

ALBERT & ERMA PAZAR &  
ERNEST & VIRGINIA BELLOTTI  
12/13/79

SC: We are at the Pazar home at 316 Pinon Street. This is December 13, 1979. Maybe we will start with Mr. Pazar. When did your family first come to Huerfano County?

AP: They came here about 1907 or 1908. Because of the need for coal in the 1890's we had a lot of people from continental Europe migrate to this country. Usually they would allow only so many from their respective areas in Europe. Most of the people would come to Pennsylvania. Next people began to migrate to the West from Pennsylvania to Illinois and into Colorado. Many followed the coal mines. On our arrival in Huerfano County, we found many small coal mines, dry land homesteads and small irrigated farms. The government gave mineral rights on the 160's acre homesteads when they first started homesteading. You were allowed to take up a homestead it was 160 acres, you got the mineral rights, then as I remember sometime around 1910, or '12 the Federal government reserved the mineral rights but in lieu of the mineral rights they gave you an additional 160 acres, making the homestead 320 acres. A lot of people from Kansas and Oklahoma settled around the Rattle-Snake Buttes East of Walsenburg, taking out the usual homesteads. The area was quite a thriving community, they raised pinto beans, small grains and shipped out of Walsenburg between 50 and 100 carloads during a good season. The Rattle Snake Buttes had a general merchandise store, A Mr. Shell and family from Kansas used to run it. The area prospered for about 5 years or so, then began to go down hill quite rapidly.

EB: What was the name of the town down there? Cuchara?

AP: That was after Cuchara. Cuchara was before Walsenburg. Walsenburg developed with some of the farmers from Oklahoma and Kansas coming in, the coal miners and many of the early settlers who were already here. Many of our homesteads were located around the foothills, too. I think your folks had a homestead, did they not?

EP: We had a homestead up in Bear Creek. 160 acres, no mineral rights.

AP: Yes, our folks did the same thing, around 1913, '14. One of the families that had a 160 acres homestead thought that he was getting the mineral rights but it was just in that period when it changed. They found out they didn't have the mineral rights and that was up around Pictou where they have a lot of coal. They gave it up and our folks took that 160 acres. They couldn't find another 160 acres to have 320, so they just took the 160 acres. After we got out of school, we had to move up to the homestead and stay there till school started. We had to do that for three consecutive years. Then you proved up on the land and they gave you a deed to it. Our folks did that. After several years they sold the homestead and moved to Walsenburg, that's the story of the homestead.

Previous to 1912, my parents and my mother's parents bought a little irrigated ranch down on the Cucharas river East of Walsenburg. They thought they could grow vegetables and alfalfa and crops of that kind but there were two families and the price of vegetables was awful low and the price of cattle came down and there was not enough to support two families. My dad went back to the mines and sold his half of that ranch to a Mr. Crump. That's what's now known as a part of the Corsintino ranch East of Walsenburg. The original owner, Paul Wayt's dad, homesteaded this ranch. The Wayt people moved to Walsenburg and started a lumber yard.

EP: Did they have that lumber yard back there where you have your store?

AP: Yes, down below it. They had the lumber yard where the 1913 tent colony was. They had a part of that space where the housing project is now, it was known as the 1913 strike tent colony. People come out on strike and didn't have any place to stay. They had to leave the mining camp premises and there were no vacant homes in town so the union got a lot of tents in and put them up. The first year, the winter was bad. We had a big snowfall and people were in tents. They suffered from the cold. Snow, wind and a bad winter.

After the strike Walsenburg grew just a little faster and the pace became a little faster. Coal became the predominant fuel for the people that were scattered around. You could always get work at the coal mines. Here in Walsenburg we had

25 or 30 little what they call ma and pa stores. We had a couple of wholesale houses. Then the camps, there were at least 10 or 15, starting down toward Aguilar up toward La Veta and out towards Pictou and Gardner. It was a fine area. A lot of good stories were told about the mines with their camp stores. During this time everyone in business, wanted to hold that business for themselves. They did not want anybody to encroach on their assumed trade area. The mining companies with their stores had strict rules where you had to trade with the camp store, otherwise you would jeopardize your job and company house.

EB: They insisted that you shop at those stores.

