

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

I'm Lawrence Pyeatt. I was born during the early years of the Great Depression (1929-1939) in a Camp Court, also known as an Auto Court (motel), on December 4, 1932, in Rifle, Colorado. My father was Niler Eugene Pyeatt (1/21/1885-3/30/1952), who married my mother, Ora "Bell" Roby, June 4, 1931. I was one of two children from that union. My brother, Mel, was born five years later. My father was 14 years older than my mother when they married. Both Niler and Bell had been married before. Niler was a widower and Bell was divorced. Bell had one child, Eloise Sparks (nicknamed Wiz), from her previous marriage, and Niler had seven children.

As a younger man, my father inherited his family homestead in Deer Creek, Colorado. He lost the family homestead to his gambling debts. Early on, my dad hauled freight by horse and wagon from Baggs, WY, to Craig, CO. The trip would take him two days and he would stop halfway and stay with an old German rancher. One morning, the rancher made him biscuits and as he poured syrup over the biscuits, a dead mouse dropped from the container. It was unlikely dad finished his breakfast.



Niler Pyeatt on a freight wagon.

My grandmother from my father's side, who died in 1927, is buried in Palisade Cemetery. I did not know my grandfather on my father's side at all. My father's first wife was Bessie Hughes (10/23/1898-9/13/1928). Niler and Bessie married in 1915. Together they had seven children: June, Sam, Emma, Roy and Bertha. Another boy, Gordon Earl McKelvie (born George Earl Pyeatt, 12/25/1926-11/23/13) was adopted at about 2 years old by a family in Grand Junction. Financial hardship was the reason Gordon was given up for adoption.



L-R: June, Etta, Bessie holding Bertha, Roy, Niler & Sam. This photo was taken at the southeast corner of 3rd and Kluge.

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1974 Family Reunion in Pagosa Springs. L to R: Lawrence, Etta, Sam, June, Gordon, Bertha, Mel & Roy.

I met my half-brother, Gordon, at a family reunion in 1971. There is a connection that occurred between my half-sister, Bertha, and Gordon when they were teenagers. They did not know they were related but met and had a mutual interest in one another. It is said our father put an end to that by informing Bertha that Gordon was her brother. Another one of Niler and Bessie's children, a son, passed away very young from what may have been ingesting pills. His name was Frank Edwin Pyeatt (1/7/1920-11/20/1920).

Craig Empire, Number 44, November 24, 1921

PILLS POISON BABY

**Ten-Months-Old Son of Mr. and Mrs.
Niler Pyeatt Breaks Bottle and
Eats Cathartic Tablets**

PLAYTHING BROUGHT DEATH

Breaking a small pill bottle which he had used as a toy for several months, Frank Edwin Pyeatt, 10 months old, swallowed a number of the pills and died Saturday morning from strychnine poisoning. The pills were cathartic pills of an ordinary, well known brand, containing only about one-sixtieth of a grain of poison.

The little fellow had been playing with the pill bottle for several months, his father, Niler Pyeatt, stated. Saturday morning, while the mother was preparing breakfast, the bottle was broken in some manner. June, the 3-year-old sister of the infant, called the mother's attention to the fact that "bruvver was eatin' tandy." Mrs. Pyeatt investigated and found the baby with several pills in his hand. The child died from the effects of the poison about 11 o'clock Saturday morning.

Niler Pyeatt, father of the child, was in Baggs Saturday and knew nothing of the tragedy until he returned to Craig.

Frank Edwin Pyeatt was 10 months and 12 days old. He is survived by a mother and father, a sister, June, 3 years old, and a brother, Samuel, 2 years old.

The little body was laid to rest in the Craig cemetery Sunday. The funeral was held from the Pyeatt residence, the Rev. Carl Wild officiating.

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Roby Baby Dies



Little Myrtle Olive, six-weeks-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. O. M. Roby of Canon creek, died at noon last Saturday in this city, where the Robys had been living the past few weeks. The funeral was held Monday afternoon from the Burdge mortuary, Rev. Phillip D. Norvell officiating. Mr. and Mrs. Roby have the sympathy of their many friends in this loss.—Glenwood Post.

Myrtle Olive Roby's Gravestone The Craig Empire, 1/14/1925

My mother, Bell Roby, was born in Rifle, CO, in 1901. Her family had a homestead at Mariposa Creek in Craig, CO. Since there was no facility in Craig to have a baby, shortly before Bell's mother went into labor, she took herself by horse and buggy to Rifle (a two-day trip) where Bell was born at her father's place on Rifle Creek. Bell had one sister, whose name may have been "Olive." Olive died at about one year old. The family found that Olive could not hear. She was deaf. Olive's cause of death is unknown. When my mother married her first husband, Walter Sparks, she said Walter did not feel he needed to work at the time. When their daughter, Eloise, was born, Bell couldn't tolerate Walter's desire not to work, so she ended their marriage. Soon after, Walter enlisted to serve in WWI. He became a medical aidman. Walter continued to provide medical services to members of our community after he had been discharged from the military. In later years, Walter drove a Packer wagon and sold spices for Rolly McNess Spice Company. After their divorce, Walter married his 2nd wife, Lilian McMahan. They lived in the Appleton area of Grand Junction. Walter and Lilian had two children, John and Paul.

