

MF: This Margie Fenton and I am speaking to Edna Kershisnik. It's April 21, 1988. It is rainy outside. We are speaking from her living room.

I guess first I'll ask, where were you born?

EK: I was born in Lincoln, Nebraska, in 1901, on September 30th.

MF: What brought you to Rock Springs?

EK: Well, we lived in Nebraska until I was in high school and then we moved to Douglas, which was a beautiful sleepy little town, with lots of trees and grass. A really nice place to live. Then I went to the University of Wyoming after graduation and met Frank Kershisnik and then married in 1923. And that's how I came to Rock Springs.

MF: What were your first impressions of the town?

EK: Well, like I said I lived in this beautiful little town of Douglas. I had never been in a mining town. There didn't seem to be any pride in your homes. There was very little grass, wooden sidewalks, what there were. No paved streets, the mud was a foot deep when it rained. And the first thing I saw, was from the train window, was like a big metal frame. And there was maybe thirty steps up and then you walked over the railroad tracks to get to the other side of town. And there was thirty more steps to go down..And that was the only way pedestrians could get from one side of Rock Springs to the other. There was no underpasses and things like that-nothing.

MF: Where was this located?

EK: This was from, well it would be from the North Side Bank, across the tracks, and I don't remember what was on the other side at that time. Probably a saloon. There were more saloons than most anything else! (laughter)

MF: Where did you live?

EK: Well, we lived on Gobel, in an old rock house for about six months. The lady that owned it was um, we called her Auntie Young. And there was only one bedroom, and she lived in the house too. And she slept on the davenport in the living room so we were never able to have company at night, or anything. She would fix her dinner early, and then when Frank got home at six, well, then I could have the kitchen. We lived there for six months, and then my in-laws had a ranch and they spent quite a bit of time there, and they had younger children and they kinda wanted us to come over and live in their house, which we did. And then after perhaps a year or so they built a little house right next door on M street. And thats where we lived until two months before my youngest child was born, and then we moved to this house on Pine street.

MF: And you have lived here most of the time in this house?

EK: Yes, uh huh. We have lived here almost fifty years now. And on M street, well there weren't any more houses besides our little house and it kind of backed up to the back of Washington School. And that was where I used to watch the Orientals going into their dugour homes.

MF: They all lived in one section?

EK: Yes, well, there was, I think, maybe like a certain group. They just had like small roofs that were sitting on the ground it looked like to me. And I'd see men walking along and suddenly they would disappear. They, I don't know, they must have had a way of getting under those roofs. And I guess later on the school district must have bought land or something and they dug it all up and you know, prepared for a school ground. And people used to come over there and they would find beautiful artifacts of the Orientals. Like jade buddahs and different things. My husband and I, we never did go over there, but

people really got some beautiful things from that lot.

MF: Why did the Chinese leave their artifacts there?

EK: Well, I just don't know if they were moved suddenly or why. But there were many people.

MF: And just regular people took these?

EK: Pardon me?

MF: Just people came and took these items?

EK: Yes! Well maybe they (the orientals) had hidden them in the ground or something. And maybe they had to move suddenly. I really don't know how come. But then, they were, I remember because people would swarm over there in the evenings, you know.

MF: What year was that?

EK: Well, that was probably around sixty years ago. Something like that...be '28, '27- 1927-28, something like that.

MF: Were the Chinamen still there, in town?

EK: No, I think they were moved to someplace about the east end of Rock Springs. I never did see where they were settled. But I did become very friendly with the Okanos. They had a fish market, on Pilot Butte, and I'd walk down the street with my baby buggy and babies in it and Mrs. Okano would be sitting on the stoop there, just a couple of steps, and she always greeted me with "How many you got now"? (Laughter) And we kind of kept track of each other all through the years. And they have always been a very, a family that I was very fond of.

MF: Were there sidewalks that you could push the buggy on?

EK: Well, there were some sidewalks, but no paved streets. And it just seemed to me like Bitter Creek just wandered all over Rock Springs. You were always haveing to cross on little bridges and such as that.

MF: How many children did you have?

EK: Six. And they are all married. And I have, well I brag a little bit, I have twenty grandchildren, and eighteen great-grandchildren.

MF: How was it raising six children back then?

EK: It was very easy. Everybody kept their children quite close to home. And my five children were born while we were on M street, and my youngest was born two months after we moved here. But I can always remember one neighbor, she could patch overalls so beautifully, and my mother and I did not do such good patching and the children were always wanting this lady to patch their overalls for them.