AP: Oh, yes. But I don't know, the mines are like our trials today with the Iranians. We're trying to make everybody see our way and those poor people over there are trying to make us see their side and it's one of those things where you just have to try to get along with people rather than overcome them. Try to overcome them and you'll have trouble. That's where you got into your strikes and battles with the coal companies and the unions. People in between didn't have much to do with solving the situation, but they suffered right along. Then of course 1914, '16, something like that, first World War started and a lot of the young people got killed, that kind of changed things. Next a building up period where the coal mines were working and most of the homes, trains, office buildings and factories used coal for fuel. I remember when we were in Chicago for the World Series ball games. We visited some people we knew. The Bulavsky's who had a dairy while living in Walsenburg. On our way back from the ball games we noticed deliveries of coal in canvas bags, delivered in the morning to the door steps. The canvas bags had a couple of nice handles on them. The owner would come out in the morning and get his fuel. It looked odd to us. Coal to us, you'd go out and pick it on the dumps or get it any way you could and we didn't think it very valuable. The city people needed the coal for heat and they had it in a nice canvas bag. To them it was valuable and costly.

I don't know if you remember, Ginger or Ernest, we used to feed our horses oats

in a bag, somewhat like this, it was strapped over their heads. The coal bags looked somewhat like the horse feed bags.

VB: I can remember.

AP: The purpose of that was so they wouldn't loose any of the valuable grain. They would put a strap up over the ears and leave some room so he'd have a little air.

The people that use coal, say the hat is a little bit better, it holds longer. We still use coal in our house and many people in town do the same. You know right in the middle of the coal belt area we have a hard time getting coal. Until just recently there have been developed a few open pit mines.

EB: Even the open pit mines you have to go down to get it because nobody will haul it. If you don't have a way to haul it you have a hard time to get coal.

AP: That's right. We paid \$60 per ton for the last load with the tax that's \$63 per ton. We bought the same coal for \$1.50 a ton some 25 years ago. We wouldn't even use some of the coal that they sell us now, it was put on what we called dumps. To show how that one thing alone has multiplied from \$1.50 to \$60, that's 40 times. Inflation is the term now used. Allover things are up, perhaps in different ways.

EP: Yes, miner's wages.

AP: Miners used to work for about \$1.80 a day and they would work anywhere from 12 to 16 hours a day, this included work on Sunday. In fact they would go to work in the dark and come home in the dark 7 days a week. In 1912 Wilson signed into law the 8 hour work day.

EB: And if the dad had a kid he'd bring a kid along.

AP: Yes, he'd take one of the boys into the mine with him just to help. Without any safety precautions and I know one or two instances where kids got hurt, with dire circumstances to burden the families.

The First World War over and lots of troubles around '29 and '30. About what we're experiencing now. People spent too much money or they didn't spend enough, it's questionable. We got into the 1929-1932 depression. Next the

Second World War. People thought that was a salvation but whether that cleared things or not is a question again, because we're in the same boat we were in the two previous times. I think it's all a matter of too few people getting hold of most of the wealth and having trouble moving it around where everybody can participate. We know some of it is illegal like the Shah of Iran and the oil and the Iranian people.

EP: That's not on the topic.

AP: But it's the truth. Illustrating the point. Instead of using wealth for the good of the whole, one or two people get hold of it or their families do and the whole populace have trouble getting enough to eat. That's what happened, in '32 and after World War II, most of us came back and found there was a new system of merchandising by chain stores. Walsenburg had 25 or 35 little stores, the ma and pa stores. With the chains coming in, one by one the little ma and pa stores liquidated. The final one was Mr. Ernie here. Now there's only one left. The chains say it's for the better but I sometimes question that. I don't know if it's better or not. They had 35 little stores, say, five in the family, that's 175 people. Now the Safeway, how many would it employ? Perhaps 15 to 20 at the most.

EB: Well, down here, I guess I was the last one to quit, but I was still making a good living when I quit my store, but it got where they were breaking in very often.

AP: See, Ernie, that's an indication of the conditions of the country. People breaking in and robbing, and they robbed him, what, two or three times a year..