My mother relayed a story to me about her grandmother, my great grandmother, who had left her husband. Great grandmother Roby was living in Kansas at the time and left by wagon train with my Grandad and his sister. Grandad was 8 to 9 years old at the time. His sister would have been about 10. Her planned destination was Oregon, however, the wagon master kicked her off in Baggs, WY, because she was too difficult to travel with. From Baggs, WY, great grandmother Roby came down to Craig, CO, and homesteaded just south of Craig.

Another story my mother relayed to me was when she was living in Glenwood Springs and she took the train to visit her parents in Rifle. While she was staring out the window of the train, she saw in her mind's eye her aunt having a scare while driving her horse and buggy to pick her up. When my mother arrived, she asked her aunt if she was OK. Her Aunt described how she'd been coming down a hill when the horse and buggy almost crashed. She was very grateful she hadn't.

I was told that my father was working in a mine and living in a one room cabin with Bessie and their 6 children. In 1928, Bessie became pregnant again and the family couldn't make ends meet. Bessie felt she could not have another child, so she attempted to end the pregnancy herself. Complications from that event caused her untimely death. My father could not take care of the children on his own, so they were sent to live with extended family. June was sent to the Hughes family in Kansas. Niler took all three boys, Emma and Bertha, and dropped them off at their Aunt Myrtle Randolph's house on Roan Creek. Soon after, Emma was sent to Denver and Bertha stayed at Aunt Myrtle Randolph's on Roan Creek.

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Another story my dad told of his mining days during the Great Depression was when the Harris mine lured men, who were desperate to work, with the promise that after a day of work, they'd either be hired or fired. Men, including my dad, traveled many miles to the mine for work only to have everyone fired at the end of the day after they'd given a free day of work to the mine. The mine operation carried on. There would be a whole new group of men the next day.

Life at Aunt Myrtle's house on Roan Creek was not easy for my half-siblings. Myrtle had been a beauty contest winner and a Wild West show role player in her youth. Aunt Myrtle was often angry, dramatic, and a harsh disciplinarian to the rest of the kids. Myrtle also had been married several times. Her last husband was last name Randolph. Mr. Randolph was older than Myrtle. I believe Myrtle had a daughter named Sarah who may have lived in Oklahoma. It was said that when our dad showed up on the property once without money to help support the kids, Aunt Myrtle grabbed a shotgun and chased him off the property. Whenever anyone came to visit the house, the children were forbidden to come in. They would stay outside until the guests left.

One of my half-brothers relayed a story that the children were sitting in the living room one night when a human hand appeared in the front window. The children screamed and went running into the kitchen to tell Aunt Myrtle, who told the children that it was the hand of their dead mother. It is suspected that Aunt Myrtle had a somewhat dark sense of humor. When Myrtle and Mr. Randolph moved from Roan Creek, they got a boy they called "Connie." I do not know where, when or how. This boy was very spoiled and could do no wrong. In later years, Connie had his share of trouble when he got arrested and landed himself in jail for auto theft.

My dad was a man of big ideas and he enjoyed taking risks. He also was a gambler. Family lore recounts that he probably lost a million dollars at least a dozen times before he died. Just before the Great Depression, Dad and three partners were building Auto Courts (motels). They had owned one in Glenwood Springs, one in Rifle, one in Green River, WY, and the Wick Hotel in Grand Junction. Family humor often told that the Hyatt Regency should have been called the "Pyeatt Regency." Niler and his three partners lost it all at the start of the Great Depression. Other projects included a gold mine, domestic water project and an oil/gas drilling project.



Ora "Bell" (Roby) Pyeatt at the Martin Place 1941.

There came a time when my mother, Bell, laid down the law with my father. She told Niler she would divorce him if he did not quit gambling. Niler quit and they remained married until his death in 1952. Our family moved many times during the Great Depression. Canyon Camp (a gas station in DeBeque Canyon) was an early "home." My family lived in a cabin on Rifle Creek where I remember the dirt floor and playing in the framework of one of the first evaporative coolers. It was an open "box" framed of wood with gunny sacks hanging over the top and down the sides. The gunny sacks were old and worn from years of exposure. There was a bucket and pan on top so water could be poured to run over the top and down onto the gunnysacks. When wind would blow through, it would create cool air. The family never did benefit from the old cooler. In its dilapidated condition, I remember while playing in the box, dust and debris fell from the old gunnysacks landing in my eyes causing pain and irritation.

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One of my earliest memories of my brother and I was when mom would give us a bath. There was no running water and mom would heat water on the stove and pour it into a small bathtub. I got my bath first. The water would always be cold by the time Mel got his bath and he'd sit in the little tub shivering. We wouldn't see our first indoor toilet until I was a freshman in high school.

I remember living in a little blue house on Rapid Creek east of Palisade. From there, my family moved to Rifle where I started 1st grade at about the age of 5. I recall contracting whooping cough and being pulled from school because I was sick. I did not go back to 1st grade in Rifle. My family moved again back to Palisade. We lived in the Voytilla's Place on Rapid Creek, where I would start 1st grade over again. The Voytilla's place was a peach and apricot ranch that eventually was bought by my grandparents (Roby), who later sold it to my half-brother, Sam. At the Voytilla Place, I remember there was a path straight down the hill where I'd catch the school bus. Soon after, we'd move to the Martin place (Harlow's).



Lawrence Pyeatt, 5 years old.

