

**Interview of MARY HELD October 10, 2003 by Beth Smith** (43 minutes 30 seconds)

*Transcribed by Jackie Powell*

B = Beth

M = Mary

Names of people and places need to be checked.

B This is Beth Smith in Salida, where I'm interviewing Mary Held and trying to get a little of her oral back  
[stop in tape]

B This is Beth Smith. We're up at 430 Ouray in Salida where I'm interviewing Mary Held and trying to get a little of her oral history background. Say hi, Mary.

M Hello.

B Mary, tell us about your parents and where you're from.

M My parents were George and Geneva Bundy Keatch. I was born in Cass County, Missouri, in 1912 and uh, lived there for just four years, when my father decided that he wanted to finish – He'd, he'd had some of his college work and he wanted to finish, and he wanted to go into something like YMC work -- CA work or something of that, working with young people. But when he graduated – He went to William Jewell college then, and finished his college work. William Jewell being at Liberty, Missouri, just 15 miles from Kansas City. And he finished his college work there, and went to Rochester, New York, to the Rochester Theological Seminary where his college professors had talked him into the fact that they thought that with his leadership he should be a minister instead of just a professor. And so he uh, started this work and died then in the winter of 19 [pause] 10 – 12 – no, I was born in 12, so 10 on is -- 24.

B All right. Your mother then, what was her name.

M My mother was Geneva -- Sally Geneva Bundy Keatch...She was raised on a, on a farm of, uh – about 5

miles from the Kansas state line – Her – one of eleven children, four – four girls and seven boys.

B All right! And you, did you have some siblings?

M No.

B You were an only child.

M I was a spoiled baby. Only one. No! I don't think I was too spoiled, but I was my daddy's girl. However, my father died when I was 10 and we -- my mother and I -- went back to Missouri and uh, [throat clearing] she finished her college education at William Jewell College and I graduated from high school at Liberty High School. Mother then went to Kansas City as physical therapist at Children's Mercy Hospital. And I went to Kansas City Junior College for two years. And uh, then I graduated from Ottawa University, later.

B That's good!

M Now what?

B Now what? Maybe you should fill us in on John, too.

M This -- This is where I met John who was born in Joplin, Missouri, in 1910. Uh, his father was a music teacher, as was John in later years. And his mother was the first woman osteopath to graduate from an osteopathic college.

B. Is that right?

M Yes.

B And where did uh, John go to school, then.

M John went to Ottawa University, living in the town of Ottawa, and uh, money was a little tight. It's better to

go to college when you can.

B That's right.

M When and where.

B When was John born?

M 1910.

B And what -- He went to the school in Ottawa also. How did you meet John?

M German class.

B Oh.

M We sat next to each other in German class.

B Now when were you married?

M -- Yeah, 1934.

B All right. But you weren't out in Salida at that time.

M Oh, no.

B Tell me how you got to Salida.

M Well, uh...We -- After we were married, the summer we were married, we went to this small town in Illinois for one more year. And we decided if John if he was going to teach he needed better tools. And if he wanted better tools, there were none better in the music field than in Northwestern University. So we took

the summer and went up to uh, Northwestern to music school. Then after that we went to the north woods in Wisconsin because John needed more uh, hours in music, and uh, we had planned to go back then ... for him to go back to school again at uh, Ottawa. And uh, we uh, were uh, out in the campground outside of Sainer, Wisconsin. When we went in for our groceries in the evening -- all of us who went up there for two or three summers uh, always planned to go in in the evening and we'd meet our friends and have a coke and uh have fun together and then and go on back to our camps from there. John and I had gone up to Sainer and when we got into town this evening they said, "Oh, John, John, hurry over to the railroad station, there's a telegram for you. They've been looking for you and looking for you." And we went over, and there was a telegram from Dr. Larimer, who was the former president of the school board here, and John called him. He asked John if he would come out to Salida. Well, everything was going out and nothing coming in, so we decided it was a smart thing to do to take the year off and go out and teach a year. Well, a year turned into many years.

B How many years was he here?

M. I'd have to stop and do some more figuring again.

B ...count 'em up...

M But, uh it was because you see the boys were born here and Hank was 20 by the time he was married.

B Now where did you live when you moved to Salida?

