

Yvette Williams
125 East Field
La Veta, Colorado
August 2, 1979

I cook with coal. I use my stove maybe once a week in the summer when I do real cooking. In between I use an electric hotplate.

I came here in 1928 from the San Luis Valley. My mother and father came to the San Luis Valley to file on government land. They came to Monte Vista first. They decided the land business wasn't for them. My father was a railroad man. He worked for the D&RG here in La Veta. He had worked for the Rock Island Line. I came here in the 6th grade. I graduated from high school in Alamosa. We lived in Creede for three delightful summers. We lived in Chama, New Mexico, and Tres Piedres, New Mexico. My father was sure that La Veta would be where he would stay. He retired here. My Mother was the happiest when she could finally have her own home here instead of having the railroad supply her quarters.

My family came to the San Luis Valley in 1907 from Iowa where my father had worked on the railroad. He had a farm background. The land always attracted him. My mother's folks had homesteaded in the 1800's in Iowa. I started school the year after we moved to the San Luis Valley. I started in Alamosa. There were seven in my class. They had the high school on the top floor, and the grade school below. That building forms the core of the central grade school still.

We were a railroad family. My father was a station agent. Our living quarters were furnished by the railroad in most cases, although not in Alamosa. In Chama, New Mexico our living quarters were in the depot. I was grown and teaching by then. Mom waited until summer to move in. She didn't. have the heart to go at the rooms without help. We painted, scrubbed and did everything. They were nice by the time they were done. I was teaching then in San Luis. I was just out of high school. I taught one year. The next year I went to summer school in Greeley. I taught in Alamosa the next year. Imagine a town like that hiring a green teacher. I wasn't very good. I taught the next year in Chama.

Yvette Williams

Page 2

Chama was smaller. All this time I went to summer school. I had a two year certificate the time I taught in Chama in 1919. That was the year of the flu epidemic. We had weeks of no school. In 1919 in the summer I visited a cousin in Omaha, Nebraska who had recently married and was betting a baby that coming winter. She wanted me stay. I got a job in September 1919 and stayed the rest of my life until I retired in 1958. All those years I was going to school. I never could take classes and teach at the same time. I never wanted to go to summer school because I wanted to come home to La Veta. I came home for Christmas. My brother and his family lived here. It was the most natural thing in the world to retire here because La Veta meant so much to me. Grace Penne was one of the first women I knew here. We still play cards together. Edith Firm (Water's wife who died) was a girl together with me. She worked for my father in several places as telegrapher. Pansy Coleman is an old settler who played cards all through the years. Pansy had the drug store, and it was a different place. It was open early in the morning until midnight, The trains met in La Veta around midnight. You could mail letters until midnight. Lou took the mail to the depot. The depot would be humming. There was a Roundhouse where the trains would turn around.

This was all before the automobile wrecked La Beta. That changed the face of our country. The railroad died out because of trucking. I can see how convenient trucks are because they load at your door. You have to pick up at the depot on trains. I think the railroads may come back. There are trains two times a day now. If the energy question gets tough enough, it will be economic to tack on another car or two for goods and even people. Now the government encourages automobiles and road improvements.

There used to be a train from Denver to Creede with a connection in Alamosa to Durango. It was a narrow gauge train, and that was how I travelled. When they discontinued service, they tapered off with a train to Pueblo. We

could go to Pueblo and back in the same day. Before that it used to be a two day trip, one day up and one day back.

Travelling to Creede used to be a delightful experience. It was very casual. They would let fishermen off along the way and would pick them up in the afternoon on the way back. Jo Anne Shade, a teacher, wrote an article on the old Chile line from Antonito to Santa Fee It also was a very casual affair.

I lived in La Veta during the depression years. We were never hurt by the depression because my father and myself had steady jobs. I remember summers when daily men would come to the door for food. The park used to be a hobo jungle. It used to be called Hobo Park. On their way to try and find a place to work they would stop off there.

