

**JAMES LUXNER.** Born 1937.

**Transcript of OH 1083V A.**

This interview was recorded on July 8, 2002, for the Maria Rogers Oral History Program under the auspices of the Carnegie Library for Local History, Boulder, Colorado. We are in the library. The interviewer is Shirley Steele who filmed and transcribed it.

**NOTE:** The interviewer's questions and comments appear in parentheses. Added material appears in brackets.

**ABSTRACT:** James Luxner lived in the Industrial Mining Camp and in Superior during his childhood. His father and grandfather were miners in Colorado; his father working in the Industrial Mine until it closed in 1945. James talks about his life as a child there and in Superior. He recalls the self-made fun the children had and the activities in town and how it compares to the Superior of today. He also comments briefly on the work of the Superior Historical Commission.

[A].

00:00 (This is a recording made for the Maria Rogers Oral History program and the person being interviewed is Jim Luxner. This is July the 8th, 2002. I am Shirley Steele . The purpose of the recording is to preserve some of the memories of people who lived in the Superior area and the Industrial Camp in the '30s. and early '40s. So we'll start with you Jim, and you can tell us how your dad got there.)

I believe my dad was born there. I wish I knew more about the history. I should have found out when I was young.

(What was his name?)

Charles, Charlie.

(So his parents lived there.)

Yes, Felix and Mary Luxner.

(Do you know where they came from?)

They came from the Austria/Poland region. I've been trying to pinpoint it but I can't find our home town. Everything just says Austria.

(Do you know the name of the hometown?)

No, I wish I could find it.

( And your grandfather was a miner?)

Yes. I believe he started out—he arrived here in 1890 from Austria, I guess, and then he worked in Leadville for a few years, and I know that he and Grandma Mary married in June of 1900 in Boulder. I have vague memories of them. I know they moved to Louisville—or Denver—to live with my dad's sister Bertha in their older years. That's about all I remember of grandma and grandpa.

(So when did they come to the Industrial Mine?)

I presume in 1900 when they were married here and probably working there.

(So do you know when your dad was born?)

January 1901. My mother was born in June of 1915.

(What was your mother's name?)

Helen.

(Do you know what her maiden name was?)

DeMinico. She was born in Louisville. In fact, I was born in the same room she was born in.

(So you really are pioneer families.)

Yeah. Her sister Mary Di Giacomo and her husband Jim had the house in Louisville, and it's still there. Nice house.

(So when your dad moved to the Industrial Mine Camp, you lived right in the camp?)

I understand after I was born that I might have lived in a duplex in Louisville for awhile, and then we moved to the coal camp, so that would probably have been late 1937 or 1938. Of course, I have no memories. I have vague memories of the mining camp. Walking down to the bathhouse, to meet daddy after work. He'd always have something in his lunch bucket. The mine—I had to move down into Superior when I was seven, which would have been '43 or '44, I think. The house I lived in actually was sitting by Coal Creek. But a flood in 1938 moved it off its foundation, and it was moved to its present location.

(Were you living there when the flood was—?)

I was in the camp. My grandma and grandpa were living in the house at the time.

(When were you born?)

July 21, 1937. So I'd have been a year old when the flood was. I have one sister, Janet, and two brothers, Micky and Bob. As for growing up in Superior I can just remember always having a good time. Keeping busy with the kids playing ball. At night time we'd go down under the street light and just fool around until my dad would whistle for me. Then I went home. Did a lot of fishing and hunting with Jackie Machin. Swimming, skiing up on the hill, ice skating down on the lake.

05:06 (What lake was it?)

That'd be about where Denny's [Restaurant] or something—they stores down in that area. I never thought I'd live long enough to see a stop light between Superior and Louisville. Now that's all there is. It's unreal. Kind of disappointing actually, but that's progress. I went to grade school in Superior, graduated in 1951 from there. Then I went to Louisville High School, graduated in 1955 in June, and then I went to the Marine Corps in June in 1955. In 1958 I had to get out of the service because my dad died, and I needed to help my mother and brothers.

Later that year I married my wife Jeanette who I met while I was in the Marine Corps. She's from—born in Port Angeles, Washington, but from the Wilmington, California area. We moved back to Denver—well, we eloped when we got married. We hopped in the car and come home. We got an apartment in Denver where I could be close to Mom and the boys. And I had a job for Henry and Boltoff [?] selling auto parts over the counter. We went out there every Sunday.

(Went out where?)

To Superior from Denver. This was in the days before the toll road was officially opened.

(Going back to your dad, do you remember what he did in the mine?)

I presume he just dug coal till they closed down. When they closed down, I know he went to work at the railroad in Denver, and then he worked at the Wilson Packing Company until he died in December 1957. So he kept busy. He did some cement work in Boulder too also. I remember coming up, and he'd go to work, and I'd go down to the kids' pond and fish. I think the fish pond is still there. Then when I was in high school, during football season I'd come up on Saturday morning and go to the Morgan's house—Bob Morgan—his mom and dad's house and then I'd go up on the radio and give a synopsis of the football game the night before. So I remember Boulder very well—Louisville and Superior—actually it's the old stomping ground.

