

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

NARRATOR: Hazel Flowers

BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION: Hazel Flowers was born in New Mexico in the early 1920's as the oldest of ten children. She and her family moved to a farm outside of Ingalls, Kansas in 1927. She was married in 1940 and has remained in Gray County ever since. In 1961, she and her husband built the Cimarron Motel. She now lives in Cimarron, Kansas.

DATE OF INTERVIEW: June 26, 2003

INTERVIEWER: Rachel Pederson

LOCATION OF INTERVIEW: Cimarron, Kansas

NUMBER OF CASSETTES: 1 audio cassette

LENGTH OF CASSETTES: 60 min.

LENGTH OF INTERVIEW: 54 min.

SUBJECTS DISCUSSED: Farm life and implements; Stock market crash and the Great Depression; Dustbowl in Kansas; Home front of World War II.

**Hazel Flowers
Narrator**

**Rachel Pederson
Interviewer**

**June 26, 2003
Cimarron, Kansas**

Hazel Flowers -- **HF**
Rachel Pederson -- **RP**

(Beginning of side A)

RP: And I'm interviewing Hazel Flowers. Ok, go ahead.

HF: [unclear] want to put that someplace else?

RP: I'll set this right here.

HF: Yeah, that'll be fine. And uhm, so I bought these because I'm the oldest of ten kids because I thought, "You know, they've heard about the dirt storms and all these things but this is such a nice book." And so I tried to find if this outfit was still in business here after we did that but I got it back, and one of my grandsons that lives in Kansas City did a searching around down there and nobody ever seemed to know this outfit of Mindon Cards and so they probably long gone because that was in the early seventies.

RP: This is great.

HF: Yeah and you can take that book and copy it if you want to. That's what I did for . . . I don't know what that girl's name was now. Let's see. She lived up by Jetmore someplace.

RP: But yeah, I definitely make sure I get it back to you but I would love to take this and copy it.

HF: Sara (McFarland) copied it before and you're sure welcome to it. I have sure gotten more of them if I could have. I got one for each one of the kids and sent it to them but this is the only one I kept.

RP: Thank you very much. Ok, let's get started. Basically, just talk to me. Tell me stories that you remember. I've got some questions that are just the kind of, help you start talking.

HF: Let me see what you got. Give me an idea of what you're . . .

RP: And I've lost the first page here.

HF: It's probably in there someplace. "When and where were you born?" Well, I was born in New Mexico but my folks, my folks grew up here. They just lived down there, happened to be down there when I was born. So I lived down there the first five, six years of my life but I always went to school here or at Ingalls. I graduated from Ingalls.

RP: Ok. Were your parents farmers?

HF: Yeah, they lived out north, they lived about a half mile north of the dairy.

RP: Ok, and they raised, they raised corn or wheat?

HF: Corn, wheat and just like, just like what they farm here.

RP: Uhm, how many brothers and sisters did you have?

HF: Well, I'm the oldest of ten.

RP: Yes, you told me that already. Sorry.

HF: That's ok. There were six girls and four boys.

RP: Uhm, tell me about some of the chores you did as a child.

HF: Oh, well, honey, it's a lot different than you girls do today.

RP: I'm sure.

HF: Because we milked cows and fed chickens and hogs and . . . and I was, I was the oldest and I helped Dad outside a lot and my sister next to me then helped Mom, so I milked cows and I worked in the field. I always . . . did a lot of things.

RP: How many cows did you have?

HF: Oh, around, I think we milked around ten or twelve.

RP: Did you keep it then for family or did you sell it?

HF: Well, no, you . . . in those days, they separated it and then they sold the cream and you fed the separated milk to the chickens and the hogs. You didn't sell whole milk like they do today. You couldn't . . . there was nothing like that going on. (phone ring) Hand me that phone, would you? (Tape break for personal phone call) . . . He's (Hazel's grandson) had cancer twice and . . . don't want to say we kind of baby him around here. He has to have some help and so that's what that amounted to. Ok, what was we talking about? We was talking about doing chores.

RP: Yes, ma'am.

