Oral History of William R. Shuster

History of Wyoming
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Kathleen M. Simek

Author's Note: William R. "Bill" Shuster's father has been interviewed for this class previously. I thought it might be interesting to hear a second generation opinion! Also present during the interview is Bill's wife Jackie.

William "Bill" Richard Shuster was born May 1, 1949 at the old Rock Springs Memorial Hospital on "C" Street to William Shuster and Ellen Canestrini Shuster, life time residents of Rock Springs. Doctor G. M. Harrison was in attendance.

Bill spent the first four or five years living in an apartment on "B" Street and later moved to a house at 215 Virginia Street where his parents still reside. The house was green. "Everybody on the block wanted a white house, but the developer said we can't paint every house because it would look like a hospital so everybody had to pick a color." It was rectangular with a one car garage, living room, dining, kitchen and two bedrooms. Later they fixed up the basement and added another bedroom.

Bill's first memories are of Kindergarten at Lincoln Elementry School. The next year he would transfer to Our Lady of Sorrows Catholic School where he would spend the next eight years being taught by the nuns. There were two grades in each classroom. They wore blue school uniforms.

Boys were expected to behave themselves. Girls were expected to maintain proper behavior at all times. They were not allowed to wear pants, "that was a mortal sin in those days". The priest, Father Gianola, came in during the eighth grade and gave us a

little talk on sex education. "He used words that you would not expect a priest to know and use."

There was another Catholic School on the otherside of the tracks but they "were like another town". The two schools, though less than a mile away, had nothing in common.

Ellen Shuster traded at the Miners Mercantile, now Wyoming Automotive on Pilot Avenue. Salt Lake City was a long ways away so they rarely went there. Miners Mercantile was also owned by Uncle Rudy and Aunt Louise (Shuster) Anselmi. Bill's father and Louise are brother and sister. Rudy Anselmi is presently head of Wyoming (state) Board of Equalization. Aunt Louise passed away in the Winter of 1984.

Rudy's daughter Mary Lou was a radio announcer for then KVRS 13.50, now KUGR. She played the top twenty hits every Sunday from 12:00 to 1:00 and also worked evenings playing requests.

Bill was joined by two brothers. David, five years younger, presently works for the Wyoming Highway Department. Stephen is twelve years younger. A 1984 West Point graduate, Stephen is married to the former Patty MacManus of New Jersey and expecting a child in the Spring of 1985. He is stationed at Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Taking out the garbage, shoveling snow, cutting the grass and occassionally drying the dishes were the tasks assigned Bill. He had plenty of time to play with his special friends, little Louis Muir and Johnny and Debbie Vase, children of Mike Vase. Other neighbors were the Pete Vase's and Louis Muir families.

"Kick the Can" was a favorite game for the Virginia Street

children. Someone would be the "guard" and everyone else would hide. The guard would try and find the other children. When he did they were brought to an established "caught" circle. Anyone who had not been found could sneak over, kick the can and let the others go free.

The Land behind the Morman Church at 2055 Edgar was a vacant lot and very rocky desert. Bill loved to climb the rocks. To this day there is a special warmth in his voice when he talks about the desert around Rock Springs. "Five minutes out of town and you're in the middle of no where. I just like to be out in it." His wife Jackie claims "he loves the solitude found there".

Bill's family did not have a television set until 1956, but he immediately recalls that "The Honeymooners" was a family and personal favorite when they did get a television. Bill also enjoys reading. Zorba the Greek was a much loved book, read and reread because of the main character's "free wheeling" type of personality. He first read it when he was a freshman in college (1967).

Bill remembers that Christmas was celebrated with a big turkey and ham dinner. They opened their presents after Santa came Christmas morning. Easter was celebrated by an Easter egg hunt for family members followed by another large family dinner.

He also remembers the "Grape Festival" at the Slovenski Dom. Grapes were hung from the ceiling and a policeman would guard them. Festival goers would dance around the grapes and try to steal them without the policeman catching them. If they were caught they were put in a jail and had to pay a fine to get out.

His family did not hunt or go camping. Bill went fishing with his Uncle Richard (Canestrini) and once a year they all went to the Knights of Columbus picnic at the Kent ranch. One year they found a dead horse in the hills not far from the picnic grounds and from then on they made yearly checks on the horse's remains. The family did take vacations. The California one to Disneyland and San Diego was instantly recalled.

