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LP2009.013.0039

Colgate, George and Eva

April 14, 2006

Interviewed by Colby Colgate

CC: This is Colby Colgate recording George and Eva Colgate. The date is April 14, 2006. So, George and Eva, what are your full names?

GC: George Colgate.

EC: Eva Colgate. My maiden name was Adams. My parents were Lee and Celeste Adams and I had two sisters.

CC: What other family members did you have?

GC: We had nine children in our family, our mother and our father. My siblings were Bob, Dick, Helen, Don, Nell, Dell, myself George, Lois and Jimmy. Nine in the family.

CC: What got you-

GC: Two sisters-

EC: Oh, my sisters were Alphadeen and Shirley. Alphadeen still lives in Custer County. My sister Shirley is in Boise, Idaho. What brought my family to the area, my father was killing himself farming in, down around Rocky Ford east of Pueblo and they moved up for an easier life and a better life for all of us.

CC: What brought your family to the area?

GC: My father had purchased a piece of ground near Hillside, CO and it has been in the family about a hundred years now and it's been passed down to his son and I got it from my father, and so, because we own the ground there, that's where we're in the area.

CC: When you were growing up, how far away was your closest neighbor and were you guys close?

EC: About a mile. We had a neighbor on both sides but the one daughter was about a mile.

GC: It was about a mile and half to the nearest neighbor. We were busy with our work and didn't associate much with the neighbors.

CC: What kind of transportation did you use when you were growing up?

EC: We walked. We had horses.

GC: We walked and we had a 1922 Chevy truck. That was our transportation.

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CC: Do you have any favorite vacation memories or any childhood memories that you remember?

GC: We had a, my father had a two weeks' vacation every year and generally went fishing on the Western slope, Crested Butte, Gunnison, Lake City, in the mountainous fishing country over there.

CC: Do you have any vacation memories?

EC: Never had any. Well, that's not true. When I was ten years old, we went to California and I got to see the Rose Bowl parade and Shirley Temple was the Grand Marshall and I saw it 60 years later and she was Grand Marshall again.

CC: Were the schools any different when you were growing up and what did you study?

GC: Schools were about the same. Subjects were a little different. We emphasized academics, math, spelling, language, science, chemistry, biology, had three foreign languages offered, civics, art, music and the physical education was mainly boys, football, basketball, track. The variety of subjects offered were a little more than we have in Custer County now.

EC: I went to a one room schoolhouse from 1<sup>st</sup> grade through 8<sup>th</sup> grade.

GC: Where?

EC: At the Willows schoolhouse in the Valley and there were three students in my class and because we had a very rare one room school because we had quite a library. We had lots and lots of books to read, and I still don't know why we had such a large book library for a one room school but we had lots and lots and lots of good books that we read. It was cold. We walked to school. On my 8<sup>th</sup>, well, when I was in 7<sup>th</sup> grade, we rode, my younger sister Shirley and I, rode a horse to school. But mostly, we walked. It was a mile and a quarter.

GC: Did she go to the old Westcliffe school house?

EC: I went to the old Westcliffe schoolhouse for my 1<sup>st</sup> grade and then we moved down in the Valley and I went to the [unintelligible] for the rest of it.

CC: If you rode your horses to school, where would they stay?

EC: We had stables behind the school house and our parents would bring hay and put in the stables and then we had to feed our horses when we got to school and then be sure they had water and then, after school, we'd ride home.

GC: That's the thing about riding horses to school in the wintertime, had to ride bareback cause if you were riding with a saddle, they would freeze and so you had to ride bareback so you had to walk the horse to keep you warm when you get to school.

CC: Do you have any other school memories?

EC: School memories? Oh, we played lots of games during recess. The school was actually used as a

social thing for the whole community and there'd be box socials and dances and pie socials and dances. It was quite, it was used a lot for community activities.

CC: What kind of chores did you do around the house when you were younger?

GC: With that many in the family, you, everybody had to work. I recall one of my assignments was to keep the two wood boxes full, one in the kitchen and the one in the living room. For that chore, I was paid two cents a day, which came out to 14 cents a week. If I could find another job to pay me one penny, I got 15 cents. A movie at that time cost 10 cents. A sack of popcorn cost 5 cents. So, if I could get the 15 cents, I could go to the movie and get a sack of popcorn for another cent which was the highlight of the week.

EC: When I was in 8<sup>th</sup> grade and in high school, the theater was open in Westcliffe and my daddy loved Roy Rogers and Gene Autry, so usually, once a week, we all got to go to the movie and see one or the other of those stars, if we got our chores done in time. And the chores were feeding the calves and feeding the chickens and getting the cows milked and all that good stuff.

GC: We also had stock, a milk cow. I was designated to milk the cow. We had chickens. We had garden, an orchard, so we grew most of the food that we ate.

CC: What do you remember about the Depression?

EC: I lived on a farm so we really weren't affected too much as far as not having enough food. My mother sewed our clothes, but I do remember that towards the end of the Depression, Franklin Delano Roosevelt tried to bring up the price of animals, and so he came into the farm and he killed all the young animals so that they would not grow up to even be heard, and supposedly, that was to raise the price of meat and pork. I really don't know if it did or not.