HF: So we rode the school bus and we always had uh, one of us did the dishes after breakfast and the other one washed the separator and if you've never washed a separator you don't know what you're missing [laughing].

RP: So what was the separator like? What was it, was it?

HF: Well, a separator . . . there's several sitting around town here in yards. It had a handle on the side and you turned it so fast and the milk was in this big bowl up here on top and went down through a bunch of disks, seemed like there was fifty some disks there and, and uh, you had to be turning it so fast. There was a bell on it to tell you when you were fast enough and that separated the . . . it had two spouts on it. One was the cream and one was the milk, when the milk, when it went through the disks. And then you sold the cream, they had . . . there was two or three places here in town that bought cream and you sold it in five gallon cream cans. You sold it according to butter fat so if you had forty pounds of cream and if it had, if it tested then forty percent then you had sixteen pounds of butter fat in that five gallons of cream and that's what you make butter out of and so . . .

RP: Ok. What about harvest? Do you have any stories you can tell me about harvest?

HF: Oh, yes. I remember one harvest that was so muddy that we had the . . . In those days you didn't have self-propelled combines. You pulled them with the tractor and you didn't have rubber tires, you had lugs on the . . . and we had to hitch horses on in front of the tractor to pull the combine through the field. I don't know if I can find the right . . . (rising to get picture albums) I don't have these things cataloged or . . . they're just . . . They're just pictures.

(Seven minutes of searching through albums)

There was three girls born the same day in New Mexico and the folks were all neighbors. So, one of the girls moved away right away, but this one here and I kept track of each other until after, oh, maybe our twenties or thirties. Now, there is team of horses and me working at cultivating a field. You can see antique-ish the tractor is and that's a header barge. That's what they used to put the hay into the . . .

RP: What's this tank here?

HF: Well that was a fertilizer . . . no, no that wouldn't be. They didn't have fertilizer yet then. I suppose that would be a fuel tank and they had driven the tractor up beside it to fill it up.

RP: Oh, ok.

HF: It looks like these pictures have all come lose. I need to go through there. We raised a lot of chickens after I was married.

(Five minutes of looking through albums)

HF: Well, I'm sorry honey. I'm not finding much for you.

RP: That's ok. We can just keep talking. We can just keep talking. Uhm, while you're looking . . . Talk to me about what you did for fun as a kid.

HF: Oh, rode horses.

RP: Rode horses? Did you have just one . . . two?

HF: Oh we had several horses we could ride. Uhm, there were neighbor girls who . . . You don't know who Levela Leaky is I don't suppose. She lives here in town. They lived about a half a mile from us. She and I used to ride horses. . . . These are in Hawaii.

RP: When did you go there?

HF: In '72. My sister, Adrian Phelps's mother and her husband and my husband and I went. The architect in Hawaii is so pretty because they, they use round instead of big square. . . And they don't have, or when we were there they didn't have any . . . neon signs out blaring or anything. Every thing was real. Oh, honey, I didn't find that picture I was looking for.

RP: That's ok.

HF: There's one of the combine and the tractor in the field with, about half stuck.

RP: So, you were born in New Mexico. Were you born at home or in a hospital?

HF: In a hospital.

RP: In a hospital? Did the doctor still make house calls?

HF: Oh, I don't know if they made house calls or not. I was born in February and it was storm weather and Dad had taken Mom to town and she had stayed in town because she was about due and uh, your cars and stuff wasn't near as dependable in those days as they are now, or near as warm and all those things. And I don't know how long she was in town before I was born. But I do know that she was staying in town. The, when the folks moved to my mother's folks moved out north here . . . I think, I think in 1905 and then my dad's folks, or his dad, his mother died when he was two, and I think they moved here in 1907, so they went through school here or [unclear] the country schools and then, in town. Then uhm, Mom's father moved to New Mexico and after Mom and

Dad was married why they moved down there in 1918 and they lived there until we moved back up here in 1927, so us three oldest kids were born in New Mexico.

RP: So you said you were about six when you moved up here, right? So would you remember the stock crash of '29? Did that have any affect on you at all?

