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Oral History Collection

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Curtis, Everetts and Emma

June 16, 1990

interviewed by Irene Francis

IF: This tape is part of an oral history taping series called "The Wet Mountain Valley, A Gold Mining History," funded by the Colorado Endowment for the Humanities. The interviewer is Irene Francis. The date is June 16, 1990. The place is the old Westcliffe Schoolhouse in Westcliffe, CO. I'm here this afternoon with Mr. and Mrs. Curtis and Mr. Curtis went to school in the old Westcliffe Schoolhouse and graduated from Custer County High School. What year did you graduate, Mr. Curtis?

EC: 1940.

IF: 1940. Give me your whole name.

EC: Nickname?

IF: Sure, nickname and everything.

EC: Ellery Curtis, call me Bud.

IF: Bud.

EC: Yeah, and spell your last name.

EC: CURTIS.

IF: Ok, and we also have Mrs. Curtis. What is your name?

ELC: It's Emma L. Curtis, Lydia is my middle name.

IF: And what is your maiden name?

ELC: Schwarz.

IF: Spell that for me.

ELC: SCHWARZ.

IF: And you grew up in Rosita.

ELC: Uh huh.

IF: Were you born in that area?

ELC: Yeah.

1 Curtis, Everetts and Emma

IF: What is the farm or ranch that your family had?

ELC: Well, it would be just Schwarz, I mean, he homesteaded. My dad homesteaded it.

IF: In what year, do you know?

ELC: I don't know.

IF: How many acres did he have?

ELC: He had 640.

IF: Did he raise cattle?

ELC: Yeah, he raised cattle.

IF: Do he do any-

ELC: A little farming.

IF: Did he sell any of it to the, did any of it go out on the railroad that was here?

ELC: I don't think so. Just locally. I don't believe so, no.

IF: Now was this in Antelope Valley?

ELC: No, well, cause I think our ranch was in Antelope instead of Rosita.

EC: No.

IF: Ok.

ELC: So, it wouldn't be in the valley, I don't think, you would call it, Antelope Valley.

IF: That's what they call it now, it's a subdivision.

ELC: Yeah.

EC: That's right.

IF: You went to school in Rosita?

ELC: No, more in Antelope.

IF: In Antelope?

ELC: Mm hmm. There was a little school there.

IF: And do you know the teacher and the teachers you had?

ELC: Let's see, Mrs. Entz, what was her name? The sister.

EC: Oh.

ELC: That was the schoolteacher.

IF: That wasn't Florence Entz's sister.

ELC: Uh huh, uh huh.

IF: And did she live out there?

ELC: No, I think she did. I think she lived with Mrs. Vogle.

IF: Mrs. Longford's out there also?

EC: Mrs. Vogle was right across the road.

IF: Did they have a ranch too, Vogle?

ELC: That's where the subdivision is. It's on her place.

IF: I see, and you're right next to where the Vogles-

ELC: No (overlapping voices) If you go out, you'd hit our place before you'd hit Mrs. Vogle's place.

IF: Alright, yes. Some of that, hmm, can't think of his name, anyway Schultz, is it anywhere near there?

ELC: No, no.

EC: It was on the other side of the road.

ELC: Yeah, he was on the other side. (noise) He lives on the old Abbott place.

IF: But your father homesteaded.

ELC: Uh huh. Homesteaded, yes.

IF: Where did they come from?

ELC: Oh, they come from Chicago.

IF: Chicago?

ELC: Mother was raised from here. She, her mother and dad lived out here in the valley on the old Elzy place. The old Elzy place is what they homesteaded too.

IF: And what was your mother's name?

ELC: Susie, uh, Elzy.

3 Curtis, Everetts and Emma

IF: Oh, your mother was an Elzy?

ELC: Uh huh.

IF: Fine, right.

ELC: Susie Elzy.

IF: Ok, now where you born out on the ranch?

ELC: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

IF: In the house?

ELC: Mm hmm. Yeah, with a midwife.

IF: Who was the midwife?

ELC: Grandma James, we used to call her.

IF: Did they have a homestead here?

ELC: She lived right there, coming in Rosita. She had a mine there.

IF: Did she, she kept the mine?

ELC: Yeah, Grandma James did. She had a mine there.

IF: Did she have somebody else work it or did-

ELC: Yeah, she did have, well, my dad worked in it for a while.

IF: Mm hmm. Do you know the name of the mine?

ELC: I did at one time but I don't know.

IF: Mr. Curtis, you graduated from the Custer County High School?

EC: Oh, yes.

IF: And what year was that?

EC: 1940.

IF: 1940. Who were some of your teachers?

EC: oh, one was the principal, Mrs. Kugel, Icha Stone, there may have been several others, like Mr. Gregor was there one year. I don't know.

IF: Where did your family live?

EC: My grandfather was here and he run the Massur garage when it was a livery stable. When these automobiles come in, he took the garage over. But he ? My father come here in 1929 from Wyoming and during the Depression or beginning of the Depression, and he bought my grandfather out. He run the garage. June Jones. 1938 I think, the Shorts bought it.

IF: So, you were not born here. Were you born-

EC: No, I was born in Wyoming.

IF: I see. What grades did you attend in this school in Westcliffe school?

EC: From 1st grade to 11th.

IF: And who were your teachers?

EC: Sue Canda and C.H. Richmond. Then I moved to Silver Cliff, back to Mom's.

IF: And then you attended the high school after you moved to Silver Cliff.

EC: I went to Silver Cliff and I went to school up there till I got into high school.

