

JIM STARK

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HISTORY OF WYOMING

CHRIS PLANT

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Jim Stark was born in Airdrie, Scotland, which is a town near Glasgow. He was an only child. He came over to the United States when he was four years old. His father first went to work in a mine in Kioankol, and a year later the family moved to Reliance, Wyoming.

Jim Stark spent most of his childhood in the coal camp of Reliance. He enjoyed the school there. It was not a big school; they were about twenty in the class. It first started as a one room school, but later a formal school was built, and then a High School was added. The High School became the first Junior College ever started in Sweetwater county. The teachers were mostly females, although the High School also had male teachers. "They did not have too many young ones, it seems they were older," remarked Jim Stark. Because of the different nationalities, "Rock Springs and Reliance were more or less like the melting pot of the world," teachers had to stress on the English language. "They mostly stressed a lot on math, a lot on English, spelling and writing." Many immigrant children spoke their mother tongue at home.

As a child, Jim Stark's main chores were to chop wood and bring it in the house. His father was the money maker, and "kingpin" of the household. Like most other women, his mother stayed home, and did the cooking, sewing, and of course had to do the washing by hand.

The main recreation in Reliance was baseball, "in the camp we had a baseball team." Children kept active, and often had to make their own amusements; they often played "hide and seek", and "kick the can." The population of Reliance celebrated St. Patrick's day and Bobby Burn's day. Jim Stark's father sang Irish and Scotch's songs on those days, another man would play

the bagpipes, and a Scotch lady would dance the Highland Fling. On the Fourth of July people would play baseball games in Reliance, but Labor day was celebrated in Rock Springs. The whole community also participated in First Aid contests; the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts had their own First Aid teams. The First Aid teams were started in order to organize people in rescue operations, not only in the local mine, but also in case of emergency in mines nearby. Reliance had a "bungalow" where people could go to the movies or listen to a concert.

The population of Rock Springs, Superior and Reliance consisted of many different nationalities, mostly from Europe; "it was pretty much all mixed. I think at one time they had 59 different nationalities in Rock Springs;" Reliance had only three or four hundred people. Although the children had different cultural backgrounds, they all "seemed to get along." Jim Stark attributes it to the facts that "people worked hard and had no time for their problems, jealousy and all that;" and also that none were too rich.

Reliance had a company doctor who "was the main man in the town then," but there was no dentist. Emergencies and births were dealt in Rock Springs hospital. The six miles between Rock Springs and Reliance were dirt roads, and many people travelled in their Model T Fords.

Houses were owned by the U. P. They had a front room, which is the equivalent of our living room, a kitchen and two bedrooms, and "then you had outdoor toilets of course." As there was no bathroom, water had to be heated on a coal stove in order to take a bath. People had to pay a rent of about \$14.00 a month. The store was also owned by the company. People would do their shopping at the store, and the expenses were deducted from the check at the end of the month. When the mine shut down around 1954, the U. P. sold

its houses to the employees and those who had first choice took advantage of it, and the new owners remodelled the houses.

The U. P. treated the employees fairly well, "but of course the union was pretty strong, they kept on top of things." When Jim Stark's father came, the union was already organized, but they were still growing and getting stronger. The longest strike that Jim remembers was in 1922, it lasted six months. The miners wanted "shorter hours, more money and better conditions." They eventually gained what they were fighting for, including an eight hour work day and ten days paid vacation.

In 1936, Jim Stark's father broke his back in the mine, and could not work there any longer. The family moved to Kalama, Washington. "The goal of all coal miners when they retire is to own a chicken ranch or be on a ranch," and that's what Jim's father decided to do. Their Kalama's little ranch had strawberries and chickens. A year and a half later the family had to return to Wyoming; the humidity of Washington state did not suit Jim's mother. They settled in Rock Springs and from then on (except for a few years during the war) it became Jim Stark's home.

Although Jim Stark had not quite finished High School, he started to work as a truck driver on the outside of Reliance mine. He stayed there for four years, and then move to California where he did some boxing. Boxing was one of his favorite sport; in later years he started a boxing program in Rock Springs for both Green River and Rock Springs youth, and was named Deputy Boxing Commissioner in 1958.

Jim Stark served his country during World War II. He was on a destroyer and went to Noumea, Australia, and Guadalcanal. The ship was hit and many lives were lost; the crew returned to Honolulu, and for the remaining years

was on escort duty between Honolulu and the United States. Jim was called back, and served two years in Korea.

In 1946, Jim Stark began his law enforcement career with the Rock Springs Police Department. He joined the Sweetwater County Sheriff's office in 1955 as a deputy, and a few months later was appointed Undersheriff. He took over the job as Sheriff in 1977 when Sheriff Zakovich resigned due to health problems. Jim Stark finished the term and ran twice for reelection. When Sheriff, Jim Stark moved to Green River. On January 5, 1987 Jim Stark resigned, and he now lives in Rock Springs with his wife Ann.