The depression didn't seem to affect La Veta too much. The railroaders had steady jobs. The agricultural people didn't feel it too much. It didn't matter much to them because they could grow their own food and always had enough to eat. It is sad that the farm families have disappeared. There used to be so many little ranches. Now there are just big ranches. I am so glad that the big ranches have gone to people who are keeping big spreads and keeping on ranching. It would be a shame if it got cut up and developed from here to Cuchara.

Harry Willis is having to conform. He learned to. John Albright has searched very hard for good people to buy the local ranches as they have come up for sale.

To actually see water in the Rio Grande River in the San Luis Valley was wonderful this year. It was like that when I was a child. There used to be artesian wells all over the valley. Now they have to dig for water. There used to be more water in the San Luis Valley. The water table has undoubtedly lowered.

Coors used to have contracts with the farmers for thier barley. They would contract whole fields. Parts of the San Luis Valley are wonderful farm lands. They grow potatoes, peas and grains. A couple of summers ago Mrs. took me to Del Norte. I wanted to find the record of what land my parents had filed on. But I discovered no records were kept until people actually owned the land. So there is no way to know if that land was desert of good agricultural land. That was Rio Grande County.

Schools were very structured when I started teaching. I was right out of high school when I started teaching. I went to the Institute in Del Norte before I started teaching in San Luis. It was an interesting experience. A few teachers came from Colorado Normal School in Greeley. Teachers from all around the county came and got new ideas about teaching. All through my years of teaching education has become less structured and has recognized individual needs more and brought education down to the community more. Gradually an emphasis on music and art has come about. The schools are using resources in the community for education. In Omaha where I taught we took children on field trips to museums, etc. The first graders go on field trips to the grocery stores. Field trips have gradually come, and it is so good to have those opportunities for the students.

Denver has grown so much. Downtown Denver has maintained itself because the large downtown apartments and the popular stores are intact

La Veta has had quite a controversy about its zoning ordinance. We are having some good influences in La Veta. One man owns land that can be residential, but he won't sell it unless he knows what people will do with it. Harry Willis has learned there is more money in quality than in the cheap stuff. He is going to have a new development south of La Veta, and he is doing just what the zoning ordinance would have required. We have a good planning commission, and that is really important.

When we had our meeting to decide what we wanted in our zoning ordinance, one of the main things that stood out. was to keep a small town atmosphere. As long as La Veta maintains its present borders, it can never be very big.

East of town where the dome is and Harry's little development are small suburbs. They have to pay attention to county regulations. I was so pleased when Panadero fell through. The economics of that could have wiped out this town. Manufacturing snow the way they wanted to would take a lot of energy. I hope we have heard the end of that. There are homes up Baker Creek now. I don't know if they were looking forward to the ski area or not when they built them. None of those places are less than half an acre. The Spanish Peaks development went in before some of the regulations. If Jack Britton were really concerned about his area, we would call off further sales or combine his lots.

Some people are leasing government land, and that's not right. It's not as bad here as it is in the southwest. You can't have an unlimited number of people. So far La Veta is on the down side instead of the up side in terms of growth and population. People are coming in and not making it here in businesses. The Boxwells had to leave and the Budds have closed their shop. They had the antique store on Main Street. They had an auction, and now they are still operating out of their home.

The Indians were completely out of this area when we came. In the San Luis Valley the Spanish situation was different. There were not as many Spanish children in school then as there are now. I went to school with two Spanish boys, Manual and Carlos Sanchez. Their father was a Presbyterian minister. They went to Alamosa to high school. I ran into Manual in Denver. He was a postal clerk in the Danials and Fishers Store. Eilleen Padilla here is a Sanchez. She is a protestant also and is a cousin of those boys. Pueblo is their home base.

I remember when the La Veta Catholic Church was erected. There were fellows in the road to the north of the church making adobes. Everybody wasn't happy about the building of that church because of the cost. It took more money than they felt they could afford. Now they are happy to have it.