M At lower D in Uncle Moe who was -- Mister Molbeck, who was the band man came, and said, "John are you still hunting a place to live?" And we had been staying with Mrs. Runkel on First Street She was running a motel, but she didn't have any room at the motel because they were building Highway 50 through here when we came to town. And all of the short-term available places were all taken up with construction people. So uh, we uh, then, she took us in, and said we could stay with her until we found something. So the next day Uncle Moe came to John at school and said that his wife was taking care of uh, the row houses down on Lower D Street, and they had one that had just become available and were we interested. Well of course we were interested. And, they had a good, and I mean it was a good um , kitchen range -- Majestic

– and I had never had to ... I had, oh, I had done a little cooking at my aunt's on a range, but I'd never lived with a kitchen range, but I could do it. So we moved in. And the first faculty picnic, my mother heard that we were going to make a cake to take so what did she do but go down to the, a store in Kansas City and buy a portable electric oven and shipped it out to us! And so when I got to the picnic with that cake, people looked at me and said "Would you, a newcomer to this altitude, dare to offer to bring a cake to a picnic?" And I said I didn't know any better. And uh, they laughed at me. So we furnished our share of the food by taking the cake. [Laugh]

B Tell me, did the cake fall like my often do in this altitude?

M Well, I'll tell you what I did. I baked a cake and it really turned out very nicely. But I thought I can do just a little bit better. So I baked a second one, and it really did turn out just a little bit better. It was a good cake, and I wasn't the least bit ashamed to take it. But with a cake mix, whah you can't fail!

B Perhaps you're right. [Laugh] Now, John was teaching music at this school.

M Yes. John came out here. Dr. Larimer, of course, was a graduate of Northwestern medical school, so he naturally went to Northwestern to pick himself up a man to come out here. And then, they knowing where we were and John would be a good man for Dr. Larimer, why, we were sent out here. That was how we got here.

B And what were you doing here at the beginning of your career?

M I just was a music teacher's wife.

B Well good.

[Both laugh]

M We did all the things at the school the faculty did, and things like that, and enjoyed the faculty. And they were a very compatible group when we arrived here, and greeted us and helped us to uh, get established

and it was a very pleasant situation.

B And who was the superintendent?

M Uh [pause] Well, things changed very quickly after we were here, and Papa Hightower became the superintendent and L.A. Barrett, Lawrence Barrett, was the high school principal.

B And where was the high school?

M Where it is now.

B It was already built like it is now?

M No. No, no. The old high school, which the parts of it are still here, was where we started, and stairways -- You went in a uh, front side of four front doors and went up a very wide stairway, which was about -- oh -- a half to three quarters of a story above ground level because there was a half sub basement where they had classes also. And we uh, then uh, went there. That's where he put on his first show, "Spartan Sparkles." His first year he says, "I've got to put on a show and I don't know what to do." So I said, "Well, do [uh, uh -- pause] just a regular show that you can order from somewhere." And uh, he said, "Oh, I don't know." So I said, "Well, you know, and it's a way you can find out what kids can do, you can do a variety show." He said, "Okay, that's what we'll do." And our first variety show uh, we used some backdrop curtains, of a dark bright blue, from Mrs. R.K. Young at the First Methodist Church. And put on those, that blue background silver stars. So, let's call it the Stardust. And you.... Because John had always said, "If I ever had a dance band group or anything like that Stardust would be my theme song." So, okay, here's your theme song! Let's do this, and that's what we did.

B Good, good.

M And, uh, so, uh, that's the story of how Spartan Sparkles got started, and what we did when we came to Salida.

B Did he have a band at that time?

M No. The only time that John had a band was uh, if the band man was sick or something like that he could take over. People really felt that the band was John's field. He had had very little vocal training except through his own father, who uh, was from Drake University, a music graduate. And he and his sisters by the time he was 9 and his sisters were 7 and 5 could sing a full evening's concert of three part music...

B Oh, wow!

M ...it wasn't all unison it was part music.

B Do you happen to remember what salary he started at?

M No, I don't.

B I think we'd, we'd laugh if we found out, wouldn't we? [Laugh] Now, wasn't too long and you started teaching too, is that right?

M Well, it was quite a little while. We had lived, well we had lived several places in Salida because we would pack up in the summertime and go back east in the summertime so John could finish his masters degree. And so uh, because of that we never really got established until [pause] and I can't tell you, I, I must go back and figure the date that we moved up here, onto the mesa. And uh, it was a very little house. There was one long room in the front and three rooms at the back that you go through a big double door into a little hall, and these three rooms opened off – a bedroom, a bathroom, and a kitchen. And that was our little house that we started with.

B Where was that on the mesa.

M Right here.

B In the place you're living now.

M This is where we live now. And that wall right over there was the outside wall of the living room at the other end, then, and uh, we built this living room and the dining room and kitchen behind it – part of the kitchen – and then the garage on the east end and our bedroom and uh, closets on the west end. So that's how we have as large a house as we do now.

