

Ernie Adamson -EA
Mr. Webb [?] -MW
Mrs. Dowdy [?] -MD
Peggy Ford -PF

PF: We're standing at the 80-acre homestead of Kate Slaughterback, Rattlesnake Kate. I'm with Ernie Adamson, her adopted son. He's going to tell me a little bit about the area.

EA: I guess this is still called the BeeBee [?] Canal, and it runs across the bottom of the homestead. This is within a half-mile of where she killed the snakes. Right out across there.

PF: A little bit to the northeast is where she killed the snakes. There's a lake up over there.

EA: There was then; I haven't been over there in a while. This is the ditch. If the horse would have reared or got loose, he would have had to cross it; it didn't have a bridge in those days. I probably wouldn't have made it across the canal.

PF: The horse would have started running towards home, then.

EA: This place out here is where they lived at that time.

PF: Across the road; north of the road is where she was living at the time.

EA: That's where the pictures was taken of the snakes.

PF: I see. Then it was later, after she and Jack separated, that he gave her 80 acres of the original 400 that he had in the area.

EA: He owned all this ground. They had their house back over in there.

PF: Where that grove of trees is?

EA: No, not that far over. Some of the Nichol's [?] live there now.

PF: Do you still own the 80 acres?

EA: No, after Kate passed on, I sold it and divided the money with my boys. She wanted the boys to have it, but they're town kids; they don't want to come out in the country. I figured the best thing to do was to sell it. My boys got a start that way.

PF: The farm that you still maintain the interest in is the adjacent property?

EA: No. It's about a mile and a half down [WCR] 41, from the 4-way school [?].

PF: I see. That was a part of a farm that Kate originally owned, or did you buy that?

EA: Kate bought it when we lived down on the Box Elder Creek; then we bought that place. Kate actually bought it.

PF: How many acres?

EA: One hundred and sixty.

PF: So you have a quarter-section over there?

EA: Yes.

PF: On this bridge, in the photograph from the early 1950s, this is where Kate was posing with her dress on. That she had and where she was wrapping her arms around the back of her head to show her physique and all of that.

EA: Yes. This is the very same spot, not the same bridge. They rebuilt the bridge, but it was right here.

PF: You said as a child you had no running water in your house at all, when you lived at either of the houses. So this is where you took your bath? You came down here and...

EA: I had to stay under the water to keep the mosquitos off.

PF: Makes good sense.

EA: We never did have water in this house. It was just a pump outside and we carried it in. Mom was pretty, I don't know what you would say. She didn't want even a phone. When the phone line came through; we never could get her to put one in the house. She never did get it hooked up for electricity. Finally, the last few years, she did get a phone, so we could call and see if she was doing all right. She never did get electricity. She said, "I'm not paying a dime." I don't know how she put it, but she said she wasn't going to pay a dime for a glass of water. She figured it would cost that much. [Laughs]

PF: Oh, boy. So she just used kerosene lamps, then, for her light?

EA: Yes, kerosene lamps and she carried in the water. It would have been really nice if she would have had electricity. Could have had an icebox and a few things. She kept her goat milk and her goat butter and stuff down in the well on a rope; that kept it cool.

PF: That's the way she preferred to live until her death. The story that you were telling me a little bit earlier. Someone had delivered a five-gallon jar of water to her from Fort Lupton and she got in an argument with the person and tossed it back at him. Is that right?

EA: Well, he set it out on the ground, and after they had their little set-to, he took off and just left the water sitting outside. She wanted to take it in the house. Lifting five gallons of water for

a 73-year-old lady wasn't too good. She was probably mad and just grabbed it up. Anyhow, that's what started everything. She pulled something loose inside, so they operated on that. She lived out here on this dumb farm and never ate very good. Like goat milk and few eggs and little bit of food. After the operation, she was all right. They started feeding her too heavy of food, I guess. I don't know. Her bowels locked up and they had to operate again because they let it go so long. Her poor old heart just wouldn't take two operations.

