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Summary of Oral History Interview with Helen Kattnig
December 8, 1990
Interviewed by Irene Francis

Helen Kattnig was born in 1901 in Rosita, Colorado, to a family of miners. Her father worked in various mines, including the Leavenworth Mine, while her mother, Clara Hamill, managed the household. Her grandparents had migrated from Minnesota in the early 1880s, drawn to the mining opportunities in Rosita. Helen grew up with five siblings and attended school in Rosita until the ninth grade.

Rosita was a thriving mining town during her youth, with multiple businesses, including a bank, grain stores, a shoemaker, a drugstore, and grocery stores. She recalled the social life centered around dances held at private homes and the town's dance hall, where neighbors played live music. Square dances and round dances were common, and many couples met at these lively gatherings.

Helen married in 1920 at the courthouse in Silver Cliff and moved to Silver Park with her husband. They ranched, farmed, and worked in the mines. The family raised cattle and grew potatoes, lettuce, and peas, selling produce locally. During Prohibition, bootlegging was widespread in the region, and she recalled many neighbors making their own liquor.

She described the challenges of ranch life, including harsh winters where snowstorms left them isolated for weeks. They relied on homegrown food and careful planning to survive. The Great Depression impacted local ranchers, but because they produced much of their own food, they did not suffer as much as city dwellers.

Helen's memories also included childhood pranks, school discipline, early automobiles, and the transition from horse-drawn wagons to cars. She witnessed the decline of Rosita as mining waned and businesses closed. She also described the relocation of Rosita's church to Silver Cliff, which was moved on logs and pulled by horses.

Her interview provides a vivid account of life in a mining town, the hardships of ranching, and the resilience of early settlers in Custer County.

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