

Palisade Historical Society  
Oral and Video History Project  
Interview

Oral History # 22

Place: Home of Ralph and Nancy Eighmy (daughter)

Mailing Address: PO Box 40424, Grand Jct. CO 81504

Email:

Interviewee: Dorothy Elizabeth Vernon Moss Green

Interviewer: Charlene Weidner

Videographer: Gary Hines

Also Present: Nancy Eighmy, daughter

Date: May 23, 2016

Length: 58:39

Phone:

Phone:

This is a summary an oral history video recording created for the Palisade Historical Society.

The text in *italics* is not part of the original transcript and is added for clarification or additional information.

**Family:**

Dorothy was born 10/10/1928 at the Vernon family home on Rapid Creek near Palisade, Colorado. *Dr. Weidlein attended.* Although the house did not have an address at the time, it is now 878 Rapid Creek Road. Her father, Joseph John Vernon, was of Italian descent and was born 05/21/1902 in the mining community of Sunnyside, Utah. Dorothy described him as a pleasant, hardworking man who did his best to provide for his family. He died *August 22, 1984* at the Palisade Nursing Home (*now known as the Palisade Living Center*). Dorothy's mother, Mary Elizabeth Jenkins Vernon, was born 08/18/1903 in Cardiff, South Wales and came to America when she was eight years old. She passed away *February 12, 1986* in Palisade. Dorothy's siblings are Victor Vernon, James Vernon, Mary Ann Dusbabek, and Margaret Campbell. Dorothy was the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest child.

Dorothy married Ralph Moss in 1948 at St. Ann's Catholic Church in Palisade. Their children are John Moss, who passed away at 24 years of age from Hodgkin's Disease, Marie Hall, who lives in Idaho, Nancy Eighmy and Katherine (Kim) Howard, who both live in Clifton, Janice Hall and Jayne Moss, who both live in Las Vegas, Nevada, and Richard Moss, who lives in Montrose, Colorado. Ralph and Dorothy divorced. Ralph continues to live on West 1<sup>st</sup> Street in Palisade. Dorothy married Glen Green in 1985. He passed away in 2012 in Grand Junction.

Dorothy's paternal grandfather, John Vernon, immigrated from Verona, Italy. Like many immigrants, his last name was changed at Ellis Island. At that time, immigrants had to choose between working on the railroad or in the mines, so her grandfather opted for the mines. Mining did not appeal to her grandfather, so he became a mine inspector. He bought the Rapid Creek property from John Smith in 1920 because he did not want his sons to become miners. Later, Dorothy's parents took over the Rapid Creek ranch and remained there until 1971. Dorothy's paternal grandmother was *Mary Farlo Vernon married John B. Vernon. Both are buried in the Crested Butte Cemetery. Mary 1877-1950, John 1871-1930.* Dorothy's maternal grandparents were David and Elizabeth Anna Jenkins. Elizabeth was also married to John Gulliford. *They also lived in Rapid Creek.*

**Education:**

Dorothy attended grades one through twelve in Palisade schools, graduating from Palisade High School in 1946. There were 32 students in her graduating class, and at the time, 150 students in grades 1 – 12. Dorothy liked going to school. The Rapid Creek students rode the school bus, driven by Ed Freemyer. If the bus broke down, they walked to school. Girls were not allowed to play sports, but they had gym class.

Dorothy remembers the fire escape at the school, a spiral slide from the third floor to the ground. They liked to play on the slide after school, and it was okay, as long as the teachers did not catch them.

Girls were not allowed to wear pants to school, but having seen girls in the movies wearing rolled up blue jeans and untucked white shirts, one day Dorothy and five of her high school friends decided to dress in jeans and their fathers' white shirts for school. An announcement was made over the schools' public address system that, since these girls were dressed for work, they would have to wash the school walls that day.

Dorothy remembered two teachers in particular – Jeannie Milleman, who taught math, and Jane Johnson. Mrs. Johnson was from New York and wore very nice clothes. She taught the girls how to comb their hair, dress, walk like ladies, and polish their shoes.

They had school plays, even in grade school. This was a big reason for families and friends to come together. There were school dances in high school, and Dorothy recalls she always had the last dance with her father.

After high school, Dorothy attended Mesa Junior College, where she studied graphic arts in advertising and social work. She also worked at the college library. She did not graduate because she got into an argument with one of her teachers, who gave her a failing grade. Not wanting to wait a whole year to repeat the class, Dorothy decided to quit school. In those days, most girls did not go to college for an education – they went to find someone suitable to marry.

