



Gene and Maxine Flaharty

*“Boy they
worked ya, they
didn’t want no
sitting around!”*

*By
Betty Dawson
and
Eileen Riewe*

*“It wasn’t a laundry
mat then, it was a
commercial laundry.”*

“If you don’t work for what you’re worth, you won’t get anywhere in this world. That is what my parents always told me,” said Gene Flaharty, life time resident, and local laundry man. Gene has lived in the same house in this community for over forty years. He has a unique philosophy of today’s kids. He says that, “Kids are too free with each other today. In my day we knew how far to go before someone would come after us.”

twenties. Back then everybody helped everybody else. I believe it was different in those “wild” (pioneer) days. Today it’s too fast, and it costs too much.”

Gene went on with the story. “As a child we We (Eileen Riewe and Betty Dawson, friend and granddaughter of Gene and Maxine Flaharty) wanted to talk to them to find out more about their life. We wanted to know how Gene and his wife, Maxine, formed their opinions of today’s world. They started their story at the beginning. “We were both born during the

lived next door to the laundry. We gathered wood and collected eggs for the people who owned the laundry. We did it to get money to feed the horses. We had work horses that did some of the work around here in town. I also worked at the laundry and played on Crawford hill.

“I said when I grew up I was going to buy this land, (where the Flahartys live now) and build a home on it. It was a vacant lot then with all sage brush. We always played on the bank (on the hillside), and I always said I was going to own this land. I finally got a chance to do it, and I made only a dollar a day, not much more, when I bought this.”

Maxine added some memories of her childhood. “We had a big family, but we got along fine. I had three sisters and four brothers. We stuck together until my father died when I was in the fifth grade. My mother wasn’t able to take care of all of us, so we were moved to foster homes and got temporarily separated.”

Then we asked them about their dating years. Maxine replied, “I was about sixteen when I began dating. My foster parents never told me when I should be in, and I never took advantage of them. We had dances or maybe a sleigh ride. I lived in Oak Creek then, and it was a big mining town. Oak Creek was bigger than Steamboat, because it had all those stores, two drug stores, and one clothing store. We used to have a post office bigger than Steamboat. And I remember when Haybro was still a little town; it was right by the Edna mine.”



“When we were first married we didn't have a kitchen sink.”

We next asked Gene and Maxine how they met. “We met through Gene’s sister. She introduced us, and it was love at first sight. We got married on a Saturday night (Abraham Lincoln’s Birthday), and the only way we got the Justice of the Peace to marry us was because we knew him really well. It was just a small country wedding because we had to work the next Monday, we couldn’t go on a honey moon.

“We now have three kids, six grandchildren, and one new great grandchild.” Maxine told us, “I gave birth to all three of my children at home for less than the hospital bills cost for my new great granddaughter.”

Gene went on to say, “In those days I hired out for a dollar a day, not a dollar an hour. I spent only \$50 for this lot where my house is now, and I built the house for \$500. Then when I added on an extra room; it cost \$1,000. When I first built the house it didn’t have running water; it was a couple of years after we got married before we got running water. We dug the water line our-

selves, and the city came out and tapped it on to the house and charged us for it.”

Gene Flaharty has spent most of his adult life in the laundry business. We wanted him to talk to us about his experiences. He did everything from stocking the stokers to repairing the broken machines. He told us, “I started in the laundry business when I was fourteen. I managed the business with big washing machines that would do 50 pounds of laundry in one load, or 200 all at once. I had to load and unload the machines all day. Although they were bigger than the newer ones today, it took longer to move the clothes around.

“When I started out I was just a little ‘wig’ in the business, and by the time I had to leave 30 years later I did everything from shoveling coal, to putting in new washers and dryers. I literally ran the business for other people. During rough times I would boost the business by putting money into it to put it back together again. I worked hard, from five in the morning until six at night.

“Then when I finished I always went home and ate supper, and went and shoveled coal for apartment buildings, Dr. Willett, J.C. Penney’s, Nite’s Rest, The Pilot, the Yampa Motel, the Steamboat Garage, and all along in front of the bank. The shoveling job paid pretty well, about 10 to 20 dollars a month. I did that for thirty years.

