beth Smith: That's good. Is that something that you started?

Dick Robbins: No. David Murphy's been in it, I think he's going on his fourth year. In fact, he's one of the supervisors now in it. That's why Nathan is kind of interested. They was good friends.

[00:21:30]

Beth Smith: Sounds like your life has been family oriented.

Dick Robbins: Yeah. I'm the youngest of seven boys.

Beth Smith: Any of them live around here?

Dick Robbins: There's only ... I have a brother in Denver. There's three left. There's I and two brothers left. Ernie, he lives in Denver. He's 84. Bob, he's five years older than I, and he lives in Needles, California. Elsie, my sis, lives in Ignacio. My youngest sister, Melinda's mother, lives in Spencer, Iowa.
[00:22:00]

[00:22:30]

Beth Smith: Scattered around the United States, huh?

Dick Robbins: There was five of us went in the service. Five of us boys went in the service.

Beth Smith: All at the same time?

Dick Robbins: All the same time. All came home.

Beth Smith: Oh, that's good. Yeah. When you were a young man, did you ski around here? No?

Dick Robbins: I skied when I was a little kid. My son was a skier, but I never was.

[00:23:00]

Beth Smith: I hear thunder.

Dick Robbins: It's about the 17th of February. For four months, I lived in the Springs. And Marie went out there. She was in a Penrose, and then she went to another part of Penrose where she had, they had moved her to a more healthcare unit?
[00:23:30]

Beth Smith: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dick Robbins: Anyway, but they had to put her on blood dialysis. We done that for four months. She had surgery for her stomach dialysis where we'd do it at home because if she came home, they don't have a dialysis machine here.
[00:24:00]

Beth Smith: That's right.

Dick Robbins: It's in Canon, and she couldn't travel. You're on that machine three hours, and she couldn't travel that, so she had the stomach dialysis. Then my daughter went to school, but she was unable to do that here about a month and a half. They put her back in the hospital here. My daughter is the one that had to go up there four times a day to do her dialysis because they wouldn't do it. They finally sent her back to Penrose. Of course, the last two months ... I had to go down there for the day and spend the day, and I didn't have any place to stay down there. But they let me stay in that Sturman House in Penrose for if you're taking ... If you've got cancer-
[00:24:30]
[00:25:00]

[Tape abruptly ends]