When Jim Stark first joined the Police Department, Rock Springs had less than 10,000 people. The police officers knew most of the people then, laws were not as strict as they now are, and they never encountered major problems. Whenever someone was seen drunk, staggering in the street, the police officers would drive him home.

The Hell's Angels, a motorcycle gang from Los Angeles, once came through town, but the police had been told of their arrival and therefore was prepared to push them out of town.

A few safe burglars also came to town, but none were major criminals. Five ex-cons, who had escaped from Carson City, Nevada, were picked in town. Shepherders were neither major problems, a few spent all their money when coming to town, would get drunk, start arguing and then fight; to the most they would have to spend the night in jail and pay a fine in the morning when sober. During the railroad time, right after World War II, a few Indians came to Rock Springs to work. Forty to fifty of them lived together in box cars, when drunk they would fall asleep just about anywhere. Some people who had left their door opened during the night were surprised to see an Indian asleep

next to them, and the police had to come for help. In general the community did not mind having Indians in town.

In the 40's and 50's Rock Springs had seven Houses with a Madam and two or three prostitutes in each place. There were the M. & M on North Front Street, the Wells, Shy Ann room on South Front, the New Grand Cafe, the Royal room, the Ritz rooms and the Dalamar cafe. The city had a doctor to examine the prostitutes, and the police department would fine the Madam \$25.00 a week, and \$12.50 for each prostitute. Although gambling was against the law, it was openly practiced in cafes and fines were regularly given. The one arm slot machine was fined \$75.00, and the flat top was \$100.00. Although some cafes owned their own slot machines, others belonged to a dealer who would collect 40 to 50% of the profit, but it was still the responsibility of the cafes to pay for the fines. The machines were completely confiscated in 1975. The prostitutes and gambling fines grew in the city coffers, and eventually helped to buy a new fire truck for the city, and also pay salaries a little higher.

Pimps were arrested under the Vagrancy Law, also known as the 14-4. Police officers would pick them from the street, make them pay fines, and tell them to leave town or else... and those who eventually returned were really careful otherwise they had to visit the local jail. The law was not used on regular customers, but on pimps, safe crackers, and burglars, it was an easy way to drive undesirable people out of town. A judge ruled this law unconstitutional around 1958.

Jackson used to be a popular gambling place, similar to what Las Vegas and Reno are today; in 1954 the Governor ordered to close the gambling in Jackson. Jackson in turn put pressure to close the "Houses" in Rock Springs and succeeded in doing so. All houses of prostitution were officially closed in

1954; however they continued to operate undercover until the 70's when the boom hit Rock Springs.

Earl Dotsey came to Rock Springs in the late 40's, and started operating a bootlegger place for black people. He had a few prostitutes working for him, but they were officially employed as barmaids; he also had gambling machines. The prostitutes operated from a room next to the bar called the Green House. Dotsey often kept his own people under control, and would even cooperate and help the police find someone. In order to fine Dotsey, the police used to send now and then some undercover people, one of them being the Carbon County Sheriff who was then a young man. The black community was then small, maybe 300 altogether, most worked in the mines and were hardworking people.

In 1924, an explosion occurred in a mine near Sublette, and many miners were killed. Jim Stark remembers his father being part of one of the rescue team. A few times people died when the mine caved-in. Accidents did occur while the mines were operating but two young boys also died while exploring the Stansbury mine that was abandoned.

The Bitter Creek flooded a few times, the worse time being in 1937 when West Flat and East Flat were covered. In order to prevent further floods, banks were built.

When Jim Stark was first in the Sheriff's office, there were four deputies and each had a car to go around Sweetwater county. Part-time deputies were stationed in Bairoil, Wamsutter, McKinnon, and Granger, but because of the complexity of new laws, the part-time deputies became full-time deputies. In the 40's any man of good moral could become a police officer if he was tall, big, and could carry a big stick, but in 1972 a new law came requiring officers to be certified. They now have to have 475 hours to become professionals, and

most go to the Academy in Douglas. Jim Stark is pleased to see that education is a major improvement for police officers; law enforcement used to be too strong, however it is now swinging too far in the other direction and protecting too many criminals. Police officers are too often restricted in their ability to enforce the law.

The 1970's were years of problems for the Police Department and the Sheriff's office. The mayor of Rock Springs had been informed that new employees would come, but he was insufficiently informed. The city had little money, not enough police officers and was therefore unprepared for the "boom". Better communications between the new plant and city officials could have reduced the problems.

There were not enough houses for the newcomers, hotels were packed, local people "put the rents sky high... trying to make good money all at once;" the less fortunate lived in culverts or in tents, but were told to move because of the danger of floods or rainstorm. The population grew from 9 or 10,000 to about 25,000 in a short time. People came from all over the United States, and most were single men.