GC: I remember stock being destroyed to make a shortage of stock and raise the price. I remember seeing long, long rows of grain with kerosene poured on it and burned to destroy it so you could make a shortage of food to raise the price of food, which I think was a mistake. That was the government thinking then. I'm not sure it's better now.

CC: What effect did World War II have on you?

EC: Well, I remember sugar rationing but my mother had peas so we had-we didn't worry too much about not being able to buy sugar. We had gas cards where you'd have to take a little coupon and go get gas but we had a pickup and we didn't go very far and so we, we had horses that pulled all the farm equipment so we didn't need gas.

GC: A lot of things rationed, fruit, meat, sugar, gasoline and oil, rubber products. A lot of things were rationed and you had to have your coupons to get it. But during the Depression, we, my father had a steady job. He got a paycheck every week so we were one of the very fortunate people in the community and then we did have enough food. We grew food at home too. So, yes, we had a hard time with a big family, but everybody else had a hard time too. Someone asked if I was poor during the Depression. My

answer was no, not any poorer than anybody else. We were all poor.

CC: What connection have you had with the services?

GC: I was in the army during World War II, went over to Europe in the Army Engineers and as, in the war in Europe, I was injured, sent home with pretty well broken up, spent nine months in the hospital. Finally released wearing a steel brace on my leg and using crutches. But I learned to walk on my own two feet and I'm still walking, so I did survive, but it was rough way.

CC: When you were younger, were there any community groups that you or your parents belonged to?

EC: You didn't have time. You had to work. You worked most of the time just to keep food on the table and be able to have money to pay your bills. In fact, my sister came to visit me about 15 years ago, about 5 years ago and we went over by Lake City and she said, why didn't we ever go here? And I said, my answer was because we worked. We didn't have time. Once a year, we got to go to the state fair if we got our chores done.

GC: Organized community groups, I don't remember them, the children in the neighborhood played together but I don't recall my parents being in community groups.

EC: When I was about 8<sup>th</sup> grade, they had what they called a home demonstration clubs and they would come and show the farm wives how to make mattresses and quilts and stuff like that and they would use the one room schools for the classes and I helped make many a mattress.

CC: What was your first memory, answered the of a car or a telephone or any of the modern conveniences?

GC: Well, the first car I recall was a 1922 Chevy pickup that my, our truck, wasn't a pickup, the truck that my parents had. First telephone, first radio I recall was a homemade one that my brother made out of razor blade and wires and coils and he did get reception, radio reception. That was back, probably in the early 30's.

EC: Probably my most wonderful one was when they threw the light switch and we have electric lights. I was a junior in high school when that happened. We didn't have to carry a lantern or a lamp around to see where you were going and what you-

GC: And telephones, I recall telephones, a community telephone that each person had a certain ring for them. It rang two shorts and a long or a short and long and a short to get certain people. We had one ring that would ring and everybody was supposed to answer the phone. So, if you needed to talk to everybody, one ring and you'd get everybody answering the phone. Often, when you got a call from outside of someplace, anybody could pick up the phone and listen to your conversation. We were working one place that someone from Minnesota called, Minneapolis and they rang our number, answered the phone and phones, you could hear being picked up all the way along the line and reception wasn't good. Finally, someone came on and says, if everyone would hang up when you get through, I will call you and tell you what the conversation was, but Mr. Colgate needs to get the message

now from Minneapolis. Everybody hung up. After I was through, she called all the lines and told them what the conversation was. That was telephones in the early days.

CC: Was everybody in the community fortunate enough to have a telephone?

EC: Well, pretty much. There might be one or two people that didn't have a phone but they used everybody else's. They would come in your house and use your phone. But I think almost everybody around our area had a phone.

GC: Houses were very seldom locked. If somebody wanted to use your telephone, they had permission to come in your house and use your telephone if you weren't home. That was the day when you didn't have to lock up everything.

CC: Other than perhaps listening to the radio, what other recreation or entertainment did you participate in?

EC: Reading. Read a lot.

GC: Everybody read a lot.

EC: Sewed, we quilted. We pieced quilts so that we could tie them. You think they're too long to quilt them so we make them and then everybody'd get together and we'd tie the quilts-

GC: Quilting bee?

EC: I have quilts that are 70 years that I helped tie.

GC: I didn't listen to the radio. We didn't have a radio.

EC: We did. It was operated by battery and the battery run down and we were all clustered around with our ears trying to hear 'Jack Armstrong, the All-American Boy.'

GC: We had enough work to do around the place with the gardens and orchards and livestock that we-we had enough to do.

EC: Never ran out of stuff to do.

CC: What role did music and art play in your life?

GC: Very little in ours. We'd listen to music-

EC: Yeah.

