

Palisade Historical Society
Oral and Video History Project
Interview

Oral History # 012

Date: 3/13/2012

Place: The Stewart's Home- 3660 G 4/10 Road, Palisade Length 37:32

Interviewee: Gordon Stewart

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Growing up in Palisade:

Gordon was born January 2, 1943 at the old Grand Junction St. Mary's Hospital on Colorado. About six months later, his mother, Zella, and Gordon went to San Francisco to be with his father, Jack, who served in the Coast Guard in World War II. The family moved back to Palisade after the War and bought a house in 1947. Gordon's maternal grandparents, the Acres, lived in Palisade on G.4 Road and he spent a lot of time here. His grandparents had a black chicken named Blackie who would follow him around.

Gordon walked to school every day--one half block--for 12 years. The only playground in town was at the elementary school with a slide, swing set, merry-go-round, and was where children played. The best thing to play on, however, was the fire escape at the school at 8th and Peach (built in 1910) which later became the junior high school. The fire escape was enclosed and you could climb up and slide back down. When school was in session, there was a Math class on the top floor. If you got a 100% on a test, you got to go down the slide. Gordon did not get to do this, as he could only get a 100% if he wrote down the answers on a piece of paper and put it under his arm. The teachers were too smart for that.

Young boys played on the mountain where the Interstate highway is now. They played King of the Mountain and War with their BB Guns. They would also go to the River and play Tarzan and Jane. They would jump off the highway bridge to see how deep the water was. They would mess around and tell their parents they were at somebody's house. You didn't have to worry about kids in those days. He put cards on bicycle spokes to make them sound loud while they rode and left black skid marks at the old ladies houses to make them mad.

The Boy Scout's club house was at Riverbend Park in an old CCC Camp Building.

Palisade's streets were gravel then. Kids would play in the streets and get lots of cuts and bruises. The streets were lined with streets. The Town cut them down, though no one wanted them to be cut down when they paved the streets.

Gordon mowed lawns for neighbors with a push lawnmower before there were gas driven ones. His Dad's advice was never tell them what you wanted, but let them pay you for what you were worth. Fifty cents was a lot of money in those days.

Milk was delivered at home. His mother trained the milkman to walk in, put the milk in icebox and pick up the empties on the way out. His best friend delivered the newspaper to their home all through high school.

The depot was (south) of the railroad tracks and the City Hall and Fire Department were on the north side of the tracks when he was in high school. And there was one and one half policemen." He drove a 1950 Chevy pickup. On the bank building there was a light. If the policeman saw it, he went to City Hall to take the phone call or to see what was going on. No walkie talkies in those days.

Gordon and his friends had fun with the police officers by making them chase them, though it wasn't serious. At Christmas, there were Christmas lights along Main Street all the way to the park. There were three or four switches, and if the policeman was turning them on, Gordon and his friends would come behind him and turn them off.

The fifties was a great time to grow up. Things were still relaxed. He had a lot of fun. There wasn't a lot of pressure. The economy was getting better, and they played outdoors all the time, and grew up swimming in the canals. One of the big swimming holes was in the Highline Canal. Another was out in the Vinelands. Everyone was outside and having fun. They would thin peaches at daybreak until 1:00 and then live in the canal the rest of the day because it was so hot.

Businesses

There was a theater in town (Elberta) where the Slice O' Life Bakery is now that he went to as a little kid. It closed down when television came to town.

The Soda Fountain was in the Palisade Drug Store. He and his friend, Hugh Plumley, would go there and drink carbonated water until they got kicked out for burping too much.

The Rock House Café had pinball machines. His is the "pinball generation." Pinball machines would keep us from being outside.

The Library was in a building where the (municipal building) is now. Fairy Ryan was the librarian. There was a hotel (Carolyn) on the east side of the bank building. When his parents moved back from California, his mother had her first Beauty Shop (on the ground floor in the hotel building in 1948 or 1949. Another hotel - Jordan's Inn - was across the street where the grocery store is now. (It burned in 1915)

Palisade used to have a lot of businesses. The Toggery was a (general store) south of the bank building, (across the alley). Midwest Photo was also there. There was also Beahms Clothing store. In one building was the Drug Store, Bancroft's Grocery Store, and the Post Office. There was another grocery store - Young's Grocery Market. Long's Butcher Shop was not too far from where the (municipal building) is now. There was the Locker Plant - people didn't have deep freezers - so when you got a deer or half a cow, you would rent a locker to keep the meat frozen. They also had groceries. Bennett Young's filling station sold a variety of groceries. There were several places to buy groceries in Palisade.

There were two car dealerships - Hoffman Motors sold Fords and Bennett Motors sold Chevrolets. In the early 1950s, Bennett Motors (on the corner of Third and Kluge) became Waggoner Chevrolet. The building was torn down and the Circle K building was built-- (Portell's) Computer Store. The Circle K closed. Waggoner moved the garage south to Highway 6 and is now the Super Stop. The original part of the building was the Chevrolet garage. There were lots of backyard mechanics, too. There was a hamburger milk shake place across from the high school - where Packing Shed Restaurant is now.

