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Clift, Rex

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Interviewed by Irene Francis and Jackie Valentine Stophy

Rex Clift was born November 12, 1904 in Rosita in an area he called Hungry Gulch, just past where the schoolhouse used to be. His father was a miner who drilled holes, shot dynamite, loaded cars, and did other work. He worked mostly for the Bassick, Yellow, and Querida mines and after Rex was born, they moved to Querida.

Rex went to the Querida school through 3rd grade where he said he mostly learned to be ornery. One time he put a chipmunk in the schoolmarm's desk drawer and when she opened the drawer, the chipmunk jumped out and she tipped over backwards, and her dress went up over her head. Schools were mostly in session during the summertime because roads were so bad you couldn't go anywhere during the winter. Later he went through 8th grade at a Canon City school and then quit because "I was smart enough." After school, he was a jack of all trades, working as a brick mason and in the Bassick and Ilse mines.

In 1929 he got into grazing sheep and spent the rest of his life in the business. At one point he had a herd of 1100 head and during the summer they grazed near North and South Colony, above timber line. They sold the sheep's wool. He married Neba Crewett who he met at a dance in Rosita and talked about raising lettuce, peas, and potatoes on their homestead. He said there was a lettuce shed in Westcliffe to store lettuce until it was loaded onto the train and sold. Eventually the climate got drier and drier and colder and colder and they couldn't raise lettuce or potatoes anymore.

The author and Rex talked about different remedies and medicines used while he was growing up. They used to buy their medication at Marian's drugstore. During the depression, they ate deer meat. They had sheep and a few cows but couldn't afford to butcher them. Instead they would hunt several deer in the fall and eat them during the winter. They would wrap them in burlap and hang them on the north side of a tree, putting the carcass in the cellar so it could thaw out when they were ready to eat it. He also made bootleg corn moonshine during the depression.