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Miller, Wilbur

June 5, 1990

Interviewed by Irene Francis

IF: We are in the home of Wilbur Miller. The date is June 5, 1990 and my name is Irene Francis and I'm here with Sam Gregor and we're making an oral tape. Wilbur, will you give me your full name and spell it to me please?

WM: Wilbur Miller, WILBUR MILLER, and my wife is Marilyn MARILYN. She's sitting across the room over there.

IF: And what was her maiden name?

WM: Franz, FRANZ.

IF: And would you give me the name of your mother?

WM: My mother was Freida Miller. My father was Martin Miller.

IF: And what was your mother's maiden name>

WM: Kitzman.

IF: Would you spell that for us?

WM: KITZMAN.

IF: Now were your parents native to this area?

WM: My grandfather Miller came from Missouri, Norborne, Missouri where he was a farmer and because of my grandmother's health conditions due to asthma, came to the Valley in 1913, with two sons and a daughter, my grandparents on my mother's side, Kitzman, my grandmother Kitzman came as a little girl with the Colony. Her father, Henry Kettlar, was one of the wagon drivers in the Colony that came. Richard Kitzman, who was my grandfather on my mother's side, came from Germany and homesteaded the Kitzman place, which is in the Willow district of the Valley.

IF: You were talking about them coming, your grandfather being, uh, spell his name, his mother's father's name.

WM: Kettlar, I'm not sure if it's one t, it might be two t's in that, I'm not certain.

IF: And you mentioned him coming in the, being the wagon driver. Can you relate some of the, he told you anything about coming with the Colony? I know they came from Chicago area.

WM: I didn't know him. He died before I was born. However, my parents talked about that some and they organized in Chicago at the leadership of Wulstein. My understanding is they came by train to somewhere near Topeka, KS, which would be by the railroad line, and traveled by wagon with I guess some oxen, some horses, some mules. The story that was related to me was that they crossed the river at Parkdale, the Arkansas River and they had trouble getting the animals to go into the river and my grandfather finally tried his team and I think he was driving a team of oxen and they were the first ones that crossed and then the rest followed. I don't know the validity of that but that's what I was told anyway.

IF: Where's Parkdale?

WM: That's on Highway 50 between Canon City and Salida or Canon City and Texas Creek.

IF: OK, now, so how, when they came directly up into the Valley, how did they come up?

WM: They crossed, went through Canon City and crossed the river at Parkdale and then came up what's called the Copper Gulch Road. There wasn't a road there but that's Copper Gulch, came up that Gulch and with some, any pass where DeWeese Lake is now, into the Valley from that north end.

IF: And then when he came up into the Valley, he settled in the Willow district, you said.

WM: He homesteaded at the corner of Hermit and Kettle Lane on the northwest corner of that road. Kettle owns that property now.

IF: So, was your mother was born in the Valley?

WM: That's correct.

IF: Do you, did they ever relate to you, were there any doctors, did she have a doctor? Was there a midwife?

WM: I know that she was born at the Kitzman ranch house in the Willow district and I don't know about doctors or midwives.

IF: What do you remember about transportation in this area? Do you remember when the train was here?

WM: I remember when the train was here. I remember when the train stopped running and they tore up the tracks. The train I believe ran until sometime in the late 30s.

IF: Did you ever take it?

WM: Never rode the train.

IF: Did you ever watch it as a young boy?

WM: Oh, yes, watched it very often coming to town.

IF: You'd come downtown and watch it at the station?

WM: At the station or at the crossing, don't know the names of the streets but, ones that ran east and west, the one by the Westcliffe Milk Products is.

IF: Oh, it came down that far?

WM: It came on down beyond that, right behind where Arno Hartbauer was, was part of the, that was part of the track and had a turntable there to turn the engine around. On that street that goes past where Father Dan lives, some friends of the family, Arno Hartbauer's parents lived to the west there on that property that Celeste Adams is developing now. We used to go there quite often and you had to cross the tracks and it would be activity, railroad activity, along those tracks there.

IF: Did you watch them turn the train around?

WM: Watched them turn the train around. There was a lot of activity with the ice houses and the lettuce and cauliflower packing sheds.

IF: Did you ever work in any of those?

WM: No, my dad, there were a couple of, I think they were high school teachers, at least they were teachers in the school system here, who leased this piece of ground north of the house here, about 40 acres and planted it to lettuce and the green peas and cauliflower, and those were iced, well, the peas were picked or the cauliflower and lettuce was cut and put in crates, peas in hampers and they'd take the hampers and then hauled in there and deposited at those sheds where they would ice them. All that I knew about was riding as far as where we deposited those crates of lettuce and hampers of peas.