IF: Did you graduate from, did they have a formal graduation from grade school?

EC: Oh yes! From 8th grade. But I graduated from the one in Silver Cliff. One teacher was Mrs. Farmhill and another teacher I can remember one was ? Hansenn. Another year was a Mrs. Cook.

IF: Did you play any sports in school?

EC: Oh, basketball, that's about all they had.

IF: How about you, Mrs. Curtis? Did you-

ELC: No, no, never did.

IF: How about out, when you were out in the Antelope Valley school? What kind of things did they do?

ELC: Not much. They didn't have hardly any sports. We just played games.

IF: What was your favorite game?

ELC: I can't remember. (laughing)

EC: Or what? Probably was a little, six or seven kids in that school out there.

ELC: There wasn't very many.

IF: Mr. Curtis, when you went to this school, what was the favorite thing for the kids to do here for recreation?

EC: Oh, baseball.

IF: You never remember walking the walls?

EC: Oh yeah!

IF: Around the edge of the school?

EC: Yeah, but that wasn't, that wall wasn't built until 1973.

IF: No, I mean around the school on the-

EC: Oh yeah, yeah-

IF: They used to walk the ledge is what I heard.

EC: Walk the ledge, yeah! See how long you could stay on it.

IF: Oh my gosh!

EC: Yeah!

IF: Did you get to ever ring school bells?

EC: Oh, a lot of times, yeah.

IF: That's a pretty heavy cord to pull, huh?

EC: Yeah, you just got to hold and hang on!

IF: Hang on. I know some of the young people come and I say, you want to pull a bell, and they get hold of it and it won't go. Once you know it's hard to pull, then you can do that. So, what year did you leave here? What year did you leave this area?

EC: Oh, gosh, I don't know.

ELC: Let's see, Chris Beecham down in Canon now for about 25 years.

EC: Something like that.

ELC: 25 years.

EC: Yeah, I think it was about 25 years. St Thomas in the Silver Cliff summer tour started glowing.

IF: Really? That's when you left, huh? Did you ever see the Silver Cliff cemetery glow?

EC: Oh yes, a lot of times.

IF: Did you really?

EC: Yep.

IF: Tell me about that.

EC: Well, the tombstones would light up when you get close to them, they go out.

IF: Well, I've been down there and I haven't seen any.

EC: Haven't you ever seen it?

IF: No, I've been down there-

ELC: I think it has to be a certain time-

EC: Some time of the year and I think it's when you've lots of moisture.

IF: Oh, do you? That's your theory, lots of moisture? Would they go in the wintertime and there's snow on the ground, do you think?

EC: Not so much as early spring is when they really come out.

IF: Is there a certain time of night?

EC: Oh, just after dark. Many times, every night-

ELC: I never did go.

IF: I've been out there twice and I haven't seen them.

EC: No?

IF: No. and you walk up to the stones and-

EC: Just faded out, yeah.

IF: Why do you think that?

EC: What do I think?

IF: Yeah.

EC: Well, they claim that it's phosphine gas coming out of the ground that makes it do it. But I don't know. I ain't that much of a scientist.

IF: Nobody's ever proved that.

EC: Well, Mrs. Murray used to say it was your dad, old man Atherburn having a card game and they had to loan him rent.

IF: I see, ok. (laughing) So, something spiritual there, huh?

7 Curtis, Everetts and Emma

EC: Oh, yeah.

IF: Did you work in the area?

EC: I worked for the county over here, Custer County, 14 and a half years.

IF: On the road crew.

EC: Yeah.

ELC: Then he-

EC: After I got out of the service, I worked there.

IF: And you, Mrs. Curtis, did you, did I ask you, did you graduate from the school?

ELC: No, out there.

IF: Just out there but did you go to high school?

ELC: No, didn't, just 8th grade.

IF: And what did you do when you got out of 8th grade, what did you do?

ELC: Nothing. I don't think. I don't know anything.

EC: California, you went there.

ELC: Yeah. California was, I stayed out there for quite a while.

IF: Were you two married in this area?

EC: Oh, yeah.

IF: What church were you married in?

ELC: Well, I tell you, we eloped and we went to ? and got married.

IF: Oh. Did you live in town?

ELC: Uh huh.

IF: What street did you live on?

ELC: We lived in Silver Cliff.

EC: Silver Cliff, the last street. I don't know what they call it now. On that cemetery.

ELC: Cemetery, yeah.

EC: I don't know.

IF: Mill Street? Do you have children?

ELC: No. No children.

IF: And when you moved to Canon, what kind of work did you do? When you retired?

EC: I worked in the Schmidt plant and then I, I worked for a man on an oiling crew. Then I finally went to work for the county. I retired off of that.

IF: And now you're back for your reunion.

EC: Not yet!

IF: Mrs. Curtis, you mentioned that you had a bakery in this area.

ELC: Yes.

IF: And where was that bakery?

ELC: Just right across here-

IF: From this building?

ELC: This building. Just right across.

IF: And it was in, you said, the, what used to be the Greenleaf school.

ELC: Yeah.

IF: Who was in the bakery with you?

ELC: My sister.

IF: Your sister? Did you bake the things right there?

ELC: Yeah, we baked the things right there.

IF: What kind of –

ELC: It was donuts and, mostly donuts.

IF: What year was that?

ELC: Let's see, we moved down there-

IF: This before you moved down here.

ELC: Yes.

IF: Did they just come and buy the things?

ELC: They did come in and bought the things.

IF: Oh, that's nice.

ELC: Yeah.

End of recording.