

Beth: Okay, this is Beth Smith. I'm at 7163 C.R. 110 on the Little Arkansas River where John Spino lives. And he's going to talk to us this morning about his family and Salida and where they came from and what they did and lots of things he wants to tell us. Hi John.

John: Hi Beth.

Beth: Where do you want to start?

John: Well, we'll start with my grandfather, Pete Spino. He came from Lago, Italy, which is a province of Provenza, or Cosenza, I'm sorry. He came here working on the railroad for a short time and raised enough money to buy what we call the Spino Ranch, which is off of C.R. 120. I'm not sure who owns it now but my father and three or four of his brothers were born there on the ranch. My grandmother Spino came from Italy.

Beth: Who was she?

John: I always called her grandma.

Beth: Oh!

[laughter]

John: I've got it here somewhere.

Beth: Yeah, I think right here.

John: Louise Capelli. Grandma Spino, that's her name.

Beth: Okay.

John: And my father attended school in Salida up to the second grade.

Beth: What school did he go to?

John: I don't really know, probably Longfellow, I would imagine. And then he had to work on the ranch to help his father. And he spent a little time on the railroad, and he built one of the first auto courts which are now called motels.

Beth: Can you give me a name? I don't think we talked about that.

John: I'm sorry, Albert Spino, Sr.

Beth: And he was married to?

John: He was married to Helen Carroch, my mother. They built a motel on 291 right across the street from the ball park, which is still a ball park. And the motel is now called the Redwood. No, it's not the Redwood ...

Beth: Woodland.

John: Woodland Motel. My memory's slipping, I'm getting old! I was born, I think, in the Salida Hospital. My brother was born at the motel. They ran that for quite some time. He added four units on each year until he got up to twelve. They had a grocery store and a gas station.

Beth: At the same place?

John: In the same place. And the house that we lived in is still in the center of the motel. And I remember when I was a little kid, I don't know maybe three, four years old, my dad had the bright idea to jack the house up with railroad jacks. They raised it about three feet and then they started digging by hand, and with horses, and they dug a basement under the house. And later he built a dance hall under the house so naturally that made it hard on my brother and I, trying to get any sleep. Everybody was downstairs yelling. But we do remember a little bit about that. I remember also times when, seems like weather was colder in those years. He had to build fires on top of the ground so that the water would flow to the motel units cuz it would freeze, even though they were down four feet or more.

Beth: Blocking the ...

John: No, I'm not.

[laughter]

John: Okay. Then, he also had a rural route, postal route to Turret and Whitehorn which he ran the mail, twice a week, for seventeen years. And on this route he had a lot of the ranchers and miners were bootlegging whiskey and Dad told me these stories. He would bring it back to town and sell it for them. And I think he got into a little trouble over that, eventually. My mother had a rural route to Garfield, five days a week.

Beth: Mail route?

5:25

John: Mail route. And she had that for 27 years. I got some old pictures of her, sometimes the snow would get too deep for a car and she would go so far and then borrow a horse from one of the ranchers and carry the mail the rest of the way on horseback. When my father and I ... I used to enjoy this cuz I hated school ... He would take me out of school quite often to help him get wood for his motel units or auto court. I liked that. My brother didn't get involved. He always had to go to school. We furnished wood and coal for the auto court for all the people who stayed there. All the rooms, the units had kitchens. Now what he would do is rent them permanently through the winter and then every spring the people had to move out so he could rent it to the

tourists. So, then in the fall he'd get new tenants for the winter. So, it was pretty rough. They had a hard time, a lot of hard work as everybody in those years knows. It wasn't easy. Then later, he was able to build another motel about a half block down the street, which is still on 291. And I don't know what he called that. Then he had the two motels. Later he sold those two and built one of the first, it might have been one of the second on highway 50 which is the Colorado Lodge. He ran that for a while and then he built the Redwood Lodge, the Shawano, and then another one called the Western Holiday. So, he had built six motels throughout his lifetime. He lived to be 92.

7:45

John: Then, my mother came from Calcite, she was born in Calcite along with her brothers and sisters. Her name was Helen Carroch, I don't know if I said that. They mined limestone for CF&I, Colorado Fuel and Iron, in Pueblo. So, they were a hardworking family, all of them.

Beth: Did you ever live in Calcite?

