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Summary of Oral History Interview with Frieda Entz Hanssen

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Interviewed by Irene Francis and Ara Weimer

Frieda Entz Hanssen was born in 1915 to William J. and Nellie B. Entz. Her family migrated from Lincoln, Kansas, to the Wet Mountain Valley in 1918, traveling by covered wagon. They settled on a homestead eight miles north of Westcliffe, initially living in a one-room cabin with a sod roof. Life on the homestead was challenging, as they relied on well water and dry farming, depending entirely on rainfall for crops.

Frieda attended Ula School, traveling by horse and buggy or sleigh in winter. She recalled strict but dedicated teachers and playing childhood games like baseball and "Echo." After completing high school, she helped on the family farm before marrying Walter W. Hanssen in 1933. The couple had one daughter, Donna Nell Hall, who later moved to Gunnison.

Farming on the dryland homestead was difficult, leading her family to move to an irrigated ranch in the valley in the 1940s. They later ran a general store in Silver Cliff, called E & H Grocery, selling meat, dry goods, and other essentials. Managing the store proved overwhelming, and after a year, Frieda and her husband returned to ranching and community work.

Frieda was deeply involved in the Methodist Church, where her husband held leadership positions. She also served on the first library board, helping to secure funding and organize community resources. During the Great Depression, her family survived by farming, bartering, and using government WPA programs. She witnessed local infrastructure projects, including graveling roads and bridge construction.

She also recalled the early history of Westcliffe, including the presence of Beardsley's bank, silent movie screenings above Grandma's House, and the town's skating rink. She described the hardships of rationing during World War II, as well as the resilience of rural families in times of crisis.

Frieda's recollections offer a vivid portrayal of pioneer life, emphasizing the perseverance required to farm in a harsh climate, the evolution of Westcliffe's economy, and the strong sense of community that defined the Wet Mountain Valley.

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