HF: Well, not money wise but, the reason that the, that it was so hard here in those years, is because we had the stock crash in '29 and I remember that Dad had a good wheat crop in '31 and got thirty cents a bushel for the wheat so that didn't amount to a lot. And then we had the Dirty Thirties so we had the Depression and the Dirty Thirties at the same time here where, in the plain states. Colorado, Eastern Colorado and Texas, Western Texas and Western Oklahoma and Kansas, Nebraska, so that made it doubly, doubly hard and uh, well, when you went to school, we used to laugh and say, for our dress, we had the old one, the new one and blue one. And that would about take care of your wardrobe because you didn't, there wasn't money floating around any place. They had WPA which was a, a uh . . . What did WPA stand for? Well, anyway, they hired the farmers to build bridges, such as that, put in big culverts along the roads, I guess to give the spending money so they had money for groceries or whatever. And my husband was in the CCC's, which was a boy's or young men's camp. There used to be one in Finney County. He was in Clark County and there was a number of the people here that was, in one of the Dakota's, I'm not sure which. Bill Kramer's dad was in the CC's at the same time as my husband was. You know who Bill Kramer is, don't you.

RP: Uh-huh. Yeah.

HF: There were a number of people here but I don't think you'd know, that were in the CC's and they, they paid them thirty dollars a month. They built, well, they build Clark County Dam down there and they gave, left the boys five dollars and they sent twenty-five dollars home to their folks so there was a lot of government . . . There was another government program that was on at that time that kids in high school could work at and it was called NYA. And that was some kind of youth deal, but I remember that I helped in the office and I got three dollars a month. You wouldn't spend the time of day for three dollars but . . .

RP: Probably not.

HF: But I worked a lot for three dollars a week at . . . after, well, in high school as . . . now you'd say it was a babysitter, and a house cleaner, and what have you but I got off every other weekend and I babysat and I did the laundry and I did the cooking and I cleaned the house. I got a whole three dollars a week. That was about the . . . I worked at the ASCS after I graduated from high school and I remember I made eighty-one dollars a month and boy, I was in the chips.

RP: ASCS. What does that stand for?

HF: Well, its' out here. I think now they call it Farm . . . it's right out here east of town, just west of the Baptist Church.

RP: Oh, the uh . . .

HF: Farm . . . it's not Farm Credit, it's farm something.

RP: I can't remember that either.

HF: Well, they changed the name. It was Agricultural Stabilization . . . something, is what it used to be. Anyway, it's been around for a long time so, but I remember I really thought I was up town, and I was. It was a good job.

RP: So if you worked really hard for three dollars a week, stuff must not have cost the same.

HF: Oh, it didn't.

RP: What are some examples of . . . ?

HF: Well, when I worked at the office, in the ASCS office, I could eat for a quarter. Have a ham sandwich and a glass of milk and a dip of potatoes salad or . . .

RP: That's pretty good –

HF: The milk was a nickel and the sandwich was ten cents and the salad was ten cents.

RP: That's a pretty good meal for . . .

HF: Well, it was good enough so . . .

RP: What about shoes? How much did shoes cost?

HF: You know, I don't remember. I just don't remember but not much, you can believe that. And you didn't, you didn't have four hundred eleven pair either.

RP: Uh-huh. That's true.

HF: Because, well in the first place you didn't have a place to put them because you didn't have closets. Used to – I'm sure a man designed it – but the houses would be four rooms with a partition running each way and they never, they never thought about putting a closet in the house.

RP: Definitely a man's work.

HF: Man, yes, a man's planning.

RP: Fourth of July is coming up. Do you remember celebrating the Fourth of July?

HF: Well, yes.

RP: What did you do?

HF: You usually bought some fire crackers and shot them off.

RP: What kind of fire crackers were they?

HF: Not like the ones today. More like these little ones that come in a whole package.

RP: Black cats.

HF: Whatever they are, those little ones that . . . about so long that just make a pop. Yeah.

(End of Side A, Beginning of Side B)

HF: . . . What grade are you in?

RP: I will be a sophomore in college.

HF: You'll be a sophomore in college. And where are you going to school?

RP: Going to Tabor College.

HF: The Penners always used to always go to Tabor College.

RP: Yeah. Adam just graduated, Adam Penner.