“In 1944, I was making 25 cents an hour, and when I quit in 1972 I was making a dollar an hour. I remember making \$11.20 a week or 46.00 a month. By, they really worked us. They didn’t want us sitting around for our money.”

Then we asked Gene if he remembered the depression. “Oh yea, it wasn’t easy to find a job then. When I found the laundry job I stayed there. The times were hard, and I’ve seen houses rent for \$10.00 a month because times were tough.”

We asked Gene if he had any other job during those thirty years. “No, my hip wore out, and I had to have some operations. The first was July 4, 1962. I had the second one in August 1963. With my second operation I had to have a cast from my chest to my ankle. It was a long time before I could stand on my feet all day after that. By the time I went back to work the laundry had lost most of the business. I had to help build it back up. Then I finally had to quit work completely in 1972.”

“People used to come on trains to see the aspens. It only cost 70 cents to go to Craig.”



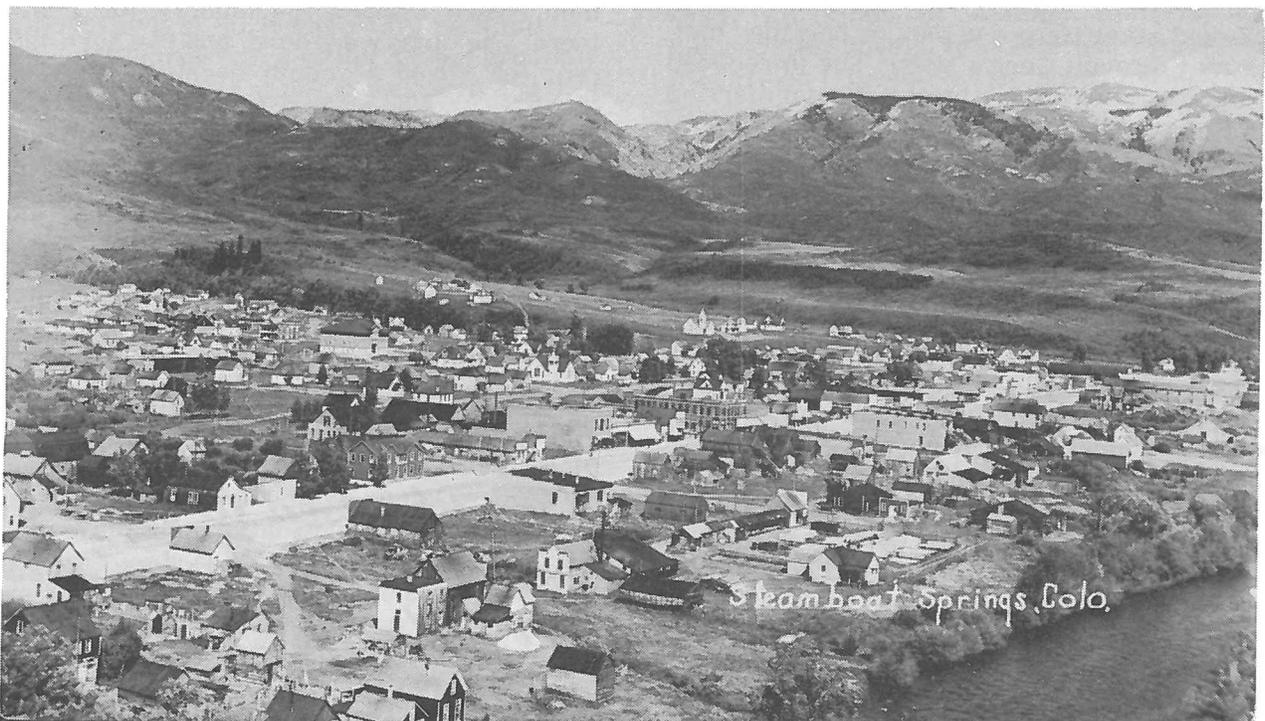
“If you made \$100 a week you were doing good!”

Gene then told us how he remembered his youth. “I was about fourteen when I started to date. It is a lot different now compared to back then. Kids are too free with each other today. In my day we knew how far to go before someone would come after us. We also used to know everyone, but now we hardly know anyone. There’s a lot of difference. If I would have gone away as a kid and came back now, I’d be shocked at the changes. For instance, back then two people used to run this town, Bud Wright and another guy. Now look how many people it takes to run it. It’s ridiculous. There’s only a difference of about 5,000 people, but the people are more scattered out.”

