

# THE MARIA ROGERS Oral History Program

NEWSLETTER

SPRING 2011



## FEATURED INTERVIEW

### In This Issue

This issue describes **fifteen new interviews** that have been added to our collection. They are available online and at the Carnegie Branch Library for Local History (see page 2 for details on how to access interviews).



Dee Spencer's Sunshine Canyon house burned in the Fourmile Canyon Fire of September 2010. In OH 1706, Dee gives a moving account of her family's evacuation from Sunshine Canyon. She talks about the sense of community among neighbors, the destruction of her house, what she and others saved, and carrying on with life, including her son's wedding.

The interviews archived this quarter range in subject from farming to fires and from school history to immigration and more.

We recently archived a donated series of interviews with Colorado's preeminent botanist, Dr. William Weber, that touch on not only his botanical work, but his life as a whole.

Several new interviews delve into the details of both old-time farming equipment and the ditch system used for farm irrigation.

We have added new interviews to two of our ongoing series: the history of Whittier Elementary School as documented through interviews by current elementary students with former Whittier students, including an interview with Dee Demmmon, who was 100 years old at the time of her interview; and interviews about the group Boulder Action for Soviet Jewry (BASJ). The latest installment of BASJ interviews includes interviews with a board member who considers how her work affected her Jewish identity, with host family members, with a trainer of ESL tutors, and with a volunteer coordinator for the organization, all of whom reflect on the nature of

immigrant resettlement work and what contributes to the success of such work.

New this quarter are interviews with people who experienced last September's Fourmile Fire: residents, a firefighter, and a property owner and historian. In the months to come, we will bring you many more interviews with people about this event as we build a special collection devoted to the history of the fire and its impact.

We invite you to spend some time with these or some of the other 1,700+ interviews in our collection, learning about Boulder history and meeting some fascinating men and women.

### New Interviews

**Details about the newly archived interviews appear below:**

**OH 1282V A-I.** This interview with Colorado's preeminent botanist, **Dr. William A. Weber**, includes eight interviews conducted over the span of nearly a year. Dr. Weber discusses his childhood, education,

and early mentors; the development of his career as a botanist; botanical work, including teaching at the University of Colorado, his study of lichens and mosses, his development of a series of books about Colorado flora, and his development of the University of Colorado Herbarium; his extensive travel for botanical purposes; and his family life. The series of interviews ends with a display of Dr. Weber's African art collection and a tour of the CU Herbarium. By Robert O. Gorson.

**OH 1615. Richard Behrmann** was a long-time resident of Niwot and Longmont in Boulder County. He was active in farming, as were his father and grandfather. He provides detailed accounts both of farming activities (such as threshing and how to keep a "buck rake" running straight) and of equipment (such as descriptions of Pittman mowers and grain binders). He also provides information about school

and social life, his brother's experiences in the U.S. Navy in World War II, and local lore. By Steven Hall. Transcribed by Jo Walsh and Alf McDonnell.

**OH 1625. Frank E. Gould** discusses the Left Hand Ditch Company. Its irrigation system supplied water to Boulder County farmers adjacent to the foothills. Mr. Gould was its "ditch rider" and superintendent. He discusses water rights and also provides an account of the Altona Grange (which built a shooting range with the National Rifle Association), of farm families' social lives, and of changes in farming communities over the years. Recorded in 1995. By Steven Hall.

**OH 1664V. Chellee Courtney's** family has history in Gold Hill dating from 1877. She details both her family history and Gold Hill history, ranging from relating the early history of such Gold Hill institutions as the Gold Hill Hotel (now the Bluebird Lodge), the Gold Hill Inn, and the Gold Hill Store; to the telling of Gold Hill legends; to modern-day associations that keep Gold Hill history alive. She also describes what life was like for a child in Gold Hill during the 1950s and 1960s, the character and community spirit of the town, and the effect of fires on mountain towns. By Caitlin McKenna. Transcribed by Caitlin McKenna and Tara Kelly.

