

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # 013

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Place (home) 3709 G Road, Palisade, CO

Length 37:32

Interviewee Nancy Maurer Taylor

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Family

Nancy is the daughter of Fred and Helen (Swisher) Maurer. She came into this world in a dramatic way, being born in the back seat of the car on the way to St. Mary's Hospital in Grand Junction. Nancy's mother was mad that she was overdue, so she drank a cup of castor oil, which induced labor almost immediately. When her mother started labor, her father called the County Health Nurse, Fairy (Bancroft) Ryan, who also worked for Dr. Weidlein. Fairy accompanied them to the hospital and delivered Nancy enroute. When they arrived at the hospital, mother and daughter had to stay in the hallway because the hospital would not take checks, due to closure of the banks at the beginning of the Depression. Nancy's father went to get cash somewhere to pay the hospital before they could be admitted.

Nancy's parents complemented each other well, with her father's humanistic outlook on life, along with her mother's interest in culture and education. Nancy credits them with being the "perfect parents." Nancy's father and his brother Ernest moved to Palisade from Iowa. Her mother was living in Palisade but went away to school in Greeley. Fred could not stand being away from her, so he traveled to Denver where they got married. Then he brought his new bride back to Palisade. They owned 50 acres of fruit orchards. Helen started teaching full time after Nancy went away to college. Both of Nancy's parents died young, her mother at 61 and her father at 68 years of age. They died seven months apart.

Nancy had one brother, Bill Maurer, who also worked in the peach orchards growing up. Later, he was in the insurance business and was living in Idaho at the time of his death a year ago (2011). Bill went to school in Fort Collins and served in the Army, but not during World War II, as he was too young.

Nancy has six children, who all still live in the area – Amy Dyer, Duke Taylor, Marshall Taylor, Jenny Taylor Parsons, Tony Taylor, and Roseanna Taylor. Nancy's children all worked in the peach business as youngsters, working for their grandfather Fred, great-uncle Ernest, Ernest and Leroy Ball, and Larry Clark.

Nancy's grandparents were well off, owning a farm in the Midwest. People in Kansas heard how prosperous life was in Colorado, so some sold their wheat farms and moved here. Nancy recalls other family names, such as Bunte, Crissey, and Ball, who came to Palisade from Kansas. Having sold their farms, they had the money to buy land and build beautiful homes in the area.

Nancy recalled her mother's story of the family coming to Palisade. Her grandfather, Frank Swisher, bought what was known as the Crissey place, 20 acres and a large house, which still stands at the south end of Main Street, across the highway from what is now Palisade Park. He moved his wife, their ten children, and livestock via rail car from Kansas to Palisade. The boys had to ride in the railcars with the livestock, but the girls and their mother had a sleeping car berth on the train. They arrived in Palisade one evening and stayed at the Midland Hotel. Nancy said that her grandfather Frank had a dramatic flair. He told the children that in the morning after breakfast, they were to go out and stand in the middle of Main Street facing the mountain (to the north), and on his direction, they were to turn around and see their new house down at the end of the street. Later, Nancy's Aunt Francie was born as the 11th Swisher child in that house.

Schools

Nancy went to kindergarten at Mount Lincoln School. Her mother and Rena Mary Taylor started the kindergarten there. She went to grade school and high school in Palisade. Grades 1 – 8 were in the old school that was built in 1910 and has since been torn down. The high school, just to the west, was quite new at the time. Nancy remembers having great teachers who valued culture and promoted things like music and literature. Nancy said that the girls could wear blue jeans to school, but no shorts, spaghetti strap tops, etc. Dresses were not required.

Nancy was one of nine great friends who were known as the "Nasty Nine." They were all actually very nice girls who grew up together. They all graduated from high school in 1951. She and her friends went to different colleges after high school but have stayed in contact throughout the years. Nancy went to Fort Collins on a scholarship for one year. Then she transferred to the University of Colorado in Boulder, where she earned her Master's Degree.

Life in Palisade

Nancy remembers living in Palisade as a free, wonderful existence. They rode their bikes, picked asparagus in the spring, worked for their fathers in the orchards, and earned their own money. Palisade had two hotels, a feed store, bank, hardware store, Post Office, pool hall, and about eight churches of various denominations. Nancy remembers her father taking her to the pool hall sometimes on Saturday afternoons, where he had a beer and she had a Grapette soda. Her mother was furious that her father took her into the pool hall. There was a movie theater where the Slice 'O' Life Bakery now sits, with Dr. Weidlein's office and a dentist's office upstairs. According to Nancy, lots of babies were born upstairs in that building. Dr. Weidlein had a reputation as a wonderful, old country doctor who never charged people who were unable to pay him. His house was across the street from the fire station (where it was formerly located on East 3rd Street).