“I washed most of my wash clothes on a board, sometimes a person was better off doing the laundry herself.”

We asked Maxine what Steamboat was like when she came here. “There were only very small buildings in Steamboat, and the Western Lodge and the Nordic were about the only two important buildings.”

Gene added, “The town didn’t start growing until the ‘60s. Before modern technology we didn’t have machine plows for the roads. If there was any plowing at all it was by an A-frame which was pulled by a horse. When we got married the only way we got to work was to walk. We went over the hill. The valley wasn’t completely open for years. We didn’t have a cut road up to our place, so we didn’t have a car until the fifties. That was only 36 years ago.”





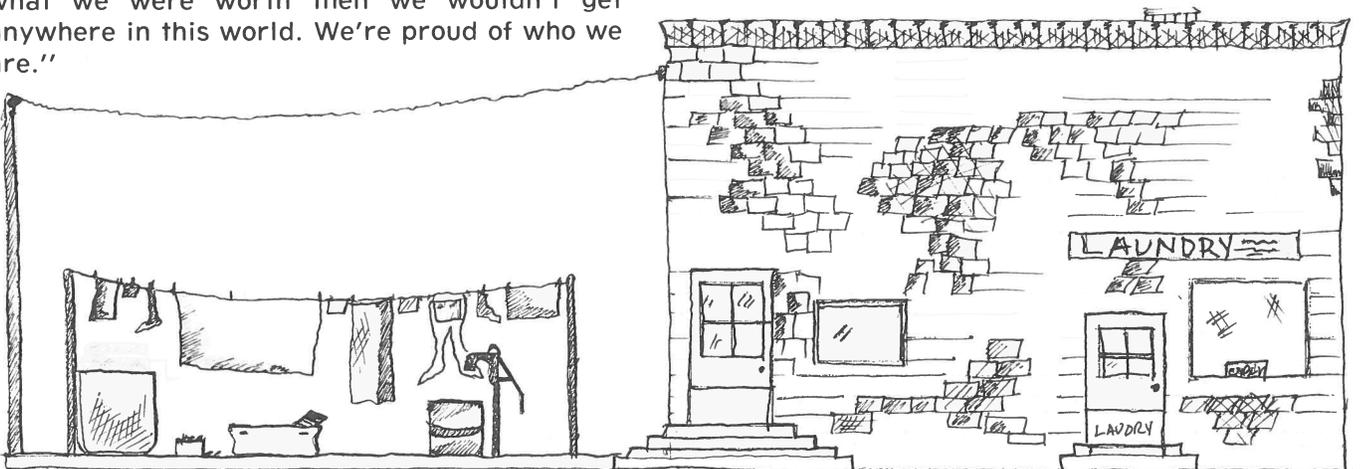
We asked Gene about other past times. He told us, "I always have a big garden. I have cabbage, cauliflower, lettuce, onions, tomatoes, radishes, rutabagas, squash, corn and potatoes. I also have cherries and apples. I raise anything that will grow. Then we put it all away in our basement or freeze it. We harvest what grows, but sometimes we have to be protective by covering it when it gets too cold."

As the Flaharty family gathered on Thanksgiving eve for a family dinner we were all glad to spend a traditional holiday together as a group. As we do this on holiday occasions we always remember good food and drinks and lots of laughs.

Peggy Trezavent, my great aunt, summed up this occasion by recalling a family historical prominence. She stated, "You know, the Flaharty family has worked in the laundry business here in this community for forty years. Our parents always told us if we didn't work for what we were worth then we wouldn't get anywhere in this world. We're proud of who we are."

This is a picture of all the Flaharty family. From the left to right, is Doug Chenowith, brother-in-law. Sue Chenowith, Betty's sister. Amanda Sue Chenowith, niece. Eva Smith, Betty's mother. Maxine Flaharty, grandmother, Gene Flaharty, grandfather.

"I wish I had a dollar for every ton of coal I shoveled. 7 tons!!"



Robert Bruce Mook