I remember in September, my sister, Bertha, took me to 2nd grade. She would have been in high school at the time. I was not prepared for second grade in a new school, so the teacher asked me at recess if I wanted to play with the kids in the first grade. From that moment on, I was in the first grade. Because I'd already attended part of the 1st grade, I was ahead of the other kids. It took several years for the class to catch up with me. Bertha and I rode the same bus. We called the bus the "Cracker Box" and our bus driver was a man named Ed Freemyer. The bus had a row of benches around the perimeter where the older kids sat, and there was a bench down the center where the younger children sat. I remember the older kids would often pick on us younger kids by using pencils to play drums on our heads. Some years later, I recall our driver, Ed Freemyer, was walking down the railroad tracks when he was hit by a train and killed.

On Saturdays, we would go to town. Mom would give us a dime each and we would go to the Joy Theater. Saturday was kid's day, and we would watch Hop-along Cassidy, Tom Mix, the Cisco Kid or others. The Joy was across the street from the Kiva Theater and close to Santy's Café and Bar. After the movie, we would wait in the car with mom and when dad would come, we would go to the City Market on the corner of 4th Street and Rood Avenue when they would do grocery shopping for the week.

I remember moving from the Voytilla Place to the Martin Place and my dad worked the peach orchards. I remember my half siblings made life hard for me. I succumbed to the pressures of sibling rivalry throughout my young life and never did conflict well. I was told that one day, while I laid on a bridge over the irrigation creek at the Wick Hotel watching the water pass by, one of my half-brothers, Sam, snuck up behind me and rolled me into the water. My half-brothers also liked to shoot marbles at me with a beany shooter, among other things.

In 1941, when I was about 9-10 years old, America entered WWII. I remember the atmosphere at the house as being very subdued. I knew something important was going on, but I didn't know what. After a few days, I realized the seriousness of the war. All the young men on Rapid Creek volunteered to go fight. There was a going away party for them at the Egger's lower ranch. There was lots of food and

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homemade ice cream. This was my first experience of ice cream. My half-brother, Sam, did not go to battle. He had a stiff leg and was ineligible.

Years prior, Sam had accidentally got himself in the knee with a hatchet while chopping wood. Uncle Randolph saw fit to stuff a wad of chewing tobacco in the wound to heal it. The wound became severely infected. Sam spent the next two years in Children's Hospital in Denver being treated for the infection. He almost died. While he was hospitalized, he was able to continue with school and probably got a better education there. When WWII was in full swing, I remember all the kids banding together and collecting metal scrap to help with the war efforts. The high school boys collected a massive amount. It's the reason the coal mines were empty of rails and had to be reconstructed if the mine went back into production. When the war came to an end, I remember we were able to get firecrackers again.

Also in 1941, we lived at the Martin's Place, which was a peach orchard. I remember a large grave marker (John P. Harlow) in the orchard west of the house. I am sure the Martin house was haunted. I would lie awake in bed many nights and listen for footsteps coming up to the foot of my bed other strange noises coming from the old stone house. In later years, I asked my mother why she never came to comfort me. She said she was as scared as I was! During the next five years, my dad had made a deal with the owner of the Martin Place. It was a share crop deal that lasted until 1946.

With my brother, Roy, gone to war, I got to build peach boxes for the harvest. I got Mel to stack the finished boxes, but he didn't like the job and I had to stack some of them myself. I don't remember who nailed the lids to the finished boxes that season. I know it wasn't me. That job required more nailing skills than I possessed. I only made boxes for one harvest. I remember that Palisade had a yearly celebration in July. One of the contests was a peach box nailing contest in which the largest number of boxes made in a given time would decide the winner. Of all the contestants, Roy Pyeatt and Matt Debelock were the fastest. It was said that they were tied, but Roy hit his fingers more often than Matt.

During the time our family lived at the Martin place, I made friends with Danny Egger and James Vernon. We had many adventures exploring the cliffs and cracks in those cliffs above our place. Cracks were common along the rims of the Bookcliffs. We explored all of them above our place. One crack was quite extensive. On a side canyon on the way to the Winger Coal Mine, there was a pond and the remains of an icehouse that, in the past, had provided ice during the summer months for the residents on Rapid Creek. Above this pond in the side of the cliff was an entrance to this crack. We would climb down to the floor that was made of dirt and rocks that had fallen down over the ages. It was relatively flat, and we could travel along this crack until it suddenly ended and another crack took off at a ninety-degree angle. This crack was narrow with no floor. One had to wedge themselves into this crack and scabble along sideways, being careful not to slip downward because the crack narrowed as it went down. After scabbling sideways about twenty or thirty feet, one could slip down and move sideways and enter another crack that was wider. The floor of this crack angled down and one could exit on the other side of the mountain. Years later after having some mining experience, I went into this crack and discovered just how dangerous it was. We were so lucky to survive without injury or death.

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Ornan & Eleanore Roby

One afternoon, I remember being at Grandma and Grandpa Roby's place (which we also called the Voytilla Place), just south from the Martin Place. My second-cousin, Fern, was there, too. As the adults readied to go to town, Fern's mother,



Eloise, asked me to take Fern, who was probably 3 years old at the time, for a walk. To me, a walk meant we'd head up the hill toward the cliffs my friends and I explored. There was a pretty good-sized cactus patch to cross and I'd picked up Fern to carry her over. As we traversed the patch, I dropped Fern into the cactus.

Grandma Roby, who had been following us, was none too happy about that. It was the only time I ever heard her swear. She said, "You damn boys!" and took Fern away to tend to cactus spine removal. I'm quite sure I got heartily disciplined for that one.