IF: You're talking about them raising those kinds of things. Did they irrigate the land?

WM: Yes.

IF: Irrigated, and they grew very well. What about the hail that I know comes now? Do you take a chance?

WM: You took a chance and if they were hail pecked, then you couldn't ship them.

IF: Right. Did you ever help pick any of those?

WM: Yes, I did, wasn't my favorite job.

IF: Did you pick lettuce?

WM: Cut heads of lettuce and packed it in the crate, yes.

IF: How much did you get a crate, or did you-

WM: We were just helping my dad and I don't know what he got it by the crate. Seems to me like about

\$3 or something like that.

IF: Peas. How did they pack those?

WM: They were in a hamper that stood about 2 foot tall. It was tapered to where it was about 10 inches at the bottom and about maybe 14 inches at the top.

IF: Why do you think they had that kind of hamper?

WM: Well, they wouldn't pack down, see, as you go down this way, you would bruise fewer of the peas and if you had a broad base, you'd have a lot more at the bottom it would suffer from the pressure.

IF: Still bring them in that way. Some of the stores that your family shopped in?

WM: There were a number of grocery stores in town, two hardware stores. The Falkenburg family had one hardware store and the John Deere dealership. The Beeman family had one hardware store and an International Harvester dealership. Dad bought machinery like mowing machines, dump rakes, that sort of thing. From the Beeman Hardware, bought the, some, later on, a tractor power powered mowing machine from the John Deere dealership. The dry goods store, there was, a Schultz ran the dry goods store where the Village Shop is now.

IF: The Beeman's were where Jennings is now, aren't they?

WM: Right.

IF: Where was the grocery store?

WM: Ok, the grocery store was, there was one grocery store in Grandma's House there, that one time was a Piggly Wiggly store, one time it was a Safeway store. Then, the Canda family had it as an NG store. There was a, Thunderbird had one where the hardware store is now, where the Ace Hardware, they Vimont. Then, Joe Schneider had a grocery store and butcher shop in the vacant ground next to Martin & Tope there. Mrs. Mott had a drug store in Martin & Tope's building where the post office was and where the new restaurant is, Shining Mountain restaurant. That was the Merriam Drug Store.

IF: You remember that store?

WM: Remember that store. That's where we bought all of our school books. They handled the school books for the entire county.

IF: I see, they bought the school books there at Merriam Drug Store instead of at the various schools.

WM: People were responsible then for their own books, and books weren't supplied by the districts. So, whatever books you needed were ordered by that drug store and parents would go in with students and they'd buy books there.

IF: Now, I'd like to know about, where were you born?

WM: I was born in this house that we're sitting in. I was born in the north here and we're building this

house now, keeping the original shape, putting in all new windows and doors and booth and going to face it with brick.

IF: How old is this house?

WM: Well, it was here when my grandfather bought it and it was pretty much as it is now. It's a log house that's been boarded vertically on the inside and outside. The inside has, at some time or another, had dry wall put on it. The outside had lap siding for certain walls about 8. 10 inches thick.

IF: Pretty solid house.

WM: It's a comfortable house. It's cool in the summertime and easy to heat in the winter.

IF: Did you have a doctor? Did your mother have a doctor attending her when you were born?

WM: I think so, but I'm not sure. The lady that was our neighbor, Vahldick, about a half a mile to the south, spent a great deal of time there and told me repeatedly that I wouldn't have survived if she hadn't taken things in hand.

IF: (laughing) That's probably true. How about school? Where did you attend your grade school years?

WM: Went from grade 1 through 5 at the schoolhouse at the corner of Macy Lane and Cuffal Lane called the Adobe school. For part of that time, my twin sister, Wilma and myself were the only students. My older sister, Evelyn, when I was in the first couple years there, was there along with a girl by the name of Lola Frank. Those two graduated to high school and so we were by ourselves for a year and then Dolan family moved in with three children. They were there for the 5<sup>th</sup> grade.

IF: Now, who was your teacher?

WM: We started out with Frank, I think her name was Maida Frank, that's an unusual name. Then, she became ill only a few weeks into the 1<sup>st</sup> grade year and the district got a young girl that hadn't finished yet from Greely. Collins, I think was her name. Then, there was a Mrs. Holmes who came from Canon City, taught one year and-

IF: Would she drive up and down from Canon City?

WM: No, she stayed up here. She'd go back to Canon on weekends. For a couple of years, there was a, I want to say toothpick, Teatler from, he lived up near Canda somewhere up there and she taught a couple of years.

IF: So, they had a teacher for two students to teach there as a teacher for two students.