**Life on Rapid Creek:**

Dorothy grew up on Rapid Creek with 17 boys. She recalls winning all of their marbles, so the boys would not let her play marbles after that. Some of the people Dorothy grew up with were Gary Huber, Janice Hampton Nesbit, Peggy Stokes, Roseann Egger, *Frank Marolt*, *cousins Pat Goffredi and Al Goffredi*, *George Distefano*, and *LeRoy Distefano*.

Living out of town, they were isolated and came into town only once a week. Opportunities to socialize outside of Rapid Creek were limited to school and church. They all were orchard people and everyone, adults and kids, helped each other out. Rapid Creek was a diverse neighborhood, with all different cultures and races. The Rapid Creek kids were close friends and jokingly called each other names that would be considered racial slurs these days.

Dorothy's father grew fruit and worked in the coal mines during the winter to supplement his income. He worked at the Winger, Blue Flame, Stokes, and Cameo mines. They filled the coal cars and pushed them out of the mine by hand at the end of the day because they didn't have equipment to do this mechanically.

Dorothy recalls they had a lot of fun living on Rapid Creek. Neighbors visited, often staying to have a meal together. There was a waterfall above what were known as the Martin and Harlow places, where water came down from the Palisade reservoir. The locals called it "Shower Rock." People used to go up there to take a shower under the waterfall. Dorothy learned to swim in the Colorado River. She recalls her aunt took her out in the middle of the river on a log, rolled the log over, and said, "Swim!"

In the winter, they ice skated and played their own version of ice hockey with sticks on the ponds where Mautz place is. In the early days, ice was cut out of the pond to store in the ice house. The ice would last until the middle of summer.

Everyone was assigned irrigation water rights based on who was there first, and sometimes conflicts arose from this touchy issue. There were times when the men strapped on guns because of a potential threat of trouble. Dorothy recalled that her dad would not let the kids go with him when he had to go up to the headgate, because they never knew what might happen.

### **Palisade Memories:**

The only time they went to the grocery store was to get things they did not grow. Dorothy recalls a mercantile company, located on Main Street across the street from Bancroft's meat market. The store was right on Main Street, not set back from it like the current grocery store sits. The store was owned by Mr. Hill. You could buy ten pieces of peppermint stick candy for a penny and pickles out of a barrel. They thought these pickles tasted much better than the ones her mother made, but no one ever dared to tell her! Later, the owner of the mercantile store went into business with the Bancroft meat market. The mercantile store sold household articles, as well as groceries. Dorothy recalls The Toggery (*across the alley from the bank building on Main Street*) was the only place in town where one could buy fabric. They also sold sewing supplies and sewing machines.

A lot of people came into town for peach harvest. Dorothy enjoyed this, because they got to go to town more often to deliver peaches for shipping. Her *uncle by marriage*, John Goffredi, lived across the road from them and grew mainly apricots and grapes. Town was crowded and bustling with activity during harvest time.

They usually went to town on Saturday for shopping and on Sunday for church. Going to the matinee movie at the Elberta was a regular event, and people would go whenever the movie changed. A lot of people got their first kiss in the darkened movie theater! Dorothy remembers the Catholic Church rated movies A, B, & C. She recalls shaming people in line to see "Gone with the Wind" when it came out. Later when the movie was aired on television, Dorothy saw it and thought maybe the reasons it was considered quite racy for its day were that Rhett Butler said "damn," and maybe because of the low necklines on the ladies' dresses.

Next door to the theatre was the stairway up to Dr. Weidlein's office. He had a contract with the mines. Money was deducted from the miners' paychecks for their medical care, so he made house calls to the miners' families. Dorothy recalls Dr. Weidlein visiting when they were ill, and she and her siblings would bet if they would get a yellow, red, or green pill. She recalled he was a nice old man.

Palisade Day was always a big day. Everyone came to town for the festivities, which included various races and contests. Dorothy remembers the three-legged race, the egg and spoon race, and a slipper-kicking contest. The celebration was held in the park, and it was a great family picnic day. On Memorial Day, the band in full dress marched down Main Street, then out to cemetery to play. Various dignitaries spoke, and afterwards people went to the Moyer Pool in Grand Junction for swimming and a picnic in

Lincoln Park. In the Palisade park, there were “monkey pod” trees, which had berries on them that made your mouth pucker when you ate them.

### **Italian Culture:**

Dorothy’s family made trips to Grand Junction once per month. There were a lot of stores, things, and people to see. She recalls the big Italian culture there. They always stopped to say hello to Italian storekeepers, like the Pantusos, who owned a shoe store. The first City Market store, started by Joe Prinster, was on 4<sup>th</sup> and Rood. It was always fun going there, because they bought candy.