John: We spent our summers in Calcite. We'd spend at least two months every summer there, and we really enjoyed it. My mother, besides carrying the mail, cooked for my aunt and uncle, which opened up on highway 50, one of the first little cafes, it was called the Skelly Motor Inn, which is now the Country Bounty. And they started that with four or five stools and a little counter and they fried hamburgers in a frying pan to begin with. My mother later on cooked there from noon to probably seven or eight o'clock at night every day after carrying the mail. She did that for about fifteen years. So, it was hard work for them. My mother and father split up when I was eight or nine years old. We lived on G Street, close to the Longfellow School area. Trying to remember some of the things that might be of interest.

Beth: I don't think we met your brother. What was his name?

John: My brother was Albert Spino, Jr. Called him Speed. He spent most of his time in the automobile business, selling cars for Stapleton Chevrolet. After he came back out of the service, him and Helen, my sister-in-law, built a small motel, which is still a motel close to the present bowling alley. I ended up going into the Marine corps when I was 17. Turned 17 in July and joined in September. That was late 1945. And I came out in 1948. Before I went into the Marine Corps I was working in underground mining for a mine called American Fluorspar, which is up by King's Crossroads where 291 and 285 meet. I worked there when I was fourteen. My mother had to sign a release so I could go underground. I didn't care much for that.

Beth: What were you paid to do that?

John: I think it was something like a dollar and a half an hour which was pretty good then. So, I went from there down to Calcite and worked for my uncles and my grandfather driving a truck when I was fifteen. We loaded rock, the limestone we had to break with a sledgehammer and load by hand. They didn't own a steam shovel, what we called them then. Of course, skip loaders and back hoes weren't invented yet. So, I did that for quite some time. Drove a truck down from Calcite to Howard and had to dump into the railroad cars. Like I said, I was fifteen and didn't

have a driver's license, but I got away with that. When I got out of the Marine corps, kind of skipping around here, I worked for Skelly Motot Inn, weren't any jobs that were available until about 1949 or 50.

12:25

John: I think it was '49 I got a job at Reynolds Metals, Reynolds Aluminum, underground mining above the Poncha Hot Springs. John Bayuk, Sr. hired me on again. I worked for him at American Fluorspar. And we were making, I think it was around fifteen dollars a day to begin with, which was pretty good. Because I was only getting 35 dollars a week pumping gas. Didn't own a car cuz I couldn't afford it at that time. I worked in the mine for about 4, between 4-5 years, open pit and underground. And then the opportunity came up, my aunt Jenny Carroch, she owned a little café which is close to present day J.C. flicks on highway 50. And J.C. flicks at that time was Oxford's Market, before they built the bigger building. She talked me into running this restaurant.

13:50

John: So, I went from running a bulldozer and working underground to flipping hamburgers. That was quite a change.

Beth: Jack of all trades.

John: Yeah. Yeah, we had a lot of fun with that little restaurant. It only seated 35 people, but it was a good moneymaker. So, after the first year then I bought another restaurant down on the highway, which we call Johnny's Café. It's now the Mexican restaurant, I don't know the name of it, do you? Can't think of the name of it. Lower highway 50. After the first year of owning that, a bunch of my customers that had to drive to Canon City to bowl talked me into putting in a bowling alley. So, I didn't know ... never touched a bowling ball before, didn't know a ball return from the gutter, anything about it. I had Frank Patello build the building with four lanes, and I bought government surplus lanes in Colorado Springs. I think they were around \$3,500 delivered. And they wanted more than I could afford to put them in, so I hired Babe Granzella and Jack Carothers. The three of us put those lanes together. They were numbered like a jigsaw puzzle. So, it was pretty easy. Frank Butala leveled them for me and got them sanctioned and that was a real goldmine. We were about ready to add four more lanes. I had that until 1957 when I decided to go to California, for a lot of reasons.

Beth: Wait a minute, tell me a little bit about your service in the Marines.

John: I spent two years in the Marine corps. I went to boot camp in San Diego. And then I was shipped over to Camp Pendleton which is Oceanside, California. And I had put in for overseas duty but then I got married while I was waiting and at that time they weren't taking any married men over. The war ... They had declared peace shortly after I'd joined so I didn't go overseas. So, I spent all my time in Oceanside, at Camp Pendleton.

Beth: What division were you in?

John: I don't remember Beth. I drove a truck in the Marine corps. I had put in for heavy equipment, running bull dozers and stuff like that cuz that's what I knew and liked to do. But anyway, I ended up driving a truck, hauling laundry and dry cleaning around to all the PX's. I had to carry a rifle and a pistol because I collected money from each PX. So, that was a good experience, I enjoyed that. But I was happy to get out. Came home in 1948.