Bill claims he did not really date. The kids used College Hill as the local teen hangout. He remembers driving out to Witten and Dines coal mine sites with metal detectors. By this time they were "ghost towns". A fire siren would go off at 10 pm. Anyone under 16 would have to be off the streets. Bill was never caught breaking curfew so does not remember what happpened to you if you were caught!

The railroad would bring in a car load of Indians to repair the tracks so Bill remembers lots of Indians in work clothes.

During the 1960 Presidential election, John F. Kennedy motorcaded through the streets of Rock Springs. He was warmly received by all kinds of people -- "good crowd".

In the early 1960's, Lady Bird Johnson dedicated Flaming Gorge Dam. Bill went out to the airport to watch her arrival and shake her hand.

On May 9, 1969, while a student at the University of Wyoming, a train celebrating the 100th Anniversary of the Transcontinental Railroad came to Laramie. Bill remembers John Wayne was so drunk he was hauled off the train into the depot. The train left

without him!. Bill could not say what happened after to Mr. Wayne or how he got home.

Bill graduated from the University of Wyoming in 1971 with a mechanical engineering degree. He remembers small anti-war demonstrations he sympathized with. He had a college deferment for two years. The Selective Service changed to a lottery system based on birthdate during his junior year. May 1 was number 330 out of 365 so he never worried about being drafted.

Shuster's first job was with Safeway the summer of 1965. He worked in produce and as a "bag boy" for $1.25 per hour. One Saturday night two men working in the bakery started pie fighting. Some how one of them spotted Bill and chased him around the store and out to his car. The poor car recieved a Boston Cream pie to the windshield!

Some of the produce people would "accidently" break a couple of watermelons and share the remains with the rest of the employees. He made $300.00 the whole summer.

The following summer's job was busboy at the Outlaw Inn for $1.50 per hour. The summer of 1967, he started working for the Highway Department at $1.90 per hour. He was "stuck out at the weight station at Little America". He soon accepted a job on the railroad for $2.60/hour as an electrician rewiring section houses. The summers of 1968 and 1969 he was a draftsman at FMC for $525.00 monthly. In 1970 he worked as an electrician for FMC at an hourly rate, it was a "good pay raise".

After graduation from the University, he worked one day for a seismograph company that was working in the "dark ages". The hourly

pay was $1.90. They were being sent to Lander with a $6.00 per day subsistance allowance for lodging and food. The men were going to pitch a tent in the Lander City Park to help make ends meet. It was not the for him!

He remained unemployed until that September when he accepted a job with Bectel Construction as a surveyor out at the Jim Bridger Power Plant. That November he moved into an office in the engineering department at $750.00 per month. Shuster recalls several incidences of accidental deaths. One man had a railroad car full of steel fall on him. Another man fell off a hoist 150 feet to his death.

In order to get his Bectel job he had to join the Pipefitters Union. They met at the Outlaw Inn once a month. "The meeting would get pretty rowdy", especially when they were discussing wages and non-union contractors. Dues were very reasonable, about $32.00 a month. Part of the money was sent to the International Union, part remained locally. They also sent money to build a Union Hall in Cheyenne.

Bill never received strike pay, but had always saved extra to get by. Strikes usually took place in the summer so lots of the men took their vacations.

Bill was fired from one job but never really could get a reason from the foreman. The Union E- (examining) Board cleared him to work again though.

There were several lay offs too. On one of these lay offs he went to Alaska. That story and an account of his vacation to Mexico

are included following this report.

Mountain Fuel Supply Company hired Shuster in August of 1981 as an engineer. He does specification, designing and testing on pipelines, compression stations and gas well. Presently Bill has an office in the Mountain Fuel complex on Connecticut Avenue.

In October of 1974, Bill met Jacqueline Mae Sheely at a party given by a mutual friend, Jim Ruggeria. "Jackie" and Bill started "going together". On January 1, 1976 they were married in a small formal ceremony at Trinity Luthern Church in Rock Springs.

Carrie Kristen Shuster was born January 16, 1977 in Rock Springs. Proud father was in the delivery room. Bill recalls that the next day , Monday, January 17, Gary Gilmore was executed.

In early 1980, the Shusters brought their present home at 312 Taylor in Rock Springs. On February 20, 1980 Jennifer Marie Shuster arrived and again Bill was in attendance in the delivery room.