(People in Superior were mostly—worked for the Rocky Mountain Fuel Company?)

Fuel Company—miners, yes—little bit of farming going on I think, not a lot. After the mine closed down—I really don't know, most of them did—they all had jobs. As to what they did, I don't have a clue.

(What did it look like in the mining camp? Do you remember?)

Well I've seen some pictures that people had from the old days. I can vaguely picture our house. I know it was up on the top row, on the south side going up the hill. Just buildings and the mine—the tipple and that.

(Where was the tipple in relation to your house?)

It would have been east. A little bit northeast. I can remember the slag dump on the south side of the mine, which is still there.

(Is it?)

Oh, yes.

(Have you been up there at all?)

I was there about three months ago. Actually walked around.

(What's it like there now?)

Just a few foundations, pipes, cement blocks where the hotel used to be and the bathhouse.

(What was the hotel?)

You know I don't remember the hotel. I've heard like Violet Bonelli and them people talk about it. But I don't remember the hotel. I remember the bathhouse. That's about it.

(What do you remember about that?)

Just walking down there to meet my dad.

(Did you ever go in it?)

Something in my mind says, yes, I did, but I don't know, I was only three or four years old.

(So what you remember must be Superior.)

Oh, yeah, Old Town Superior, I'm very familiar. I remember we had no stores except for Asti's gas station down on the highway to Louisville.

10:16 (So where did people get their groceries?)

Louisville. Or Boulder. We used to go to Ed Smith's, I can remember that. He had a grocery store, and after he shut down, we'd go to Thomas's.

(Where was that?)

Louisville. Both of them were. In fact, I used to work in Thomas's when I was in high school after school, delivering groceries. Stocking shelves.

(So what did kids in Superior do for entertainment? Besides hang out by the tree?)

By the tree, and like I said, ice skating in the winter—take a bunch of tires down and set them on fire. In the winter we'd walk up the hill south of down and ski down, walk back up. In the summer, hunt, fish, ride bikes. You know, just the kids stuff. Play baseball, football. I know it was a good time, I enjoyed it. I wish that times were as slow now as they were then.

(Is that why you see it as a good time, because it was slow?)

Everything didn't seem to be so hurried. You know today everybody is in a hurry to get somewhere.

(Do you have children?)

I have six children.

(I was wondering how their lives differed from yours, when they were kids that age.)

Well, they didn't have the freedom I had because we lived in Denver—you know with all the traffic and everything, there was a whole different aura to the situation you lived in. Where if I took off, I knew I had better be in range of my dad's whistle, cause he had a nice razor strap if I was a "bad boy." [Laughs]

(Were there "bad boys" in camp?)

Oh, ornery. I don't know of any bad boys. I remember the outhouse and the well we had, raising chicken, rabbits, bringing in coal out of the coal shed. Walking down to Grasso's with a bucket to get milk couple times a week.

(Grasso's was what?)

It was just a house. It had a cow or two, got the barn. In fact it's part of the preserved history of Old Town Superior now. It's right by the Town Hall.

(So you had chores to do as well?)

Oh yes, \_\_\_\_\_ responsible. I remember going to the Town Hall once or twice a week with Andy Symanski and Art Symanski and playing cards in the old Town Hall, which is no longer there, of course. The jail cell in there, the old hand pumper fire truck the guys would pull.

(Where was the old Town Hall in relation to the one they have now.)

West two blocks. It was two doors from my house. The school was across the street from my house.

(You didn't have to go very far.)

No, I used to struggle that distance every day. [chuckles] I can remember the nuns would come from south Boulder once a week for catechism for the Catholic kids.

(Was there a church there?)

Yes. St. Benedict's

(Is it still there?)

No, it's gone. I presume it was gone in the sixties or the early seventies. I remember serving mass there for Father Roberts and the other priest, I can't recall his name. My sister Janet was married there and my dad was buried from there.

(Was Superior bigger in those days than it is now?)

No. It was about the same—in fact, it was a little smaller. There is a little bit of new construction in Superior—not a lot, but—

(So the houses you see there now are mostly there when you were?)

Yes. My old house is still standing. Got some changes made, skylights and stuff. The old garage is still out there. Remember the car burned down in there one night when I was a young kid, I think it was a '31 Chevy, and there were the outhouse and having to dig a little hole for it—I can still picture that back yard—and a well.

15:23 (So you had well water?)

We did at that time. They didn't get running water in Superior until much, much later. I think it was the late seventies or eighties. I'm not sure. In fact sometimes we had to haul water from Louisville if the wells were dry or the pump was broke. The old dial telephone. The cellar.

(The houses had cellars then?)

Oh, yeah, everybody had a cellar to keep their canned food in. I'd imagine there was a lot of canning in those day.

(Do you recall at all how the Second World War affected Superior? You would have been kind

of young.)

No, as far as I know—I know of only one person that lost his life in World War II, and that was a Morrison boy—I think his name was Bob, I'm not sure. I can remember my cousin Billy was in the navy and my cousin Nancy was in the army, and they'd come to Superior sometimes on leave and see us when they came back to Denver to see their Mom. I don't remember much about World War II.