Beth: So, in the 50s you were anxious to get back to California.

John: Yeah, yeah, I don't know ... I just always wanted to go back. And, I did. I left in '57, moved to Inglewood, California. I was about two blocks from the Hollywood racetrack. Ended up selling cars in Inglewood, California. That was the only job I could find at the time. And that was good to me.

Beth: Were you married at the time?

John: Yes, I was married. Well, I got married after I got out there, to Elaine. I don't remember her last name. Why?

Beth: That didn't last too long, did it?

John: No, it didn't. About four years.

Beth: Uh-huh.

John: Then in 1968, I had the opportunity to get back in the bowling business, and we bought a little twelve lane house, bowling house. I and another guy. And so I was back in the bowling business. Had that for two or three years. Then I had another opportunity to get into the bowling business in a new place, Apple Valley, California. Close to Victorville. Between San Bernardino and Barstow. That was sixteen lanes and we built a new one I and two other, I and two other men went together on that. That one didn't do very well. We pretty well lost everything we had in less than a year. So, I ended up back in Inglewood selling cars again. Then back to Apple Valley selling cars in Victorville. Then in 1966, I opened a sporting goods store in Apple Valley, California. In '60, well, I had met Betty, my present wife, in late '64, the same year that my mother had passed away. She had passed away at the age of 54 here in Salida. And Betty and I together, got the sporting goods store going. And we kept that for 13 ½ years, along with the RV, recreation vehicles, motor homes, campers, trailers, boats. We had two locations eventually, one in Victorville, one in Apple Valley and we did very well with it. We invested in real estate every chance we got and we were very fortunate, we were able to retire at the age of 49 in 1979. So, it's been 25 years I think. We're on our 25<sup>th</sup> year.

We came back to Salida, started building a home here in 1982. We bought property in the mid 70s here on the South Arkansas river. We started the house in 1982, moved here in late '83 and we've been here ever since and really enjoy it. I guess this is where we'll be. We'll end up at Fairview Cemetery.

[laughter]

Beth: Well, glad you came back to Salida. What changes do you notice now in Salida from what you grew up with?

John: Well, I remember as a kid when we lived there by the ball park, a lot of us, Bill Mehos, and some of the DeLeos, I can't remember all of them but I remember swimming in the river. We'd jump off the bridge at Sand Lake area and float down to the ball park, get out and build a fire to thaw out. We did that quite often in the summer time. And we would go to, usually Friday evening or afternoon, go to the movie, western, three or four of us on one bicycle, three at least. And then Saturdays, quite often, we'd walk up to Red Rock, what we called it, up behind Tenderfoot Mountain and we'd shoot bullets, .22s, off the rocks just to hear 'em zing over our heads. We'd tell each other to duck because we were ready to shoot. We were just playing, luckily nobody got hurt. I don't know, I was a kid and I think that life was so simple, it was wonderful. We enjoyed, I remember really enjoying it here in Salida. It seemed like, like I said, it was simpler. Everybody seemed happy. The little downtown area was just a real hustle bustle little town. There was a lot of clothing stores, Lewis's Candy Kitchen, and another one called The Greeks down by, next to Waggener's Drug Store. We just spent a lot of time walking the streets in town and found our own thing to do. We didn't need, nothing planned for us. We had our own fun, made our own fun. Just grew up that way.

Beth: Did you play ball?

John: Softball, yeah. Nothing exciting about that, more for fun than anything.

24:15

John: Up here behind the Skelly Motor Inn that my aunt and uncle owned ...

Beth: On U.S. 50.

John: On U.S. 50, yeah. On the South Arkansas river there were ice sheds and I remember as a kid they cut these big blocks of ice and they had these big sheds that had two foot thick walls filled with sawdust and they'd store ice for summer time use because there wasn't any refrigeration. But that was another experience, cutting and floating the ice to the conveyer belts. And in the summer, I had an opportunity from the same uncle who owned the Skelly Motor Inn, he had a nice route and I drove the truck and delivered ice, carrying 25 pounds of ice up stairs to the ice boxes, people that lived upstairs above the businesses downtown and I did that for two or three summers. I don't know how old I was then, I don't think I was more than fourteen. Twelve or fourteen. I know I wasn't supposed to be driving a truck, but I did.

Beth: About that time they were growing a lot of lettuce in the valley weren't they?

John: Yes,

Beth: So, that was necessary.