HF: See, which one does he belong to?

RP: Uh, Ken Penner.

HF: Ken Penner. Ken Penner's dad would have been . . . uh, our dentist. The Penner that used to be the dentist here in town. He's been dead a number of years now, was in my class in grade school.

RP: That's cool.

HF: So, but the Penners lived north of Ingalls. I lived south of Ingalls. The folks moved to Ingalls in 1932 and they lived over there until nineteen, I think, forty-one or two, somewhere in there. I got married in 1940 and it was after I was married that they moved back over up here by the dairy.

RP: Did you have a radio?

HF: Sure.

RP: What were some of your favorite radio programs?

HF: Well, you didn't have a lot of radio programs like you do today. You didn't have a lot of stations either but uh, when the Grand Old Opry came on in Nashville, I think maybe around 1928 or 29 we always listened to that on Saturday night. You didn't listen to Soap Operas or anything. There wasn't anything like that. On radio you'd get maybe some news. I remember when KJNO came on the air was about the time that we got married, around 1940 and it would be so static-y (sic) so much of the time that you couldn't hardly understand what the man was saying.

RP: Do you remember jackrabbit drives?

HF: Oh, yeah.

RP: Can you tell me about those?

HF: Let me see that (indicating Midnight at Noon pamphlet).

RP: This?

HF: I think there is an article in here about jackrabbit drives. There were a lot of jackrabbits and uh, they would take uh . . . set up snow fence in the center of maybe four sections or something like that. And then, people would be on horseback and they would drive the rabbits toward wherever they had this set up and they set this pen up and after they got that done, after they got the jackrabbits driven in there, why then they took ball bats and knocked them in the head and shipped the, shipped them out of here on box cars. And I don't know where they went but they were harvested then for uh, their fur. The fact is we bought rabbits after we were married. We were in business here in town and in the wintertime – I don't remember how much it was, a nickel a piece that you paid for a rabbit – but uh, there was a guy came through here with a truck and picked them up every so often. Often. They didn't get to smelling or nothing like that, you know. It amazes me that there are just no rabbits. The rabbits that are around here are cotton tails and these were jackrabbits. Jackrabbits are more, they're big . . . bigger and rangy built. Cottontails are little and . . .

RP: Fluffy.

HF: Fluffy, yeah. But jackrabbits weren't. Let's see, what does this say? "Rabbit drives were carried on Sunday afternoon," I don't remember that especially, "in the center of an area," they say fourteen miles a snow fence was installed. But it went into this pen, the snow fence, so when they drove them up then they drove them all into the

same . . . “Under no circumstances,” yeah, they didn’t allow guns. It doesn’t say anything about how they killed the rabbits but that’s how they was killed.

In 1935, uh, Ingalls and Cimarron - I don’t know what all, but I do know about them – they quit having school in April. Closed down for the spring because they’d get these kids in for school and then they couldn’t get them home at night because the dirt storm would come up and if you can’t see your hand if front of your face . . . which is the way it was.

RP: Yeah, that’s crazy.

HF: So, so they uh, they finally said, “This is it.” So whatever your grade was then . . .

RP: That was it.

HF: That was it. But that was in 1935. (Indicating picture in pamphlet) That’s just the way it looked coming in. It just be rolling in. Usually it came in from the north or the northwest. Uhm, one or these – and I don’t know which one it was – Dad and I was out at the barn taking care of the stock and the dirt storm hit and he had to tell because there was so much, I guess, - I call it noise but it was, it wasn’t quiet – anyway, Dad said he had a hold of the header barge. I said, “Well I do too,” but we, we didn’t know where anybody was. And mom used to wet sheets and hang them up over the windows to keep the dirt out and when you set the table you turned the plates upside down because there’d be dust.

RP: Keep the dust out.

HF: Yep, until you got around to eat.

RP: That’s crazy.