The Christensen's operated a drive in for milk shakes and hamburgers on their place before the Interstate was put in. You drove (on Elberta) across the Highline Canal, and turned down the dirt road through the peach orchard. Past the last packing shed the road dead ended.

Where the Blue Pig Art gallery is now, (the Hugus Building) in the late 1940s was a restaurant. (Lucy's). It moved to the Vinelands in the early 1950s into a big two-story house. The Highway went through the Vinelands then. The original Highway through Palisade was Third Street which went back to Highway 6 and west to Clifton. If you drove from Palisade to Fruita, there was one stop light - at Mesa College - in the Valley.

Peach Harvest:

Palisade looked like Disneyland on a busy day during Harvest. Most of us worked, you could work as a little kid - there was no laws then. You would start by sweeping the packing shed floor to keep it clean. As kids got older we would be box boys where you shot boxes down to the packers to pack. When they were teenagers, they would work in the shed, or out in the field picking peaches, or hauling peaches into the shed.

School worked around peach harvests. If harvest was late, they would postpone school in the whole valley because mothers, dads, and kids all worked in the harvest. Even most working families that had a job, the Dad would work in the orchards on weekends to make extra money.

Most of the migrant workers were American families. There were winos and hobos who would jump off the freight train and work in the harvest also.

Harvest in those days was fun. "We didn't consider it work." All kids worked to make extra money because they had to buy their own car in those days. That taught kids responsibility and to take care of things. The best place to work was the packing shed because that was where the girls were packing peaches. We strived to work there. When we loaded the old railroad box cars with ice in the middle. Crews would pack both ends and race to see who would finish first. We made work fun. Whoever finished first might have gotten an extra buck or two. We were paid 75¢ an hour. Over time was more hours not pay: do you want 20 hours or 12 hours? We'd take as many hours as we could - 48 hours a day if we could. Peach harvest wasn't that long. The flat bed trucks were lined up two or three miles down first street and all the way to the park on Main Street to get unloaded at the platforms.

Family:

Gordon's great-great grandparents moved from Oklahoma to the Vinelands which was a Seventh Day Adventist community in those days. They settled there. Granddad Stewart was a Methodist

minister who moved from Hotchkiss in the 1930s when his father, Jack, started his freshman year at Palisade High School. Granddad was the Methodist minister in Palisade when his father was in high school.

Jack Stewart ran the 100 yard dash in 9.9. in 1934 which was pretty fast in those days. The family story was he ran fast when his father came after him with a Bible. Jack taught at Palisade High School for 32 years. Initially, he coached all the sports - baseballs, basketball, football, and track by himself. Gordon's mother would wash all the uniforms and press them. Jack had several good basketball teams who went to Denver for the state finals, but never won a championship. Jack made extra money by working in his peach orchards in summers, weekends, and after work.

Gordon met his wife, Ruby (Bullard), in Glenwood Springs while swimming in the Hot Springs Pool. Then, he asked her to come to his graduation night ceremonies. They grew up across the street but didn't really know each other. They were married in 1964. Their children are Jack and Julie. They have five grandchildren, and four great grandchildren.

Gordon lived in Palisade except for the time they went to Denver for school. He went to barber school and Ruby went to beauty school. They live in Gordon's Uncle Roy's house. When he died, he left it to his mother. When Gordon and Ruby moved back from Denver, they moved into the house. They went to Denver for barber and beauty school. The house is next door to his grandparents place.

Career:

Gordon has been a barber for 48 years, He has had the barber shop in Palisade since 1968 and is the second longest person in business in Palisade. The longest was dentist Dr. Ralph Kibler who was in his office for 47 years. His mother was a beautician. Ruby is a beautician in town. He used to have a peach orchard and ran the barber shop at the same time. It was driving him crazy so he sold the orchard.

Three or four guys who went to high school would stop at Gordon's barber shop to visit. "There was a lot of lying going on." Others who grew up will stop to trade stories. Gordon feels blessed in the barber shop. His customers come from all over the Valley. One guy drives all the way from Avon. It's been a good business, slowly coming to an end.

Sports:

Gordon Played OTA Baseball when he was little. The baseball field would be in the middle of where the sewer lagoon is now. High School baseball was played there, as well. The football field was there, also. In high school, he played basketball, track, baseball, and football. He was the full back and punter for Palisade's first State High School Championship Football Team in 1958. The was all-state and all conference in football and basketball.

Generations of Stewarts graduated from Palisade High School

Gordon's Dad, Jack, graduated from Palisade High School, but his mother lived outside Palisade so she went to the old Mt. Lincoln School. It cost \$100 tuition to go to Palisade High School, and her parents didn't have the money, so students were bused to Grand Junction High School for free. Gordon graduated from Palisade High school as did his children, and grandkids.