MF: Did you have a midwife or did you go to the hospital?

EK: I went to the hospital. The North Side Bank was here when I came, the Park Hotel was here and the bank building across the tracks. The North Side State Bank was kind of a rickety old building, in fact my husband fell down the elevator shaft and broke his ankle one time. And the Stockgrowers Mercantile was there and at the end of Pilot Butte was the Rock Springs Commercial, and my father-in-law was mamager at that time and Frank worked for him for \$125.00 a month. And believe me we pinched pennies for a good long time!

MF: When the kids got sick did you take them to the doctor?

EK: Oh hes. Dr. Lauzer was here, and he would come to the house you know; At that time they visited your homes. And, well, he delivered all my children except one and he was in Cora

on his ranch the day that Jean was born, and his assistant delivered Jean. Dr. Saunders I believe his name was.

MF: And your doctor was Dr. Lozier?

EK: Lauzer. L-a-u-z-e-r. And he was really a very fine and conscientious doctor. We depended on him a lot. And I could call him and maybe be in tears over something with one of my kids, but he would always come and reassure me that everything was going to be o.k.

MF: Did you have running water back then?

EK: Yes, there was water in our little house. We had a half basement and with five children, my husband and me. And my father died and my mother came to live with us. And that made eight people living in three rooms. But it was a nice little house. The living room was not quite as big as this one and the bedroom was a fair size. It had to be, it had to hold three beds! (Laughter) And the kitchen went all across the back of the house and was through my kitchen window I used to watch the Orientals in that vacant lot.

MF: Did you have a washing machine?

EK: I had three babies and no washing machine. And two of them were always in diapers it seemed. And I had to wash the sheets and everything. We did it.

MF: By hand?

EK: Yes, I had the clothes lines outside. And when we moved in this house I had a twin tub Dexter, and I just thought the world of that! That was really a big help for me. And then when we remodeled the basement, my children decided I needed a washer and dryer. And I fought it but finally gave in, and I'm glad I did.

MF: What kind of holidays did you celebrate, how did you celebrate them?

EK: Well it was always family affairs, you know. Grandma and Grandpa lived right next door to us and we celebrated together and there were relatives of Franks around us, you know. And we, nobody, none of our friends had any money, you know. We, Gee, we planned for quite awhile before, before we'd ever get to see a picture show or something like that. But we made our own entertainment and everybody was happy. You know everybody shared the same problems and such.

MF: Did you get together with your neighbors?

EK: Oh yes. Well, our entertainment was usually over the fence, you know. Just visiting because they had youngsters too. But we just seemed to all get along very well. It was nice. And then later on when the children were growing up, somehow we got interested in arrowheads, and we'd, Well, there was our little white house, some vacant lots, a couple belonged to Grandpa and then there was the county barn that they kept all the road machines in and Frank and I used to go passed that and up a small hill and we'd just hunt around. I don't remember that we found anything at that time. But we did come upon an Oriental grave yard. Up on that little hill. And it was interesting to us because there were just wooden boards that were the markers, with figures on, you know, probably telling the name or something. And we'd see food on the graves, some of them, and then sometimes we'd see one that had the bones dug up. Because at that time they thought no one rested in peace until their bones were back country, and they'd send them back to Japan or China.

MF: Where is this hill, in reference now?

EK: Well, it was just beyond that red barn. It was just beyond M street. Now theres lovely homes up in there now. Kinda, let me see, how can I tell you. Well, I don't know, it was just up in that section. But now there are nice homes up there.

And we, we used to go up along White Mountain and find lovely heads, really nice. Nice workmanship, very few chips. That meant they were making them there, you know. They had brought them in and obsidian that they brought back from Yellowstone Park. So our collection grew until finally my youngest son framed them. And it was a family project. So until the family wants to part with them, why, we're keeping them. And we have, probably he framed sixty or seventy frames. And each one, none of them are all of this one or all of that ones, you know. We just remember some of those that meant a lot to us.

MF: Was the town very big when yo first came here?