HF: Yeah, it, it’s really hard to, I guess I want to say explain how it really was, but it really was bad. And then when I read in the paper now that dirt storms are coming back because it was dry last two years ago . . . There is no way because here, you had a team of horse or a tractor and you could go out and maybe, you worked a long day, you might get twenty-five acres uh, listed in furrows so it wouldn’t blow - and the wind’s blowing from the south today, we’ll say. So tomorrow the wind’s blowing from the north and it just blows those back full. Now they can go out with their tractors and their implements they have today and before noon they can do a quarter of ground, the whole field. So there is no way, no way at all for . . . I don’t think. But the, the dirt really did blow up around . . . where did I see that? It would blow up, it’d cover up implements and tractors and stuff like that in the field when it was blowing so . . .

RP: That’s a lot of dirt.

HF: Oh, boy. You’re not just kidding that’s a lot of dirt. And if it came up from the south, it was red. The sky, everything was just red but that, there red dirt in Oklahoma,

you know. I don't know if you've ever been on 160 highway Coldwater east down through Medicine Lodge. That's red dirt. Well, that's what they have in Oklahoma and well that would be . . . when it came from the north it would be black.

RP: That's interesting.

HF: The chickens would go to bed.

RP: Because they thought it was night?

HF: Because they thought it was night, yeah right.

RP: That's crazy. Do you remember first hearing about Pearl Harbor?

HF: Oh, yeah.

RP: Do you remember where you were or what you were doing?

HF: I think I was in school.

RP: Were you teaching or . . .

HF: No it seems, it seems no. It seems to me like that I had taken the kids to school for some reason, I don't remember what but that's where . . . That's where it seems to be where I was. That was a really interesting tour when we were in Hawaii. To . . . They have, well, they had a large wall with a, some kind of a camera running and – I've forgotten what they call that kind of picture – but it really, you really felt like the planes was coming in at you, on you or something, you know. And it's kind of really sobering to walk across this area where they said that this uh, one ship was in the bottom of the ocean under you. There were so many people in it. I, I thought it was kind of . . . chilling.

RP: Yeah. Yeah. So was anyone you knew in the service? Did your husband go or . . .

HF: No, my husband didn't, wasn't in the service. He was a farmer. Farmers didn't go . . . Sure, you knew a lot of people because there was a lot that went.

RP: Then during World War II there was rationing right?

HF: Right.

RP: What was rationed?

HF: Tires, sugar, shortening. I don't know what all was but tires were. I guess they needed the rubber to make . . .

RP: Something.

HF: Something. And sugar and shortening, coffee was but uhm, I don't . . . I really don't know what all was.

RP: Now, children went around collecting things in order to help in the war effort. Do you know anything about that?

HF: What war effort?

RP: World War II.

HF: We lived on the farm. Nobody came around collecting anything, and they might have done that in the big city or something, you know, but I sure don't know.

RP: Do you remember hearing news from the war or anything like that?

HF: Well, you didn't get it first hand, blast by blast like you do now. It would be old by the time you heard it, you know, because you either heard it on the radio or you read it in the newspaper but it wasn't instantaneous like . . . I think that it's way over done.

RP: Probably.

HF: Because it, you know, another thing is – and maybe it's not so – but I don't think that news is very truthful anymore. I think they slant it like they want you to hear it. Not what really is going on. That might not be so but way it seems to me.

RP: Do you remember hearing news that the war was over?

HF: Oh, yeah.

RP: Do you remember where you were? How you felt?

HF: I don't remember, I don't remember . . . it was, it was over for sometime before we heard it out here. It wasn't that . . . I don't want to say . . . it was newsworthy of course but it wasn't that exciting. Maybe that's the right word, I don't know.

RP: Yeah. Kind of seems like you were a little bit removed from it.

HF: Well, you are out here in the middle of the country. Of course, they, most people think that it's all Indians and so forth west of Highway 81 or something, you know, but it's a lot different than it was around the city.

RP: So how long have you been living in Cimarron?

HF: Well, I've lived in Gray County ever since 1927.

RP: Right you lived in Ingalls or by Ingalls.

HF: We lived three miles south of Ingalls. Then when Clebert and I were married we lived nine miles south of Ingalls for three years and then we lived eight miles south of Cimarron until 1951 and we moved into Cimarron, into town in 1951. So that's how long I've lived in Cimarron.

RP: How come you moved in town?