Mel Pyeatt & Fern (Hall) McMahan

At the lower end of the Martin Place was a soil bank created when the area was leveled for the peach orchard. This vertical wall provided a wonderful place to dig a tunnel. We boys worked on it for some time. The tunnel had two portals and went in about 8 feet with a crosscut of about 5 feet. This gives some hint to my later profession. We had no knowledge of how dangerous it was. The following summer, it had become a trap for tumble weeds and a home for critters. Later, when we lived at the canal house, I walked up to the place and observed that it had caved in. I think the new people living at the Martin place had destroyed it. A death trap for sure.

To the south of the house was the packing shed and a large yard for trucks, tractors and wagons to turn during the peach harvest. The first harvest at the Martin Place came after a long summer of taking care of the peaches, thinning, irrigating and applying Tanglefoot to the peach trees. Tanglefoot was a sticky goop that was painted around the trunk of the trees to keep ants and other insects from infesting the trees. I never thought it was particularly effective.

During these peach orchard years, school did not start until after the peach harvest was over. I was in the 5th or 6th grade and had a teacher named Mrs. Hood. She didn't like me or any of the boys at all. She had a paddle that she would use regularly to discipline the boys. One day, she went after Vernon Waldron with her paddle. He grabbed the paddle from her hand, slammed it down, broke it, and walked away. I never saw Vernon Waldron again, and Mrs. Hood went and got another paddle. There was another incident where all the boys in the 5th and 6th grade got disciplined with a rubber hose by the principal. There were probably about 40 of us. None of us knew why. But one did. In those days, we never questioned vaccinations. I remember all of us kids regularly got whatever the next vaccination was.

The Peach Grower's Association would advance supplies to the growers. After harvest, the money that the association made from the sales was divided among the growers, less the cost of advanced supplies. I remember when my dad went to meet with the lady with whom he had the share crop deal. He came home with his hand jammed in his pocket and went straight back to the bedroom to stash the money in the bedroom. The next day, my mom took me to get new shoes. Although we weren't rich, I recognized

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this as the end of the depression era for my family. My family never went hungry during those lean years, but there were extended times where the family staples were venison from hunting the land around Rapid Creek, and beans. I remember that one of my half-brothers had “Rickettes” due to malnutrition.

From the Martin Place, we moved to the Vincent Ranch. We had chickens and a rooster we called “Captain Marvel.” The hens and rooster came with us when my dad rented a house and we moved behind the Winger Mine tippie. Mel and I needed to be closer to catching the bus for school. By the time Captain Marvel turned two years old, he’d grown very aggressive. It probably didn’t help that we kids teased him relentlessly. There came a time when Captain Marvel’s temper had him coming after us kids, the Terrell boys and my dad. One day, Forest Terrell got attacked by Captain Marvel and injured quite badly. Mom had enough of Captain Marvel’s aggression and, needless to say, Captain Marvel’s disappearance did not go unnoticed. On the ranch one day, gone the next.

While living at the Vincent ranch, I remember a fall night during hunting season when it was raining. There came a knock at the door. It was a man who had come down from a hunting camp. There was no phone service and he needed to get a doctor and an ambulance up to the camp. Two young men (I believe they were friends) in the hunting camp were cleaning their rifles across from one another. One of the rifles accidentally fired and one of the young men was critically injured. My dad drove the man to town. Awhile later, there was another knock at the door. The ambulance had gotten stuck in the creek below our place, so my dad got his horse team and pulled the ambulance from the creek, so it could continue up to the hunting camp to retrieve the young man. As the ambulance came back down, it was stuck in the creek a second time. My dad got his team of horses and pulled the ambulance out. Unfortunately, the young man died from his injuries.

Powder and Rimrock were my dad’s two favorite horses. Dad farmed wheat at the time and they pulled the plow/cultivator and other farm equipment. Dad liked to use Powder for excursions to take care of water and irrigation tasks, however, he often came home walking along side Powder instead of riding him. Powder wouldn’t sit still and would spin when being mounted, so dad eventually would give up in frustration.

Rapid Creek went up past the Egger’s ranch right up under the rim of the Grand Mesa. Above the ranch were a series of beaver dams. These and the creek between them were great for trout fishing. The hike up to the Eggers Ranch was arduous. The fishing was good, although the catch was variable. Mel, Danny, James and I would return home sometimes after sundown.

Families living on Rapid Creek during my childhood:

Pyeatt	Jenkins
Roby	Floryancic
Lloyd	Mautz
Goffredi	Kladock
Vernon	Terrell
Livingston	Stokes
Shagga	Eggers
Marolt	

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Starting with the farthest up the creek, the Lloyds had two children: a daughter, Phyllis, and a son, Sydney. I would visit Phyllis Lloyd, whose family ranch was further up on the north side of Rapid Creek. Phyllis was older than me and didn't appear to enjoy my company, which became apparent after only a few minutes. Her younger brother, Sydney, had a business with his mother in Palisade in later years. Next were the Goffredis with a son, Alfred, who later taught at Mesa Jr. College. Below them were the Vernons, with two sons, Victor and James, and two or three daughters. Up on the bench on the south side of Rapid Creek in the little blue house were the Livingstons with two daughters, Patty, the older and a younger daughter, which I don't remember her name. The Livingston's moved soon after my family moved into the Martin Place. When my half-brother, Sam, married Virginia Van Horn, they lived in that little blue house for a while. West of us and just above the Vernon's was Joe Shagga. Joe lived in a small shack. I don't remember much about him, only that he lived alone and was an alcoholic. Just south of Joe were the Marolts, who had a son, Albert. Mom corresponded with him when he was in the service during WWII.