PF: That's interesting. Well, it's a beautiful area out here. A beautifully clear day today. Some of the photographs in the 1950s and the late 1960s. Were they taken by that shed over there where you a part of the roof caving in?

EA: Yes, that's the old cow barn. That's where that horned owl...

PF: That barn owl, horned owl came and stayed. Was there a cellar over here that she used or was that closer to her house? Did she have a cellar?

EA: No, that was something that was put there later. I don't know what it is.

PF: The mailbox used to be right out here along the road. Did you take that down and save that?

EA: No, I took it down. Well, I couldn't take all that stuff back to California, so we had a little auction at Keenesburg. That mailbox and some of the furniture sold over there.

PF: I see. Shall we go on down and look at some of the other things?

We're now standing in front of the house that Kate lived in until her death. It's located on the south side of the road. Mr. Adamson is going to go ahead and tell me a little a bit about this particular house.

EA: I'm not real sure who she bought it from, but we moved it in. Pulled it with trucks down this highway. I was along. We didn't have it too well organized; I was on top the house holding up the wires.

PF: Oh, no. You went underneath them!

EA: We made it all right. Then she did quite a bit of work on it. Moving over these old rough roads shook the fireplace chimney down pretty well. She rebuilt that. I'm sure she put the siding on. Done quite a little work on it. She done a bunch of work inside it, too. She lived here the last, about 20 years.

PF: The little Quonset hut would have been off to the left, off to the east. You said, after Kate died and things were sold, someone purchased the Quonset hut, is that right? [Noise of truck going past on the road] Wow. We are into the dust, now, aren't we?

EA: These old roads are dry. I guess that was a milk truck. [Laughs]

PF: I guess so. Here comes another one.

EA: Shall we go in? Do you want to look it over a little more?

PF: Sure. Do you think we'll find any rattlesnakes inside?

EA: No, I'm sure they're pretty well gone now. Once in a while you still see one, but I think they're pretty well moved out.

PF: But we did see that bull snake at the cemetery. Mr. Adamson and are standing a little bit to the southeast of Kate's back door. We're looking at the well. Why don't you tell me a little bit about this?

EA: We dug this well; Kate's brother and I and the hired man by hand. We blocked it up. This is where we got our water. She had a little trap door that was our Frigidaire. We lowered the butter and a little bit of stuff down in there to keep cool.

PF: She used this clear until 1969, then. No refrigeration on the place at all? Tough lady.

EA: And no water in the house. Well, the water well wasn't deep enough. The water wasn't too good; that's why she hauled water from Fort Lupton. There was plenty of water; it was great to wash dishes and all that, but it wasn't too good for drinking.

PF: Where was your outhouse? Has it been taken down? Was it out past the barn a little bit?

EA: Yes, back out in there. This corral wasn't here. Somebody else built it since it's been sold. That was part of the old shed. We had another shed back there. I think that pile of debris there; I think that's where they just sort of dozed the old shed into a pile. It was made of; well, we just got cottonwoods and woven wire and then filled the woven wire with straw. It was a pretty, native old shed.

PF: A little bit rustic, maybe.

EA: That's a good word.

PF: Shall we walk around the back of the house? So did she dig her own cellar under the house? She must have when she brought this house in.

EA: Yes. We built sort of a foundation, but we couldn't set it on there. She dug her own cellar. Replaced that chimney. Done a lot of work on it.

PF: Did she plant most of the trees around the house?

EA: Yes, uh-huh.

PF: Did she have a garden close by?

EA: Yes. Just the other side of that row of trees was her garden. She had about a half-acre of watermelons, cantaloupes, tomatoes, onions. She had quite a garden.

PF: This house that we're looking at over here. Was that one of the houses that she lived in?

EA: Yes, that's where Jack and her lived after they moved out of this place across the street. That had a real nice place there, a full basement and a nice house on it.