On the whole Bill thinks the boom of the 1970's was good for Rock Springs. The belt route, streets straightened out, better fire and police protection, more and better shopping, the new sewer system and beautification program started during that period. The education system is in good shape.

He does admit to resenting the "Texans" at this time because they were "loud and obnoxious". "Some of them were just ... but to them Texas was just heaven! They always tried to tell you how great Texas was, how terrible things were in Wyoming. You'd ask them if things are so bad in Wyoming, why are you here?" And of course they could never answer that.

Traffic was bad, prices went up and rent was very high if you could find anything. Though crime never personally touched him, he remembers it being a problem, especially the violents of Michael Rosa's death and the shooting incident at Dotsie's when Deputy Delbert Grey shot and killed a worker from the Jim Bridger Power Plant. Two favorite "boom town" stores were brought to mind. Jakes Bar on "K" Street had little rooms in the back. For $30.00 you and the prostitute of your choice could have privacy. Curley's was a two story building where the Young at Hearts Senior Citizens Center now stands. Downstairs was a pool hall and around back on the second floor was dice gambling. You had to knock at the back door and hope the door keeper knew you and let you in. "Lots of money was exchanged -- cars, money, property." Some were old time residents but some were new comers.

Bill is very optimistic about the future of America. He foresees a "reduction of government interference in private lives and more of a return to individual initiative -- people getting out and doing things on their own without waiting for the government taking care of it for them."

Bill's advice for the future is for his children to "be honest and up front in your dealing with other people". Good words for all of us to live by.

The following are copies of Bill's own written accounts of two trips he made. The words and spelling are his and reflect Bill as a person.

Mexico Trip

Went to Mexico with Larry Tarno, March 1975. Left Denver on Meicana and flew to Mexico City. We didn't have hotel reservations, so we relied on cab driver to find us a place - nice hotel in downtown. Rented a VW and went to Temples of Sun and Moon and other archeological sites. Small towns in the country were interesting - open air markets and barter system, lots of small children begging for money. Flew to Guatemala City - extreme military presence everywhere, armed soldiers in airport lobby and on downtown streets. There is a secret police force - the Narciso - plain clothes police who are everywhere at night making sure there is order on the streets. In the airport a teen-age boy said his uncle had a hotel so we spent the night there ($20). The next day we found a hotel for $6/night. Took a DC-3 to the eastern jungle and visited the Mayan temples and pyramids - excavation run by the University of Pennsylvania. They also had a nightly program in Guatemala City to help raise money. Excavation continues but the jungle is still trying to cover everything.

took a guided tour to Lake Atilan to the south. Many active volcanoes and numerous lakes at Chichicastenago. The Indian peasants had a sacred hill in the middle of town that they used for pagan worship. When the Catholic missionaries first came, they made a deal with the Indians. They built a church on the hill but the Indians are still

allowed inside for their pagan worship. When we were inside, there was a Catholic baptism in progress in the back of the church and the Indians were in aisles placing corn and flowers on the floor and lighting candles to their gods. Strong anti-communist feeling in this country - guide showed bullet holes in wall in church courtyard where sommunists were supposedly executed. Numerous American companies in Guatemala - especially drug companies. Of course, there was a McConald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken in downtown. Guatemalans hate the Mexicans but are (or were) friendly to Americans (they especially liked the Yankee dollar). We flew to Puerto Vellarta on the Mexican coast, spent a few days and then went to Mazatlan for a few days and then back to Denver. The best places to see were the places that were not slanted to the tourist. Mazatlan is nice, but it is not Mexico - it is set up for the tourist. The small towns in the country gave a better picture of the people and customs. In Guatemala especially, the people are either poor or rich - there was not much of a middle class. There was always little children where every we went and they were alsays begging. Conditions in these countries makes us thankful to be living in the U.S. Also, in all the Mexican restaurants ~~rauants~~ we ate in, I never saw a taco, or a burrito on the menu. Do you think Taco Time is pulling a fast one on the Americans?