Going south, there was a rancher, but I can't remember his name. I don't know if he had a family or not. I do know that alcohol played a big role at his place, because I remember how disgusted mom was when we drove by his place and saw the harvest crew that were all very drunk. Next were the Jenkins with a daughter, Lillian, who married Bill Floryancic. Bill worked as a butcher in the Bancroft grocery store in Palisade. He later started his own grocery store in Palisade. He built a house just south of the Voytilla Place. Next, south of the Jenkins, came the Mautz family with two daughters. The older was Helen and the younger was Shirley. Across the road from the Mautz's were the Kladocks. They had two sons, Leon and Kenneth. Up the canyon East of the Kladocks was the Winger coal mine that had a tipple down where the Rapid Creek Road met the highway. Above the tipple and next to the canal was a small 3 room house that we later lived in for maybe a year or less. We called it the canal house. Just south of the tipple were the Terrells with two sons. Forest was the oldest. Across the road were the Stokes with one daughter, Peggy. Finally, just south of the Terrells were the Eggers. The Eggers had a ranch about six miles up Rapid Creek. This was a second house they kept so the kids could attend school and the family had access to civilization. The Eggers had 10 to 12 children, of which about 7 were still living there at the time I was there. Those that I remember are John, Jim, Eddy, Danny, Francis, and Regina.

The Lloyd Ranch was the last one with water rights on Rapid Creek. After the spring runoff one year, there was not enough water for all the ranches. That became a serious problem for the Lloyds later that Summer. The Martin Place was the first to have water rights on the creek. My dad, Niler, and half-brother Sam would be irrigating when the water would cease to flow. A walk up the creek would reveal that Mr. Lloyd had opened his ditch out of turn and would take all the water from the creek. This led to angry words and near fights. One summer when the creek was very low, the ranchers got together and tore out all the beaver dams in the upper reaches of the creek. This provided some increase in water flow for a few hours, but the creek quickly became low again. The Eggers Ranch was at the end of Rapid Creek and had no water rights. To compensate for no/low water, they constructed a reservoir on their property. It filled with water during the spring run-off. One season when water became particularly low, the surrounding ranchers got together and got the law to force the Eggers to open their reservoir. The ranchers thought this would provide water for some time, but in an act of defiance, Mr. Egger released his water in a flood. The water was low again the next day.

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The Blue Flame Mine surface facilities caught fire I think in the summer of 1942. All the men of the creek rushed up there to try and put it out. Our head ditch for the ranch ran along the ridge above the mine. The men dug a new ditch to the mine and diverted the water to the fire. Once the fire was out, the men were standing around talking when my father suddenly collapsed. Sam pounded on his back and is credited with saving his life. I was at home in the kitchen when four men came in carrying my father. They put him to bed and called Dr. Weidlein. The doctor did what he could for him and told my mother that his heart was in bad condition. He said that he might last until tomorrow or for ten years.

Dr. Weidlein was our local physician and had his office above the movie theater in Palisade. On my visits there, I remember seeing a row of large bottles on a shelf. After his diagnosis, he would put a measured number of pills from one of the bottles into a small envelope. There were pills of all colors and depending on what he found wrong, you would get an envelope with pills of a certain color and instructions on taking them. They were all of identical size and differed only in color. All colors of the rainbow, plus black and brown pills. The doctor did not have hospital privileges at St. Mary's hospital. He made house calls in the evening. Many children of the doctor's patients were born at home under his care. He gave years of service to the Grand Valley. His old automobile was a common sight around the Valley, and I think he visited mainly those folks that could not afford more expensive treatment. He was also the mine doctor and was called to various mines at all hours. He was married, but I think he lived alone.

In 1945, after about five years at the Martin Place, Dad had saved enough money to make a down payment on a ranch about five miles south of Palisade on Krusen Creek, east of Horse Mountain. This was known as the Vincent Ranch. It had extensive fields with two small reservoirs on the ranch and two larger reservoirs on top of the Grand Mesa. Water from these reservoirs fed into Krusen Creek but could be diverted into Cottonwood Creek that joined Rapid Creek.

Of my brother, Mel, I remember he was fearless. He was an athlete and wrestled in high school. At the age of 17, Mel married his wife, Barbara. It wasn't unusual for young people to marry at those young ages back then. Mel and Barbara had been in a relationship throughout high school. One day, they had gotten in an argument and the two went separate ways. Just after the argument, Mel was riding on the back of an orchard hoopie flatbed truck when he fell off and hit his head. Mel didn't remember arguing with Barbara and they married shortly after. Mel and Barbara stayed together 70 years until he passed. Mel was never afraid of a challenge.

Lawrence Pyeatt
18 Years Old



19 Years Old



22 Years Old



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Upon graduating high school in 1951, I enlisted in the Air Force. I was stationed at the Naval Base, Treasure Island, in the San Francisco Bay (Yerba Buena). This had been the site of the World's Fair in 1939 and had been converted later to a Navy base serving war time needs. My tasks were administrative, and I spent time typing reports and assigning soldiers to other bases. I remember a Russian ship docking where I was stationed. It was interesting to me that the first people to disembark the ship were a large group of female sailors. The officers were next, and they were men. I recognized it was a testament to how many men had died in WWII, so women were placed in the role of sailors. At the time, I observed no animosity to or from the Russians.