**OH 1670V. Bill Nagel** talks about the experience of helping a Soviet Jewish immigrant family to resettle in the Boulder area in the early 1990s through Boulder Action for Soviet Jewry and the deep friendship that sprung up between the two families. Among the topics touched on are Bukharan Jewish culture, successful adjustments to and appreciation of American life, the importance of encouraging self-sufficiency for immigrant families, and the ways in which immigrants enrich American culture. By Becky Rosenberg. Filmed by Brandon Springer. Transcribed by Becky Rosenberg and Susan Becker.

## **Visit Us: In Person or Online**

⇒ Listen to and/or view any of our 1,700+ interviews at the **Carnegie Branch Library for Local History** of the Boulder Public Library, 1125 Pine St., Boulder, CO 80302.

⇒ Visit us online four ways!

1) Use our digital archive: **www.boulderlibrary.org/oralhistory**. Audio, summaries, and transcripts of interviews.

2) Read our blog, Listen to This!: **boulderoralhistory.wordpress.com**. Oral history news and resources.

3) Listen to our podcasts on iTunes: **www.tinyurl.com/MROHP-iTunes**.

3) Visit us on Facebook: **www.tinyurl.com/MOROHP-FB** (become a fan to see new posts automatically).

⇒ Search Boulder Public Library's online catalog to find oral histories by topic: **http://www.boulderlibrary.org** (Choose "local history" for your search from the home page and include the words "oral history" in your search.)

**OH 1671V. Joan Nagel**, along with her husband Bill, served as an “anchor” family (aka host family) through Boulder Action for Soviet Jewry for a family of Soviet Jewish émigrés from Dushanbe who arrived in 1991. Joan describes her own family history relevant to this undertaking and relates stories regarding the immigrant family, their life in Dushanbe, and their experiences in America from the moment they stepped off the plane, all their possessions in hand, until today. Nagel discusses the family’s ability to adapt quickly to American culture and their industriousness in finding an array of work opportunities. Nagel also discusses the family’s move to Aurora along with other Bukharan Jews (Jews originally from central Asia) who were brought to the United States by BASJ and who formed Denver’s now growing Bukharan Jewish community. By Brandon Springer. Filmed by Becky Rosenberg. Transcribed by Brandon Springer.

**OH 1673V. Kathryn Bernheimer** discusses her work with Boulder Action for Soviet Jewry, including work on the board of directors, being a mentor for an immigrant family, and her role in creating fundraisers for the organization. She talks not only about cultural and economic adjustments that were necessary for the Russian Jewish immigrants whom BASJ helped resettle, but also about the influence that the immigrants had on her own developing Jewish identity. Other sections of the interview consider her professional life, including her former job as film and theater critic for the *Daily Camera* and books she authored. By Joyce Gordon. Filmed by Caitlin McKenna. Transcribed by Taryn Davis.

**OH 1685V. June Howard** talks about her property in Sunshine Canyon and its history, including that of the Pilot Mine, Casa Loma cabin and Cottonwood cabin. Her narrative is accompanied by illustrations from the book she wrote, *Stories of Sunshine: Life in a Mining Camp*. She recalls how the family acquired the properties, visits to the site, horses she kept there, plants and animals seen in earlier times, and gives an account of structures that remain and those that were burned in the September 2010 Fourmile

Fire. By Martha Dick. Filmed by Megan Bowes. Transcribed by Dee Baron.

**OH 1686V. Mimi Ito** worked as an English as a Second Language (ESL) trainer of volunteer tutors for Boulder Action for Soviet Jewry (BASJ). She recalls her experiences in this position and also discusses the role of her late mother, Harriet Moskovit, who became a tutor for one of the BASJ-sponsored immigrants. Mimi describes the tutor training program and talks about how teaching English facilitated acculturation of immigrants and resulted in friendships being formed that lasted long after BASJ ended its formal program. She reflects on how the program demonstrated the ability of a small group of dedicated volunteers to enrich their own lives as well as the lives of those with whom they worked. By Shirley Steele. Filmed by Liz McCutcheon. Transcribed by Shirley Steele.