EK: No, well, it was a lot bigger then Douglas, of course. But I wouldn't know how many people were here. They were all miners, you know. And two of, well, one of Franks uncles was killed in the mine but that was before I came here. We were both at the University at that time. And also before that, across the street, across that vacant lot by Finer Cleaners, his uncle had a butcher shop and he and his son were closing up the shop for the night, and two men came in and killed his uncle and robbed the store. So there was quite a bit of, I'd say accidents or sad things it seemed like that used to happen, but of course they didn't touch me so much because I didn't know very many people here, just our neighbors and the relatives.

MF: And where was it you husband worked?

EK: The Rock Springs Commercial it was called.

MF: Was that a store?

EK: That was the name of the store. And it was right across the street from what used to be Wexelbergers cleaning establishment. It was at the end of Pilot Butte, where it turns to go up toward where Union Merc used to be.

MF: What kind of things did they sell?

EK: Oh it was everything. Groceries, and dry goods and the same way with Miners Merc, that Rudy Anselmi was the manager of, and Union Merc. My son-in-law eventually became manager of that store, and that was groceries and dry goods too, you know.

MF: Did you do all your shopping where your husband worked?

EK: Oh you bet!! (Laughter) That was absolutely necessary. But Rudy and Frank were always very close friends. And then when Grandpa finally quit being the manager why we'd go to Miners Merc to shop, for groceries especially. And Union Merc too, you know. Of course Stockgrowers was the same, groceries and dry goods but it was across the tracks, and it was kind of a problem to get there for me.

MF: Did you buy most of your clothes or did you make them?

EK: My mother and I made all our boys, I had four boys, we made all their little overalls. And I remember one year Jack, he was just a little boy, but his Aunt Ann gave him a real pretty pair of blue serge little overalls, and he looked at them and he was so tickled and he said, to my mother, "Please don't patch them Grandma"! (Laughter) Oh, I've had lots of nice memories. I've made lots of nice friends here but you know now they are mostly up in the cemetery. But some are in nursing homes and I think that I have been very fortunate that I can still be in my own home.

MF: Where did your kids go to school, was it just like one room school or was it...

EK: Oh no, no no. There was Washington School where the three oldest ones started, and then the three youngest ones started at Yellowstone because we had moved here. And they all went to the University. My oldest son, kind of inherited the insurance business that my husband had. And my daughter Marilyn

married Emil Bertagnolli, then David graduated from the University of Wyoming as a geologist and he has lived all over the world. He married a local girl, Maryann Kovach, and then Jack married a local girl Carlene Menepace and they live in Rock Springs. David now lives in Texas. They bought a home during one of the times that he was here in the United States and Gulf Oil, who he works for, for thirty some years, they kept it rented for him and everything. So they had a home to come back to and now he is retired and Jack is retired also . And they had four boys and like I say I'm very fortunate that we're all here still, except my husband who died in '53. And after David was Jeanie, who is Mrs. John McCrann and they live here and they have four children and then Joe is my youngest and he teaches in highschool.

MF: Was there a lot of violence in the town?

EK: Violence? Quite a bit, it seemed to me like. Well, you know, now seems like theres quite a bit, you know for the size of the town and all, but probably no more then ordinary.

MF: Were there many churches?

EK: The, yes there were quite a few churches. There were, well some of these newer ones that have started weren't here then. You know, Assembly of God and some of those. But there was always two catholic churches, the north side and the south side. And the north side church which was only a block from our house was in the process of being built. We went to church in the basement for a long time. And my oldest son was the first child baptised in the north side church after it was finished. And the south side then when we moved over here why we became affiliated with that. And the Episcopal church was here and the Methodist church and the Mormans of course. And I think they were the most prominent churches here.

MF: Were there any natural disasters here, like floods or dust storms?

EK: Well, it just seemed to me like we were always worried that Bitter Creek was going to overflow it's banks. Because on M street we were in a position where we could have had water in the basement and such as that. But most of the flooding was down on West Flat. You know theres kind of that big bridge, go over, and then there is a street that goes off to the side and those people used to get water in their basements.

MF: Was there a lot of dust:

EK: Dust? Yes especially until the streets were paved, you know. And when we moved up here there weren't any houses like across the street and we could see a dust storm coming from Green River, from here you know. We'd hurry up and shut all the windows and try to keep it out.

MF: Were there any epidemics?

EK: Yes, we had an epidemic of Scarlet Fever at one time and I was the one that got it. And then just one of my children got it. And the rest were quarantined out of the house over at the Grandmas, which was next door. And my husband too, you know.

MF: Was a lot of the town effected?