*L - R: Etta, Bertha, June, June's husband
Bill Sparks, Roy and Sam at the Martin Place 1941.*

While stationed in San Francisco, I was notified that my father had died. I requested an emergency discharge and returned to Colorado. Upon my return, I spent most of my time in the mines and the orchards. I went wherever the work called. I admit in those early years, I was terrible with money. I would just spend it. I loved the local dance halls: Copeka Ballroom, Dixieland Dance Hall, as well as two others in Loma and Mack. I remember seeing Slim Whitman at Copeka Ballroom. My carefree lifestyle at the time included working, music and dancing, drinking, fighting and girls. I was not able to stay out of the Smoke Shack beer joint located near Mesa Junior College by the veteran's hospital.



Working in the mines was not for the faint of heart. One of my first jobs in the mines was as a lift operator, shuttling the miners from the entrance to the caverns below. In my first month, I got an urgent call to retrieve an injured miner and bring him to the surface for medical treatment. It was obvious the man was dead. A large rock had dislodged from above him and hit him in the head. He died instantly. Injuries and death in the mines were commonplace in those early days.



Niler Pyeatt

My dad's final adventures moved him and mom from Pear Park to Palisade, which was not an active farm. He had tried farming potatoes and tomatoes but didn't have a lot of luck. I remember when my dad would get nostalgic, he would sing old songs. One of his favorites was "Let the Rest of the World Go By." Dad became a real estate salesman and did that until he passed of a stroke in 1952, 10 years after the doc had told my mom he'd either die tomorrow or live 10 more years. My mom told me what happened. She said my dad had come in and sat down in his chair. She started to speak with him when he said to her, "I am blind as a bat right now." He couldn't see a thing and passed in his chair at that moment. My mom ran into the front yard yelling for help, but nothing could be done.

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

Ora "Bell" (Roby) Pyeatt 1980

After my dad's death in 1952, my mother moved into the Roby's house behind the Baptist Church with her mother and father (Roby). I remember installing the first evaporative cooler in the house. My grandmother, who was in poor health due to a thyroid condition, suffered with the heat and would spend her summers in front of the cooler. I also brought them their first black and white television set. My mother took care of her parents in this house until they died. After they passed, our family decided the house was not repairable and it was not feasible for mom to carry coal to the stoves over winter, so it was torn down and a new one was built, which remains in this location today. Bell lived at the new house until 1985. Bell moved to Elko, NV, to live with her daughter, Eloise, until she passed away in 1994.



Bell's daughter, Eloise Sparks.

My first introduction to getting my lifetime career started was when I was offered a job on a "surveyor" crew. This is when my love of math kicked in. I was working for Union Carbide surveying in the mines when I became aware of the pay disparity between I and another surveyor that had a college degree. He was making \$600/month, while I was at \$400/month. I asked for a raise but was not given one due to having no college. I signed up for college and got in to the Engineering Program. To pay for college, I took a job with Union Carbide's Asbestos Project.

I met my first wife, Carol, when her dad, who knew I was heading out to California to work at the Coalinga Asbestos Project for Union Carbide Corporation, asked me to give Carol a ride. She was heading to California for school. We got to know one another on that car ride. Carol was looking to become a teacher. She was very involved with her church. I was ready to settle down and get life under control and thought she could help me do that. Before graduation, I worked taking 10-foot core samples of asbestos, ground the samples and determined the percentage of asbestos in each sample. This was specifically for product development. This work was done with no safety equipment, air flow or ventilation concerns. When people got sick, it was called Rabbit Fever. At this writing, I am 91 years old. Many of my coworkers and peers from those early days of mining and testing asbestos have long since passed away from related illnesses. Although I have decreased lung capacity, I'm still alive and kicking!

By the time I was 30, I had gotten married, had two children, quit drinking and got back into mining as a surveyor in Green River, WY. I worked in a number of different mines in the western US.

1. Idorado Mine, Red Mountain Pass, Metals, Silver (Miner)
2. Joe Mine, Uravan/Atchison Mesa, Uranium (Miner)
3. Trona Mine, WY, sodium carbonate (Surveyor)
4. Roadside Mine, Cameo, Mesa, Coal (Engineer)
5. Dorchester Coal Co, Fruita – Coal (Engineer)
6. Union Oil, Parachute, Oil Shale Experimental Mine (Ventilation Engineer)
7. Whipsite Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP), Carlsbad, NM (Engineer)

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

Carol and I married in 1965. We were both strong-willed in our opinions and rarely were our opinions in agreement. Her Dad, Alex Thompson, was particularly headstrong. I remember sitting in a restaurant for dinner one evening and Carol's dad sharply criticizing the waitress for serving his water on the wrong side. Needless to say, I did not respond well to conflict. My relationship with my father-in-law was strained. After we married, Carol and I got to work. I in the mines and Carol, after a short career in teaching, volunteered for the church, as well as raising our two children.

Carol's faith was strong. She found career, connection and community in her church. Even though I spent part of my younger years as a member of the Baptist Church, organized religion became a sore spot for me when one day, I was sitting in my dad's car waiting for him to come back from playing cards. We were parked out in front of a bar near the Avalon Theater when two of the elders from my church stumbled out of the bar drunk as skunks. The hypocrisy remained in my mind and I lost connection with organized religion. I only went because Carol was so involved, and it was important to her.