St. Anne's Guild used to be quite a force, and it's becoming so again. Arlene Smirch is the force behind it together with the new families. Kate Gross always carried on with the children. She always had children in her home for Monday afternoon catechism. Arlene came five years ago and took over where her aunt left off.

The Presbyterian Church was thriving when we came. My nephews went to Sunday School there. That first year they had a Christmas program there. They had a Christmas tree, and the children said their peices. It dwindled bit by bit and was finally sold to the Historical Society. I'm glad it sold to them. They will maintain the sanctuary as an example of a small town church. Mrs. Carrie Hamilton was the last hold out of that church. She used to clean it, build the fire, etc. for Sunday School. The last funeral they had there was Mrs. Lawrence Kreutzer, Mrs. Hamilton's husband's sister. Nothing was being done, so Mrs. Hamilton went and cleaned it herself. It was upsetting to see the weeds and the lawn unmowed. Now it is mowed regularly. Louis and Erma Chavez live in their house next door now, and they have kept it up through the years, and they will keep it up now. They say, "We'll never let that piece of ground go as long as we live even though we are the last private residence on that side of the street."

The place where Pinos live is for sale now. It is sad to see mobile homes come in on that street. I don't know Shalcrafts personally. It would be nice to see that place be turned into duplexes or fourplexes or a Senior Citizens Complex. It is so pretty, there and there are such lovely trees there. From Pete Baiones to Oak Street would be lovely for a Senior Citizens Center or

Complex.

All of us who have a real feeling for La Veta want to look after it and keep bad things from happening to it.

North of Cleo Harry Willis has land. It is a real bird sanctuary. I'd hate to see that sold to just anybody. Maybe the Nature Conservancy could be of help in preserving that area.

One of the town mysteries is how one of three town lots became private land. There was an old time barn on that property that was torn down. Andy Grey owns it now. Clyde Walls sold it Geiser who sold it Grey. Wells was a railroad man, and he owned that space. Both the train station and the lumber yard rent that land. There is land back of the tin barn where Goemmers have their barn. I don't know if that is private or not and if they pay rent on it.

It is important to the town what is built on that corner. The lumber yard is a good place for commercial enterprises. The railroad is evidently willing to rent to commercial enterprises. It would be nice to have something nice go in on that corner. It would be a good place for a market. The trains could haul in their goods if the trains came back. I really don't see a new market coming in in the near future because of Charlie's in La Veta and Safeway in Walsenburg.

One concern of the people interested in zoning is more trailer courts. Julian Tracy runs a good place. In his new place there he fulfilled all of the requirements on his own. Jack Bailey is putting some in by his place. I hope he'll do it properly. He has eaked out a living here. He has learned to be a cobbler and to do upholstering, and he is very good. I can't blame him for wanting to do something with the land he has. It is better to have a local person than someone who comes in and doesn't have much feeling for the place.

The Sanchez' property is the nearest thing to a slum we have. They moved a mobile home in when zoning was up for question. I have never complained because Mrs. Sanchez has a bath, a nice kitchen, etc. now. She lived without a lot for a long time. Ben Sanchez has a junk yard. I think that is fine, but I think he should build a fence around it. The Baldwins have a lot of junk by the lumber yard, and a fence would help that place. People were not too happy when the Youngs built a garage across from the Catholic Church, and that chain link fence doesn't look very nice. And the land by the drive-in should not be a trailer court.

There is valuable land on Oak Street that is a transient trailer court. But Eldon and Mary's friends wanted to have some way for them to earn a living, and she runs a lovely place, and help people come back year after year.

The Morgans on the way to Cuchara have had a feeling for the place. They never will let anything happen to the land along the river there. I guess their business has to have an awful mess.

The people who own land along the river have a conscience about it. Julian, Proctor Hayes, Praters, Ralph Hicks, and the Moores all have a feeling for their land. The upper end there is under water in the spring and can't be developed anyway. The zoning business will come up again sometime. It will be the new people's problem. Howard Moore has two local standing offers to buy his place.