John: Yes, where Pepsi Hylton's Lumber is, that was, there were lettuce sheds there and granite sheds, all in that area along the railroad track. It was a big lettuce producing place. In fact Danny Granzella and his mother grew lettuce here on the property we live on now. Cuz their place was right across the river from us. They used this for raising lettuce and other things. I don't know why, I guess the industry for that has gotten so big that they quit doing it here in Salida many, many years ago. And when they got refrigerated railroad cars and stuff, they could haul it clear across the country so it just kind of put these guys here out of business. I don't know what else I could tell you Beth.

Beth: Can you think of any characters around town that were outstanding as you grew up? Business leaders or ...

John: Well, no, I remember a few of the stores. Doveton's clothing store, which was down on Lower F, across from what used to be the Main Bar. And then Sam DeLeo had a beautiful clothing store on the corner of First and F and next to him was Flory's shoe store which was excellent, and I don't know why we don't have a store like that here today. And clothing stores for that matter. Something besides Wal-Mart. But we don't. There were a lot of businesses downtown, well that was the only place. But today the big superstores like Walmart, and I guess they can't make it. It was a lot different in those days.

Beth: Yeah, this was a railroad town. Had a lot of railroad activity. Do you remember anything about that?

John: Not too much Beth. I didn't get involved in the railroad, but I remember the roundhouses and the depots. As a kid, we used to play around the depot. It was interesting to see the different people coming and going. Then I remember the train going over Marshall Pass, the narrow-gauge railroad. It was exciting to see the trains, passenger trains come to town, see the people get off the trains, walk across the bridge to the restaurants, hotels. Other than that, I don't remember much about them.

Beth: Do you remember any hoboes? Can you describe?

John: Oh, yes. Yeah, they'd spend time along the river and in the cottonwood trees and wherever they could camp for a few days. Yeah, I remember them, yes. They were always along the railroad tracks, mainly close to the towns where they could get some handouts. But no trouble with them at all, that I can recall.

29:30

Beth: How about this big Hot Springs swimming pool. There's also one at Poncha Springs. Did you ever use that?

John: Well, this one that's here on Highway 50, it wasn't here when I was a kid. We spent most of our time riding our bicycles down to Wellsville, which was a real nice hot springs, nice pool. The hot baths were there too. In fact, the pool is still there, I think. The water's still in it, you can

see it from the highway. From highway 50. And up at Poncha, my dad used to go up there quite often. He had sinus trouble real bad and the steam seemed to help him. They had the steam baths. The rooms were little, tiny rooms and I believe they were cement tubs and you'd get the water as hot as you wanted it, or just have steam come out of it. It was really something. Really helped him with his problems. The pool up there, I don't remember much about, I think it was round and there was also one at Mt. Princeton. Whenever we'd get a ride up there, we'd go there. I guess there's still one there. I don't know why they haven't done anything with the one in Wellsville, but I guess maybe it didn't pay. They closed it up a long, long time ago.

We hauled rock out of, with my grandparents and uncles, out of what they call Taylor Gulch, which is directly across the highway from Wellsville. We'd go back up in there and mine limestone there too, when I was fifteen-sixteen years old. Hauled that down to the railroad in Wellsville. There was two bridges there at one time. One directly across and the one's that there now. I don't know why they took the one out, but that's the one we used to haul across. It's hard to remember everything without thinking about it.

[laughter]

Beth: When you were growing up in Salida did you belong to any clubs or organizations, Boy Scouts, or anything?

John: No, not Boy Scouts. The only club that I got involved in was the Eagles.

Beth: And what was that?

John: It's like the Elks. Elks and Moose Lodge. Eagles is no longer here. [whispering] Yeah, I remember one other thing. In 1949, my brother and I and a few others got involved in the first whitewater river race, down the Arkansas. And at that time it was all the way from Salida to Canon City.

Beth: That's what they call FIBArk now.

John: Yeah, and what it was was the Junior Chamber of Commerce in Canon City and the Junior Chamber of Commerce here had some kind of a bet going. My brother would be more familiar with the circumstances. Our boat the first year was a P38 gas tank and Al Geist who owned a body shop up here on the highway welded pontoons on the side of it. And Bob Pasquale was one of the men who was in the boat. My brother and I were both married at the time, we didn't want to do it. And another one was Chip or Trip Berry. Him and Bob started the race in this boat. The water was so high then, there was this footbridge between Salida and Wellsville, and you had to portage because the water was hitting the bottom of the bridge. Well, the boat was too heavy for two men to take out of the water, so that was the end of the race for our boat. It was called the Spino Music Company boat. My brother and my dad had slot machines and juke boxes and pinball machines [whispering] Oh, back to the boat. I think it's still in the FIBArk museum. I heard that, I haven't gone down there to look. I have but every time you go there the door's closed, locked. I'm going to have to check into that someday.



