

Interview with Celestino Cordova  
Green River, Wy.  
October 1991  
Interviewer: Rita James

RJ: Mr. Cordova where were you born?

CC: I was born in Chamisal, New Mexico

RJ: When did you move to Wyoming?

CC: I moved to Wyoming in June 1945

RJ: What was the population of the town when you first moved here?

CC: Oh it seems to me that it was around 3,000 something, it wasn't very big.

RJ: What business brought people in to the area?

CC: Well mostly employment at the time, there was alot of work in Wyoming mostly for the Union Pacific.

RJ: How does the town differ from then to now?

CC: Well I think it has grown quite abit.

RJ: Where did your father do for a living?

CC: He worked for the Union Pacific.

RJ: Did your mother work too?

CC: No, she stayed home raising the family.

RJ: How many was in your family?

CC: There was at the time 7 kids plus my mother and father.

RJ: Can you describe your house that you lived in?

CC: Real old house. 2 bedrooms, kitchen, and livingroom.

RJ: Did all the kids sleep in the same room?

CC: No, we use to put somethimes a mattress on the floor. Some in the livingroom, some in the kitchen.

RJ: Did it have plumbing?

CC: No, we didn't have plumbing. We had to carry our water from well it was a local water pump, we had to carry it in buckets.

RJ: Did you have an outhouse?

CC: No, we had a seperate room in the back we used for and then an outhouse in there for in the winter time when it was cold.

RJ: What about electricity, did you have that?

CC: We did have electricity.

RJ: How did you keep warm in the winter?

CC: Well mostly we use to have a coal heater in the livingroom and a wood stove in the kitchen.

RJ: Where did you get your coal?

CC: We use to get our coal from Rock Springs. A friend of my dads use to go up there and get a truck load of coal once a week or when we needed it.

RJ: Was he the only one involved in getting this coal?

CC: Usually my dad, myself, or one of the boys would go up there and help him.

RJ: How did you get your mail?

CC: We got mail in the Post Office, you'd have to go to the window and ask for it.

RJ: So you did have a Post Office in town?

CC: Right.

RJ: Do you remember any disasters, like droughts, or floods or bad winters?

CC: Well seems to me like the winters were worst than they are now, cause we use to get more snow. I remember one winter the winter of 48-49 they had quite a bit of snow. The traffic was paralyzed, I wasn't here at the time but I remember reading about in the newspapers and letters from home.

RJ: And where were you at at this time?

CC: I was in the military stationed in Germany.

RJ: What about epidemics, do you remember anything about any diseases?

CC: I don't remember anybody being sick that I can think of.

RJ: What did people do when they got sick, was there a doctor in town?

CC: Yes, there was a couple of doctors in town.

RJ: Did doctors make house calls back then?

CC: I don't know if they did or not, we never had any cause for one to come to the house.

RJ: What did the women do when they had a baby, did they go to the hospital or did they have their babys at home?

CC: They went to the hospital.

RJ: What about Dentists, did they have them?

CC: I remember they had dentists, but I never did visit him. I never had any work done on my teeth until I went into the service.

RJ: Did you ever go out and have dinner or lunch at a diner?

CC: Mostly, yes we did. Maybe on paydays--something like that.

RJ: What was the name of the place?

CC: It was the New Grand. It wasn't owned by the same people, still I imagine the same people, just younger.

RJ: So it was passed on through the family?

CC: It was passed on through the family, yea.

RJ: What was a special treat for you as a child?

CC: A carnival or maybe a rodeo. (Go out with girls, Whispers this.)

RJ: Did your dad hunt game?

CC: Oh yes. My dad was a great hunter.

RJ: Did you go hunting with him?

CC: Yes, I use to go out with him occasionally after we moved back to Wyoming.

RJ: What kind of game did you hunt?

CC: Deer and rabbits.

RJ: What were the 20's like?

CC: I don't remember what the 20's were like. I wasn't around in the 20's I wasn't born till 1928.

RJ: Can you explain a flapper to me?

CC: Whats a flapper?

RJ: One of them show girls in the saloons, do you remember seeing them?

CC: No, I guess I was to young to remember that kind of stuff.

RJ: Do you remember much about the depression?

CC: No, I don't remember the depression at all.

RJ: Where did you get your food from, was there a grocery store or did you grow your gardens?

CC: We use to get groceries, food and stuff like that from a local grocery store around the corner.

RJ: What about stores for clothes and toys?

CC: Clothes and toys they didn't have much of that in Green River, we use to go Rock Springs to buy clothes.