EK: Oh yes, there was a lot at that time. But thats the only time I can remember an epidemic where you were quarantined, you know.

MF: How did they treat it, was there any medecine?

EK: Well, let me think. I don't remember. I know the doctor came almost every day but I don't remember that he left medecine.

MF: When was that, what year?

EK: Well that would have been when David was really small. He was born in 1930, about '35 maybe. Something like that.

MF: Were there any town holidays, that the whole town celebrated?

EK: Well I know there was, let me think, probably the miners had a holiday but I didn't, really wasn't effected with those and of course the Orientals had that big dragon that they would march down Pilot Butte, on their New Years. But you know, I was busy with all my family, and everything. My sixth child was going to be born. I said to my husband, " I can't bring another baby into this three room house"! And so thats when we moved up here and I thought we'd never ever fill up this house. But now just my youngest son and I are here, and we have every inch of space used up. (Laughter) It's funny, I feel sorry when I think of when I'm not here, what are the kids gonna do with all this stuff I've accumulated, you know. But, its been a wonderful life. I really have never regretted coming here, wonderful people, sincere.

MF: Did they build the house for you or was it already here?

EK: This house was built by John Wisnand, and I don't know how long they lived in it but we moved into it, it'll be fifty years this coming summer. They had troubles, and I think Mrs. Wisnand went to California, I'm not sure.

MF: Where were you married?

EK: In Douglas, on July 3rd, 1923, be sixty-five years ago this coming summer.

MF: In church?

EK: In the catholic church.

MF: Were you advised on family planning?

EK: No, we didn't, nobody had any family planning at that time. You took your babies as they came and were happy to have them. And now when I think of it six children sounds like a lot but I don't know what I'd do without this number six. He is a great comfort to me and is very attentive and watches over me very carefully.

MF: Did you listen to the radio, you didn't have T.V. back then did you?

EK: No, no we had radio, and oh yes we, Amos and Andy and some of those. We really looked forward to those. I didn't have a t.v. till after Frank died. And then they, the children decided it would be a nice thing for me to have. I kind of fought it for awhile but now we're very dedicated. (Laughter)

MF: Did you belong to any social clubs?

EK: Well, we just had our own little bridge club, you know I belong to two and I really didn't have time to do any civic work and I wasn't interested in it either, as far as that goes. But quite a few of my friends were. And a lot of them worked too, you know.

MF: Did you go on vacations, camping or hunting?

EK: Well, Frank used to go fishing quite a bit. And we'd go up to Pinedale and load the car with the kids. We didn't have a car when we moved up here. You know, we walked every place. From M street I'd walk clear up to the hospital to see friends and such as that. We did a lot of walking you know. And then Frank and one of his brothers bought a car. Frank could have it certain days and his brother would have it the other times, you know. And finally we were able to get our own car. And like I say we would go up to Pinedale and fish and we made quite a few very nice friends that I still see up there. In fact one of the girls that was my sorority sister lives in Pinedale. And I see her now. Joe built a house in Pinedale.

and thats my youngest son, and we go up there now quite a bit. It's a beautiful little house and we enjoy going there. Then I have several other friends that we met in our trips up there, the Morcrofts, and the Carsons.

MF: Were the roads paved then?

EK: Oh we just rattled over the worst roads you could ever imagine. Half the time we had to stop and build a road through a creek or something, you know. It would take hours to get there, in the car even. But, it was fun and our friends were always so nice and glad to see us. Even with the six children. I really appreciated that. A lot of times we'd stay all night with somebody and we'd bed the kids down somehow, you know. Nobody stood on ceremony, seems like. I'll always remember how Margaret Morcrofts kitchen smelled, because she baked bread and OH it smelled so good!

MF: Did you go up there often?

EK: The children and I wouldn't go as often as Frank would go with his brothers, go fishing, you know.

MF: What did you do around the house--you know during the day?

EK: Well, we had duties to do everyday. My mother and I just about had to wash twice a week, which was Monday and Thrusday. In the meantime we'd do some cleaning or baking, such as that. And ironing of course. One of us would iron upstairs and one would iron downstairs. To keep things going you know.

MF: Who handled the finances, you or your husband?

EK: My husband did. And I always thought we were just at povertys door almost. I ujsed to feed my whole family on a pound of hamburger by using lots of crumbs and corn meal and such as that. But they always tell me they never were hungry.