EB: More than that. Go home and get in bed and two o'clock in the morning the police would call and say, "Come up here. Board up your windows." One time they come in there and they had a gun in my face, and Minnies. So I said, "Well, one of these days one of us will get killed." I think if it wouldn't be for all that robbing and hold-ups and stuff, I would have stuck it out a little longer.

VB: How long did your folks operate the store, how many years.

EB: I think it started in 1922.

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EB: When they started that store I was only 6 year old or so and I'd go in to sweep up, get a candy bar or two and go on.

EP: That was on 7th Street at the time, next to the Silver Dollar.

EB: Then it got where every time there wasn't any school, I had to go work in the store.

SC: Where was the store located when you ran it?

EB: The first store, I think until World War II, was on 116 W. 7th. And then we moved down to 721 Main. It's still there. Near the theatre. The way I'm going I'll have to open it again but I sure don't want to.

AP: Lot of hard work, to have somebody come in and stick a gun in your face and take it away from you.

EB: The only way you could really go in the store in my opinion, is by giving credit. And some of them people could get pretty nasty. You know, if you put this in Believe It or Not... this is an actual fact. This guy drove up in front of my store one day and he owed me an older grocery bill. His boy come in and and I said, "What's you dad doing out there?" He says, "Ah, he's just waiting." I said, "Why don't he come in?" He said, "He don't want to come in." So I walked out and said, "Why don't you come in for a minute?" "Well," he says, "I ain't got nothing to do in there." I says, "Maybe you could think about paying something on your bill." He said, "Are you crazy?" (Laughter)

AP: Yeah, we had these little grocery stores around here and of course we had shoe stores and hardware stores and they'd say, well, we'll give this fellow credit and he wouldn't pay and now we see him coming down the street and he sees us and first thing he does, he scoots over the other side so we won't meet. That's where the chain stores have the better system. They get cast. The little merchant, sells on credit and at the end of the year he had to write off a whole lot, and he thought he was making money but he never did have any.

EB: He had the better system, obviously. You know, these little stores....

AP: They helped the country though.

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EB: You know, every month there was quite a few people we used to help.

EP: Well, there was a lot of people, too, that just didn't have the money they needed to pay. They would really get stuck, too.

AP: But by the same token, you got stuck with a lot of them and lost out. It was the country coming up, just like a family coming up. Were you going to ask some questions?

SC: Well, this is very interesting, this is fine. I can ask questions if we are slowing down, but so far you haven't needed much prompting. But to talk about the store and this whole business thing a bit more while we are on the topic. Thinking about the strikes here, did your family have the store during the 1913 strike or was it after that?

EB: Ours was after that. Maybe you were in business?

AP: No...

SC: I believe you were mining and homesteading during that period. And your store started after that. It would have been happening during the Wobblie Strike. Cause that was a time when there was a need for credit.

EB: That was my brother and brother-in-law during that time. I do think they lost some money in the Wobblie Strike, though. I remember the strike. I used to sell their paper. They used to have a meeting down in the hall owned by Cliff Brice. Polish Hall they used to call it. I went in there and they gave me... they had a newspaper so they gave me a bunch of these newspapers and I took all the papers and they let me keep all the money.

AP: They wanted circulation.

EB: I was young then.

SC: When was that?

EP: Wasn't that '22?

AP: Yeah. But I've heard several versions on that. I don't know whether you

have, but you know John L. Lewis' wife was a very well educated woman. And what education John got she gave it to him. And I think Jack Anderson commented on this several times, that while the oil companies were coming in and the gas lines were coming in, John L. and his wife was buying oil and gas stocks, and telling the people to have the strikes, and when he died his portfolio of securities was very high in oil and gas stocks. But of course there they just used their ingenuity in making money and whether it was wrong or right is up to you to determine. That's the way it was done and that's the way it's still done. The boy that carried the flag during the Wobblie Strike, went to the Hill School with us.

AP: Is that a cartridge already?

SC: Just one side. So you were talking about the planes..

VB: Yes, seems like to me when I was a kid there used to be those little planes flying over, one engine and two wing airplanes.

EP: They come up after the First World War.

VB: But I mean during that strike, didn't they fly around down here?

AP: Probably did, probably did. I don't recall.

EP: Was that a miner's strike?