RJ: Did your mother sew clothes for you?

CC: Yea.

RJ: Did she do alot of sewing?

CC: Not alot, but she did some.

RJ: What kind of toys did you play with?

CC: I don't remember, cowboys and indians. Pistols and rifles.

RJ: Did you make your own toys or did you buy them from the store?

CC: We made our own toys. We made little trucks out of sardine boxes and put wheels on them. We put rubber bands on them and made them run.

RJ: Do you remember your first job, what was it?

CC: I was working as a laborer for the Union Pacific, summer help.

RJ: How old were you?

CC: I was about 16.

RJ: What about birth control, did they have that back then?

CC: Never heard of it.

RJ: What were the holidays like for you?

CC: Oh Christmas! I use to love Christmas. I use to love to receive presents.

RJ: Did you have a Christmas tree?

CC: Yes, but I don't remember having lights or anything like that. We use to decorate with bells.

RJ: Did you string popcorn?

CC: Popcorn, yea.

RJ: Did you cut your own tree or did you buy one?

CC: No, we use to cut our own tree.

RJ: Where there parades back then, and what kind of things did you see in the parades?

CC: I remember one parade they had, it was the 4th of July or thereabouts. It was pretty much like you see today.

RJ: Do you remember anything about the railroad coming through?

CC: No, the railroad was here when I first moved here.

RJ: Did you ever ride the train?

CC: Oh yes.

RJ: What was that like?

CC: I use to love to ride the train. In fact I use to take the bus from here to Rock Springs just to ride the train back.

RJ: So that was a pretty big deal?

CC: Mostly, freight trains. (ha,ha)

RJ: How big was the school you attended?

CC: I don't know-I think it was Washington or Lincoln, I only attended that school for half of that year.

RJ: So they had different classes for the different grades?

CC: They had different classes for the different grades.

RJ: About how many kids where in class?

CC: Maybe about 30.

RJ: Did you graduate?

CC: No, I didn't graduate out of high school, I did graduate while I was in the military.

RJ: Did you walk to school back then or did you ride a bus?

CC: Oh, definately- I never heard of buses back then.

RJ: How far did you walk?

CC: Well I say maybe about a mile or maybe a little over a mile.

RJ: And in the winter time, did you have to walk?

CC: Definately.

RJ: What kind of sports were popular when you were young?

CC: Baseball I imagine was the most popular.

RJ: Did you play any sports?

CC: Well not much to talk about. I played with the kids formed our teams, but I was never on a team in school or anything like that.

RJ: What did you do for fun, was there a show house or an activity center where the kids went for fun?

CC: They had a movie theatre and a roller skating rink.

RJ: Do you remember your first girlfriend?

CC: Yes, she was ugly.

RJ: What was her name?

CC: I don't remember.

RJ: Do you remember your first kiss?

CC: Nope.

RJ: What kind of music did you listen to?

CC: Most of the music was country western.

RJ: How did you listen to this music, was in records or tapes?

CC: No, mostly radio- I don't believe they had any tapes in them days.

RJ: Was there any prejudice back then?

CC: Oh yes definately. Most places wouldn't serve blacks,

hispanics, or indians. If you wasn't white you weren't nothing.

RJ: Do you remember any thing about the chineseese massacre?

CC: No that was before my time.

RJ: Do you remember the first time you rode in a car or truck?

CC: No.

RJ: What about churches, was there different churches for different dominations or did everyone go in the same building?

CC: No there was different dominations, and different buildings.

RJ: What religion are you?

CC: I am catholic.

RJ: Were you ever a part of the coal camps?

CC: Nope.

RJ: What was it like living through WW2?

CC: Well WW2- it was just stories we heard through the radio or people, things like that.

RJ: Were there alot of local boys and men that went to the war?

CC: Oh yea, I had a brother in the navy.

RJ: Did he come home safely?

CC: Yea, after 4 years.

RJ: What do you remember about the unions?

CC: I don't remember much about the unions.

RJ: Did both men and women belong to the unions?

CC: I imagine they did. I use to hear talk about it, union meetings- things like that. But I don't know what it was.

RJ: What about politics?

CC: I guess they were just as crooked in them days as they are today.

RJ: Do you vote?

CC: Yes

RJ: Have you always voted?

CC: Yes, I voted since I became of age.

RJ: What party do you belong to?

CC: Democate.

RJ: What do you think of the president we have now?

CC: I think he's ok. We have had better and we have had worst ones. But I think he's done a good job.

RJ: How do you feel about women in politics?