B And you're still here. I remember you used to always have a garden across the stgreet.

M Oh, yes. Well, we started with the garden over here. Then my mother uh, bought up the unused lots across the street and we started gardening over there. On our side – I don't know why or how, but there's not a rock in our garden. And John dug as deep as hip deep for a carrot pit, and he didn't dig one rock out of our garden. And across the street it is so rocky that when we opened it to plant a garden over there – vegetables, being John's hobby – we would wait at the end of the row after the man had opened it with his uh, team of horses. And uh, the youngsters in the neighborhood helped our boys and us pick up the rocks that were turned out so that we wouldn't have so many rocks in our garden.

B And that was just across the street.

M And that was just across the street. You could just see the soil, the depth of the soil, where they dug to bring the water in, for instance, uh, dug for the pipe, and brought it across to our yard, and the soil just got better and better and better. And as I say, he dug a carrot pit, for storing for winter, and not one rock in it.

B Isn't that unusual?

M It is!

B Yeah! When did you start putting that big Christmas tree in your front yard?

M Our first year up here.

B Ah! Beautiful! Many years of it.



M Mm-hm. We uh – Of course, the wind, when the wind took it, it just took one big round of soil with it, and it -- I -- we don't know if that tree went on north as it went down and whether it took took the next smaller, a little bit smaller, spruce tree and took that out or whether the wind did it or the other spruce tree did it.

B And now that happened just recently.

M No, 10 or 15 years ago.

B Oh, it did. All right. Now, you went to work one of these days.

M Yep, and as I say I'll have to look that up and find out. I started teaching and I had my choice between second and fourth grade. And John looked at me and grinned and said, "Oh, take second – you'll love 'em." And uh, so uh ....

B So how many years did you teach second grade?

M It has to be in the figuring, too, but a good many.

B Yeah.

M I saw a good many youngsters go through.

B Never moved up to fourth grade, then.

M No.

B Was always second grade.

M Always second grade.

B At Longfellow school.

M Yeh, yeh. Longfellow School. (laughing) It was always Longfellow School. I went through a couple or three principals, but that was always kind of interesting, breaking in new principals.

B Well now there used to be a rule that uh, two married teachers could not teach in the same school district. Isn't that right?

M We never ran into that.

B Oh, you never did.

M There were two or three teams of us here.

B Well, that's great!

M The Canters -- two of 'em taught, and um, there was another one that -- I can't think of their name right now -- but there were several teams of us.

B Lot of 'em now, just took a while to get started.

M Oh, yes. It just went on there was nearly always at least one team.

B Can you remember anything that you did or taught at the beginning of your career with the second graders that had changed quite a bit before you finished your teaching career?

M Oh -- yes -- Science! That's a field that was changing, changing pretty fast at that time in the things that were being taught in the schools. But otherwise, no, not particularly. Your English and your math and all of those things were just uniform and had been for years. So, it was interesting but nothing particularly outstanding.

B Did you notice any differences in the way they taught reading?

M No, because we were allowed to teach it our own way and go along with it the way it was. So, ah, I felt very confident in the way my children were progressing and so I didn't...

B Absolutely!

M ... break my heart over it.

B You were very active in the community, too. What were you interested in in the community? What did you do?

M Everything that John did!

B Ah, sure!

M No, I didn't do much on my own. Mostly it was things that we did together. And uh, we, uh -- faculty things. And high school, every time he put on a show I was there. And uh, we had fun working -- and it was fun-- working with the young people and we both enjoyed it.

B You belonged to the Methodist Church, didn't you?

M [Laugh] Well, uh [Laugh] My church, my father always said, my father was a Baptist minister, uh, and at the time of his death he was finishing his work at Rochester Theological Seminary, and his, the, his premise was, a church as long as it's a church so long, it doesn't matter what or where or who, but any church is important in your life.

B Very good. I remem....

M He was a very liberal person, and gave me a very liberal background. And which my mother approved, too.

B Now John uh, led the choir at church for many years.

M Yes, [laugh] Wherever we went wherever the choir was needed. One time we were Episcopal, one time we were Baptist, and we wound up here as Methodist. To us, as I say, not what church, but a church.

B What about the other part of the community, Elks or ...

M Well, later uh, John uh, formed his group of Elks men and that was very uh, well I guess important is what I should say, in programs around town for several years he had the Elks men's group but uh, otherwise we weren't part of any other special group.