WM: Yes.

IF: Where did she stay?

WM: Many of the teachers stayed with Franks, which is about a quarter mile from the schoolhouse, Goddard Frank. Then, 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, I attended the Lutheran school in Westcliffe, which was in the

basement of the Lutheran church.

IF: Where did you stay when you stayed there? Did you come home?

WM: I came home when the weather was good and when the weather was bad, I stayed with my aunt and grandfather who lived in Westcliffe.

IF: When you went to that parochial school, and so did you graduate from that school then?

WM: Yes.

IF: And then, did you go to high school?

WM: Went to the Custer County High School and if my memory serves me correctly, I was Salutatorian. At least, I gave a speech at the graduation.

IF: It was either Salutatorian and Valedictorian or President of the class (laughing). That's who gives the speeches. How many were in your class?

WM: 13, I think.

IF: Do you remember some of the kids you graduated with?

WM: Leona Hood, then my sister Wilma, Kenneth Plant, Bob and Don Sparking, Judy Crabtree, Elmer Crain, Eddie Hermans, and the Hartbauer. That's about all that-There was a Bob Boss and Victor Trujillo.

IF: What year was this?

WM: '48, 1948.

IF: 1948. Then, you graduated from high school and did you go on to school?

WM: I went into the military. I joined the Air Force to avoid being drafted in the Army and spent four years in the Air Force. I was stationed at Pertold Air Force Base in Washington for most of those four years. I went to navigational school and that was about a year in school in Denver for navigation and radar because the bomb navigation radar optics in the 36's.

IF: Did you go overseas at all?

WM: Yes, I spent time on Guam for a short period.

IF: So, were you on a radar base?

WM: No, this was a strategic air command base. That would 36<sup>th</sup> squadron.

IF: So, you served four years.

WM: Four years.

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IF: Then you-

WM: I started to school at a branch of Washington State University and studied Mathematics. Then I-

IF: Did you go on the GI Bill to school?

WM: The military paid for it at the time but it wasn't GI Bill because I was still in the military.

IF: Oh, I see, ok.

WM: After the military, I went to work for the Convair Company and continued my education at San Diego State in San Diego. I was with Convair for a year and a half and I had in about two years of a degree. I left there and went to the Boeing Company in Seattle. Then, finished my degree in mathematics from the University of Washington and spent five years as a research designer for mathematics for Boeing Company.

IF: Now where along here did you meet your wife?

WM: I met my wife at about the time I went into the military.

IF: Was she from here?

WM: No, she had a degree from the University of Wisconsin and was teaching in Pueblo. She was at a dude ranch, it was called Alpine then, not, the only thing that's left of that up at Mackie's Alpine is one cabin which was the saddle shop. The rest of that burned down. There's a lodge burned down anyway.

IF: Did she come out on the train? Was that part of a train deal or how did she know to come from-

WM: Well, she was at the university, she worked one summer at, over at Cortez at the, oh, what do I want to say, the national park over there, Cliff Dwelling.

IF: Oh, Cliff Dwellings.

WM: Mesa Verde. She worked over there for a summer and then, she, I think she maybe worked another summer at the dude ranch up there on Premly and then she got a job teaching in Pueblo after graduation and came up here and worked at the Alpine dude ranch in the summertime.

IF: I see, so you weren't married when you went into the service?

WM: No, I went into the, I was in the military for, I think, 6 or 8 weeks before we were married.

IF: I see. Now where you married?

WM: Amarillo, TX.

IF: Ok, now tell me the names of your children.

WM: I have one son, Robert Miller, who runs El Grande sales and service in Westcliffe, and has some grandsons here that brings and some other people.

IF: Ok, and he is married to?

WM: He's married to Debbie. She's, you put me on the spot. She's from Flagler. Her dad had the, he was, he's a mechanical engineer and he worked for Martin Marietta and then got tired of that life and bought the Chase dealership in Flagler and ran that for a number of years. He came and took a course to sell tractors and ? and he's back at Martin Marietta again.

IF: I see, and they have, they now have a business in town also.

WM: Yes.

IF: Ok, let's see what else can we ask you here. What, then after you were not done with the education, I guess, after you went through the service, what did you do when you worked?