AP: IWW, Industrial Workers of the World, and they coined a phrase, "I Won't Work." The Industrial Workers of the World, they were trying to further the rights and gain something that was beneficial to them but then the opposition come out and the Wobblies, they called them, they said it meant I Won't Work, I.W.W.

VB: That was just hearsay about the planes.

EB: I heard that strike was put in here so they could put in natural gas.

AP: That was the claim.

EB: That's when they put in the Texas natural gas lines to Colorado Springs.

AP: And at the steel mill.

EP: CF&I?

EB: See, at that time I think there was a law in the state, maybe it's still there, I don't know. If you had a building permit or something, it had to be heated with

coal. And then I think somebody was using gas heat in a private concern and they wanted to change to coal, it was kind of frowned on. But when they had the strike and there was no coal, they would say, listen, you want me to use coal. But I got to run my business, I'm going to do the best I can. I'm going to go to gas. You know, as far as I am concerned, that is all hearsay, but..

AP: I think a part of that is right. Because if you were in some related industry that had nothing to do with the strike, but commerce and things of that kind, and you weren't able to get anything to heat your houses, you were going to go to a person who could give you fuel. Gas is cleaner than coal and he could get immediate delivery, while the coal people were on strike.

EB: Now it's a complete turn around. Now the government wants everybody to use coal, at least they are talking that way.

AP: Gas is petering out, so they want us to conserve gas.

VB: How much was gas, do you remember? What was the amount of gas at the filling stations?

AP: I don't know, but..

EP: I mean, like gasoline if they used it for houses. Did they ever use gasoline for the houses?

EB: It was natural gas.

AP: It was comparable to coal in price and that's why it took over from coal. You could heat your home for a season for maybe \$50, \$60, for an entire season, and gas was the same, so the cost would probably be in the neighborhood of \$5 a month or something like that. They would sell you with the idea, which is right, that you didn't have to deal with the ashes, you didn't have coal dust, you didn't have to put up with all the smoke that the coal made. It was better, that's why it went ahead and coal went backward. That is why we're in trouble now. And that's the world over. They all went to using gas and oil. Mr. Arab over there, he was sitting down and watching us and I saw a cartoon one time, several of 'em, and they were just watching, 30,40 million cars in the United States and pretty soon he

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says, "When we get to 100 million cars we're really in business.". Two or three of them got together and began to jack up the prices.

SC: Well, that is all certainly interesting and a pretty thorough discussion of the mining situation.

AP: There were a lot of sheep at one time here, too.

SC: Yes, on the homestead? Your father was a miner and you had the homestead when you were a boy. How old were you then?

AP: That was in '14, '15, '16, I was about 13 years old.

SC: So you were old enough to remember real well. Did your dad leave the mine because of the strike?

AP: Well, when they called the strike all the miners went out on strike and we were living at Ideal. That's just 6 or 8 miles from here. And we moved from there into town, and my mother.. John was about to be born, he was born during the strike, so my dad with one of the other miners, rented a home. That cement block home, back of where the Josephs live. They rented that home. We lived there. After the strike they moved out to Pictou here, Toltec and Pictou, and we were in the war they had, the strike war. The line of demarcation, no man's land, was the ridge here, the Hogback.

SC: So you were in Toltec area during the strike, on the other side of the dividing line.

AP: We didn't know what was going on, but here they come, I think from Illinois, with a bunch of guns and they were handing these guns out. You know how kids are, we were eyeing those guns and over on the other side of the dividing line were the State Militia and they had their guns. They were getting ready for this big old war and when they started it was like a real war. For several weeks I think.

EP: We were at Rouse during the 1913 strike and we owned our own home there in the camp. My dad came out on strike and so they told him he would have to work or leave the camp. Mother said, "I own my property here and I want to stay here." But they said, "All right you can stay here, but don't leave your premises. So

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we left Rouse and moved.. remember that wagon with the horses? Three feet or four feet of snow. And we went to Bear Creek, 14 miles away. We had to walk and we pushed, it was the covered wagon days all over. We got up to the ranch and stayed there.

AP: Did your folks homestead that, too, or did you buy it?

EP: When we moved to the ranch, the Brunelli's place, we were working his farm. And we lived and worked half and half. Then we homesteaded, 160 acres, across the river. Ernest was born on that homestead.