Carol and I have two children, Laurie, born in 1967 and David, born in 1969. Very early in our relationship, Carol's father, Alex, had a heart attack. As he was recovering, I worked at the family gas station and restaurant. Carol's mom, Kathleen, ran the restaurant. It so happened that quite regularly, I could not get the register to balance at the end of the day and spoke to one of the employees about \$20 missing from the cash register. The employee was upset I would even ask. I came to find out that Alex would abscond with \$20 out of the register just about daily.

In 1967, I had taken a job teaching in Fruita, when Carol went into labor with Laurie. I remember having to tell the principal at the time that my wife had gone into labor, and I needed to get to the hospital. The principal for some reason wasn't particularly fond of me. He told me to go and that he would try to find my replacement. Teaching was never my forte. I didn't enjoy it, so I never went back to that.

When I got a job at the Trona Mine in Green River, Wyoming, Carol and I moved. We bought our first house there for \$12,000. The Trona Mine produced sodium bicarbonate. David was born in Wyoming, and I remember when Carol went into labor, there were only two doctors available in the whole town. Those doctors, Sudman and Stratton, were old and always overworked as they took care of the townspeople, as well as the miners. Between the needs of the town and the needs of the mine, they were exhausted. It was late at night when the doctor arrived after having been at an accident at the mine. He gave Carol medication to slow the progress of her labor, so he could go home and get some rest. I remember Laurie arriving very quickly and David would probably do the same. 14 hours later, David arrived. Carol had talked about having four children, but that experience changed her mind. As far as the kids' life trajectory, I often thought of how Laurie was always early to whatever her commitments were, and David was always late.

One of my earliest memories with my kids was around 1971, the movie "Fantastic Voyage" (1966) came on the television. The kids watched this science fiction adventure film which shrank human beings to go into the human body of an injured scientist and make repairs to his brain. David was too scared to go to sleep that night for fear of inside bodies under the bed.

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

Early on, our family came to own a Lab mix named “Rex”, who had been left tied to my in-laws, the Thompson’s, Corral Restaurant. Rex was particularly attached to Laurie. He would walk her to school and back. I remember that if I had to discipline Laurie, I would have to ask for Rex’s permission first. He was very protective of the kids. Rex was a dog that couldn’t be contained. No matter how hard we tried, he would roam. One day, the neighbor brought Rex home after he’d harassed the neighbor’s horses. He said if Rex did it again, it would be his last. So, I took Rex to the animal shelter. I really liked that dog, and the kids loved him. It was devastating to have to give him up.

Swimming became Laurie and David’s sport of choice. They both were very good at it in different ways. Their love of the sport was born out of necessity, because Laurie had come into the world with scoliosis, and the best form of treatment was swimming. Swimming would eventually heal Laurie’s spine. Because both kids were quite competitive, they grabbed the torch and swam. I remember Laurie would dive in like a seal when launching from the water’s edge. Laurie was fast and David had stamina to go the distance in sports – an interesting connection to how they entered this life. Both would join the swim team in high school. David went on to run iron man races and climb 14ers. Whatever Laurie would do, David would increase his effort by tenfold. They would build playing card castles on the kitchen table and David would fill the entire tabletop.

In 1973, our family moved to Orchard Mesa. I remember the kids learning how to ride bikes and Laurie having a pretty serious bike wreck. I also remember she had a horse on the farm property where we lived. She would sometimes ride bareback and didn’t use a saddle. When David learned how to ride a bike, he didn’t understand how to use the brakes. I remember David’s forward momentum at high rates of speed would end with him crashing into whatever would stop him from moving. One afternoon, Carol had to fish David out of the canal behind our house after watching him as he rode his bike into it.

While living in Orchard Mesa, I worked at the Roadside Mine in Cameo. Charlie Salingo, who owned the Roadside Mine, needed a mine engineer and I was available. Carol was firm in her decision that the Orchard Mesa house was too far from church, so we were only there a year or two when we moved closer to town in Grand Junction. We had a large tree in the yard of our Grand Junction house. I remember there was a tire swing hanging from the tree and David turned that tire swing into a hanging chase lounge. A neighbor boy, John Luke, came over to play and the kids put him on the swing, and spun the rope until it could twist no more. When they let go, the swing spun wildly and the rope broke, tossing John Luke from the swing. Poor John Luke went home crying but came back the next day for another go.

I recall Laurie being a quiet and reserved student, spending a lot of time at the library and being a voracious reader. Carol and I both had a love of music. Both kids played instruments: David the French horn and Laurie the Oboe. I remember Laurie getting her solo during their orchestra’s performance of William Tell’s Overture. At the end of the storm, the rooster crows. Laurie’s oboe performance completed that moment. Carol sang in choir and David learned to sing, as well. I remember David and Elizabeth Newbower singing the duet, “Hello My Baby.” As Laurie and David got older, I remember them learning how to drive. We had a Hudson Hornet and a Ford Escort they would use. True to his nature, David wrecked his first car given to him by his Grandfather Alex.

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

I was at Roadside Mine for about 4 years when it was sold to GEX. Charlie then started the Dorchester Coal Company in Fruita, so I followed him there. I worked there for about four years and when that mine sold, I took a job at the Union Oil Experimental Mine at Parachute.

I remember the first computers coming online and buying a 64K TRS80 at Radio Shack and bringing it home. David took to it immediately and we worked on writing programs. I was able to create a program to help David learn spelling. He would spend hours creating and storing his work on a floppy disc. Laurie was also working on the computer when she inadvertently reformatted David's floppy disc. David did not grieve the loss long. He went right back to it.