Where was I?

Beth: Did you go down the river just that one year?

John: With that boat, yeah.

Beth: You did other times too though?

John: They did with other types of boats, yeah. That boat would have worked good if we could have got it under the bridge.

[laughter]

35:05

But they did shorten it. I think they only went to Canon City twice, if I remember right. That was too long a race. They shortened it down to what it is now, which is only 26 miles.

Beth: To Cotopaxi.

John: To Cotopaxi. Yeah, going through the Gorge was too dangerous in that high water. There weren't anything like kayaks or rubber rafts in those days. There were canoes and man-made boats. Handmade. Well, what else can I think of Beth?

Beth: Well, we're sitting here in John's trophy room with all his animal heads on the walls, looking at us, listening to our story. Makes me think you have a hobby of hunting.

John: My wife and I started trophy hunting. I've hunted all my life, even when I lived here. When we had our sporting goods store in California a lot of our customers would come in expecting to see some trophy animals hanging on the wall. And at that time all we hunted for is mink, which we both enjoy. So, we decided we'd better start hunting for some trophies, nice racks to have mounted, to put up on the wall. So, we started hunting British Columbia in 1976 and since then we got quite a few big trophies. We've been to British Columbia hunting eight times and Alaska three times. Taken quite a few of the animals that we have now, hanging on our walls. Luckily for me my wife hunts right beside me and she has better trophies than I do. We've both taken four Canadian moose each, and four caribou each. She has a Colorado moose, first lady to take a moose in Colorado. And, of course a lot of elk hunting.

Beth: Who shot the buffalo?

John: I shot the buffalo in Custer State Park, South Dakota, 1977. He was a big one. Took us five years to eat him.

Beth: Lots of good meat.

John: We've had a lot of good times. We still go to British Columbia; we're planning on going again this year. We usually ride a hundred miles or more in the bush country, 200-300 miles from any roads. We enjoy doing that kind of thing, getting as far away from people as we can. This could quite possibly be our last trip up there. At the age of 75, I don't know how many more times we can do it.

Beth: Well, how about fishing? That goes along with the hunting.

John: Fishing we do a lot of, we do a lot of backpacking still. We pack into the high mountain lakes, beaver dams. And we spend time in Arizona at Lake Havasu, two and three months each winter, fishing for striped bass. And that's a good place to be in the wintertime. But we're getting to where we're wanting to stay home more. So, we spent more time at home this winter. And we haven't minded it at all. The weather, this was a cold winter and we still enjoy being home.

Beth: Is there any place around the Salida area that you particularly like to go to camp or hunt?

John: Yeah, our best place, our favorite place is between Marshall Pass and Monarch Pass and needless to say the mountain bike people have taken over that trail, so they've ruined it as far as horseback riding on it. We can walk it without any problems. That is one of our most favorite spots. Now, we are enjoying, what's that park? Saguache Park. Couldn't think of it. Between Saguache and Gunnison. There's no mountain bikers there, so we can ride our horses into that park and into the Lagarita Wilderness so we spend a lot of time over there. It's good fishing there too.

Beth: You got any favorite hunting stories you want to tell us?

John: Not really, we've had some hairy ones! As far as airplanes, bush planes and stuff like that but no, I don't think so. I think all of them were good.

Beth: That's just the way of life with you, huh?

John: Yeah, yeah, nothing real special. Lot of fun, lot of hardships, but a lot of exciting moments, too many to even talk about I guess.

[laughter]

Beth: Well, anything else you want to add to this?

John: No, not that I can think of Beth. I think at this point in our life, we're just very, very happy to be living here in Salida, happy with the way things are right now. We're both in good health and still enjoying everything we like to be doing.

Beth: Well, that's good John. Thank you very much for recording this for the library. I think you've given us a new idea of what Salida is like from your lifetime. Thank you very much.

John: Okay, Beth. Probably is a lot more...

Woman's voice: Yeah, I should have come down here to help you with your memory. Did you talk about what you wanted?

John: Yeah.

Woman's voice: Your mom on horseback delivering the mail?

John: Yeah, I did honey.