As in any boom the prostitutes came along too; they were mostly from Denver, Salt Lake City, Los Angeles, San Francisco, and a few local ones. They were all openly walking along the streets. Some came alone, others came with pimps. Even housewives from Denver and Salt Lake City flew to Rock Springs on a Friday and were back home on Monday. Every month or so the police made raids on the prostitutes and their pimps; they'd fine them, but the bond's men had them out of jail in just a few hours. The fines were very little in comparison to what they made in a night. Jim Stark thought that "the prostitutes probably kept trouble down. A lot of the workers got built up and wanted to release

themselves someday, and they would either do it by finding a woman or booze and I think maybe they helped in some way, but it just went overboard."

The boom years averaged about one murder a month, workers of Point of Rock came to Rock Springs and drank heavily. Some got involved in a fight and shooting would occur, however some domestic problems also ended in a murder. The police never had too much trouble finding the murderer, he usually was at the scene or close to it. Considering the shortage of officers, the police department did exceptionally well in solving all the murders. However it was difficult to enforce the law completely and small thefts remained unpunished. A few men were robbed by prostitutes, but obviously never reported it.

Following an incident, the Police Department was extremely careful when arresting a girl; a young teacher, from the East, wearing a short dress was mistakably arrested.

In order to bring extra revenues and also solve parking problems, parking meters were installed in Downtown Rock Springs. Jim Stark feels that both mayors of Rock Springs "invested the money pretty well, improved the city. Both mayors have been good." Parks were added to the town. Government money and money from the trauna plant also "brought the economy up." Both, the Police Department and the Sheriff's office increased their employees.

The good communications between Exxon and the city officials avoided the repetition of another boom in the mid 80's.

The most exciting part of Jim Stark's job was the ability to solve a murder; "That kind of things make you feel good;" and he felt that that must have been also felt by officer Mizel who recently solved the 1985 murder of a young girl at Rock Springs High School.

The saddest parts of his career were deaths of children. He particularly

remembered the death of a young girl on a hill near Bitter Creek during a head on collision; the young girl was on her way to spend Christmas with her grandparents, and Jim Stark at the scene of the accident saw the girl surrounded by presents and dolls. Another case in the late 70's involved a young baby who had died in a trailer from lack of care, the father had killed the mother and committed suicide.

Jim Stark kindly lent me Only Count The Sunny Hours, the diary of Madame Isabelle in Kemmerer, discovered, researched and edited by Ray Essman. Although the book is short, it very well summarized the life at the "Green House", it was painted green, and how well the Madame tried to integrate in the community. She did her very best to do business in Kemmerer itself.

During the prohibition Kemmerer was the place where whiskey was made, "soft drink parlors" were serving hard liquor under the counter. A few policemen, the mayor, the deputy sheriff, and the chief of police were indicted because they hadn't arrested the people who made liquor illegally, however they were released as no one would testify against them. The mayor at that time made Bunning's park, and also changed the channel to the creek, because it was a health hazard, "he channelled it on the outskirts of town which is now getting on the inside, but he channelled it out. He made a big improvement."

Since Jim Stark has been in Sweetwater County people have always voted strongly for the Democratic party, however he feels that it is more balancing now. The last Republican Sheriff in Sweetwater County was Chris Jessen in 1932, he later became chief of police in Green River.

Jim Stark remembers going hunting for rabbits as a young boy and not needing a license, but the reduction of game has forced the authorities to issue licenses.

Jim Stark was married in 1943, "I got three days leave, we came back and got married." His son was born in 1946, and his daughter in 1948. A definite shadow in his life is the death of his only son in 1968, while serving in Vietnam. He has four grandchildren, two in Rock Springs and two in Vernal with his daughter in law that he also calls his daughter.

Jim Stark's message to the young generation is "stay away from drugs, get an education, go through life, try to climb, get the best out of life."

Jim Stark really enjoys Wyoming, its freedom and its friendly people. "I don't care for big cities." With God's willingness he hopes to return and visit Scotland, "They tell me it is a very beautiful country, so I'd like to take a trip and look," but as far as he is concerned, Wyoming, "that's for me," he says.

Jim Stark has been honored with the following awards: Exchange Club-- Law Enforcement Officer of the year, Wyo. Peace Officer of the year, Sheriff of the month by the Wyoming Sheriffs Magazine, American Legion Outstanding Law Enforcement Officer in the state of Wyoming, Army and Navy awards for working with the youth. He has also received awards from the United States Marshall's office, the City of Green River, the Green River Fire Department, The City of Rock Springs, the Sweetwater County Search and Rescue, and recognition from other organizations around the county and the state. Jim Stark received an honorary associate degree in law enforcement from Western Wyoming College on May 22, 1987, which was also his 70th birthday. A scholarship fund has been established in JIM STARK'S name at Western Wyoming College.

Jim Stark is a member of the Wyoming Police Protective Assoc., B. P. O. Elks #624, F. O. Eagles #151, Oddfellows, VFW, American Legion, National Sheriffs' Assoc., Rock Springs Chamber of Commerce Yellow Jackets, and the Wyoming Peace Officers Assoc., which he is a former president.