B Mm-hm. Now, you helped John win lots of awards

M Well, the only way that I helped was to keep things at an even keel. And I always went to every contest with him and uh, always took safety pins and pens [or pins] and extra handkerchiefs, and uh emergency things. And sometimes we needed them, too. So it was fun, doing the things together.

B Mm.

M We were just always a team.

B That's good. Can you remember anything about your children growing up in Salida?

M Well, Hank was certainly very anxious to get to start to school. And he and Pat woods and Paul Rudham became quite a team in that first grade together. But uh, they enjoyed our schools and did activities. George was long and skinny and not good football material, and he only played on the second team as far as basketball was concerned. But they enjoyed the athletic part of it as well as the uh.... And one on the times, the -- Thinking of the quality of the schools here, uh, we were at a ...a...a group were going to do some school work and uh, uh, uh, they uh, this...Oh, I know what it was. It was when the boys, when Hank was enrolling for college and he had two languages on his list. and the uh, assistant in the office said, "Don't

let him do this, this is bad, this is hard, he can't do that." And they said something about Salida "Oh, are you from Salida?" "Yes." "Oh well, they have good schools. Go ahead and let him do it." That's always been our favorite story about Salida schools.

B We'd better mention when John and George were born, their birthdays.

M Let's see....

B Did you uh, put that down here?

M No, not yet.

B Not yet.

M Okay, I will later, but then....

B That's fine. And they have a couple of grandgirls for you now, then, don't they?

M Mm-hm. Well, no, let's see. Now Hank has twins and then several years later a little girl. Christina has just been on a trip down into Mexico with them. She hadn't traveled very much. The older girls had kinda traveled and done more and then they had kinda neglected Chris so they took her this time.

B And George has a couple of girls?

M Mm-hm, mm-hm.

B That's good.

M Ann Marie and Jennifer. And they're both college graduates, from Iowa schools.

B Now, can you think of some changes in Salida that you witnessed and enjoyed?

M [Laugh]

B Well, maybe you didn't enjoy...

M Well, I – I -- just have enjoyed living here. I don't know of any special changes. We were able to buy this place that had a very small house on it with one long room in the front, and at the back were the bedroom, the bathroom, and the kitchen. And uh, then we increased the size of this home when we increased the boys, and uh, we uh, felt it that made a very homely place for them and we've been very happy here. We have a nice yard, and we used to have The Blue Spruce Tree of the town. Many people said, "Well, that was my tree, meaning their own tree, they took it as a special thing. And we, I feel very safe in saying, we were the first people to like trees in Salida.

B And now they all do.

M And now they all do. Mm-hm.

B Um, you lived here through several wars and, uh, actually we had Camp Hale up the road a little ways. And you remember anything that Salida did to support the troops?

M Well, yes, they sent John He... Uh, our little daughter died when she was three, Marianne, and that threw him immediately into 1A. Before the week was over they had him all set up in 1A. Now, he was not sent off that soon, but very soon he was sent, and he wound up on Saipan, but he was a one of the fortunate ones and un, with his background of teaching and of music, he was put in as uh, director of music in the camp and he uh, took care of all of the uh, guests who, like any actors or actresses who came out to entertain the uh, soldiers at the, in the field. And uh, so he had a very interesting job when he was in the Army. The only thing was bad was that he was there and I was here. [Laugh]

B How long was he gone?

M Three years.

B And then he came back to teach again ...

M Mm-hm

B ...at Salida High School.

M Um, Mrs. Thompson had taken over for him and she -- kind of tried to do some finagling. She wanted to keep the job. And, this is, Mrs. Thompson was the doctor, was the wife of one of Doctor Thompson, who was one of the physicians here in Salida then. And uh, no they, by law, John had his job back. They had made that kind of law and governing men who were sent for the service.

B So he got his job back, hm.

M So he got his job back and the people in the town were, would to see to it, some of them, that he got his job back, too. And of course, John Larimer on the school board and being a Northwestern man and John from Northwestern, well, we had a good connection there, too.

B Now John started the Spartan Sparkles...

M Mm-hm.

B ...way back when.

M Our first year.

B Uh-huh.

M Uh, he wanted to put on some kind of a show, and that's when I talked him into -- Listen, I don't mean to be bragging, but I did -- that's when I talked him into "Well why not just do a variety show if you don't know? Because you don't know people well enough to know what they can do or not do." So, they would volunteer

things, and from that he built his – what he called – At one time years ago he said, “You know if I ever had a show, I’d call it Spartan Sparkles, and I’d use Stardust as my theme song.”

So that was the beginning of Stardust and Spartan Sparkles.