WM: I was at the Boing Company five years. I left the Boing Company because dad wanted to do something with the ranch. So, I got a, I went through the educational program then at the University of Washington and got a teaching certificate. I taught school in Castle Rock for two years, high school, after I came back from Seattle, that was in 1963. At the same time, I built the house from the upper ranch which I bought at that time from my dad. Then, I attended the University of Colorado and got a master's degree in Applied Mathematics. I taught two years at Florence Mathematics, Florence High School, and in 1967, I got my master's degree and went to the University of Southern Colorado, Instructor in Mathematics. Then, in 1974 and '75, went to Colorado State University and got a PhD in Multidisciplinary in Mathematics Animal Science and Economics and continued to teach for 21 years at the university in Pueblo. After getting my PhD from CSU, I did a fair amount of consulting for CSU, ultimately going up there as a Visiting scientist in 1988, I guess and have been a visiting scientist ever since. Ultimately, I took retirement from USC because I was on leave from down there anyway. So now, I do mathematical modeling for Animal Science Dept, Economics Dept with several grants, one from NASA, one from the National Science Foundation. I'm doing some dizzy modeling for the USDA.

IF: So, do you fulltime ranch in all of this?

WM: I fulltime ranch in the summertime. All of those people are aware that my summers aren't negotiable.

IF: I see. How many cattle do you run?

WM: About 600 head and put up about 550 tons of hay.

IF: That's pretty much fulltime (laughing). Let's see. How about the Depression? You were young during the Depression. What do you remember about that?

WM: Well, actually, do not remember much of the Depression as I hear people who lived in the cities talk about the Depression. We seemed to be in an isolated area that didn't suffer much, at least my family didn't. My parents seemed fairly well off during the Depression. Some of my, my mother's sister, we had their children for a couple of summers because life was tough for them and they were unable



care for them properly. I recall the WPA that built many of the bridges which have I guess, maybe a few of them around, some of them washed out in successive floods. I remember the CCC camps. They had a short-term camp at the south edge of Westcliffe. They had a more permanent one down near Gardner.

IF: What kind of things did they do?

WM: They built the bridges and trails across the streams in the mountains, improved trails up to the lakes from, worked on what's referred to as the Rainbow Trail which is at about the 9500–10000-foot level along the mountain range. I don't know of anything else they did around here. I think primarily they worked up in the mountains.

IF: Do you remember when your family got their first telephone?

WM: That wasn't very recent. I was in the military when we got the first telephone.

IF: Did they string their own lines?

WM: No, it was, a lot of people did but this was telephone company, I guess it was Mountain Bell who put up the poles. I recall getting electricity about 1946. I had the dubious honor of spending time in the attic running wires or under the house running wires.

IF: Did your own electrical work, huh?

WM: There was a rancher by the name of Slaymire, who came in. He'd been the contractor in Alaska during the War and he knew something about electricity. With his help I put it in, I guess.

IF: How about games?

WM: Games?

IF: When you were young, what kind of games did you play? Baseball or football or in school?

WM: The school had a, well, at the Lutheran school, I was a fair amount of softball. Pardon me, I want to get to my wife. We played mostly softball and, in the spring, and fall at the Lutheran school and tag and that sort of stuff in the wintertime in the basement of the church. The high school had a basketball team. I wasn't very good at it but played a little bit. There was a little bit of softball, it was not really organized. It wasn't a league or anything. Some ice skating.

IF: Where would you ice skate?

WM: The one teacher, home ec and chemistry teacher, built an ice rink which is still in front of the school, ice rink and tennis court which was donated to the school and that was skating on that and then-

IF: Was that Mrs. Kettle?

WM: Mrs. Kettle. Frances Kettle.

IF: Miss Kettle.

WM: Miss Kettle, you're right.

IF: And she had that built?

WM: She had that built and donated it to the school. We played some hockey on the ponds around on Sundays. No football at all.

IF: How about music? Did the school have music? Did you play music?

WM: The Lutheran school, well, you might say that it was a dramatic change from the public school to the Lutheran school. They had essentially zero education up until the 6<sup>th</sup> grade and the level of education improved dramatically at the Lutheran school.

IF: When you entered the Lutheran school.

WM: We had music, not only singing but various musical instruments. We had; I travel every Friday. Our teacher got these old lantern slides of various posters around the world for travel hour, and really was an outstanding teacher.

IF: Was it a man?

WM: A man, his name was Bowman.

IF: Bowman.

WM: Taught all eight-

IF: Was he a layman or was he a-

WM: No, he was a layman. The pastor helped out; we had one mathematics class from the pastor because the school grew in size to where the one fellow couldn't handle it.

IF: Now, would your parents pay for that parochial school?

WM: Yes.

IF: And then there was still public school for children who weren't of that faith.

WM: We had, actually, quite a few people who were students at the Lutheran school who were not of the Lutheran faith. But their parents, I guess, felt it was a better school than the public school.

IF: Alright, I think that's about all I can think of to ask you. Thank you very much.  
Tape ends.