PF: Do you know who lives there now?

EA: Some of the Nichols'es [?]. Roy Nichols was the old father; that's where he lived until he died, and now one of the boys lives there.

PF: Essentially it was these three places, in addition to the Box Elder Creek residence that was her home, pretty much this area. Where did the Brewers live? You were talking earlier about some of the moonshine.

EA: On down the road about two miles.

PF: So they were closer to the Box Elder Creek area.

EA: They still live there. Young Fred Brewer, well, he's my age, so he's pretty young. They have two sons and one of them lives there. Then the daughter, she lives right close there. She married a Harkess [?] boy and she lives right in that same area.

[Break in the interview. New voice. And a loud, yappy dog, barking wildly]

MW: The Tanzers.[?] They lived over here in Fort Lupton. Not Fort Lupton, but what's the name of that place this side of Fort Lupton?

PF: Platteville?

MW: Yes, Platteville. They lived over there.

PF: So you have owned the property for the last 12 years?

MW: No, I'm just renting the property.

EA: This is where Kate and Jack lived when Kate killed those rattlers. They took the pictures right here. I don't know if that's the same old barn or not, but I suppose it is.

MW: Of what?

EA: That barn. They took the pictures there.

MW: Oh, yes, that's the same old barn. I couldn't keep the place up. I got disabled and I just couldn't do anything. My wife and two young children are living in Greeley. They just up and pulled out; that's all that I know. They left her [a woman who talks indistinctly in the background] here with me. They wouldn't take care of her. She got a brother that living in Eaton, and a brother living in LaSalle and a sister living in LaSalle and one sister living in Evans. They just don't take care of them, at all. They just left her here.

PF: So you have a garden and farm out here, then?

MW: Well, I couldn't raise a garden this year. I got disabled and I just couldn't do anything. No help. Why don't you come over here and sit down?

PF: We probably shouldn't stay too long.

EA: We're just checking out where Kate killed the snakes and where she lived at the time.

PF: Mr. Adamson lives in California now and he's out here on vacation for a few weeks. So he brought some of her things and donated them to the museum. So I'm just collecting additional information and photographs of where she lived and his early life out here in the Four-Way area.

MW: Who owns this over here?

EA: Thomasson.

MW: Which one?

EA: That's a good question. Orville's brother; I don't know which one he is.

MW: Lives out here on [WCR?] 52. Just a young guy.

EA: Yes.

PF: Looks like you raise a lot of dogs out here. They're your constant companions.

MW: Well, I don't know what I'd do without them. [Dogs continue to bark.]

PF: If we have your permission, we'd like to take a photograph of the barn, if that's okay. And where she lived.

MW: Go right ahead.

PF: We really appreciate that.

MW: There's a real estate man there in Denver. His name is Thomas Brown; he's a real estate man in Denver; he owns it. Ralph Campbell [?] he lives on the road up here. He's the one that's farming this place. I just got to the place where I couldn't do anything. That's the reason I just let

everything go. But I'm still stuck out here; I don't know what I'm going to do when winter comes. Of course, winter is just right around the corner.

EA: It's getting close.

MW: It was cold here this morning and I don't mean maybe. It was cold!

PF: Do you have a good heating system in the house, or not?

MW: I've got it all hooked up for propane. I got a kerosene heater and I got a coal and wood heater in there.

EA: Well, then, you shouldn't suffer from cold this winter.

MW: No, I shouldn't. Folks, anything you want to do around here, go right ahead and do it. I'm glad I met you folks.

PF: Mr. Webb [?] thank you very much. We appreciate you letting us do this. It was nice to meet you.

So you feel that this was the barn where she skinned the snakes and had the early photos of the skinned snakes taken.

EA: Yes, I know it's the place and I'm sure that's the old barn. What's left of it.

PF: I'm going to snap a photo or two of it, and then I guess we'll be on our way.

EA: This is the spot.