GC: I came home one day and heard beautiful organ music coming out of the house. I went in. My mother was the only one home. I asked if somebody else was there and she said, no. I didn't know she played the organ and I didn't find out till later she did, but she never played it except for herself. Someone had criticized her about it, playing one time, and she never played it in public again. She used to bake beautiful bread. Someone complained about her bread. She quit making bread. She was very

sensitive but so she quit making bread. She quit playing the organ. But music and art, we didn't have time for that either.

CC: Tell us about homes that you lived in that were special to you. Where were they located and did you have your own room?

GC: No, I didn't have my own room. Eventually, as I got older, I did get my own bed but my aunt from Victor, Cripple Creek area visited us and saw what my bed looked like. Next time she came, she brought a blanket, it was not a new one but it was a good blanket. She says, this is for George so he won't have to sleep under that tattered old blanket that he's got there. I did have my own bed.

EC: I didn't have, I slept with my sisters till I was probably in 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> grade and I didn't get my own room till I was a senior in college.

CC: Were many opportunities closed to women when you were growing up?

EC: I don't really know. I went to college, had no problems. I don't think so.

GC: In my life, in my younger years, it was a male dominated world. There wasn't too many opportunities for women except stay at home, do the cooking and house cleaning-

EC: Or be a school teacher.

GC: Take care of the kids.

EC: You could be a schoolteacher.

CC: Eva, what was it like to be a female in a ranching community when you first came here?

EC: We worked a lot because you didn't have the modern conveniences that you have now. The washing machines were not electric. They were not, my father finally put a little gasoline loader on our washing machine but most of the time, you washed on the washboard and you wrung your clothes out, put them on the line and you had to iron, everything you had to iron and use what you call a sad iron and I always thought that was because, sad you have to use them because they would get very hot. You had to put them on a wood stove and get them hot and they were very heavy.

GC: I recall we had a tumbler washing machine. Then to take the clothes out, you had to run them through a wringer and there was a hand powered wringer. One or two of us children would always cranking the crank to wring the clothes, dry the clothes out from the washing machine.

CC: What makes this county different from other counties?

EC: It's fairly isolated. It's surrounded by mountains and there's, you have to be wanting to go to Westcliffe. It's not something that you would just go through, you have to go get on one of the two major highways and go to Westcliffe. It's not just there that you would drive through. I think mainly it's the mountains on the west, the Sangre de Cristo's.

GC: That's it, the mountains.

CC: In Custer County, how have you seen this county change?

EC: It's changed from a basically rural community to more of a urban, but it still tries to keep part of its rural advantages but there's a, I think it's changed basically. I do not think the changes are positive.

GC: In the last 80 years, we've seen a lot of changes. Essentially, there's been four major changes that I know of and I believe those are people, agricultural and mining, weather and the use of the Sangre de Cristo range. In our opinion, these changes have had an adverse effect on the Wet Mountain valley, its present and its future.

CC: Can you be more specific about some of the changes?

GC: People, Custer County used to be a mining, agricultural area and it has changed now to more tourism, part time residents, summer residents, retired folks and gotten away from mining almost entirely and pretty well gotten away from agricultural. Used to be a lot of cattle, stock in the Valley and now mostly agricultural in the Valley is growing hay for shipment outside the Valley.

EC: There's still a few ranches that have cattle but-

GC: Used to be the children of the ranchers would grow up to be ranchers, take to ranching. But today, soon as the children get an education, they go out into the outside world. On agriculture, mining that's been the change that the mining has disappeared. Agricultural has changed considerably.

EC: Early 40's into the middle of the 1950s, there were 28 grade A dairies in the Valley and milk was shipped to Pueblo and there bottled and sold in the town of Pueblo. In 1954, they all closed up. There are no more.

GC: The weather has changed a lot. In the, I recall winter starting in October through November, December, and into January, and now, winter doesn't start till maybe December, January and February. I recall seeing banks of snow on each side of the road 4 and 5 foot tall most of the winter as you drove back and forth. I've seen temperatures of 60 below zero quite often, times when it was 20, 30 below zero, is the high for the day, so the weather has warmed up and the snow, the winter has moved later in the year. It's later in the springs, so it doesn't last as long. So, we are a lot drier, less snow, not the deep freezes we used to have.

CC: What is your hope for the future of this county?

GC: Well, I hope they can stay a rural, essentially a rural area. I don't have much hope for it because the things that make this a rural area are disappearing. But I hope we can say simple, friendly people.

CC: What about the area is most valuable to you?

GC: I think the people, the Sangre de Cristo range, the mountains and the simple, rural atmosphere of the area. You?

EC: I agree.

CC: Are there any other stories you would like to share about?

GC: One thing I do recall, there used to be a sign on the north entry to Westcliffe that said, Vehicles with lugs and horses with shoes forbidden. That was when they first started surfacing the roads. I don't know what happened to the sign. I'd love to find it. In the 50s, almost all of the roads, secondary roads in the county, were paved. You can still find pieces of pavement in almost all of the secondary roads in the county, still coming up here.

CC: Are there any other stories you'd like to add about Westcliffe?

GC: Don't have enough time to tell you. No, that'll be it.

CC: Thank you.

EC: Thank you!

End of recording.