From the moment I came to La Veta to live my big interest has been the Garden Club. The trees on Main Street used to be wonderful. They had been cut down on the west side of the street. The merchants worked with us and made such a big improvement. Milton Utt is still alive. He went in with the Garden Club to make the park nice. The Rotary Club helped immensely. It had been nothing but a weed patch for years. We reseeded all of that park land.

It had been a weed patch from 1928 until 1959. Mr. Utt was a wonderful Rotary Club member. The Garden Club helped out financially. Watering it was a tremendous project. The trees shaded the grass which was a big help.

Then the Garden Club undertook the museum wishing well with hollyhocks by it. I always feel so proud of the Garden Club when I pass that well. Then the Garden Club got the planters on Main Street. Their choice of plantings this year was not as good as it could be. Next year we'll put in more marigolds. Petunias are good also. We had geraniums this year. Another big Garden Club project was the painting of the station. That involved the whole community. The railroad provided the paint. The community did the painting. That was the best thing for La Veta. It was a sad old weather-beaten old building. Now it looks real chipper. In recent years the stores have really made their storefronts look good. Charlie's, the Mason's Hall and the shoe shop have all fixed up their fronts. When Leatta had the dress shop, she fixed it up so pretty. The insurance and real estate offices are all good. But down from Charlie's it still looks pretty bad. Harry Willis owns all of that. He lets the Gallery have their space free for cleaning it up. So it is much better to have someone in than to have those buildings vacant. Bub Keeling won't do anything with that old theater building. It is a real blemish and an eyesore on Main Street.

Trujillo came in with a Chinese couple. They put money down on those buildings when the last Panadero spurt came. I didn't know about his taste.

For a number of years the Garden Club has felt that the alley in back of Main Street from the park to the museum should be something special. It should be an attractive walkway. If someone who buys that property has that in mind, they can make as much money at their back door as at their front door.

The next big thing to happen will be when someone buys the lots opposite the park. Harry owns it now and has let it grow up in weeds. It used to be kept nice. The person who owned it then had good taste even if he was a rascal.

Harry owns that now, and he is learning that it is better to have something good rather than something cheap.

I felt that it was sad to make Cascade a regulation street for that one block there. They cut so many trees down. Harry owned the land on both sides. It could have been a nice little lane. I made him so mad that he stalked out of that meeting. Maybe that made an impression on him. He has done well since although he doesn't maintain anything.

The Pioneer Apartments could be made into something advantageous to La Veta. La Veta is very dear to my heart. I pay attention to every little old thing that happens here. Julian Tracy owns the stone barn and he won't let anything happen to it.

Hazel Bankson lets people know what is going on. It was good for La Veta for her to move here.

Dorothy Werner and Maude Coleman drew a true map of La Veta in the old days and who lived in every place. Maude moved to La Veta when she was twelve years old in 1900. I took the map in to a framer in Walsenburg to have it framed. The house next door here was built in the 1890's. It and the Danks house next door were the only two houses in the block.

Many people would say that Dorothy Werner lives pretty primitively now. But if you have talked to her, you know that she is living in the lap of luxury compared to how she lived as a young girl and as a young married woman. She is such a beautiful person, and is so gracious and lovely.

All of us my age remember using all the things in the museum: flat irons, washboards, etc. I can remember the first automobile I ever rode in and the first airplane I ever saw. I remember the first house I lived in with a toilet. We of this generation have lived through a revolution. There are places in the world where people live even more primitively than I lived as a child.

Yvette Williams
Page 11

I took a trip to South America. Now I believe there is a hope of them not having to live in industrialization. The sun may make it possible for them to live simply on a small scale in an agricultural society and not be slaves to the soil and be ground into the earth. The sun and wind will make it so people can live simply on a small scale. Getting masses of people into large cities is not the answer. The sun is an infinite resource, and the way of the future.