Nancy remembers a story that her aunts told her about the Hoffmans (of the Hoffman Garage). When young Duane Hoffman was six years old, his mother took him to watch a parade on Main Street. Members of the Ku Klux Klan were in the parade, wearing their hoods, masks, and white robes. Duane said that although the KKK members had concealed their identity, he recognized his father's shoes as he marched down the street. Many prominent Palisade men marched, in their effort to get rid of the pool hall, because they did not want anyone selling alcohol in town. Reportedly, that very night the owners of the pool hall closed up and left town. People did not realize that the KKK had influence this far west.

The “Nasty Nine” sometimes would get dressed up in their best clothes, gloves, and high-heeled shoes and take the train to Grand Junction, where they would shop all day, eat out, and spend the money they had earned. They would catch the Prospector (the late train) back to Palisade at midnight, and their parents would pick them up at the depot. Their parents had cars but they would not allow them to borrow the car to drive to Grand Junction. Nancy remembers that Palisade had a beautiful railroad depot. She felt sad when it was torn down.

Another thing Nancy remembers is that the women of Palisade were well educated and interested in seeing that children in the community received a good education. They raised money to start the first library, and then got it affiliated with the State so the library could receive increased funding. They stood firmly in support of all things cultural, such as schools, music, and libraries. The second building used for a library was near the building where the old toilets were. The women cleaned up the building and made do, in order to have a library. Later, (*in 1952*) the library moved into (*the Bower Garage*) on East 3rd Street. Fairy Ryan was the first librarian, after she retired from nursing. Then, Mary Fay Hampton headed the library for years. Nancy recalls that Fairy was a remarkable woman. She had lost her husband to a railroad accident, which left her to raise their two young daughters. Fairy had no money but got an education to become a Registered Nurse, in order to support her children. Then she successfully managed the library, having no formal education in that area.

Palisade was always big on politics. The first congresswoman from the area was Rena Mary Taylor, who was Nancy’s Godmother. Rena Mary Taylor’s husband, Avon Taylor, was highly regarded in education and was Principal of the high school. Then, there was Wayne Aspinall who went to Congress in Washington DC. Nancy’s father was on the town board. Grandpa Frank Swisher was on various boards in town government and was instrumental in getting the railroad to load peaches out of Palisade and helped organize the fruit growers’ cooperative organizations.

Peach Orchards/Harvest

They made boxes, sorted, and packed peaches. There was an insect called a crown borer that got into the peach trees. Peach farmers made a sticky substance of beeswax and other ingredients, and in the spring they had to paint around the trunks of the trees. This was called “tanglefooting.” Nowadays, they spray for crown borers.

During peach harvest, they worked from 5 a.m. until noon every day. Then they all went to the canals to swim (which you cannot do today). At 3:00 p.m., they went home for dinner and the evening. In her father’s orchards, the women worked in the sheds and the men in the fields. Nancy’s father felt that the work of pruning, thinning, and picking peaches was too hard for the women to do, so they always worked in the sheds. After the peaches were packed and the boxes were loaded onto trucks, the girls liked to go to the shipping platform, mostly to see the cute boys who worked there. And who knew – maybe there would be a little summer romance in the works!

Kuner’s built a beautiful cannery for canning fruit and tomatoes. This was a great boost to community. Often, the farmers could make more money selling fruit to than cannery than to the growers’ co-ops. The cannery was near the railroad tracks on Bower Ave., east of the railroad depot.

World War II

WWII started when Nancy was in 3rd grade and ended when she was in 7th grade. Women rolled bandages and sent things to the soldiers, and the kids gathered scrap iron and earned stamps to get war bonds. During the war, everything was rationed. There was no nylon for stockings, so the women would put makeup on their legs and paint a line up the back of their leg to make it look like they were wearing hose. Nancy's father was an Air Raid Warden at the time, so during air raid drills, he had to check the area all the way from Palisade to Clifton to make sure people were inside and had turned lights out.

Across the canal near the old football field was the CCC (Civilian Conservation Corp) Camp. It was well-kept with big lawns and sidewalks, kitchens, a commissary, and barracks. During the last three years of the war, German prisoners started coming. They worked in the orchards since it was hard to get help at the time. They were cute and sang every night. The prisoners liked being in Palisade and did not want to go back to Germany, so there was little worry about them escaping, even though there was a big chain link fence around the camp. The prisoners were still around for quite some time after the war ended.

Migrant Camp

Cabins with electricity and water were built for the migrant workers. Some of the workers lived on the farms, but the ones who lived in the camp had more facilities, such as a place to do laundry. The farmers often gave the fruit that they could not sell to the migrant workers so they could can it for their own use. Migrant workers came from Washington State, Oklahoma, Mexico, and other places.