PF: We're now in the front yard of Mrs. Dowdy [?] a neighbor of Rattlesnake Kate's. The Dowdy's live about a quarter-mile east of Kate's place, on the north side of the road. You were about to tell me of Kate's story.

MD: Yes. Don and his brother, Jerry, were coming down the road this way. They saw her laying out by the side of the road. She'd had a stroke. Of course, they stopped went over to her. You know how she was. She said, "Don't bother me! I'll be all right." There was a red ant bed there. Then my daughter-in-law come along. She got all excited so she run and called the ambulance. Don and Jerry carried her into the house and she told them what pills to give her. So they gave her this pill. She laid there. The ambulance come and took her to Greeley. The stroke paralyzed her arm. She just stayed in the hospital that one night. She had fits all night long. The next day her niece come and got her out of the hospital and took her home. I thought, *I better run down and see how she is*. Here she was sitting and she had a long stocking with a flat iron in it. Tied around her hand. Her hand drawn up tight. She was pulling that iron up and down and up and down.

EA: That sounds like her.

MD: Of course, I didn't know she was mad about them taking her to the hospital. I was sitting there talking to her. Finally she said, "It would help if people just keep their nose out of my business." [All laugh] I thought, *Oh, oh! I better be quiet.* She didn't appreciate that fact at all. But, you know, if they hadn't come along. She was right by this red ant hill. It was quite an experience. But, you know, she came right out of it. She did; she pulled that hand back out.

PF: Her own brand of therapy.

MD: I guess she was a nurse. Anyway, that's what she did. She kept [inaudible because of wind blowing across microphone]

PF: That's a great story.

EA: I didn't know too much about that story. I didn't know who helped her.

MD: It was Don and Jerry. She just wanted to be put in there on the bed and left alone.

EA: She didn't want to go to no hospital.

MD: Our neighbor just to the north here, he was in the hospital. He was just across the hall from her. Of course, he knew Kate well. He said that all that night long she gave the nurses fits. Probably the next day they were glad to see her go. Anyway, I'll never forget going down there and seeing that. Our youngest boy and that boy who used to live over here, Billy Naigle [?] they used to go down and visit her. She would tell stories. I think it was Tom Mix.

PF: She liked the dime novels and the Westerns.

MD: She used to be in his shows. At least, that's what she told the boys. Of course, I didn't know whether it was right or not, but they really loved to go hear her tell all these stories. They'd just sit there by the hour and listen to that.

EA: I know kids did.

PF: She was comfortable with children.

MD: After she was gone, Steve and Scully [?] went down there and they found a wine bottle about this high. It had 'Kate Slaughterback' wrote on it. They've still got that. We thought that was something to really keep.

She wanted a stove down here in this little old house. We was in the process of buying the place, but we hadn't bought it yet. Don said, "Now, Kate, I can't help you move that stove. It's not my land yet." She said that the man who owned this area here, his wife had gave it to her. We didn't know whether it was or wasn't, you know. Don said, "Well, I just can't do that, Kate, because it's not mine yet." You know she got mad and she cussed him. It just went on and on. I

can still hear Pastor Martin Daniel [?] saying, “My, oh, my, oh, my.” [All laugh] But he’d take her anywhere she wanted to go. He’d come and take her.

EA: Pastor Martin. That was his name.

PF: At the Four-Way Baptist Church.

MD: Yes. He’d take her. If she wanted some wine, he’d go take her.

EA: He must have been an awful good man. I didn’t know him too well.

MD: He’s still alive, but he’s in real bad shape. He’s over by Gilcrest [?]. He’s just wasting away. Some kind of [inaudible]; not sure what it could be. He hasn’t ever said, but he sure is in bad shape. Anyway, the next morning, Don was outside. Here she come through with – oh, they lived over here on the corner – what was their name? – clear over on the next road back. Her, and she had a couple others, they went down there and got the stove. It sit down there in the yard.