CC: I think women have just as much right as men do.

RJ: Do you think we'll ever have a women president?

CC: I think that we will eventually someday, if she can do the job- I'm all for it.

RJ: What about homeless people, do you remember there ever being any?

CC: No, I don't remember any. In fact I don't remember anybody being homeless.

RJ: When was the vidock built and what was it's main purpose?

CC: I don't know- the vidock was here before my time.

RJ: Did you ever cross it?

CC: Many times.

RJ: Just to get to the other side of town?

CC: Just to get from one end of town to the other.

RJ: Was that the only way to get across town besides the road?

CC: Unless you wanted to go around all the way under the underpass.

RJ: What do you remember about the 50's?

CC: I don't remember much about the 50's for I wasn't here at the time.

RJ: So you don't know if work was hard to come by in the 50's?

CC: No I don't.

RJ: What was the best memory for you?

CC: I don't know the best. I couldn't answer that.

RJ: How old were you when you got married?

CC: 23

RJ: How many children did you have?

CC: 6, 3boys and 3 girls.

RJ: What about the divorce rate, was it common back then?

CC: No, you hardly never heard about divorce.

RJ: How old were you when you retired?

CC: I retired out of the military at 39 and retired out of the mine at 61.

RJ: What mine did you work for?

CC: I worked for Texasgulf.

RJ: And how long did you work for T.G.?

CC: 18 years.

RJ: What do you think of our country today, do you think it's getting better or worse?

CC: I think it's getting better. The recession, I think were coming out of it. So I think it's getting better.

RJ: Do you have a favorite magazine or book you like reading?

CC: Playboy(whispers) Sports Illustrated.

RJ: Who was your favorite movie star and why?

CC: Betty Grable. I think was my favorite, she was a pretty woman. Thats what I liked about her.

RJ: What did people do with the money they made, was there a bank for save keeping of your money?

CC: They use to have one bank in Rock Springs that I can remember, of course there wasn't much money to put away- so people lived from payday to payday.

RJ: Were you ever tempted to do anything as a kid that you shouldn't?

CC: I imagine everybody thinks about things like that. I can't remember anything.

RJ: What was the worst thing that ever happened to you?

CC: I think the worst thing- at the time I thought it was the worst thing, but the worst thing was joining the military. I missed my family and friends. I was young and home sick. But eventually I got use to it and decided to make a career out of it.

RJ: Do you remember when alcohol was made illegal?

CC: No.

RJ: Do you remember when alcohol was made legal?

CC: No.

RJ: Did you ever drink alcohol?

CC: Yes. I was an alcoholic for over 20 years.

RJ: Do you remember the first bar in Green River?

CC: I remember the first bar. We use to look through the window- the Oxford Club. I wasn't of age.

RJ: What was the drinking age then?

CC: I believe it was 21.

RJ: Do you remember when interstate 80 the 4-lane was built?

CC: No, I wasn't here at the time.

RJ: What can you tell me about the boom in the 70's?

CC: The boom - the mines were opening up and alot of work at the time. I was living in Missouri and came out here on vacation. I went out looking for a job, was hoping I wouldn't find one, but I got hired the first place I went. So I decided to stay.

RJ: Was housing hard to come by?

CC: Housing was very hard to come by.

RJ: What was the cost of living like?

CC: Cost of living I imagine was the same at that time. It wasn't that much money, but things were cheapertoo. It averaged about the same as today.

RJ: What was or is your most memorable fad and why?

CC: Growing a mustache and wearing that pucheco hair cut.

RJ: Did you wax your mustache?

CC: No, my mustache was real light, you couldn't hardly see it.

RJ: What was for you the biggest change in your life?

CC: I think the biggest change was readjusting from military life to civilian life.

RJ: What does the Labor Day parade represent to you?

CC: That's when labor day, that's the end of the season and the end of summer.

RJ: Do you have a song or a poem that's special to you?

CC: I like all kinds of country western music, anything by Patsy Cline.

RJ: Do you think this area is a good place to grow up in?

CC: Yes, I think it is. It's a beautiful country, if it wasn't for the cold.

RJ: Do you have any words of wisdom for us?

CC: No.

RJ: Do wish to leave a message with your family?

CC: No- I don't believe so.

RJ: Would you like to comment on the future of your community?

CC: Not really, as I am fixing to move to a warmer climate.

RJ: Do you think there will be another boom in this area?

CC: Well thah't hard to say.

RJ: Thank you for your time Mr. Cordova.

CC: Oh, your welcome.