AP: It took three years. You'd have to go up there during the summer and school was out and live there, actually live there for three months, but in the meantime, your dad was probably working in the mines and he'd commute.

EP: That was right. We lived on the ranch and as soon as the strike was over my dad went back to the mine.

AP: That was the 1913 strike, before the Wobblie Strike.

EP: Then he went back to Rouse, later he got a job at Mutual. Every weekend he walked home and we'd go up to the top of the hill and watch for him to come home and he always brought us candy. We were glad see my dad, but we knew he'd have the candy.

EB: In 1919 we bought a house at 320 W. Seventh Street, and one day there was a magazine writer came to town and he was looking for.. he knew that Ford lived in Walsenburg, that was the man that shot Jessie James. So when he finished going through all the records at the court house he found out that was the house that my dad bought was the house that Ford lived in. We looked back in the deed and he was right.

AP: But that was the original house. He had built that, didn't he?

EB: I don't think he built it. I don't know that.

AP: But he lived there.

Yeah, it was a common thing, people like their dad, would walk from their ranch down to Mutual to work and then back home after work. We commuted from Toltec

and Pictou, to Walsenburg. First high school.. we didn't have a high school. National Guard was here and they had an armory and high school was in the armory, right across from where the E and S depot, little apartments are there now. Then the armory burned down and they had to build a high school. Talk about athletics, the only athletic field we had was.. you know where Main Street is, the tracks there, we used to play ball there, a little football, and we used to knock the ball from Main Street and catch it on the railroad tracks.

SC: So how was it on the homestead? You must remember that pretty clearly, the time when the family had the homestead. Would you be building in the summers?

AP: Yes, they had a little house that the previous person had, a sort of one room affair. And there were five of us, my mother and my brother and sister, and dad. We had to put on a couple of extra rooms and built those ourselves. Took logs, logs off of the farm. After a year or two had a fairly decent home there. Then we would have to till so much of the soil, plow so many acres. Had to have some horses, horses and a plow. Plant beans and corn and some small grain. And in the fall I was going to school but during the weekends had to go up and harvest. Had a few cows, a few horses, few chickens, a few hogs. But it was all just a regular farming affair. Dry land and nothing but a spring for water. Spring on each of the places, and that was one of the things with homesteading, to get water. Had a garden. It wasn't too bad, squash and pumpkins. Cows for milk. Used to milk cows all the time. And make butter and cheese. And had chickens for eggs. Every once in a while you'd kill a pig or butcher a steer. Most of the homesteaders were like that. Many would come in to the stores and sell beans, corn, things of that kind. Some would bring in butter, cattle, pigs, and chickens and eggs. At one time, thinking about this, I was working at one of the stores about 1919, I guess it was, and on a weekend we'd buy as many as 50 cases of eggs, 30 dozen each. During the week we would candle the eggs and have them ready to sell the next week.

SC: How did you come to be in the wholesale food business?

AP: We were working for the Sporleder Selling Co. A wholesale Grocery and Livestock

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Feed Firm. They decided to sell and divide the firm. My brother and I bought the Wholesale Grocery part and joined the Associated Grocers, this is our present source of supplies.

EB: Maybe it seems like a lot of eggs to you, but I understand between La Animas County and Huerfano County, that's Walsenburg, and Trinidad, there used to be between 17,000 and 18,000 miners here, see. Now I think in Huerfano County there are none, I don't know about Trinidad. Maybe 500. But at that time there were camps almost, well, half as big as Walsenburg. Rouse and Lester.. They were big size camps. There was Alamo out there near Gardner and also Tioga.

AP: Pictou, Gordon.

EB: They called them camps, but they were actually little towns.

AP: Did you teach out there, Erma? You taught out at Tioga, didn't you?

EP: At Rouse they had...

AP: You taught out there at Tioga didn't you or somewhere? You had about 100, 150 homes out there.

SC: You taught here a long time, Mrs. Pazar, didn't you? Where were some of the places you taught?