MF: Who disciplined the children, and how did you

EK: Well, I did mostly. And when I'd scold them for something Frank would stand back and say"YEAH"!

MF: What tasks did you like doing most?

EK: Putting them to bed I think. (Laughter)

MF: What did you dislike most?

EK: Well, I don't think there was anything I really disliked. It was a nice full life, and I'd get awfully tired sometimes but still it was rewarding. And you know it never occurred to me to like Rock Springs or dislike it. It was where Frank was and so we made the most of it.

MF: What was it like in the 1920's, prohibition.

EK: Well, that never seemed to be much of a problem for us. Franks father made wine I remember. But my husband was never a drinker or anything like that so.

MF: Did they make, did they have stills in town, or do you know?

EK: Oh I think everybody made their own wine. I mean like Slovenians especially and I imagine the Italians too, you know, would make their own wine. But Grandpa used to get in carloads of grapes, you know for the store, to sell to people who were making wine. It wasn't against the law or anything.

MF: Did the depression effect the area?

EK:
It probably did but it seemed to me like we were depressed quite a bit anyway. (Laughter) So we made out ok.

MF: What were the conditions like during WWII?

EK: Well, I had, our oldest boy was in the war. And it was a very hard time for us. He was in Europe of course, in the Battle of the Bulge. And we got notice that he was in the hospital and that's all it said. We didn't know if he was injured or what. And that was right at Christmas time. And that was a very hard time for us. And we finally got word that he had been sent back to the United States, and was in Massachusetts, I believe. And he finally did get home. I kept a diary of everything that was mentioned in the sector where ever he was and he never would look at it. He still hasn't, And so, and while he never, you know, gave us much information or any thing. One time he did say they were stationed close to a farm and the farmer gave him milk, the soldiers, and how good it was and how good it tasted to them. But he never has told us anything about it and doesn't seem to be the least bit interested in this huge book that I kept with pictures and everything.

MF: Did you have ration cards?

EK: Isn't it funny, I can't remember. If everybody was issued them I'm sure we were, but maybe because of our big family.... I don't know- I really don't remember that.

MF: What is your best memory of Rock Springs?

EK: The friends I made. I really had some very dear people but like I say most of them are in the cemetery. But I have a few and we visit on the phone quite a bit. But we don't see each other, you know. We are all quite elderly now and we don't get around as much as we did.

MF: What's your funniest memory?

EK: Oh my goodness sakes! I wish I could think, we had a lot of fun, but I can't think of a funniest thing.

MF: What do you think the biggest change in the country since you were young?

EK: Oh, everybody seems to be very self-indulgent now, to me. Goodness, you know it seems like every child has to have a car, it just seems like they don't let their children work for the things and that way they appreciate what they have achieved more. And of course none of our kids ever had a car until they could get it themselves. So, but now it seems like all my grandchildren, when they reach the age of driving, well, they have a car. So and like I say everybody seems a little more like selfish, it's what I want. You know they are not as willing to work things out as we used to have to. For instance like divorce, it never occurred to us, we just tackled our problems and went on from there, solved them ourselves. Where now, why a problem comes up, well, they can always get a divorce.

MF: When it boomed in the Seventies, when it started to boom here did that effect your life at all?

EK: No I don't think so, maybe it helped Franks insurance. My young Frank. That would be in the Seventies, did you say? He was in charge then. He was a graduate engineer and worked for the Highway. Then our Dad decided he had to come in to the insurance office with him. And I remember just thinking that it wasn't right because Frank liked his work with the Highway. Dad must have seen the hand writing on the wall because he had high blood pressure and there wasn't anything that could be done about it at that time, except rest. And we used to go to Denver to see a doctor that became a good friend of ours and he would put him in the hospital for bed rest awhile. But he insisted that young Frank come in the office with him about two years before he died. He died when he was 50. And you know it really has been a blessing because he was able to take over and make a good living for me and his family too. And that's what he is still doing. It's the KERSHISNIK AGENCY.

MF: Do you have any words, you'd like to leave for your grandchildren?

EK: Well, I tell them everything as they come along. We are very close. I write. I have sixty, what do you call it? Progeny, that I write to and they write to me and its getting so its awfully hard for me to write. I want to hear from them, so keep it up. I am very proud of, I really am very proud of my whole family. They've been very supportive of me and I have of them. And we just love to get together and be together and everybody is interested in their brothers and sisters, so I think the Lords been mighty good to me.