Most Italians went to the Catholic Church. It was always a good opportunity for people to meet. For the important church rites, such as Confirmation, one had to go to wherever the bishop was, like St. Joseph’s in Grand Junction or the (*Sacred Heart*) Catholic Church in Fruita. Dorothy had her Confirmation in Fruita, while her brother was confirmed at the church in Grand Junction.

Winemaking has always been a big part of Italian culture. Dorothy’s father grew grapes to make a barrel of muscatel wine every year. When he tapped the barrel, the neighborhood men all came in for a taste. Women drank wine at home, such as with a meal, but never in public in those days. Dorothy and her brother often vied for the job of going to the cellar to get fruit, so they could have a sip of the wine! Her Uncle John Goffredi grew Concord grapes, which were used for a sweeter desert wine, as well as for table grapes. John grew his grapes on arbors, as they did in Italy, but others grew grapes on terraced land. People tried to grow grapes in Vineland, but the soil there was not good for grapes. When Dorothy lived in Alaska, she made wine from the local salmonberries, using her father’s recipe.

### **Marriage and Family Life:**

After Dorothy and Ralph Moss were married in 1948, they left Palisade. Ralph was in the US Navy at the time, at the end of World War II. There was not a lot of work then, so when the Korean conflict erupted, Ralph re-enlisted and remained in the Navy for 21 years. Over the course of his military career, Dorothy and Ralph traveled and lived in many different places. They had children born in Alaska, California, Hawaii, Illinois, and Colorado. Dorothy still enjoys traveling.

Ralph was originally from Menlo, Kansas, but his father bought 20 acres of land on West 1<sup>st</sup> Street. After Ralph retired, he and Dorothy returned to Palisade and lived on the Moss property. Their children learned to thin peaches, prune, irrigate, and perform other orchard work, but none of them were interested in making agriculture their life’s work.

Several years after Ralph and Dorothy divorced, she married Glen Green in 1985. They lived in Grand Junction, where Glen owned Green & Green Construction. When the economy took a downturn, they moved to Las Vegas and remained there for eleven years. When they retired, they returned to Colorado, living on property above Molina. Dorothy now spends part of the year in Las Vegas.

### **Occupation/Professional Background:**

During the 1970s, Dorothy worked for the Community Training Center (CTC) in Grand Junction, a facility that provided job training to developmentally disabled adults. She was also the Activity Director for seven years at the Palisade Nursing Home (*now known as the Palisade Living Center*). She was hired for this job by her old teacher, Jane Johnson. Dorothy enjoyed working at the nursing home and said she almost felt embarrassed to collect her paycheck because she was having so much fun.

### **Community Involvement, Hobbies & Interests:**

Dorothy was active with her children when they were in school, with Boy Scouts, and with her church. Dorothy was always artistically inclined. She studied graphic arts in college, sketched, and did craftwork. Dorothy crocheted, knitted, sewed, and designed many of her own clothes.

**Other Memories:**

Being closely connected with mining, Dorothy recalled going to the Cameo school where the students put on plays, and they always had a Christmas party. They got sacks the size of a 5-pound potato bag filled with goodies, like oranges, candy, and chewing gum. This was the first time Dorothy had ever eaten an orange, since they did not often get such things from California. The Kerr family owned the mine and were always generous in buying items the students sold for school projects.

According to Dorothy, miners are very superstitious. She recalled a time when she went to the Stokes mine to meet her father. As she approached the opening to the mine, she was quickly stopped by miners, who said if a woman went into the mine, they would never be able to mine there again.

Dorothy talked about the Ocean-to-Ocean Highway, recalling that it came up from PV Flats, where Kokopelli's farm market is now located. The road went up over the hill above their ranch, dropped down along Rapid Creek, and then through Vineland and on to Grand Junction. When they widened the road, they moved it to the other side of the canal and took some of the properties along the river. There is still a narrow strip of land with orchards along the river.

Dorothy told a story about her maternal grandfather, who came to America *from Wales* once each year for three years. He worked in the gold fields near Cripple Creek. One time when he did not return as expected, Dorothy's grandmother became worried, so she booked passage on a ship for herself and their six children. They landed at Philadelphia, traveled to Denver by train, and then went over the mountains to Cripple Creek. Arriving there, she learned her husband had been in an accident, had lost an eye, and was sent to Salt Lake City for treatment. She decided to stay in Cripple Creek and started a boarding house for the miners. Her husband returned and retired from the mining business. Subsequently, they and their children moved to the Palisade area.

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Summary by Gary Hines, 05/27/2016