(How about school, what do you remember about that?)

Let's see, Mrs. James taught the first and second grade. Third, fourth, and fifth, I can remember Mrs. Steele, and then Mrs. Oerman [?] was seventh and eighth grade—or sixth, seventh, and eighth. When I graduated in 1951 there was—

(That would have been from eighth grade.)

Yes. In eighth grade, there was me and seven girls, I think—maybe just four, five. Mary Sekulich, Shirley Dempsey, Barbara West [?], Donna Scrifney [?]. I don't recall no other names.

(What happened to the boys?)

Which boys do you mean?

(That didn't graduate?)

Well, I imagine they either went to the service or went right to work. Or they moved out of town, of course, because there wasn't much for the dads to do, so they moved to Boulder somewhere or Denver to keep their lifestyle going.

(I guess what I was trying to say was you were not the only boy in class when you started first grade.)

Oh, no, I can remember a couple other kids but they moved out during the eight years I spent in elementary school.

(So the mine really changed the town—the mine closing.)

Yeah People had to go where the work was. What that was I don't know—construction and stuff in Boulder—I don't know what most of them did.

(What size classes did you have in school?)

Oh, very small. Probably less than 10 per grade. I'm sure there was only 5 when we graduated.

(There were a couple of grades in each room though?)

Two in Mrs. James' room, three in Mrs. Steele's room and three in Mrs. Oerman's room. Then I went over high school next four years. My whole life changed with the Marine Corps and getting married.

(Do you remember activities when in school?)

High school always in Louisville revolved around sports.

(Oh, yes.)

Of course they a lot of school dances.

(How about in Superior?)

I can remember the recesses and the playground, and we had one—they called the Big Building where they had their plays and the town dances and the outhouse was over in that area. [pause] But as for the school itself—I just remember going!

[Both chuckle] (That's the point of it.)

Yes.

20:22 (Were you ever in a play?)

Oh you had to be in a play. There wasn't enough kids to fill it up. They had to combine all the classes to get all the parts—especially at Christmas. I remember that was always the big play and the Saturday night dances my parents would go too. We just, I presume would go over there and stand around and watch what was going on.

(That would be a dance for the eighth graders?)

I don't remember any school dances, there probably was.

(So the Saturday night dances would have been put on by—?)

I don't have a clue. Probably the wives cooked all the food. Just a town function.

(What other town functions would there be?)

You know I can't remember anything that ever went on. No parades, I don't know of anything that went on—town get-together. I can remember the school picnics at the end of the year. [We'd] go to Eldorado Springs, I think, most of the time—when you could get up the canyon or we'd climb up to the railroad tunnels. I know we used to go to City Park sometimes for picnics with the school. The 4-H Club was there. I know they had a soft ball team and a soft ball field.

For excitement, you just found your own—ride bikes—whatever. Remember riding bikes to Boulder and all that stuff until they kicked us off the highway But I enjoyed that town.

(You make it sound very good.)

It was a good time.

(How do you see the changes that have occurred? Between Superior then and Superior now?)

Superior then was very small. Superior now: it's very big, very congested and one terrible amount of people. It's not a pretty sight to come over McCaslin to see all the houses. It's like a bunch of navy ships, everything is painted gray.

(You're talking about Rock Creek?)

Yeah, coming from the south side. Nah, it's a whole new ball game.

(Is that what the people in Old Superior mostly feel, do you think?)

Yeah, you have to want to go back to the slower time. You knew everybody, trusted everybody, left your doors open.

(What do you know about the Historical Commission?)

Well, I know it's a lot of fun. I joined two or three years ago, after I found out it was going. I enjoy going to the meetings and just hearing about the old days, mainly. They're doing good work in that deal. It's enjoyable. Especially, all these people bring these old pictures. Just the reminders.

(What's the goal for it eventually?)

They'd like to get some of the places put on a historical list—houses in town—Mayhoffer barn. Well, I don't know about the camp site. I think that's in Open Space. And the Old Superior Cemetery. They're working hard for historical recognition so no changes can be made.

(About how big is the Commission?)

Sometimes we have about 20 sometimes we have half a dozen. All depends on the time of year and what's going on.

(Is it always people who have lived there previously?)

No, there are some outsiders who are very interested. In fact some are more gung ho—walk the railroad bed and find old railroad stuff.

(You walked—)

Oh, I used to walk the railroad bed and go swimming. Down from the bathhouse when the Interurban ran from Denver to Boulder there was a cement bridge that had washed out sometime. We used to call it the Cements, because there was a big hole down in there to go swimming in. I can remember that, and west of that was all bush and everything—a lot of rabbits in there. I can always remember when we were in there we were always looking out for Mayhoffer on his horse cause we were going to have to run, because he'd chase us out.

(Why?)

I don't know. Just didn't want nobody trespassing. That's about all I can think of.

(I certainly appreciate your coming in—)

It was fun.

(—and remembering all of that. You painted a nice picture of a small town.)

Even my wife, who has been involved with Superior since 1958, she can't believe the changes we have to go through for progress. You just live with it.

(Well, thank you very much.)

It was a pleasure.

26:18 [End of Tape A. End of interview.]