EP: I graduated from high school in '25. I graduated in May and by September I was teaching. I went to the Institute in Trinidad for four weeks, that's all. So it took a lot of nerve to walk into a classroom, but when you're 18 you have a lot more nerve. I taught 8 years in different country schools. Bear Creek, Santa Clara. Eight years in the country. La Veta, then I went to Alamo and I taught 2 or 3 years there. Then the mine closed. Then I came into town, I think it was '34 when I came into Walsenburg. I taught until 1944 and then I went to the treasures office. Then in '47 I became the county treasurer. I was relected in '51 and that year Albert and I were married and I resigned because he wanted me to stay home. The following year I went back to school. I took an overload of second graders. Mr. Chase called and asked, "Would you help us out in second grade: for this year?" I went in to help out that second grade and I stayed 20 years. I

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retired in '72.

AP: Now she makes more money than I ever did.

EP: When I first started teaching we taught for \$75 a month. We had to do our janitor work..

AP: Haul coal.

EP: Chop our wood. Get there early in the morning and start the fire.

AP: Wash the desks.

EP: I lived 2 or 3 miles away from the school and walked. I taught from first through 8th grades. One room country school. Times have changed.

VB: I think she's one of the best grade school teachers we ever had in our county.

EP: You're prejudiced.

VB: No, I'm not.

EP: I enjoyed my teaching.

EB: Sister-in-law. She'd have to say that.

VB: No, I knew her before I ever married her brother.

SC: What was your maiden name, Mrs. Bellotti?

VB: Summers.

SC: And when did your family come to this county?

VB: Oh, as far as I know my family were here all the time. (Laughter)

AP: Your dad and his brother managed the Walsenburg Mercantile, down there for a good many years.

VB: I don't know how many years. It was quite a while. I think until 1928. I don't know when they started. My mother died in 1928, and we moved to La Veta. So we lived at La Veta for about 4 years. Then my dad moved back here. He was an accountant here. He and his brother had an accounting firm. My twin brother is an accountant here.

AP: You had some farming experience.

VB: Oh, yes. Up in La Veta, that's how I know about Emma. She was teaching up there when I lived up there. I went to the La Veta Public school. We walked to

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school, too. 3½ miles every day.

EB: Your ranch had the Indian graves.

VB: Yeah and the Indian signs in the rocks up there.

SC: Was that up around La Veta?

VB: That was in the Huajatolla Canyon. That's just a little above La Veta. They had a little school there.

EP: I think I had 6 pupils that year in Huajatolla. Bear Creek seemed to be my home. Well, we lived there. And I liked it there.

SC: Do you have memories of when you were living in Bear Creek?

EP: When we moved from Rouse to Bear Creek we moved to the Brunelli Ranch for a while and then we homesteaded. But we lived right on our land. We went to the Bear Creek school.

When I was in 7th grade we moved to Walsenburg, in 1919, then I went to St. Mary's school here until I graduated. J

SC: How do you think it is different for kids growing up now from kids growing up then?

EP: We didn't have so much at that time. Especially out on the farm.

AP: Had a lot of chores. We were always occupied. And especially when you had a little farm like that, had to go get the cows, milk the cows, gather the eggs, chop wood. Kids don't even know about that now, they have no idea what it's all about.

EP: I think the family was really closer knit myself.

EB: I think the biggest thing I know of, when I was a kid I could get up and go in any direction and hunt, go any direction and fish and kids can't do that now. I used to be able to walk any place in town and not to worry about anybody bothering me and if somebody saw I was in trouble they would help me. I don't think kids have that chance now. Somebody might hurt them.

EP: I think it's harder for children now. There's just too much. Lifestyle is so changed. At one time families were closer together.

VB: People visited more. They didn't have entertainment. At one time people

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people were closer because they just didn't have all this stuff. You had to wash clothes by hand and you had to iron with the old iron. I used to iron with those old irons that you take from one handle to another.

AP: Hot irons?

VB: Yeah, hot irons with the old wooden handles. And I think people were more helpful. They helped each other.

EB: You know you had to do something, you'd do it.

AP: You used to have to get up at night and go outside to old johnny.

EB: You had to work. Now they don't feel that way, looks like to me.

AP: We've become dependent on somebody helping us out all the time. If they didn't help us out I don't know how we'd get along. I don't know how to resolve that. That's the 64 dollar question.