By the time Laurie headed off to college and David was in his last year of High School, Carol and my marriage was coming to an end. I was terribly unhappy and burned out when I reconnected with an old flame I knew prior to meeting Carol. Carol and I went our separate ways. Carol's faith was still strong as she moved on to attend the Lutheran Seminary and become a minister and missionary. She spent time in New Zealand and then returned to Minnesota. Eventually, she came back to Grand Junction.

David would attend college, as well. He started with one year at Lutheran College and decided that was not for him. When one of his close friends was accepted to Colorado School of Mines, David was put to the test when that friend's father told him he would never make it into that school. Never one to take no for an answer, David worked hard to be accepted in the engineering program. He eventually graduated and is now an engineer in Washington State.

Laurie went on to attend Lutheran University and graduate with her degree in Literature. Laurie then attended college at Western State in Gunnison, CO, where she would get her master's degree. She eventually married and has two children of her own, Seth and Ben. Seth is currently engaged to be married and Ben is in Salt Lake City, Utah, working for the United States Postal Service deciphering handwriting and making sure those pieces of mail with mystery addresses have a chance to make it to their destinations.

I met my second wife, Mary, when I went to Eureka, California in 1955. I was seeking my fortune in a plywood plant there. Mary was in college. That short relationship didn't last and we went on with our lives. I remember Mary had been dating a man of an ethnic background and her mother did not approve. Her mother came to get her and take her home. Throughout her life, Mary has been a fierce advocate against racism and abuse of any kind. I remember a story of Mary when she was in the post office and a big, burly man was giving the postal clerk a hard time and berating him. Mary stepped in and corrected the man, which sent him out the door with other postal customers applauding Mary while the man exited the building.

Our paths would cross over the years from time to time and we would both go on to marry, have children, live and work. After Carol and I divorced, I married my second wife, Mary, (1985/1986) and we would go on to live in St. Louis, MO, Denver, CO, Santa Fe, NM, and Carlsbad, NM. My brother, Mel, and his wife Barbara were living there and helped me settle there. I would end my engineering career in Carlsbad, New Mexico. I retired from WIPP in 2004. Mary and I would eventually retire to Trinidad, CO.

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

There were several years my brother and I worked near the Indian Reservations in the surrounding areas. My brother said there were a couple of times when he was working at drilling locations and experienced feeling someone standing behind him. When turned around, an Indian would appear and then disappear without a trace. I also experienced a late-night drive with a fellow engineer, George Baloo, who was of American Indian descent. A coyote crossed in front of our vehicle, and he stopped and would not continue. It was bad luck to cross coyote tracks, and it would take a Shaman to sage where the coyote crossed before he would continue. It was late and we had another fifty miles to our work sites. There was no Shaman to be found where we were, so George drove on. We made it to our destination unscathed. George was the first Native American to graduate from University of Arizona with an engineering degree.

Another story of Mary is when we were driving from Carlsbad New Mexico to Dallas to visit her son. We went into a diner and sat down to get something to eat. There was a black woman sitting with her daughter at the counter. She did not look well at all, and no one was helping her. They were being ignored by restaurant staff. Mary walked up to her and asked if she was ok. She was not. Mary took care of her in that moment, got her a hotel room and made sure she and her daughter were settled for the night.

One of my favorite past times throughout my life has been music. Some of my favorites are Swan Lake, Morton Denny, Bing Crosby, Carol Channing, Edith Piaf, Harry Belafonte, Dean Martin, Spike Jones, Burl Ives, Ed McCurdy, Otis Redding, and Simon & Garfunkel. I have been an avid reader all my life. The Natural History of Nonsense and To Kill a Mockingbird were two books that shaped my thoughts to living a life of acceptance.

When I think back on what I remember about my half-brothers and half-sisters, their strong work ethic taught me to do the same and set the tone for how I worked throughout my lifetime. I remember my grandfather Roby being strict and authoritative, with few kind words to say. I met him one time when he was very old. He shook my hand and thanked me for speaking clearly. It was the only compliment I'd ever heard from him.

Looking back on life, my time in the Air Force taught me how to drink alcohol, which made for some hard times. I always felt that I was late in pursuing my education. After one false start early on, I would not get serious and go back to college until I was nearing 30. Clarity came in college, and I finally got myself together. After all the ups and downs, I am grateful for my kids. It was not easy when I left their mom. To be with them now is a blessing.

One of my favorite songs was Homespun America's "Calomel." It had lyrics I adopted and added my own:

When I must resign my breath,

I hope to have a natural death.

And bid this world a fond farewell,

Knowing that I did it mostly well.

Memories of Lawrence Pyeatt

A Note from the Scribe

As part of my keen interest in history and the Town of Palisade, I joined the Palisade Historical Society in January 2024, so I could assist with documenting memories of the town's residents. I first met Lawrence in February of 2024. He generously entertained and candidly answered all my questions to the end of May, as a draft document of our conversations grew into the document you see now. Our conversations occasionally went down various paths that also let me learn more about Lawrence's love and gratitude for his family. Humble, kind and quietly reserved, I got to know a deep thinker who is aware of a world that challenges humans daily, including himself, with all there is to witness and process in this moment in time. It has been my pleasure to write this piece for Lawrence, his family and the Palisade Historical Society.

Sincerely,

Kim Turner