**OH 1689V. Sara Goldberg**, volunteer coordinator for Boulder Action for Soviet Jewry, talks about how upwards of 125 volunteers at a time, filling many different roles, were vital in carrying out the BASJ project; and how they were recruited, trained, and matched with the appropriate family or job within the organization. She recalls the ways in which successful relationships between families and volunteers were nurtured, sometimes in the face of difficult social or emotional challenges requiring that special resources be identified and provided. She analyzes how and why BASJ was able to be so successful in helping immigrant families become independent and productive in this culture in spite of, and in some cases because of, the relatively short time available, limited resources, and small staff. Interview conducted and transcribed by Shirley Steele. Filmed by Liz McCutcheon.

**OH 1690V. Henry Ballard** describes his experiences during the Fourmile Fire in September 2010 when his garage burned down but his house and that of his neighbors were saved by firefighters. Ballard gives some history of the Sunshine area, then focuses on his history and knowledge of firefighting through

his work as a firefighter with the Sunshine District Volunteer Fire Department and his own part in fighting the Fourmile Fire. By Martha Dick. Filmed by Megan Bowes. Transcribed by Diane Baron.

**OH 1691V. Dee Demmon**, at the age of 100, was interviewed by students from Whittier Elementary School about her own elementary school years at Mapleton Elementary School. She recalls that the teachers and principal were very strict, which led to good behavior and effective learning. She talks about using the fire escape for fire drills and describes games that children played at that time; she also talks about friends that she had in elementary school and her favorite subject, geography. She shows a photograph of the students who attended Mapleton with her. By Jamirah Duhamel and Hannah Ybarra. Filmed by Mira Driskell.

**OH1692V. Joeseeph F. Stepanek** was enrolled at Whittier Elementary school for fifth and sixth grade, from 1953 until 1955. In this interview, which was conducted by current Whittier fourth graders, Joe recalls the two teachers he had, his classmates and friends, and how his time at Whittier impacted his adult life. He talks about his travels to Indonesia and Burma as a child and shows the autobiography he has written. He also describes some of the changes that both the school and the city of Boulder have undergone since he was a young man. By Mira Driskell and Allienna Gonzalez. Filmed by Polly McDonald.

**OH 1693V. Paul Riley** discusses the two years that he attended Whittier Elementary School in the 1930s, including descriptions of his teachers, activities, and classrooms. He also talks about childhood activities outside of school, and touches on growing up during the Great Depression. By Mira Driskell and Fernando Hern. Filmed by Hannah Ybarra.

**OH 1706V. Dee Spencer**, longtime resident of Sunshine Canyon, discusses the Fourmile Fire and the effects that it provoked, ranging from the very personal to effects on the broader community. At

the time of the fire, which consumed her house, she and her husband, Steve, were preparing to host their son's rehearsal dinner party for his wedding, which was to (and did) take place a little over a week after the fire. Spencer describes the morning of the fire, the surreal feeling of the experience, and its aftermath. She recalls the objects that she chose to take, those that others rescued for her, those that survived, and those that perished. Recounting the journey, she considers the concept of home, the importance of community and music in the healing process, as well as the transformative opportunity that can arrive even in the wake of such devastation. By Martha Dick. Filmed by Don Dick. Transcribed by Janna Plant.

**Next volunteer meetings:  
May 14, June 11, and July 9  
8:00 a.m.  
Carnegie Branch Library  
(No meeting in August)**

## **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Maria Rogers Oral History Program  
Carnegie Branch Library for Local History  
1125 Pine St. • Boulder, CO 80302

**PHONE:**

**Carnegie Library:** 303-441-3110  
**Oral History Direct Line:** 303-441-1981

**E-MAIL:**

**Susan Becker (program manager):** [beckers@boulderlibrary.org](mailto:beckers@boulderlibrary.org)  
**Wendy Hall (branch manager):** [hallw@boulderlibrary.org](mailto:hallw@boulderlibrary.org)

**INTERNET:**

**Interviews Online:** [www.boulderlibrary.org/oralhistory](http://www.boulderlibrary.org/oralhistory)

**ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM NEWS:**

**Blog:** [boulderoralhistory.wordpress.com](http://boulderoralhistory.wordpress.com)  
**Facebook:** [tinyurl.com/MROHP-FB](http://tinyurl.com/MROHP-FB)

**General Program Information:**

[www.boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/collections/mroh.html](http://www.boulderlibrary.org/carnegie/collections/mroh.html)