B Anything else you can remember that he did at the high school for the music department?

M No. Only...

B I remember a Christmas program.

M Oh, yes, uh, uh, John Berginer built his -- When John told him what he wanted -- John Berginer built his wooden tree form, which, at which time only the select choir sang. It was about 30 people. Course, the regular choir there weren’t 30 people in school left when they took a choir out, because it just turned into being everybody’s choir.

B That continued for many Christmases, didn’t it?

M Yes. Yes, it did. And the coveted place was to be the star at the top, and it was always a girl, and she always wore a crown with a big silver star.

B The choir sang on, or stood on bleachers so they were in the form of a tree.

M John Berginer – the Berginers were our dearest friends – John built him the form for that. and he was so afraid. He’d just sit there and chew on his fingernails, for fear that something would give way on that form. But we never had an accident, and we never had anybody to faint. I once saw a boy that was beginning to look a little leery to me, and I slipped down to sit in the front row over by the side where the tree was standing, the tree of boys and girls, and I “Pst, pst, pst” to him and got him to come down and sit with me. But he got all right. He was uh, had been looking at the lights and it kind of -- upset him, anyway. And he didn’t uh,, he wasn’t in very good condition. But he was all right, he did all right.

B When John started teaching, about how many youngsters were in the high school.



M Oh, dear. I don't have any idea. 300? Does that seem right?

B Not bad. Not a bad guess.

M Mm-hm.

B Mm-hm.

M Maybe three, right around then. And, the first time, no I guess it was the second year – that we went, we went over to the San Luis Valley for a spring contest. Not really contest, more of a festival, and it wasn't competing against one another, but they all gave a part of the program and then all of the groups in the valley sang together and at that time we were a part of that San Luis Valley group.

B Marvelous.

M And that was the start of ...And somebody said, "Well, John, how many people are left in Salida?" And he said, "Oh, about 30."

B [Laugh] You took 30 down there with you?

M Oh, no, we took more than that! It was... It was, they just -- One of the teachers laughed afterwards, "... and we sat there and watched and they came, and they came, and they came!" [Laugh]

B [Laugh] He certainly did a lot for...

M No, I uh, he – He got a break in the fact that he had a disposition that loved people and people loved him, and uh we never had any trouble, having a big, big group.

B Sounds like you had more fun than troubles.

M Yes. And yet, they had uh, a good musical background when they got out of there. John was lucky in that his father, as I say, had been a music teacher. And uh, as well as – By the time John and his two sisters – John was nine, his two sisters were seven and five – they could sing a full evening's concert of three-part music. So he had a good start.

B Yes, I'll say! Now there's an auditorium at the high school now called John Held Auditorium.

M Mm-hm. And they named it while he was here and could enjoy it. And that was the thing that thrilled me more, and him -- more than anything. Why wait 'til somebody dies and then honor them, because they haven't enjoyed it.

B Well, good! And I know he won many contests around the state for the children that they were working with.

M Mm-hm. And he was, at one time he was President of the Colorado Music Education...Educators Association. And that also then made him be a member of the national presidents' group, and we went to those meetings, of the presidents of all the states.

B Who was the outstanding superintendent at the high school that you remember.

M Barrett. Mm mh. Mr. Hightower wWas superintendent when we arrived, and uh, then he was there only for one year after that. And then Barrett took over. He and his wife Beulah had been very close friends of ours. And ,we -- knew each other and how each other thought and felt, and he was very good to uh, give John the leeway that he could have with all these kids. And that's when they had -- The music, the vocal music, was at the noon hour. And if a child had a free hour at the hour before noon, they went home for lunch then. If they had their free hour after that noon, they went home for their lunch then at 1:00. And uh, those that had neither brought a paper sack and sat in the back and ate their lunch real quick and hurried down to the front of the auditorium to participate.

B So everybody practiced at noon time.

M Mn hm. All the practice... Not all the practice, but a lot of the practice, was right at the noon hour. So we could put the whole group together. And the high school was practically empty.

B Everybody was singing!

M Yeah.

B Wonderful. [pause]

M Well, anything else you can tell us about high school, or grade school, or your life here in Salida?

M Well, he had our two boys. And uh, then Hank was in the fourth grade, why, uh, they -- Come August they were still hunting teachers. And uh, so I said, well, they're needin' teachers, I can use the money. And there was a second grade and a fourth grade open. I had taught second grade, and uh so I went in and I said to Bill, "Well, you still need me?" "Would you, Mary, would you come and teach." And I said, "Yeah, I would."

[End]