HF: How come we moved in town? Well, because my husband was going into a seed business and uh, that's where we needed to be.

RP: Just to distribute seed or . . .

HF: Well, he sold, bought and sold field seeds, which is a lot different than it is today. It was before hybrids were . . .

RP: So, do you remember when NBC came to Cimarron to make the special of Small Town, USA?

HF: Oh, shoot. I think I put that, put that letter in that stuff for Jodi. . . They stayed at the motel, NBC did. They were so nice to work with and I had the nicest letter from them after they left and I just been sorting through a bunch of old stuff. And I'm sure that I put that letter -- because Jodi was uh, the mother of this boy that called a minute ago, was staying with us. Her husband was in Germany at that time. I wish I had that letter to show you. But yeah, yeah I remember very well.

RP: I bet there was some funny, interesting stories of . . .

HF: Well, they were, they were just nice people to work with. And if you, have you ever seen the, the uh, video? It's, I think they have it at the Library. They've shown it several times. It's called I think, Cimarron; Small Town, USA, or something like that. But uhm, it was, it was an interesting experience and the men that were in charge didn't like to eat at the restaurant because they didn't like to be bothered with the public so I fed them at the house, at the motel.

RP: You fed them? Were you running the motel?

HF: Well, we built the motel in '61 and built the restaurant n '72.

RP: Really? I didn't know that.

HF: But, yeah. That was an interesting experience.

RP: Uhm, Sara says that Canal Street used to be a canal. Do you remember when they filled that . . .?

HF: It wasn't canal, it, no, it wasn't a canal. The guy that built it had the idea that he was going to run the water down through here and there is several places where you can see the old uhm, canal. We used to walk across it. It was dirt when I was in school, when we walked down town. But it never was, no, there never was any water in it.

RP: When did they fill it in?

HF: Well, it's just, they just worked at it. I mean, there's places out in those pastures I'm sure where, but erosion just, time, when something's been there a hundred years, why, it changes. Yeah, that's what Canal Street is. And have you ever been over to the, I call them ruts, but the wagon trail over there?

RP: Yes, yeah.

HF: There used to be a place over here west of uh, Ingalls where they crossed the Arkansas River and you could see it. There was a fellow named Doc Barton that used to live in Ingalls. Well, Edna Johnson, they just moved her to the nursing home here last week, is one of his daughters. She lived here in town. Uhm, did cattle drives and he used to come to school and talk to us about those kind of things and he took us out there to west of Ingalls and showed us the, the uh, tracks that the wagon trail had taken to the . . .

RP: Those are pretty cool.

HF: Yeah, they're a piece of history. Now, Mom said that when she was kid there was no trees along the river. They came into being later. I don't know when the trees . . . And of course since we've had irrigation and they've dropped the water table, why, so many of the trees have died because they were shallow rooted. So, no water, no tree.

RP: Do you remember . . . besides the dust storms, do you remember any big storms? Blizzards or fires or . . .

HF: Blizzards? We never had any fires around . . . oh, well, there was a few prairie fires, you know but we never had anything in the way of fires around here that . . . But we had some nasty blizzards at different, different times. One of the most recent big blizzards we had was in '57 and it was down here at main street – I don't remember – six, seven, eight feet deep and uh, it was a high as the second story out there, where Jantzens live, just north of the, of the uh, motel, the snow. It was uh . . . trains were, you know, couldn't get through. Nobody could get through. I don't remember now how long it was that it took them to get it to [unclear] but it was, it was a while. And we've had – I don't remember the dates – but we've had a number of bad blizzards over the years.

RP: I bet.

HF: But there have been people died that would get stranded in their car and decide they was going to walk someplace. If they had stayed in their car they probably lived but . . .

RP: That's sad.

HF: Yeah, really it is.

RP: Well, that's all I have really. Do –

HF: Oh, ok, well you take this and copy this because it, it definitely, that's just the way it looked coming in and it just turned dark. When it hit, you knew it.

RP: Well, thank you very, very much.

HF: Well, honey if it's worth anything. If it's not, just toss it [laughing].

RP: I'm sure it will be worth while.

HF: I can't, I can't hardly believe it but . . .

(End of interview)