Alaska Trip

Jackie and I went to Alaska in June 1976. I was laid-off from the Bridger plant in May so we dicided to go. We had a new

pick-up with a camper top so we took off. Went to Casper, Williston and then to Grand Forks Minn. to visit friends. Left and headed north to Winnipeg. Headed west to Regina then thru Edmonton to Dawson Creek, B.C. the start of Alaskan Highway. Highway is 1400 miles long into Fairbanks and was constructed during WWII to provide land access into Alaska. Road was paved into Fort St. John and then went to gravel. Since it was the start of tourist season, road was in good shape. Made approx. 300 miles a day. Stayed at Watson Lake. Interesting collection of road signs at edge of town. Was started during const. when a G.I. put a sign indicating the mileage back to his hometown in the states. Since then tourist have been putting up signs from the areas that they came from i.e. Rock Springs Pop 20,00, Elevation 6200. Next day at White Horse - very interesting start of narrow gauge R.R. down to the coast. Flat bottom boats in dry dock - boats were used to haul gold and supplies in and out of Yukon Territory. Crossed border into Alaska. Got cross-threaded with the border police - he asked me what country I was a citizen of and I told him Wyoming - made us get out of truck and he searched for illegal items, mainly maryuana (none was found mainly because we didn't have any). Stopped a Toh Junction first town in Alaska - stayed a campground run by some people from Big Piney. Met a young man from Sheridan who just had his truck wrecked by a hitchhiker who was helping him drive. On to Fairbanks and friends who were working the pipeline. He was a truck driver and had made $58,000 in 8 months. Fairbanks is the end of the Alaska

Highway. Headed south to Mount McKinley. Took a 80 mile bus ride into the base - cars are not allowed unless you had reservations at one of the few camp spaces. McKinley was awesome and it was one of few cloudless days. End of the road was still 20 miles from base. Stayed that night at park headquarters and then to Anchorage - stayed 3 days. Went to Portage Glacier south of town. Glacier had receded several hundred yards since discovery in late 1800's. North in a loop back to Toh Junction and then to Dawson City. Border station sat on top of bald mountain with no facilities i.e. restrooms, phones etc. Passed old abandoned gold dredges left in the creek bottoms. Came up to Yukon River and Jackie was wondering how we would cross. I pointed to a ferry boat across the Yukon. The boat crossed the river and we drove on and were taken to the other side and Dawson City - site of the Klondike Gold Rush in the late 1800's. Gambling is legal here (one of few places in Canada) and the old dance halls were fixed up like the gold rush days - plenty of blackjack, music and can-can girls. Dawson City was home to Robert Service (poet) and Jack London and we went to their cabins. Back to White Horse, Fort St. John, Prince George, Jasper, the Columbia Ice Fields, Baniff and Lake Louise, Calgary and into Montana. Tried to go through Glacier Park but was closed by snowstorm. Spent some time in Yellowstone and Jackson and then home. We were gone 5 weeks and put 10,000 miles on the new truck. Replaced the windshield becuase of rock damage on the gravel road. Of the 1400 miles of Alaska Highway about 200 miles is paved. This was one of those once in a life time trips, but someday we hope to return with our two daughters.

other notes:

very long daylight hours - sunrise at 4:00 am and sunset at 11:00 pm

mosquitoes as big as B-52's

prices were very high - small dixie cup of milk 70¢

stopped in a small store along highway and were going to get some popsicles - Lady said the last time she saw one was 5 years ago

Canadians, for most part were friendly, however there was some resentment about American business influence. one U.S. dollar = 97¢ Canadian, much worse nowadays

NAME: WILLIAM R SHUSTER

PRESENT ADDRESS: 312 TAYLOR ST. ROCK SPRINGS WYO.

1. Present profession or occupation: ENGINEER

2. Occupations followed in the past (give dates):

3. Date of birth: 5/1/49 Place of birth: ROCK SPRINGS

4. Date of moving to Wyoming:

5. Full name of parents (give mother's maiden name)
   WILLIAM SHUSTER
   ELLEN CANESTRINI

6. Names of brothers and sisters (and to whom married):
   DAVID
   STEPHEN

7. Schools attended (give dates):
   OUR LADY OF SORROWS 1 thru 8 UNIV. OF WYO
   R.S. HIGH SCHOOL

8. Places of residence in Wyoming (give dates):
   ROCK SPRINGS
   LARAMIE

9. Military service (dates, awards, area served, rank, etc.):
   NONE

10. Political offices held (give dates): NONE

11. Political affiliation: INDEPENDENT

12. Religious affiliation:

13. Marriage (spouse's name, date and place of marriage):
    JACKLYN MAE SHUSTER 1/1/76 ROCK SPRINGS.

14. Children (names, dates of birth, grandchildren, etc.):
    CARRIE 1/16/77
    JENNIFER 2/26/80

15. List of clubs and societies of which you are a member: